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Insiders' and outsiders' views on German from Austria's perspective: Austrian Standard German and German Standard German – the odd couple

Abstract (German)

Spracheinstellungen gegenüber einer Sprache und ihren Sprechern sind meist mit stereotypen und auch emotionalen Einschätzungen verknüpft – umso mehr, wenn es sich um eine Sprache handelt, die in mehreren aneinandergrenzenden Ländern wie Österreich und Deutschland gesprochen wird und unterschiedliche Varietäten ein und derselben Sprache im Spiel sind.

Der vorliegende Beitrag möchte anhand verschiedener Perspektiven die Standardvarietäten Österreichs und Deutschlands näher in den Blick nehmen. Während erstere als eine nicht dominante Varietät gilt, kann letztere als die dominante Varietät auf der Ebene der Standardsprache betrachtet werden – ein Phänomen, das in vielen Sprachen auftritt. Ausgehend von Studien, die sich bisher mit diesem Szenario des Deutschen in Österreich und in Deutschland beschäftigt haben, werde ich über Ergebnisse zu Spracheinstellungsforschungen über Deutsch und insbesondere österreichisches Deutsch aus zwei Perspektiven berichten:

- (1) Außerhalb Österreichs: Einstellungen gegenüber österreichischem Deutsch und “deutschem Deutsch” aus der Sicht der Auslandsgermanistik: Wie nehmen Lehrende und Deutschstudierende an Germanistikinstituten in Großbritannien, Frankreich, Tschechien und Ungarn österreichisches Deutsch und “deutsches Deutsch” wahr?
- (2) Innerhalb Österreichs: Wie sehen Österreicherinnen und Österreicher die deutsche Sprache?

1. Introduction

When it comes to language perception and stereotypical attitudes towards a language and its speakers, things often get emotional and rather subjective – even more so, when neighbouring countries share a language, like (among others) Austria and Germany.

This article focuses on language conceptualisation, language perception and stereotypical attitudes towards the standard varieties of German as used in Austria and Germany. While the former is one of several non-dominant varieties, the latter is considered the dominant variety – a phenomenon which is quite common globally.

Based on several recent studies on this “Austrian-German/Standard-German scenario”, I discuss language attitudes towards German and Austrian Standard German (ASG) from various perspectives: (1) Outside Austria: attitudes towards Austrian Standard German and German Standard German (GSG) from the perspective of teaching/learning German as a foreign language abroad: how do university teachers and students of German at universities in Britain, France, the Czech Republic and Hungary perceive GSG and ASG? (2) Inside Austria: Austrians’ views on Standard German as used in Austria compared to Standard German as used in Germany.

2. Conceptualisation of the German language

At the *Internationale Deutschlehrertagung* in Bern in 1988, Peter von Polenz stated that the monocentric era was definitely over. With this proclamation of the end of monocentrism, which assumed a geographically localisable “best” standard language, two different conceptualisations to describe the nature of the German language and its varieties have come into use: the “pluricentric” concept (by Clyne 1995, among others, also referred to as “plurinational”), and the “pluriareal” concept. Researchers generally agree that German is a language particularly rich in variety. In Germany, standard language use still has regional characteristics despite the process of standardisation and the loss of dialects in many areas (Eichinger 2001). The two major concepts mentioned above both try to conceptualise German, from different perspectives.

The pluricentric concept assumes that there are equal, national varieties of German, influenced by state borders, and that a number of characteristic features of German can also be found in so-called half-centres (South Tyrol, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg and Belgium). Ammon (1995) and Clyne (1992) were the first to fully describe and develop this model in terms of theory and terminology. The *Variantenwörterbuch* (Ammon et al. 2004)¹ not only documents pluricentric variation, but also cross-national and regional phenomena. The *Varietätsgrammatik* project adds to this research on the conceptualisation of German by looking at variation in the field of national and cross-border grammatical phenomena.

The pluriareal concept (see Ammon 1998), which is sometimes quite emotionally discussed (Scheuringer 1996, Seiffter/Seiffter 2015), has been written about since the 1990s. It argues against the pluricentric approach by referring to the linguistic differences within Germany (between north and south) and within Austria (between east and west), as well as the numerous commonalities across borders, e.g. consistencies between south Germany, Austria and Switzerland, or between west and south Austria. Elspaß/Niehaus (2014) argue in favour of the

¹ A new edition was published in 2016: *Variantenwörterbuch NEU*.

pluriareal concept; Pohl for his part has recently preferred a “combination of the pluriareal and the pluricentric approaches” (2014, 14).

Most publications with substantial empirical foundations have adopted the pluricentric concept as the underlying concept for describing linguistic variation on the level of standard language (Ransmayr 2005; Markhardt 2005; Hägi 2005 and 2015; Pfrehm 2007 and 2011; Wissik 2014), since the pluriareal concept, although perfectly adequate for describing variation based on dialectal spaces and boundaries, at the same time negates the actual effect that national borders impose on certain domains of the language, i.e. on the language of administration, laws and regulations; the media; high-frequency words and word-patterns; and above all the large domain of education.

3. The status of ASG at non-German-speaking universities abroad – looking at ASG from the outsiders' perspective

In the realm of lexical, grammatical, phonetic and pragmatic differences among the varieties of German, which have been the subject of extensive research, Ammon (1995) and Clyne (1995) have pointed out striking asymmetries in the relationship between these varieties and their speakers and their attitudes towards each other, respectively. Until the end of the 1990s, most studies focused on the German-speaking countries. However, no data on language attitudes towards the varieties of German in the non-German-speaking, academic field were available. A PhD-thesis (Ransmayr 2005) tried to fill this gap. This study (later published in 2006), conducted at German institutes in France, Great Britain, the Czech Republic and Hungary, attempted to investigate the status and prestige associated with ASG in the domain of teaching and studying German abroad.

By means of contrasting stereotypes and prejudices associated with ASG in the four countries mentioned above, the study offers a country-specific portrait of language attitudes towards ASG. The statistical data analysis showed that the Austrian variety of German has severe problems regarding its prestige at universities abroad: both university students and lecturers tend to regard ASG as a non-standard variety of German and consider German German to be the only standard variety and norm.

3.1 Sample and methods used

University lecturers (n = 129: British, French, Czech, Hungarian, German, Austrian) and students (n = 780) studying German in France, Great Britain, the Czech Republic and Hungary participated in this study. Data was collected via questionnaires and interviews, and analysed using statistical methods. The domains examined in the survey and the interviews were general attitudes towards and

knowledge about ASG; if and how ASG was dealt with in German language classes; recommendations given for or against spending a year abroad in Austria for language fluency; and dealing with ASG when marking and assessing student work in exams. In this article, only a small proportion of the many results can be presented (Ransmayr 2006, 126ff.).

3.2 Results of survey and interviews

In interviews, university lecturers were asked what they associated with ASG and how they perceived ASG. Answers varied slightly between the four countries; here are some typical statements (Ransmayr 2006, 135ff.):

“Well, the Austrians’ pronunciation – from my point of view – is somehow sunnier, not so uptight.” [laughs]² (German lecturer in France)

“A very, very beautiful dance-like rhythm. And the other thing is the melody of speech. Harmonious, and very beautiful.”³ (German lecturer in France)

“We teach Standard German here. The Austrian lecturers really only add a bit of decoration.”⁴ (German lecturer in the Czech Republic)

“What do you call ‘Austrian German’? Is it all the different dialects or is there a predominant dialect? Maybe it doesn’t exist at all, this so-called ‘Austrian German’!”⁵ (French lecturer in France)

“Rural.”⁶ (German lecturer in France)

“Charming, but wrong.”⁷ (French lecturer in France)

What we notice is a common pattern, especially among French and German university lecturers: ASG is often given positive attributes initially, but this is usually followed by pointing out its irrelevance for university teaching, or a reference to its alleged non-standard status. Consequently, these attitudes are transferred to students of German, who often regard Austrian German as a dialect. This assumption is found above all among British students (just under 60%), followed by Hungarian, French and Czech students (approximately 50%) (Ransmayr 2006, 240).

² “*Also die Aussprache, ganz subjektiv mal, das ist eine sonnigere Aussprache, eine weniger verklemmte [lacht].*”

³ “*Ein sehr, sehr schöner, tänzerischer Rhythmus. Und sonst, was mir auffällt, ist die Sprachmelodie. Harmonisch, und sehr schön.*”

⁴ “*Wir lehren Binnendeutsch, Standarddeutsch. Die österreichischen Lektoren geben wirklich nur die Verzierung dazu.*”

⁵ “*Was nennen Sie das österreichische Deutsch? Also sind das diese verschiedenen Dialekte oder gibt es einen vorherrschenden Dialekt? Vielleicht gibt es das gar nicht, dieses österreichische Deutsch.*”

⁶ “*Ländlich.*”

⁷ “*Charmant, aber falsch.*”

Austrian German = "dialect"(students)

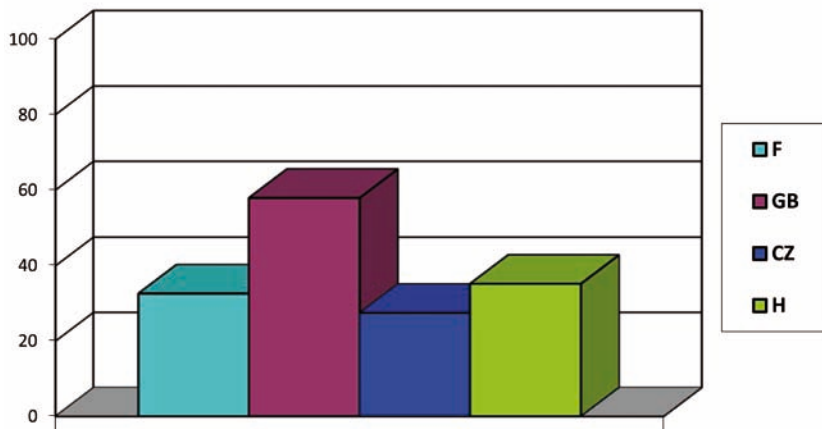


Fig. 1: ASG is a dialect

Therefore it is not surprising that students mostly refrain from using “Austriacisms” in assessed work. Roughly 90% of French and British students, just under 80% of Czech students and about two thirds of Hungarian students state that they would not use specifically Austrian terms in written examinations (Ransmayr 2006, 261):

Would you use “Austriacisms” in an exam? (students)

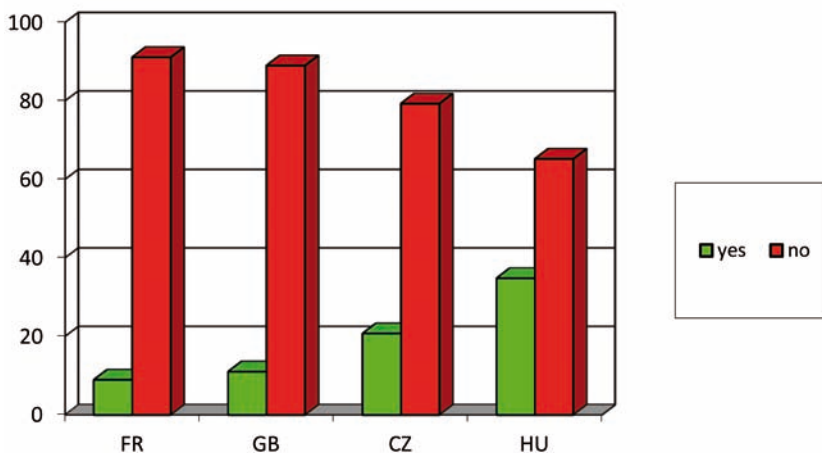


Fig. 2: Use of Austriacisms in exams

Similar notions apply to the situation of oral exams. The majority of students do not believe that a distinct Austrian accent would have any effect in an oral exam, but there are still more than twice as many students who believe that an Austrian accent might have a negative effect as those who believe that it might have a positive effect (Ransmayr 2006, 257):

What can be the effect of an Austrian accent in an oral exam?

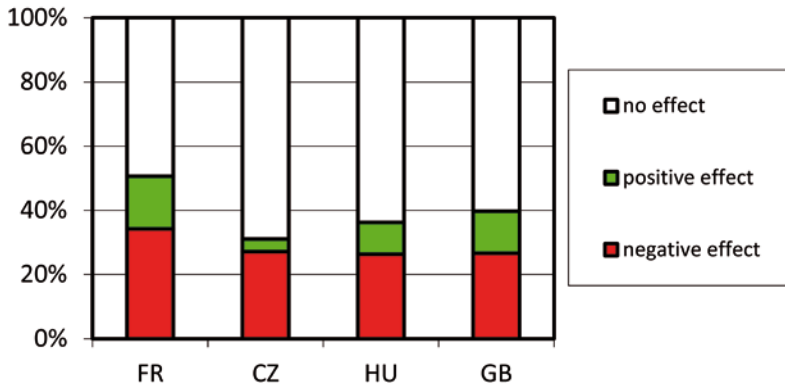


Fig. 3: Effect of Austrian accent in oral exam

Correctness of Austrian and German expressions (lecturers)

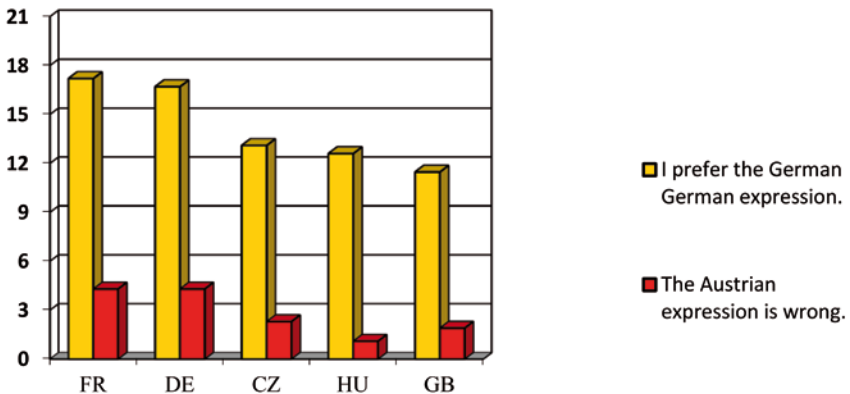


Fig. 4: Preference and correctness of ASG/GSG expressions

It also seems that there is a shared belief among students and lecturers that the correctness of specifically Austrian terms is dubious. Presented with a set of paired items with a German German standard expression and the corresponding

Austrian standard expression, the German German item is in all cases preferred, while the Austrian expression is in many cases regarded as incorrect (Ransmayr 2006, 184) (see Fig. 4).

The following quotation from a French lecturer illustrates this: “Deviations [from the “German German” norm] are strictly counted as mistakes.”⁸

To interpret this data we also need to take a look at the knowledge about ASG and variation within the German language, especially among lecturers, since teaching and knowledge are obviously closely linked. In the survey, lecturers were asked how much they knew about Austrian German on a scale from one to six (1= little, 6=a lot). Interestingly enough, after the French lecturers, who stated that they knew very little about ASG, we also find that German lecturers have very little knowledge about ASG according to their personal estimation. The self-estimation of the Hungarians and Czechs concerning their knowledge about ASG was above average. Naturally, Austrians teaching abroad state that they know quite a lot about their national variety (Ransmayr 2006, 164):

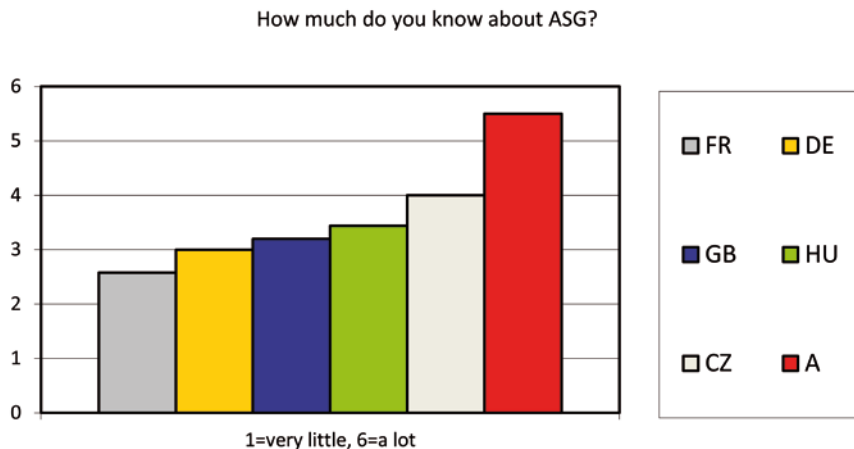


Fig. 5: Knowledge about ASG among lecturers

Finally, when it comes to recommendations for students concerning where to spend their year abroad, it is not surprising that lecturers predominantly advise students to choose Germany – not only French and British lecturers, whose preference for Germany seems plausible with regard to geographical proximity and their linguistic reservations towards ASG (“There is the danger of acquiring an Austrian accent.”⁹), but also from German lecturers:

“Maybe in Germany, to be on the safe side.”¹⁰

⁸ “Abweichungen [von der Norm] werden streng als Fehler gewertet.“

⁹ “Es besteht die Gefahr, dass man einen österreichischen Akzent erlernt.“

¹⁰ “Vielleicht zur Sicherheit doch besser in Deutschland.“

4. FWF-research project “Austrian Standard German as a language of instruction and education” – looking at ASG from the insiders’ perspective

Empirical studies in this field (Ransmayr 2006; Markhardt 2005; Martin 1995; Pfrehm 2007) have all noticed an imbalance between the representation of the German varieties and a somewhat blurry picture among speakers of the non-dominant variety of one’s own variety. In many other linguistic publications, references have been made to a linguistic inferiority complex among Austrian speakers of the German language compared to German speakers from Germany (e.g. Clyne 1995; Muhr 1989, 2005). In addition, literature also provides evidence of an ambivalent attitude among Austrians towards their own variety and a less marked language loyalty¹¹ in comparison to speakers of the German variety. In some publications the feelings of inferiority have been linked to a lack of knowledge about and vague concepts of the pluricentric variation within the German language. Linguists also presume that pluricentric variation is only rarely a point of discussion in school teaching and teacher training. Until recently, no valid data had been available to prove this.

4.1 Brief project description

Therefore, the research project “Austrian Standard German as a language of instruction and education” (FWF-Project No. P23913–G18) has focused on the question of whether and how both students and teachers at Austrian schools encounter variation within the German language during their education and teacher training (de Cillia/Ransmayr 2014, 59ff.). The project was conducted from September 2012 to April 2015 and is based on the theory of pluricentric languages. Not only did it look into the role of the Austrian standard variety of German (ASG) in the context of schools and the level of knowledge about the pluricentricity of German and Austrian German among teachers of German in Austria, but it also aimed to capture the attitudes of Austrian teachers/pupils towards ASG and depict the prevailing concepts of linguistic norms among Austrian teachers and pupils (pluricentric/monocentric).

4.2 Sample and methods applied

In order to achieve this, a set of data was collected in this study (Ransmayr/Fink 2016); both qualitative and quantitative surveys were conducted. Firstly, curricula

¹¹ Groups can be more or less language loyal under the impact of socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural factors (de Cillia/Dressler 2006). Wolf Peter Klein (2001) defines language loyalty as the fact that speakers do not abandon their language in favour of another despite a certain pressure (e.g. language contact situations).

for teaching German at primary and secondary level, curricula for teacher training at universities and pedagogical institutes (*Pädagogische Hochschulen*), and the most commonly used German course books were examined with regard to the representation of linguistic variety. Secondly, a survey was carried out among 164 teachers of German and 1,253 students at upper secondary level throughout Austria, examining the language attitudes of both students and German teachers, and the role of Austrian Standard German in everyday school teaching routines.

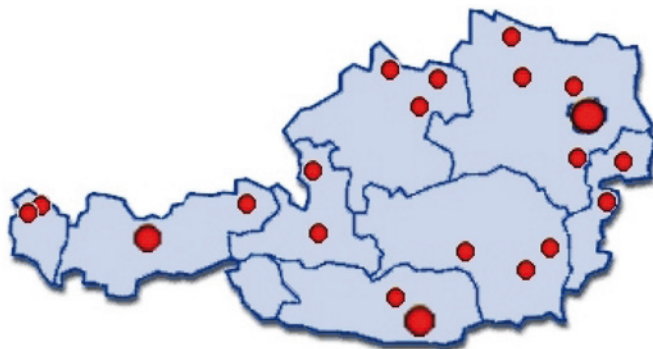


Fig. 6: Location of schools where teachers and students took part in survey

Furthermore, 21 interviews with German teachers, 2 group discussions with teachers and students, and 7 participatory observations in class were conducted.

School curricula:	primary school, secondary level I and II
Curricula for teacher training:	(German) at universities and pedagogical institutes
German text books used at schools:	basic level, secondary level I and II
Questionnaires:	pupils (secondary level II), n=1253 teachers (primary level, secondary level I and II), n=164 in all federal states
Interviews:	n=21 with teachers of all school types in all federal states
Group discussions:	1 teachers' group, 1 pupils' group
In-class participatory observation:	7 classes

Tab. 1: Data sets

SPSS was used to analyse the data, and content and discourse analyses of the data were conducted.

4.3 Results of the survey concerning the conceptualisation of German by Austrian German teachers and pupils

A survey was conducted among 1,253 pupils at secondary level II at 27 schools in all of Austria's federal states (2-4 schools per federal state). 85.3% of students were native German speakers, 3.4% BCS, 2.5% Turkish and 8.8% had other languages of origin. In addition, 164 teachers at various types of schools – primary schools, *Hauptschulen* (general secondary schools)/*NMS* (new secondary schools), grammar schools at secondary levels I and II, vocational training schools – in all federal states took part in the survey. The results show that the vast majority of teachers (89.6%) and pupils (79.2%) consider German to be “a language with differences in its standard form between the German-speaking countries” (Fink 2016):

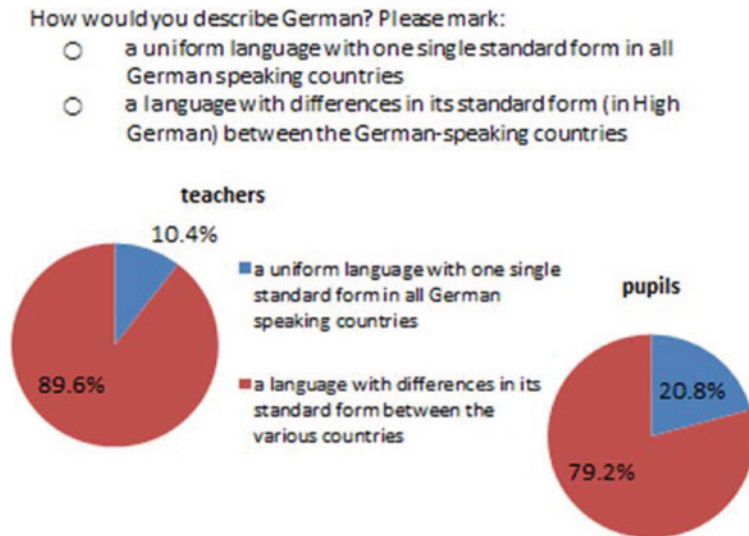


Fig. 7: How would you describe German?

Moreover, a clear majority of the teachers (80.5%) and more than half of the students (59.4%) are convinced that Austrian Standard German/“Austrian High German” as such exists (see Fig. 8).

These results clearly point to a pluricentric view, despite the fact that the “pluricentric concept” as such was only known to a small percentage of the participants in the survey: only 14.7% of the teachers and 8.1% of the students stated that they had previously heard of the concept of pluricentric languages (Ransmayr 2015).

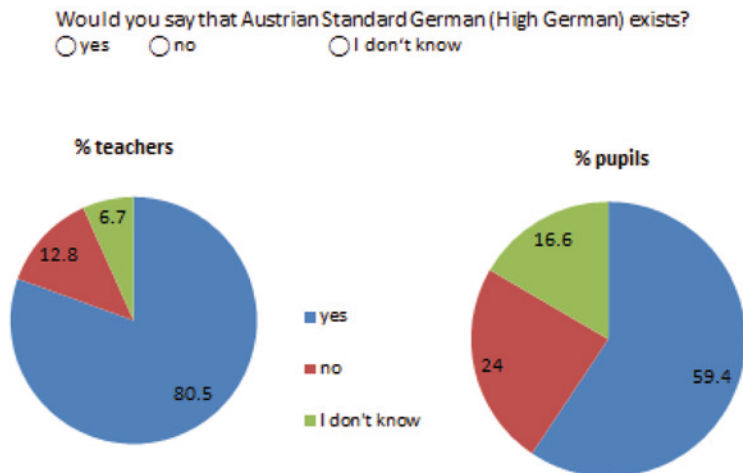


Fig. 8: Does Austrian Standard German exist?

4.4 Perceptions of correctness of ASG among Austrian German teachers and pupils

When it came to assessing the “correctness” of ASG compared to GSG in normative terms, attitudes towards ASG proved to be ambiguous. First, teachers and pupils were asked if they considered Standard German as used in Austria to be as correct as the German counterpart. The majority of both teachers (86%) and pupils (67.7%) chose the politically correct answer “yes” (de Cillia/Ransmayr/Fink, in print):

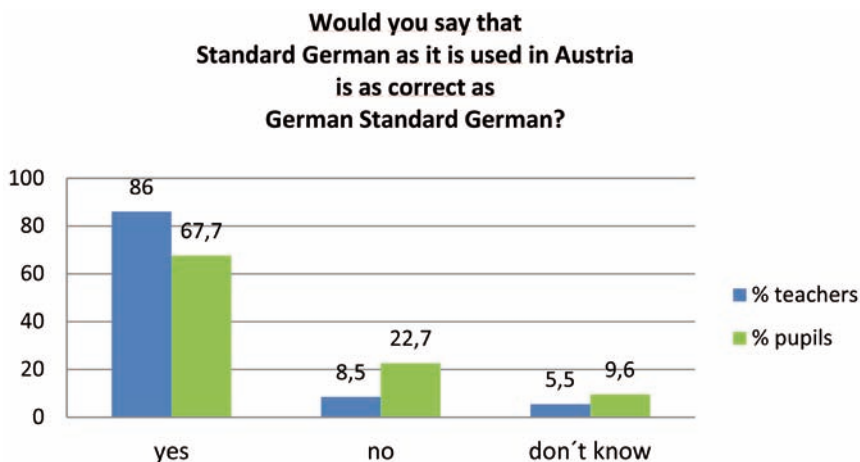


Fig. 9: Is ASG as correct as GSG?

The answers to a subsequent control question, however, gave a different result. Presented with a 4-point scale, teachers and students were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statement “German German is more correct than Austrian German”. With the 4-point scale option (agree very strongly – agree strongly – agree to some extent – disagree), only 44.1% of teachers and 31.9% of pupils disagreed with the statement that GSG was more correct than ASG – an interesting twist, bearing in mind that previously a clear majority had stated (with a yes/no/don’t know option) that ASG was as correct as GSG. Even more surprisingly, 16.1% of the teachers and 33.3% of the students agree “strongly” or “very strongly” with the statement, and therefore believe GSG to be more correct than ASG (de Cillia/Ransmayr/Fink, in print):

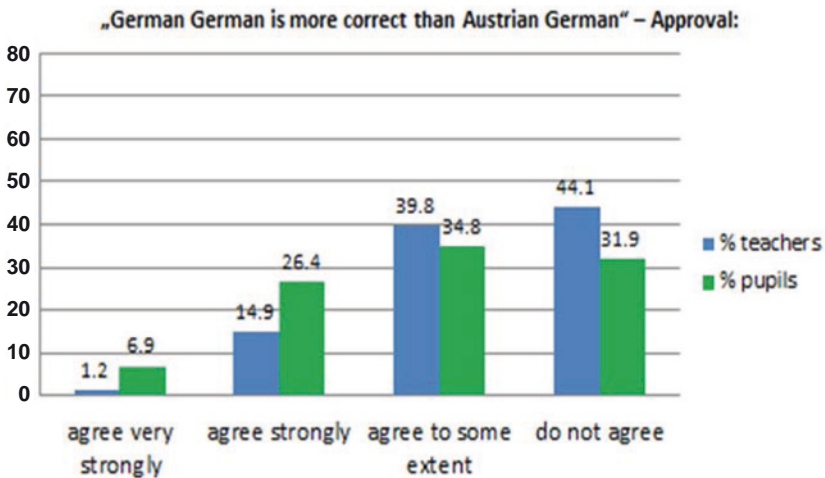


Fig. 10: GSG is more correct than ASG

The participants in the group discussions were confronted with these inconsistent results, which led to lively debates, both in the teachers’ and in the students’ group. These discussions basically confirm the ambivalent and conflicting attitude among Austrians towards their own variety of German, as mentioned above. For example, a student states: “Well, in terms of grammar, I would almost say that Austrians are incorrect, but apart from that actually not at all.”¹² Even some teachers believe that Germans stick to grammar rules more than Austrians: “Ah, I guess that ... er ... people in Germany ... er ... obey grammatical rules probably a little more. Well, I think of sentence structure, er..., a subordinate clause which begins with ‘because’, I guess that most Austrians construct it the wrong way.

¹² “Also grammatisch würd ich fast sagen, dass die Österreicher inkorrekt sind, aber sonst eigentlich gar nicht.”

Grammatically incorrect, so to speak.”¹³ A statement made by a teacher from lower Austria in an interview also shows an ambivalent attitude towards Austrian German: “Well, the Germans are lucky in that their dialect has been proclaimed the standard language by accident. This is what I tell my students. They should not feel ashamed, it’s such a big language space, there are so many varieties, and East-Central German was selected as the standard language and in that sense the Germans appear to be more eloquent when they use what they have grown up with in a natural way. And we always sound like peasants.” (Fink 2016).¹⁴

4.5 ASG in textbooks and curricula

The results of the analysis of the curricula show that there is no systematic use of terminology when referring to “norms”. No reference is made to a linguistic codex, varieties are dealt with unsystematically, and pluricentric variation is not mentioned as such at any point. With few exceptions, the same applies to teacher training curricula. The texts which are printed in the analysed textbooks contain country-specific standard variation, but specific and unspecific Austriacisms/Helvetisms/Deutschlandisms remain uncommented-on for pupils. In addition, there are no references to dictionaries (*Österreichisches Wörterbuch*; *Duden*; *Variante Wörterbuch* etc.) or to more extensive materials or theoretical background information on ASG/GSG or standard linguistic variation within German in the ancillary teaching material.

Austrian German is only mentioned in one of the analysed course books (*Deutschstunde, 8. Schulstufe, Basisteil plus*). It contains a chapter about language comparison “Austria-Germany”. Unfortunately, it does not provide factual information: instead, dialect and colloquial expressions are presented next to standard expressions. The instruction reads: “Try to teach Austrian German to a German step by step.” Some examples of dialect (or colloquial) expressions (marked with a red circle in the picture below) and their standard German equivalents presented in this chapter are: “*Gschlader*” – “*ungenießbares Getränk*” (unpalatable drink); “*Gstätten*” – “*ungepflegtes Grundstück*” (neglected plot of land); “*Gschrapp*” – “*Kind*” (derogative for child); “*Dippel*” – “*Beule*” (bump) and “*Jauckerl*” – “*Injektion*” (injection):

¹³ “Ah, ich glaub [...] dass, äh, Menschen in Deutschland, äh, sich eventuell ein: w:enig stärker an die Grammatikregeln halten. Aso, ich denk jetzt an Satzbau, ah Nebensatz, der mit *weil* beginnt, ich glaub, dass ein Österreicher oder eine Österreicherin den eher folsch baut. Sozusagen nicht grammatikalisch korrekt.”

¹⁴ “Naja, die Deutschen haben das Glück, dass ihr Dialekt zufällig zur Standardsprache erklärt worden is. Sog i a meine Schüler. Sie brauchen si net genießen, das is so ein großer Sprachraum, da gibt’s viele Varietäten und die ostmitteldeutsche is hoit gewählt worden ois Standardsprache und insofern wirken die Deutschen dann eloquenter wenn sie des womit sie aufwochsn donn a natürlicherwise onwenden. Und unsaans klingt immer wie so a Bauer.”

Ausdrücke in Deutschland und Österreich

Wir Österreicherinnen und Österreicher sprechen zwar Deutsch – aber vieles hört sich doch ganz anders an als in Deutschland. Während wir von einem „Sessel“ und einem „Kasten“ sprechen, sagen die Deutschen zu denselben Möbelstücken „Stuhl“ und „Schrank“.

5 Versuche einer/einem Deutschen das „österreichische Deutsch“ Schritt für Schritt beizubringen!

Für Anfängerinnen und Anfänger: ... heißt auf gut Deutsch ...

„Extrawurst“ – _____	Dippel – _____
Flasche – _____	Beistrich – _____
Nickerchen – _____	Grant – _____
Gschaffthuber – _____	Gschau – _____
Gschlader – _____	Gschrapp – _____
Gstätten – _____	Gupf – _____
Häferl – _____	Hutsche – _____
Jauckerl – _____	Kampel – _____
Bartwisch – _____	Bosnigel – _____

üble Laune, Blick, Spaß,
kurzer Schlaf, Komma,
Ohrfeige, Beule,
Wichtigtuier, Ausnahme,
Erhebung, Kind, Kamm,
Injektion, kleiner Besen,
boshafter Mensch,
Tasse, Schaukel, unge-
nießbares Getränk,
ungepflegtes
Grundstück

Fig. 11: Deutschstunde, Basisteil plus

Apart from this book, Austrian Standard German is not dealt with in any of the course books examined in this research project. Therefore, making students aware of the varieties of the German language and providing clear and correct information is left entirely to teachers, who hardly ever come across this matter in their teacher training – a vicious circle.

4.6 “Language loyalty” towards ASG

A number of questions tried to obtain a picture of how “loyal” teachers and students were towards ASG and whether they notice and care about GSG occurring in daily situations in Austria. Some of these questions explored the subject of the preference of certain “Austriacisms” to their corresponding “Deutschlandisms” or vice versa. Other questions tried to elicit the reactions of teachers and students to linguistic GSG influence occurring in common everyday situations. Recent research conducted on the influence of GSG on ASG vocabulary (Wiesinger 2015) has shown that there is substantial influence. One example of a set of questions in this project’s survey is presented here:

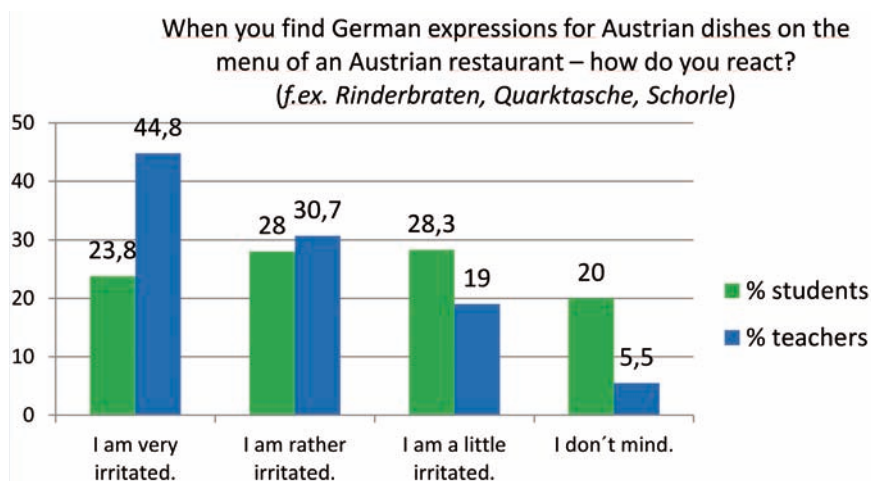


Fig. 12: Reactions to German expressions on menu

We can see that the overwhelming majority of teachers (94.5%) actually do mind when they happen to come across GSG expressions for food on an Austrian menu in a restaurant: reactions vary from being very irritated (44.8%) to being rather irritated (30.7%) or a little irritated (19%). Only just over 5% do not mind at all. However, students seem to react differently. As with many other questions in the survey, students tend to avoid extremes in their answers and appear to be more tentative than their teachers in most matters. The reason for this tendency is most likely the fact that school students are still in the process of fully developing their “linguistic identity” and can be considered linguistic “lay people”, whereas teachers of German could be considered “norm authorities” with strong linguistic awareness. This also shows in the result on the question at hand. Even though a majority of school students react with varying degrees of irritation to GSG expressions for food on an Austrian menu in a restaurant, a fifth of students state that they do not mind.

4.7 Language attitudes towards spoken ASG and GSG

Both teachers and students were asked to rate spoken ASG and GSG in a set of adjectives (opposites) on a scale of 1 to 6. Not very surprisingly, teachers and students clearly rated ASG more positively when it came to adjectives from the domains of likeability, familiarity and intimacy (*likeable, melodious, soft, pleasant, natural, beautiful, comfortable*). However, in some domains – let us call them “matter-of-fact domains” represented by adjectives like *correct* or *educated* – GSG was rated more positively (Ransmayr 2015, 187):

Language attitudes of Austrian teachers towards spoken ASG and GSG

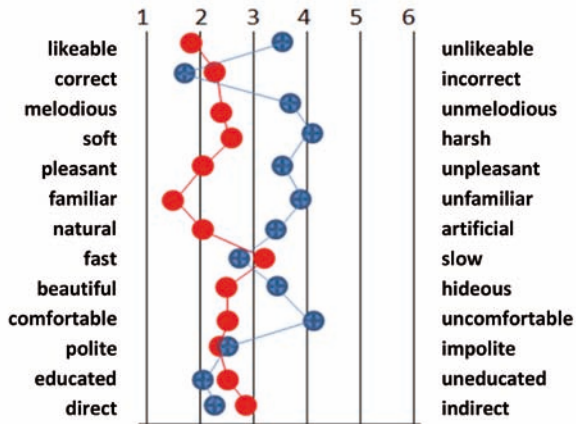


Fig. 13: Attitudes towards spoken ASG and GSG

5. Media reactions to new teaching material for teachers

One of the key findings of the study “Austrian German as a language of education and instruction” was that teachers generally complained about the lack of suitable teaching material and information for dealing with the issue of linguistic varieties of German in class in a satisfactory manner. Another result was that the most frequently used text books do not depict linguistic variety correctly and sufficiently, since this is not an issue in syllabi and curricula for schools and university courses. Therefore the Ministry of Education produced a booklet containing games for all age groups and abilities of pupils, combined with informative articles to give teachers some theoretical background. This booklet was distributed to schools free of charge. Reactions by teachers in Austria were overwhelmingly positive, and the Austrian media reported on this initiative in a generally positive way. However, reactions (mostly) in Germany were astoundingly strong, using a distinctly martial choice of words and portraying the matter in a rather alarming and defensive light. Here are some newspaper headlines:

- “How Austrians fight off ‘High German’” (Augsburger Allgemeine/Germany);
- “Austria declares war on High German” (Die Welt/Germany);
- “Austria fights against German German” (Spiegel/Germany);
- “Dialect protection in Austria. Austria wants to defend its dialect against German” (Tagesanzeiger/Switzerland).

This booklet doesn’t aim to “fight off”, “fight” or “declare war” on “High German” in the least, nor is “dialect protection” a motivation at all. It simply aims to

provide information that is not easily found in common text books or offered during teacher training. Teachers cannot be expected to teach content with no material whatsoever at hand. Therefore a simple demand was met. The media reactions expose the journalists' unreflective use of terminology, since this initiative is not about Austrian *dialect* (it is about the *standard varieties* of German – actually *all* of them), nor is the term “High German” used correctly. Clearly, the purpose of such a booklet and the necessity for such a teaching aid has not been fully understood abroad. This is, however, not surprising, bearing in mind the asymmetries between speakers of the dominant vs. speakers of the non-dominant variety as outlined by Ammon (1995, 494ff.) and Clyne (1995, 22): Speakers of the dominant variety fail to fully comprehend the position of speakers of the non-dominant variety and have significant difficulty understanding a pluricentric view of German at all.

6. Résumé

Reactions as strong as those discussed above show that language matters a lot to people. They also illustrate quite clearly how much language is part of our identity. And as soon as a part of our identity is at stake, we tend to move from being rationally driven to being emotionally driven. Linguistic stereotypes and prejudice are touchy subjects which therefore need to be addressed carefully. It appears crucial to clearly dissociate linguistic initiatives, language policies and research projects from linguistic nationalism or chauvinism, such as the examples presented in this article.

We need to emphasise the benefits and underlying purpose of dealing with linguistic variety. It is all about creating more language awareness: making people – to start with in the field of education – aware of diversity within the German language, its regional/national varieties, the respective functions and domains of each variety.

What it really boils down to is linguistic enrichment: with proper knowledge about more than just one variety, everyone can reach out much further and mutual understanding is enhanced.

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