

Ethnolectal features in children's vernacular in urban and rural German-speaking Switzerland: An exploratory case study

This preliminary study investigates the extent to which ethnolectal features traditionally associated with the language of Swiss-German adolescent speakers with a migrant background (see, for instance, 1-2) have spread to the vernacular speech of children below the age of 12 in urban and rural areas. Typically, ethnolectal features as in (1) - (2) are used by Swiss-German adolescents for stylistic and indexical purposes (see Dürscheid & Spitzmüller 2006; Schmid 2017). Anecdotal and preliminary empirical evidence suggests that ethnolectal features are spreading to the spoken vernacular of Swiss-German children.

- (1) Pragmatic expressions, e.g. *weisch?* (as a pragmatic marker), *Alter*
- (2) Syntactic expressions, e.g. omission of prepositions, articles, pronouns or auxiliaries, as in *Chani bleistift?* <Can I pen?> for *Chani en bleistift ha?* <Can I have a pen?>

The present study makes use of data collected through sociolinguistic interviews in a traditional Labovian approach (e.g. Labov 1972). Ethnolectal and other youth linguistic features are defined and extracted from the data following previous studies and on the basis of anecdotal evidence provided by the caregivers, peers and the interviewees themselves. Interviewees are (primary) school children between the ages of 6 and 12 who live in the city of or the region around Winterthur, an urban area in Switzerland with roughly 100,000 inhabitants. Interviewees are found through their social networks and by visiting primary schools in the city and in the villages surrounding it.

Preliminary analysis of the data indicates that children below the age of 12 use ethnolectal features, e.g. familiarisers (see Leech 1999) such as 'brä' or 'digger' to enhance solidarity of the speakers' relationship with the hearer, comparatively more often in Winterthur than in the surrounding rural areas. A set of factors that potentially influence this urban-rural difference are discussed, such as mobility, number of and contact with speakers of migrant backgrounds, age and gender of speaker.

References

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