The use of ethnolectal features by pre-adolescent children in German-speaking Switzerland

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Wenn Erstklässler kein Deutsch sprechen
Zu viele Schulanfänger können ungenügend Deutsch. Jetzt ergreifen verschiedene Schweizer Kantone Massnahmen zur Frühförderung.

In Zahlen
300'000
Schüler in den Schweizer Kindergärten, Primar- und Sekundarschulen kommen aus einem Elternhaus, in dem eine andere Sprache als die Schulsprache gesprochen wird.

32%

Gut 50%
der Schüler im Kanton Basel-Stadt sind fremdsprachig – das ist Schweizer Rekord. Im Kanton Zürich sind es 43 Prozent, im Kanton Aargau 35 Prozent.

682
Vorschulkinder, die zu wenig Deutsch können, sind derzeit für eine obligatorische Sprachförderung in einer Spielgruppe.
Previous research on Swiss-German dialects

«Die Zürcher Teenager sprechen Balkan-Slang – gut so!»

Der «Hausmann der Nation» kennt sich mit dem Haushalten aus – und mit Slangs. Nun bringt Bänz Friedli ein Stück über die Jugendsprache auf die Bühne, Premiere ist am Mittwoch. Der Kolumnist erklärt, welchen Reim er sich auf die Jugend macht.
Our project

• focus on children as actuators of language change
• Corpus-based & experimental
Objectives of the project

1) take stock of the **linguistic variables** used by children

2) explore the extent that **children follow adult / youth speech**

3) To explore the **social meaning** that children attach to these variables and features

→ experimental track
Today: Ethnolectal variables

- investigate patterns of variation of these features among the youngest dialect speakers

- why ethnolectal features → only adolescents and adults?
- Myth – urban versus rural areas

1. Which ethnolectal features are used by children?
2. Is there a difference between urban and rural areas? Why (not)?
Outline

1. Setting the stage
2. Ethnolectal Swiss German
3. Method and data acquisition
4. Some results
5. Conclusion & next steps
Ethnolectal Swiss German

- **primary ethnolect**: language/style used by speakers with migrant background (intraindividual variation); reflect features of their ‘ethnic’ language

- **secondary ethnolect**: imitation and exaggeration of primary features by youtubers and comedians

- **tertiary ethnolect**: linguistic features of primary ethnolect used by adolescents without migrant background for stylistic purposes

(see Auer 2002, Tissot et al. 2011, Schmid 2017)
Primary features of ethnolectal Swiss German

5 ethnolectal features* (Tissot et al. 2011, see also Auer 2002)

1. change of genus of nouns (e.g. neuter instead of masculine)
2. omission of (definite) articles
3. omission of (locative) prepositions
4. omission of anaphoric personal pronouns (e.g. ‘es’)
5. change of verb valency (e.g. used with accusative instead of dative, or with ‘wo’ instead of ‘wohin’, or used with other prepositions than what is traditionally the case)
Data collection

• collect naturalistic spoken language
• at the moment:
  • recordings of 2 class groups of primary school children aged 8-12 in Winterthur (39 children)
  • one class in a rural area (N=21), one class in an urban area (N=18)
Hegi: 26% born outside of Switzerland

Eidberg: 9% born outside of Switzerland
Participants

Urban area (Hegi)  
~ 190 min

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>m</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
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Rural area (Eidberg)  
~ 175 min

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>m</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
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Survey

• questions on
  • child: name, gender, nationality, mother tongue, etc
  • family: mother tongue, education, other languages
  • languages spoken at home and in school
  • time spent on media
  • mobility
  • contact with people speaking other languages
Recordings: Task 1 – Diapix task

- ‘spot-the-difference’ game (Van Engel et al. 2010; Baker & Hazan 2011)
Recordings: Task 2 – story cubes
Results

1. change of genus of nouns (e.g. neuter instead of masculine)
2. omission of (definite) articles
3. omission of (locative) prepositions
4. omission of anaphoric personal pronouns (e.g. ‘es’)
5. change of verb valency (e.g. used with accusative instead of dative, or with ‘wo’ instead of ‘wohin’, or used with other prepositions than what is traditionally the case)
1. Change of genus of nouns

- often occurs in PPs

  feminine → masculine

  A: Wie isch bi dir bim Türe de Strich? (‘How is the line at door on yours?’)

  feminine → masculine

  B: Bi mir staat au no en bueb do mit emene biene und emene glace

  (‘There is also a boy on mine with a bee and an icecream’)

21 August 2019   SLE 51 Leipzig
2. Omission of definite articles

A: Uf welli Siite luegt dine? (‘Which way is yours looking?’)
B: Mine <..> uf <..> ehm <..> shopsiite. (‘Mine – to – ehm – shop.’)

A: Isch bi dir Häsli wiis?
(‘Is rabbit white on yours?’)
Which ethnolectal features are used in the urban area?

- change of genus of nouns (e.g. neuter instead of masculine)
- omission of (definite) articles
- omission of (locative) prepositions
- omission of anaphoric personal pronouns (e.g. ‘es’)
- change of verb valency (e.g. used with accusative instead of dative, or with ‘wo’ instead of ‘wohin’ or used with other prepositions than what is traditionally the case)
- incongruency in complex nominal phrases
Which ethnolectal features are used in the rural area?

1. change of genus of nouns (e.g. neuter instead of masculine)
2. omission of (definite) articles
3. omission of (locative) prepositions
4. omission of anaphoric personal pronouns (e.g. ‘es’)
5. change of verb valency (e.g. used with accusative instead of dative, or with ‘wo’ instead of ‘wohin’ or used with other prepositions than what is traditionally the case)
6. incongruency in complex nominal phrases
Who are those children?

- children using ethnolectal features in general have
  - another language than Swiss German as their mother tongue
  - frequent (daily) contact with speakers of other languages

- in the rural area, small number of children with ethnolectal features

- in the urban area, higher frequency of children with ethnolectal features

AND also children with Swiss-German as their mother tongue and infrequent language contact
Perceptional aspect: “Does your child speak differently than you?”

Results from survey with parents’ responses:
- e.g. new words like "Alter", "voll heftig"
- e.g. more English words/sentence fragments
- e.g. a different conversational style due to the media (child’s self-report!)

Urban vs rural responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Child speaks differently</th>
<th>Child does NOT speak differently</th>
<th>NA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>urban (Hegi)</td>
<td>10 (55.5%)</td>
<td>8 (45.5%)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rural (Eidberg)</td>
<td>6 (28.6%)</td>
<td>14 (66.6%)</td>
<td>1 (4.8%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
As a way of conclusion…

• children use ethnolectal features reported in adolescent speech
• the most frequent feature = change of genus of nouns
• use of features dependent on degree of contact and mother tongue
• more children in the urban area use ethnolectal features, including those with Swiss-German as mother tongue and infrequent language contact
• children in the urban area are more often perceived to speak differently from their parents than those in the rural area

Ethnolectal features are enregistered to index urban rather than ethnic identity?
Next steps

- transcribe interviews (X-SAMPA)
- conduct follow-up experiments (acquisition of social meaning)
- extend to other schools and other age groups (kindergarten!) to cover more “urban” and more “rural” areas
- assess impact of other factors (e.g. amount of time spent watching tv or using social media, absence/presence of older siblings, etc.)
Thank you to:

- Eline Zenner and Nane Mertens for sharing their survey
- Lena Zipp for the equipment
- Valerie Hazan for sharing the diapix pictures
- the teachers of the primary schools for allowing us to record their children
- the parents for allowing us to record their children
- and the children (who seemed to have as much fun as I did)!
THANK YOU

slides available at: www.melanie-roethlisberger.ch
References


References


