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KU LEUVEN



How pre-adolescents use ethnolectal features in urban areas: A case study of German-speaking Switzerland

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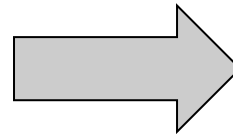
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How did it start

- *Chani bleistift?* ('Can I pencil?')



Corpus Swiss-
German
children's
speech?



Previous research on Swiss-German dialects

Focus on regional variation:

- linguistic atlases (SDS, SADS) (e.g. Glaser & Bart 2015)
- apps and online games (Leemann et al. 2015)

Focus on historical data:

- Wenkersätze 1930-2020 (Citizen Science, PI: E. Glaser)
- ArchiMob corpus (oral histories, e.g. Samardžić et al. 2016)

Focus on specific groups of speakers:

- ethnolectal Swiss German (e.g. Tissot et al. 2011, Schmid 2017)
- Youth language (e.g. Werlen et al. 2010, Galliker 2014)



Our project

→ Language variation and change in language of **children**

- Corpus-based & experimental
- Focus on youngest speakers



Objectives of the project

- 1) To take stock of the linguistic variables that children use, exploring the social/demographic parameters that correlate with that use (e.g. language contact),
→ **bottom-up & top-down**
- 2) and to assess the degree of overlap with the general adult speech community (and the diffusion process observed elsewhere; Leemann et al. 2014, Kolly et al. 2015)
→ **top-down**
- 3) To explore the social meaning that children attach to these variables and features using a series of explicit and implicit language attitude studies
→ **experimental**



Today: Bottom-up & Top-down

- To take stock of the linguistic variables that children use, exploring the social/demographic parameters that correlate with that use (e.g. language contact),
- Focus on the use of **ethnolectal features**
- and investigate patterns of variation of these features among the youngest dialect speakers
- why ethnolectal features → only adolescents and adults?
- Myth – urban versus rural areas



Research questions

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

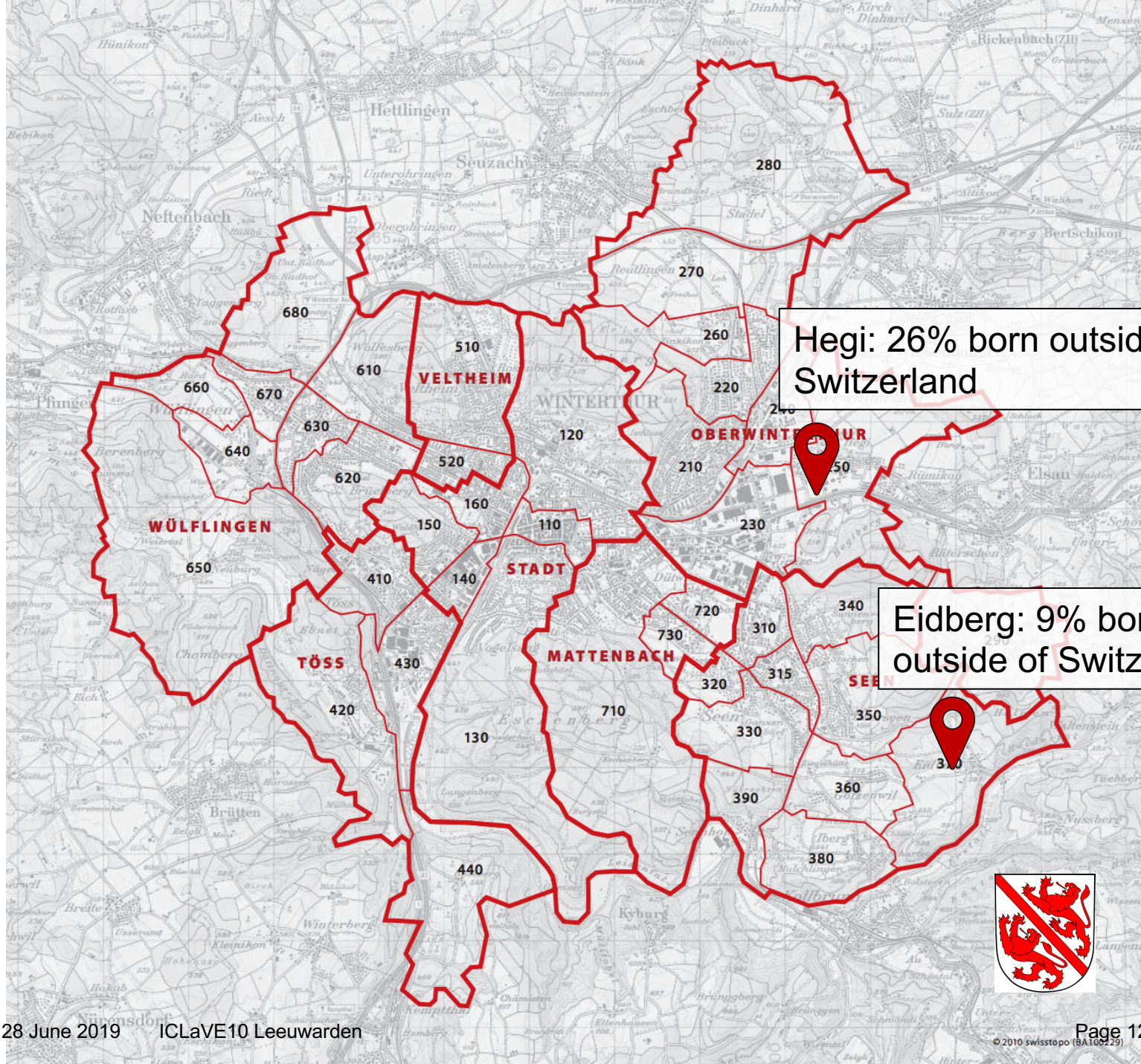
5 ethnolectal features* (Tissot et al. 2011, see also Auer 2002)

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) including metadata
 - 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

Age	f	m
8 years	1	0
9 years	5	4
10 years	4	4
TOTAL	10	8

Rural area (Eidberg)
~ 175 min

Age	f	m
10 years	0	1
11 years	5	7
12 years	4	4
TOTAL	9	12

Survey

- paper / online (QR code → Qualtrics, KU Leuven)
- 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

Umfrage zum Sprachgebrauch von schweizerdeutsch-sprachigen Kindern (Alter 6-12 Jahre)

Vielen Dank, dass Sie Ihr Einverständnis gegeben haben, dass Ihr Kind an dieser Studie teilnimmt. Damit wir erkennen können, inwiefern der Sprachgebrauch Ihres Kindes durch das Umfeld zu Hause, in der Schule und unter Freunden beeinflusst wird, ist es wichtig, dass Sie mit diesen Informationen näher vertraut sind. Deshalb wären wir sehr froh, wenn Sie nachfolgende Angaben ausfüllen könnten. Sie können aber auch den QR Code scannen und die Umfrage online ausfüllen.



1. Information zum Kind

Name (Vorname, Nachname)	
Schule und Klasse	
Wohnort	
Geburtsdatum	
Geschlecht	
Nationalität	
Muttersprache (z.B. Dialekt)	
Andere Sprachen, die das Kind spricht	
Anzahl, Geschlecht und Alter von Geschwistern	

2. Familiäres Umfeld:

	Muttersprache	Höchste Ausbildung	Beruf	Andere Sprachen
Erziehungsberechtigte/r 1				
Erziehungsberechtigte/r 2				
Weitere erziehungsberechtigte Personen (z.B. Grossmutter)				

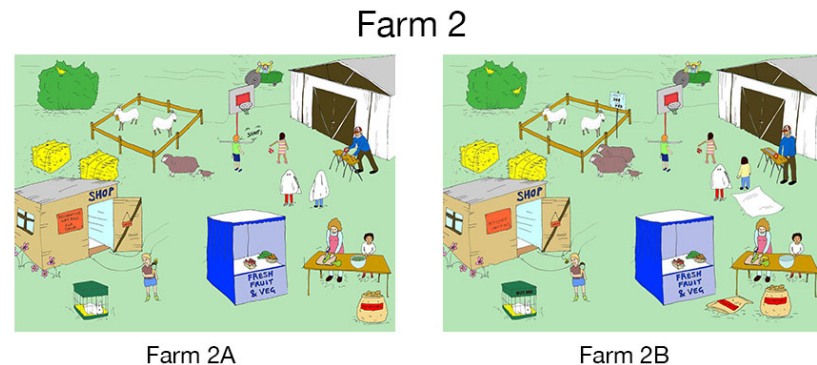
3. Welche Sprachen werden zu Hause gesprochen?

4. Welche Sprachen spricht Ihr Kind in der Schule (z.B. Pausenhof, Unterricht)?

1

Recordings: Task 1

- Diapix task (Van Engel et al. 2010; Baker & Hazan 2011)
- ‘spot-the-difference’ game



- elicits spontaneous speech interaction between two participants
- participants have to try and work out 5 differences between their own and their partners’ picture without seeing their partners’ picture.

Recordings: Task 2

- story cubes
- take turns in creating a story
- elicits more naturalistic speech than the diapiix task





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 staht au no en bueb do **mit emene** biene
und emene glace
(‘There is also a boy on mine with a bee and an
icecream’)

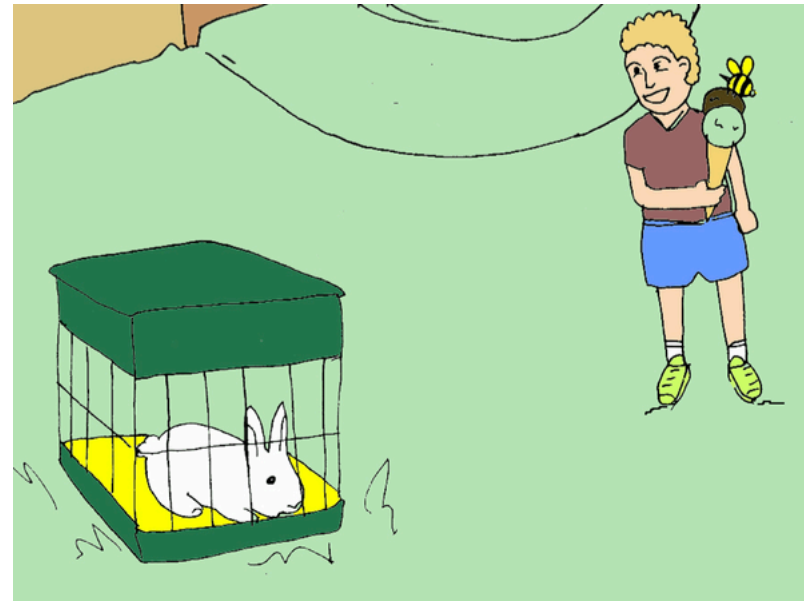


2. Omission of definite articles

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
- 3. omission of (locative) prepositions
- 4. 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?

- ✓ 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, but all adhere to the above pattern
- in the urban area, higher frequency of children with ethnolectal features including also **children with Swiss-German as their mother tongue and infrequent language contact**

Perceptual 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

Area	Child speaks differently	Child does not speak differently	NA
urban (Hegi)	10 (55.5%)	8 (45.5%)	–
rural (Eidberg)	6 (28.6%)	14 (66.6%)	1 (4.8%)



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)
- take stock of children's social network (who talks to whom?)
- extend to other schools and other age groups (kindergarten!)
- assess impact of other factors (e.g. amount of time spent watching tv or using social media, absence/presence of older siblings, etc.)



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- the parents for allowing us to record their children
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THANK YOU

slides available at: www.melanie-roethlisberger.ch



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