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The relationship between regional identity and regional variety: Language Attitudes in Munich and Berlin

Language and identity have always been strongly bound with each other, and this relationship has been of particular interest to sociolinguists since the 1960's. Much research has been done on the relationship between language and ethnicity/national identity (e.g. Edwards 1985), yet little research has been done on the relation between regional varieties and regional identity. In this project I seek to answer the question: to what degree is speaking a regional variety of German tied to the sense that a speaker "possesses" a regional identity?

Language attitudes have been studied across Germany (e.g. Dailey-O'Cain 1997). however an in-depth investigation of particular cities has not yet been carried out. In order to fill this gap I undertook a survey of two large German cities - Berlin and Munich. Berlin has historically been a very prestigious city in Germany, at various times the capital city, and the regional variety has likewise enjoyed periods of prestige (see Zimmermann 1996). The sociolinguistic differences between East- and West-Berlin have also been studied widely (e.g. Dittmar et al 1988), yet the concentration in these studies has been on the East/West difference, whereas I focus more on language attitudes in general. The regional variety in Munich, Bavarian, also carries a fairly high prestige. Thus one would expect to find a strong correlation between regional variety and regional identity in Munich, perhaps even stronger than in Berlin.

For this study I constructed two separate questionnaires (one for Munich and one for Berlin) consisting of 34 questions each, which included questions about demography, language use, and language attitudes. The respondents were fairly heterogeneous in regards to age and sex, though most were fairly educated.

The results of this study show that the respondents who spoke a regional variety reported a stronger sense of regional identity than those who did not. Contrary to my expectations though, Berliners reported a stronger correlation between speaking a regional variety and "possessing" a regional identity than Münchner. This may be seen as a result of the fact that Berlinerish is being learned not from parents or grandparents, as is traditionally thought, but actually from the peer group. This is in contrast to my Munich data, where Bavarian is still learned from the older generations. In addition, none of the respondents in Munich identified themselves as Münchner, but several identified themselves as Bavarian, which further emphasizes the relation of regional variety to regional identity, in that Berlinerish is spoken mostly in Berlin, whereas the regional variety in Munich – Bavarian – is spoken in most of Bavaria. These results show distinct differences in the way in which regional variety is viewed in Munich and Berlin, but additional research must be done in both cities to further investigate this topic, especially in Munich, where little sociolinguistic research has been done to date.