
When migration reinforces language ideologies: Dialect avoidance as strategic adaptation in transnational communication spaces

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Dialects in the German-speaking area have suffered from prestige loss and social devaluation for decades (Plewnia & Rothe 2016), often being associated with lack of education, regionalism, or backwardness, while standard varieties are socially valorized. In migration contexts, however, one might expect that regional varieties are maintained as identity resources (Dunmore et al. 2024). This is particularly plausible when the surrounding language itself is highly regionally varied, as is the case in the Netherlands. Based on interviews with German-speaking migrants in the Netherlands, this study shows that familiar patterns of dialect avoidance from intra-German migration (prestige orientation, stigmatization of certain dialects) persist in the transnational context—even up to thirty years after migration.

The conscious devaluation of certain dialects and the normative positioning of Standard German as “more intellectual” mirror classical language ideological mechanisms that reproduce social differentiation and capital, leading to deliberate intergenerational prestige planning (i.e. not transmitting stigmatized varieties to the children). Additionally, Standard German functions as a *lingua franca* in regionally heterogeneous migrant networks, where dialects are considered potentially exclusionary. Furthermore, implicit avoidance is evident, for example, in the prioritization of English acquisition for children and the omission of dialects from the multilingual repertoire, highlighting a subtle and less consciously reflected dimension of linguistic adaptation.

This suggests that linguistic avoidance should not be understood solely as a reactive strategy against stigmatization but also as a proactive practice aimed at capital maximization and pragmatic navigation of complex communicative fields. Particularly in transnational spaces, hybrid language ideologies emerge that valorize standard languages as social resources while excluding regional varieties, even in contexts where their maintenance might be expected: Language ideological and pragmatic motivations for avoidance are hardly mitigated by local norms in a multilingual, transnational, and dialect-rich environment.

References: • Dunmore, S., Rosiak, K. & C. Taylor (eds.) (2024). *New Approaches to Language and Identity in Contexts of Migration and Diaspora*. 1st edn. London: Routledge.
• Plewnia, A. & A. Rothe (2016). Von gebildeten Deutschen, freundlichen Sachsen und temperamentvollen Bayern. Einstellungen zu Varietäten und ihren Sprechern. In *Struktur, Gebrauch und Wahrnehmung von Dialekt. Beiträge zum 3. Kongress der Internationalen Gesellschaft für Dialektologie des Deutschen (IGDD), Zürich, 7.-9. September 2009*, 179–207.