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Importance of Dialects in German Language in Germany

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Abstract

In this article we will explore the effects of German dialects in modern German culture, trace their origins and evolution. We will also observe the High German language role and observe the mind-set of people towards it. We are going to study the contribution of mother tongue to one's personality development.

1. Introduction

German is an interesting language because of the dominance of dialects that arose due to the fact that there was no cultural centre in France, like Paris. At the end of the middle Ages attempts were made to create a "Standard German language," so that the numerous local regions could more easily communicate with each other. Let us not forget that nearly equivalent until the 19th century, Germany did not exist as a political entity. Martin Luther's Bible translation into German from the original Hebrew in 1522 was a major influence on the standardisation of German. The Hebrew translation targeted an "East Middle German" This "style" was based largely on the dialect used at the Saxon court. That became the basis of what we now know as German Modern German is also called High German, or Hochdeutsch. Hochdeutsch is used as the official language, higher education, literature, and mass media. Once the Germanic tribes migrated in the early centuries AD to southern Germany their speech had the silent stops p, t, and k in almost the same distribution as in modern English. Then, perhaps during the 6th century, a transition habitually evolved called the High German Consonant Shift. They came to be pronounced as affricates at the beginning of the words and when doubled, p, t, and k; after a vowel they came to be pronounced as long fricatives¹.

2. Results of the High German consonant shift

*V represents any vowel.

**Khann and lekchen, with affricates, are southern dialect forms; Standard German has stops, kann and lecken.

p-pound /Pfund pp apple /Apfel Vp*hope/hoffen

t-ten /zehn tt sitting/sitzen Vr *bite/beissen

k-can /khan **kk lick/lekchen **Vk *makemachen

These changes took place in the south of the German speaking region and then spread north, some of which reached further than others. The situation at the end of the 19th century maken / machen, is usually selected as the boundary between Low German and High German, as it is common for p, t, and k to ff, ss, and ch, respectively (hopen / hoffen, bīten / beissen, maken / machen), and t and t to z and tz, respectively (ten / ten, sitten / sitten)². The change of ik 'I' to ich, which shows that the change from k to ch after a vowel spreads unusually far in this particular word. The Dorp 'village' shift to Dorf (compare archaic English thorp), shows that the p after r and l shift did not spread as far north as the p, t, and k after a vowel¹. Change from dat 'that' to das, shows that, in this term, the change from t to s after a vowel spreads even less north (and in a few others: it/es, wat/was 'what'). Dominik Kuhn from Reutlingen¹, a small town near Stuttgart, translates films into the Swabian dialect. For him speaking a dialect means feeling at home. « When I'm outside for a certain amount of time, for example three weeks, and now I have to speak a foreign language, or High German, but I'm just looking forward to seeing my friends again. A language is a gateway to a cultural understanding "(Lobst, 2015)¹. He found there's a close relationship between a dialect and the culture of the people. In Bavaria some parents were worried about their children in the daily speech using a dialect. But lately research has shown that dialects have a positive impact on the growth of an infant. Dr Rupert Hochholzer says: « For many Bavarian children, dialects are still the main means of communication and thus they play a role. A crucial position in maintaining their dignity "(Rowley, 2013)¹. It is written in the Bavarian Constitution that the purpose of education is to awaken love for the country of origin, the above have close links to the dialects. For many children in Bavaria their dialect is at the same time their mother-tongue.

3. Dialect- Advantage or Disadvantage?⁴

There, scientists, writers, teachers, and politicians exchanged ideas about how the Swabian, Alemannic, and Franconian dialects could be strengthened. Winfried Kretschmann's idea of giving the dialect more room in schools and the education system and thereby leading to its adoption and preservation is genuinely good for him⁵. The dialect provides identification and something you can take with you, like a mobile home. Anyone who has ever been on a long journey, maybe even a few months, knows the feeling of well-being when they eventually pick up familiar phrases of dialect again. Some mothers speak Standard German with their children in order to make it easier for them at school and not viewed as less educated. By

introducing broadcasting, Standard German has also been introduced to places where historically only dialect has been spoken⁴. Linguist Kleiner believes a common language of the media has an impact on what is regarded as exemplary. Mobility, in addition, seems to play a role in dialect death. People are moving away ever more from their hometowns, even to areas where the native dialect is not spoken. Nowadays many children grow up with traditional German and dialect. This resembles a bilingual development according to brain and language experts. These children may be seen to have a greater understanding of language, which is followed by easier learning of foreign languages. If you ask dialect speakers what the dialect means to them, it turns out that most people think dialect is an important part of identity. The dialect-the common language in a certain area-contributes to a sense of relation and belonging. Neuroscientists attest dialect speakers a higher cognitive potential, teachers report greater richness of expression and advantages when learning foreign languages later. The results of school performance studies seem to confirm this: Bavaria, Saxony and Baden-Württemberg are considered the best educational regions in Germany⁴. Dialects are neither good nor evil. Dialects have benefits as well as inconveniences. They seem to be a major cultural asset and identity to others. It seems most desirable for dialect speakers to be able to speak High German as well, in order to remove potential disadvantages. Positive results, such as improved language skills, speak in favour of bilingual development with the German and dialect norms.

4. High German and low German

German dialects are categorised as either Low or Strong, depending on the region they originate from in central Europe. Therefore, northern dialects, where the terrain is somewhat flat, are called Low (Platt- or Niederdeutsch). The further south one travels, flatlands give way to hills and eventually, in Switzerland, the Alps; High German dialects are the varieties spoken in those regions. Since this territory is so large, there are three subgroups of High German dialects, West Central, East Central, and Upper. The word High German (Hochdeutsch) also refers to the standard language written and spoken in schools and the media. This is because Hochdeutsch is historically focused mainly on written dialects that have been used in the High German dialect area, especially in the East Central region where the modern German states of Saxony and Thuringia are located.

5. Bi-dialectalism

In many parts of the world bi-dialectalism, the systematic use of two different dialects of the same language, is widespread. Millions of children grow up in the USA speaking African American English at home as well as American Mainstream English at school.⁸ Similar situations arise in many parts of Europe, such as the German-speaking parts of Switzerland, where schoolchildren may only feel comfortable talking about High German school subjects but switch to Swiss-German for daily conversation. "Dialects are extremely under-recognized and undervalued, and this kind of study will help people understand that bi-dialectalism has a benefit, and this can be significant when we think about our culture, how we educate children and the importance of learning language.^{8"}

6. Psychological impact of speaking different dialects:

Dr Kyriakos Antoniou, from Cambridge's Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics studied that multilingual and bi-dialectal children displayed an advantage over monolingual children, which was evident in composite cognitive processes including memory, attention and cognitive flexibility; indicating that previously documented benefits for multilingual children could be shared by children speaking either two or more dialects.

7. Conclusion

Dialects have an important part to play in German people's lives. In this ever-changing world, they enable them to maintain their identity and culture. Dialects remain stable, although Standard German is constantly influenced outside, mainly English. Adults and children feel connected to their homeland through dialects.

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