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Sprechen Wir Deutsch?
The Construction of Identity in Austria and South Tyrol

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This paper examines some of the linguistic tools, techniques, means, and methods by which the populations of Austria and South Tyrol construct identity. In order to better situate these two communities, this paper begins with an overview of the conditions which led to the creation of each state. It then explains some of the ways in which language can be used as a tool of identity construction. Positioning theory details ways both these groups create categories of separation and belonging. Citing the use of Austrian German, dialect in literature, differing pronunciation, and lexical development, this paper examines how the population of Austria constructs a linguistic identity distancing itself from Germany. This paper also examines how, using similar linguistic tools such as pronoun use and naming techniques, the population of South Tyrol constructs its identity. In contrast to Austria, the South Tyroleans align themselves with Germany, creating closer ties with Germanic neighbours while distancing themselves from Italy. Each population positions itself in relation to Germany, either with or against, using linguistic tools to create a group identity.

Two German-speaking communities occupy the Dolomite mountains of central Europe. One is an independent monolingual nation, the second a marginalized segment of population. Though related culturally, historically, and linguistically, these groups today use their common language to create very different identities. This paper will examine some of the linguistic tools, techniques, means, and methods by which populations of Austria and South Tyrol construct identity.

History

Austria

The Austrian Empire has its roots in the Hapsburg Monarchy, dating back to 1278 AD. It was succeeded by the Austrian Empire (1804-1867) and then by the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867-1918), the latter of which united the kingdoms of Hungary and Austria. Following defeat in WWI, the empire was disbanded and *Die Erste Republik* was founded (initially named *Deutsch-Österreich*). Austria was annexed to Nazi Germany at the beginning of WWII (*Anschluss*), subsequently occupied by the four allied powers (1945-1955), and finally granted independence (commonly referred to as *Freiheit*) on May 12, 1955 (Steininger 1997).

South Tyrol

Castle Tyrol (seat of the counts of Tyrol) was built outside present-day Meran, Italy, sometime around 1100 AD in territory controlled by the reigning Hapsburg Monarchy. Following defeat by Napoleon in 1805, the Austrian Empire ceded the area to the Kingdom of Bavaria. The territory was returned to Austria by the Congress of Vienna in 1814. The Italian reunification movement (*il Risorgimento*) was strong during the first half of the 19th century, and the patchwork of independent Italian states lobbied hard against the Austro-Hungarian empire for the unification of the Italian peninsula. South Tyrol, however, remained under Austrian rule (Steininger 1997).

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Italy was brought reluctantly into World War I at the behest of the Triple Entente and largely because of the promise of several territorial concessions in Austria-Hungary (including the Tyrol)—all home to Italian minorities. Following Austria-Hungary's surrender in 1918 and despite strong opposition from the citizens of South Tyrol, the area was returned to Italian hands. South Tyrol endured Italianization under the rule of Ettore Tolomei during the Fascist years (1922-1943). It experienced brief occupation during the Second World War but afterwards was returned to Italy. Italy and Austria negotiated the creation of the Trentino-Alto Adige/Tiroler Etschland region following WW II, and both German and Italian were made official languages. What is today called the Autonomous Province of Bolanzo-Bozen became an independent province of Northern Italy in 1972 (Steininger 1997).

Language as a Tool for Identity Construction

"Language," writes François Grosjean (1982, 117), "is not just an instrument of communication. It is also a symbol of social or group identity, an emblem of group membership and solidarity." As such, language is a powerful tool for the construction of identity. The use of certain linguistic forms marks one as either a member or an outsider. These same principles apply not only to individuals but also to groups, with whole segments of a population marking linguistic identity through conscious or unconscious language choices.

Positioning is one such method. Positioning describes a relation, denotes a placement relative to something or someone else. Linguistically, positioning can be understood as "the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person's actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts" (Harré and Van Langenhove 1991, 395). It is "a process by which interactants make their orientations toward social categories relevant" (Liebscher et. al 2010, 380). Individuals can position, both themselves and others, in a variety of means: in conversations, in the storylines of conversations, and in the actions of the storylines (Harré and Van Langenhove 1991, 396).

Groups, such as the Austrians and Tyroleans, can also position. These two different groups situate themselves culturally and linguistically apart from the dominant powers in their respective regions: Austrians by separating (positioning) themselves apart from German ideology and creating a uniquely Austrian space; South Tyroleans by positioning themselves apart from Italian ideology while simultaneously allying with their Germanic neighbours.

Construction of Austrian German Separate from *Standarddeutsch*

The language of Austria is German. Whether a dialect, a variety, or even "second-class German" (as it is occasionally still viewed)—German is the national language (Rusch 1989, 1). But Austrians are adamant about a national identity separate and apart from German(y). Rusch (1989, 2) writes that "'Austrian' is linguistically very far from being a language on its own or an independent linguistic concept." It is rather a regional variety of the German language, and there is great internal variation within the national variety as well. However, "attempts at establishing Austrian as a national variety of German are common and generally accepted," and function to ideologically separate the country from its large and influential neighbour (Rusch 1989, 11).

Rusch (1989, 13), however, argues against the desirability of a codified national variety of Austrian, believing that it would "have a damaging effect on the image of the 'smaller Germans' abroad," and that establishing this national norm would unfairly privilege the Viennese variety of Austrian-German and "its most influential classes." He advocates instead for national varieties of German, reinforcing the idea of satellite German-speaking communities and "Ger-

man as a pluricentric language." "National identity," he writes, "has to be sought and found elsewhere."

The Austrians themselves seem to disagree. Through a variety of linguistic techniques, they position their national variety as a distinct alternative to *Standarddeutsch* and, both directly and indirectly, themselves as separate from Germany. A few of these means will be discussed below.

Conscientious objection

Following *Anschluss*, the term *Österreich* was "abolished and forbidden" (Rusch 1989, 3). Place names were changed: *Österreich* became *Ostmark-Deutsche*; Ober- and Nieder-Österreich (provinces) became Ober- and Niederdonau. Austrian resistance forces adopted the forbidden term and turned it into a subversive rallying cry. They coded it "05" (*Österreich* = *Ö* = *Oe*; *e* is the fifth letter of the alphabet) and plastered it on buildings and pamphlets. The country also endured the Germanization of many words, replacing Austrian vocabulary with German, which was met with decidedly cool reception.

Literature in dialect

Austrian writers make particular use of dialect in their literature. Referring to Austrian German and Standarddeutsch, Rusch (1989, 6) writes, "many writers use the various levels of style and the switching between them as a means of stylistic expression and characterization." This then serves both literary and linguistic functions. As is common for Upper German dialects, the present perfect verb tense (*Perfekt*) is used in place of the simple past (*Präteritum*): "*Am Montagmorgen ist Melzer zur Arbeit gekommen, ziemlich spat,... er hat die Siebenuhrsirene der in der Nähe liegenden Textilfabrik gehört und ist eilig in die Latzhose gefahren*" (on Monday morning Melzer had come to work fairly late... he had not heard the seven a.m. siren from the nearby textile factory and had dressed swiftly in overalls) (Wolfgruber 1984, 104).

Another element often considered especially Austrian is the positioning of the verb as main clause following *weil* (because) "*...Wunder ist es ja eigentlich eh keins, weil wir will denn schon für das Geld...*" (no one really wondered anyway, because we already wanted the money) (Wolfgruber 1984, 271). These both are examples of the creation of specific Austrian versions of German, even in the face of grammatical conventions which would, strictly speaking and by *Standarddeutsch* prescription, classify them as grammatically incorrect (Rusch 1989).

Lexicon

The lexicon of Austrian German differs in some very specific forms. It is perhaps no wonder that terminology for Austrian government differs from German (for example, *Bundesheer* and *Bundeswehr*). Traditional Austrian/Hungarian dishes such as *Kaiserschmarrn*, *Palatschinken*, and *Powidl* have, naturally, no *Standarddeutsch* equivalent. But other food names vary as well. An Austrian apricot is an *Aprikose* instead of a *Marille*; one will be offered *Obers* for coffee instead of *Sahne*; and *Erdapfel* is heard in place of *Kartoffel*. The latter, admittedly, is standard throughout Bavaria and in other German-speaking realms, but was declared—to the specific exclusion of other options—Standard Austrian in the 1979 *Österreichisches Wörterbuch* (Austrian Dictionary) (Rusch 1989, 9).

Pronunciation

Pronunciation is also a tool for language differentiation. What may seem like a mild difference can, upon closer examination, reveal layers of meaning. The Viennese pronunciation of the word *Kaffee* (coffee) is one such example. The *Standarddeutsch* variant /'kafe/ is spurned in favour of a uniquely Austrian form /ka'fe/. Though this may seem at first glance unremarkable, when considered in light of Austria's rich *Kaffeehaus-Kultur*, the expression *'kafe schmeckt mir nicht* (coffee doesn't taste good to me) takes on new layers of meaning. In this way, the expression

is not only (one may argue, is not at all) a statement of epicureal preference, but rather a dislike of German encroachment on an area of Austrian identity. Scheuringer (1987, 113) argues that it "*ist nicht nur Ausdruck der Bevorzugang eines stärkeren Kaffees… sondern offensichtlich auch Ausdruck einer sprachnationalistischen Denkungsweise*" (it is not an expression of preference for strong coffee... but rather an expression of national linguistic mindset).

Construction of German Language Identity in Alignment with Germany

Large centres of German speaking populations (Austria, Switzerland) are widely acknowledged to have their own national varieties of German and are generally perceived to be part of the larger Germanic realm. Smaller pockets of German-speaking populations are less recognized. Small populations, such as those in South Tyrol, lack the infrastructure and institutions—language authorities, a unique linguistic codex— necessary to support the development of a separate linguistic community. Minor linguistic variations are either overlooked or non-existent, both by outsiders who are unaware of local differences and by the population itself. Thus, the population of South Tyrol is generally perceived to speak the Austrian variety of German (Ammon 1997, 163).

Naming

Becoming nominally Italian was only one identity crisis moment for South Tyrol. The strict program of Italianization after the First World War helped ensure vestiges of German were forcibly removed from the region. As early as 1906, Italian senator Ettore Tolomei was demanding the assimilation of South Tyrol. He refused even to acknowledge the name "South Tyrol," arguing that "*Für uns gibt es ein Tirol weder geographisch noch historisch. Es gibt ein historisches Trentino und es gibt ein Alto Adige*" (For us there is a Tyrol neither geographically nor historically. There are historic Trento and Alto Adige regions) (quoted in Freiberg 1989, 126). Understanding the potential names had to galvanize a people behind an identity, Tolomei went further to say, "*Der Name war ein Banner; die ganze Welt würde begreifen, daß ein Gebiet dieses Namens, das oberste Becken des großen italienischen Flusses, Italient gehörte*" (The name was a banner; the whole world should understand that this region, the uppermost basin at the reaches of Italian influence, is indeed Italian) (quoted in Freiberg 1989, 126). In 1921, Tolomei demanded the Italianization (termed the *Wiederherstellung*, the "restoration") of all family and place names in South Tyrol. Thus, a Schulze from Bozen became a Sculdasci from Bolanzo almost overnight.

Pümpel-Mader (2000) explains the ties between physical territory and naming. Settlers are frequently named for the area they occupy: Tirol and Tiroler, Schweiz and Schweizer. One creates a collective social identity by "*die Übertragung der Erfahrungen der sozialen Gemeinschaft*" (the transference of characteristics to the social community) (Pümpel-Mader 2000, 124). Collective identity arises, she argues, in large part through the role of *Herkunft* (a German term which includes and brings together notions of origin, ancestry, family, and land), the naming thereof, and the social characteristics ascribed to these names which members of the society adopt (Pümpel-Mader 2000, 124). In the Tyrol regions, these include a great many physical landscape characteristics: *diese Bergbewohner* (these mountain dwellers), *dieses Bergvolk* (these mountain people), *die tirolischen Gebirgsleute* (the Tyrolean mountain people), and *die Eingebohrnen der rauheren Thaeler* (the natives of the rough valley) are all names by which the Tyroleans have been known (some since as early as 1796) and through which, Pümpel-Mader (2000, 125) argues, the Tyroleans understand not only their land and home, but also themselves.

Pronouns

Pümpel-Mader (2000, 122) examines the social role of collective identity construction. She writes of the "*gesellschaftlicher Proz-*

ess" (social process) and the role of *wir* (we) in the creation of a group. She argues that the collective is a symbolic version of the group and a collective cannot be created out of relationships of interaction. It is rather an imagined and theoretical entity. Individual relationships are based in daily interaction, but a collective—a group—is not. Because of this, the group and group membership (what she terms the *Wir-Gefühl*) are constructed not from interactions, but rather in a cognitive and emotional self-reference (Pümpel-Mader 2000, 123). The *Wir-Gefühl* is the construction of identity that is lived and experienced in social groups.

Use of the *wir* pronoun thereby creates a group membership out of these individual interactions. This is evident in South Tyrol in the alternative name to the *Tiroler Volkspartei*: "*Wir Tiroler*," (Tyrolean People's Party: "We Tyroleans") as well as in the name of the local paper, *Die Wir Tiroler Zeitung*, (The We Tyroleans Paper), and its email addresses, @wir-tiroler.com.at (Pümpel-Mader 2000, 123).

Characteristics

Cognitive and emotional collective identity is also suggested through the use of Tirol and its adjectival derivatives in everyday language. Group belonging is subtly demonstrated through the use, repetition, and subsequent linguistic entrenching of these words in everyday vocabulary. "*Nominationseinheiten*," (nominal identifiers) as Pümpel-Mader (2000, 126) terms them, stand symbolically for the creation and consolidation of group coherence. They bind characteristics of the everyday Tyrolean world to the sense of identity constructed by those who inhabit it. She cites numerous examples of this phenomenon, including "*Wir haben heute SAISON TIROL erhalten*" (Tyrolean weather), "*Tanzabend «Tirolerisch»*"(Tyrolean dance style), and an abstract characterization of Tyrolean style in general: "*Ein Haus mit typisch tirolerischem Charakter*" (Pümpel-Mader 2000, 126).

Futures

Austria

The Austrian-German variety continues to be widely used throughout the region. Though in many ways similar to other varieties of German, Austria has the population, means, and—perhaps most crucially—inclination to support a fully codified linguistic identity separate from its German neighbour. Dialectical literature continues to be produced, published, and consumed. Lexical differences are becoming increasingly codified—since 1951, Austria has produced a dictionary of Austrian. Duden now produces a *Wörterbuch des österreichischen Deutsch* (dictionary of Austrian German). And both are growing: the 1951 *Österreiches Wörterbuch* contained 118 entries; the 1990 edition contained 219 (Ammon 1997, 172). "The specific traits of the Austrian national variety have," as per dictionary evidence Ammon (1997, 174) collected, "rather increased than decreased." The evidence would seem to suggest not only a static but, in fact, growing awareness of a distinctly separate national variety.

South Tyrol

According to the 2010 South Tyrol census, 69.4% of residents declare themselves members of the German language group; 26.3% declare Italian membership (Autonomous Province of South Tyrol [APST] 2010, 15). These numbers remain fairly consistent throughout recent history: in the 2001 census, 64.0% of the population identified as German; 24.5% Italian. In 1991, it was 65.3% German and 26.5% Italian (APST 2010, 19). Figures as far back as 1961 fall within 10% of the 2010 results—this would seem to indicate relative stability in the population. A shift towards or away from either linguistic group is not evident. Thus, the linguistic situation in South Tyrol can be perceived as relatively stable.

Conclusions

Through a variety of linguistic features, both of these populations create and maintain a linguistic identity separate from their neighbours. In Austria, this is achieved through a national language variety that is not German: the Austrians create an oppositional identity. They define themselves and their language by what it is not and position themselves as separate. The South Tyroleans, in contrast, create a linguistic identity by aligning themselves with the German language. Through the conscious use of place and personal names, adjectival use which links the land, language, and people, as well as through the use of group-inclusive pronouns, the South Tyroleans construct a group membership and identity which position them with Austria and Germany, while simultaneously distancing themselves from Italy.

Each of these populations use similar linguistic tools to construct an identity that binds the group together while/by dissociating from a larger hegemonic power. Geographically, historically, and linguistically related, both Austria and South Tyrol construct identities by positioning themselves in relation to German(y), albeit in very different fashions. Their relations to German(y) serve to unite their peoples and create a powerful group membership.

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