

## ABSTRACT

Located within current 'speaker design' approaches to the sociolinguistic analysis of language variation (Schilling-Estes 2002), this study investigates how and by what means speakers of Austrian German use Austrian dialect for rhetorical purposes in interaction. Specifically, it traces the processes and mechanisms underlying conversational 'contextualization' (Gumperz 1982) by which speakers strategically index social meanings attaching to dialect style, making them relevant to utterance interpretation.

Such contextualization is investigated in discourse data from episodes of the Austrian TV discussion show *Offen gesagt* ('Openly said'). While analysis of these discourse data draws primarily on the American research paradigm of interactional sociolinguistics, methodologies from the study of dialect perception and language attitudes are also integrated, in an innovative combination of analytic instruments.

In a dialect perception experiment, 42 Austrian native speakers were asked to listen to show excerpts and to underline in transcripts any words they perceived as dialectal. Results show that dialectal input-switches, *ge*-reductions, *l*-vocalizations, morphosyntactic features, as well as lexical items were perceptually salient.

In a verbal guise speaker evaluation experiment, 242 Austrian students were asked to evaluate two dialect and two standard speakers (one male, one female each) on adjective scales in a questionnaire. Results show that dialect

speakers are perceived as less educated, intelligent, serious, and polite and as more aggressive, coarse, and rough than standard speakers, but also as more natural, relaxed, emotional, honest, likeable, and having a better sense of humor.

Drawing together these findings in a discourse analysis of one particular episode of the TV show *Offen gesagt*, this study finds substantial grounds for the claim that participants shift from standard (the 'expected' variety) into dialect for strategic, rhetorical purposes, indexing social stereotypes that the two experiments have shown will be activated by the use of dialectal features. For instance, participants use dialect in reported speech to express an antagonistic footing towards the person quoted. Further, dialect is used in interjections to negatively qualify a previous speaker's utterance, e.g. rekeying it to ridiculing effect.

This study advocates the speaker design perspective on stylistic variation as well as the integration of analytic tools from various sociolinguistic sub-disciplines for the exegesis of interactional data.