English in the linguistic landscape of Vienna, Austria (ELLViA) – outline and rationale of a new project

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Variationist sociolinguistics

Interactional sociolinguistics

Linguistic landscape study

(Social) psychology of language

Cognitive sociolinguistics
Three stages in research on sociolinguistic variation (Eckert 2012, Schilling 2013):

- Variation as a correlate of situational and social factors
- Variation as a response to audiences
- Variation as a resource in the active creation, presentation, and negotiation of interactional identities and relationships

> 'Variation as dialogue'
Bakhtin (1986[1952-53]:95-96)

• When constructing my utterance, I try to actively determine [the listener's] response. Moreover, I try to act in accordance with the response I anticipate, so this anticipated response, in turn, exerts an active influence on my utterance [...] When speaking I always take into account the apperceptive background of the addressee's perception of my speech: the extent to which he [sic!] is familiar with the situation, whether he has special knowledge of the given cultural area of communication, his views and convictions, his prejudices (from my viewpoint), his sympathies and antipathies - because all this will determine his active responsive understanding of my utterance. These considerations also determine my choice of a genre for my utterance, my choice of compositional devices, and, finally, my choice of language vehicles, that is, the style of my utterance.
Erickson (1986:316)

"[T]alking with another person [...] is like climbing a tree that climbs back."
Variation as dialogue

Contextualization (Gumperz 1982)

Language choice to achieve communicative effects

Situated interpretation of language choice ('inference')
Contextualization (Gumperz 1982, Auer 1995):

• all activities by which participants activate, make relevant, maintain, revise, delimit, cancel – in short, index - any aspect of interactional context as relevant for locally situated meaning-making

> One such activity is language choice (code-switching, style-shifting).
Variation as dialogue in the linguistic landscape

Language choice to achieve communicative effects

Situated interpretation of language choice ('inference')
Variation as dialogue in the linguistic landscape

'modern' 'international' 'dynamic' 'Youth language' 'cool' 'prestigious' etc.

sign-originator  ←  sign-recipient
Social associations regarding 'People who use English'/ the English language?

"English!"

[Hairstyle]

(Kristiansen 2008, Soukup 2013; Gumperz 1982)
Variation as dialogue in the linguistic landscape

Language choice to achieve communicative effects

Situated interpretation of language choice ('inference')

Perception of language choice

Evaluation of language choice (social associations)
Variation as dialogue in the linguistic landscape

Social meaning of English (in Austria, versus German): 'modern', 'international', 'dynamic', 'youth language', 'cool', 'prestigious' etc.

"English!"

Sign-originator ↔ Sign-recipient

Image: Sign with text "lebe DEINEN Hairstyle!"
Module 1: 'Locating and describing English language use in the Viennese LL'

Module 2: 'Establishing what constitutes English language use to Viennese LL sign-readers'

"English!"

Social meaning of English (in Austria, versus German): 'modern', 'international', 'dynamic', 'Youth language', 'cool', 'prestigious' etc.

Module 3: 'Establishing the social meanings Viennese LL sign-readers commonly associate with English language use'
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- Variationist study of the Viennese LL
  > Generate and analyze a corpus of LL signs

- Psycholinguistic study of perceptions of English vs. German in lexical items occurring in the LL

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- Language attitude study of the social meanings of English (vs. German) using items occurring in the LL
Variationist design: count-all data collection, following the 'Principle of Accountability':

"[...] any variable form [...] should be reported with the proportion of cases in which the form did occur in the relevant environment, compared to the total number of cases in which it might have occurred." (Labov 1969:738)

All instances of writing are recorded in the field (via photography)

Stratified sample of administrative districts as proxy for different groups of local sign recipients

6 districts, selected in pairs:
- High percentage of 20-29 year olds (8th distr.) vs. 65+ year-olds (19th distr.)
- High percentage of multilingual inhabitants (16th distr.) vs. low percentage (21st distr.)
- High tourist activity (1st distr.) vs. low tourist activity (18th distr.)

4 streets in each district: 2 with high / 2 with low commercial activity =24 streets in total

200m stretch of each street (100m to the left/right of the geographical midpoint)
Findings

• 1 street done (23 to go…)
• 4 days fieldwork in a team of 2
• 1260 items with writing counted
• 1598 photos taken
• 3 items per meter of street!
References


Eckert, Penelope. 2012. Three waves of variation study: The emergence of meaning in the study of sociolinguistic variation. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41.87-100.


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