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Austrian Listeners' Perceptions of Standard-Dialect Style-Shifting: An Empirical Approach

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1
2 Austrian Listeners' Perceptions of Standard-Dialect Style-Shifting: An Empirical
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4 Approach¹
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7 Barbara Soukup, University of Vienna
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9

10
11 ABSTRACT

12
13 Situated within the sociolinguistic study of intra-speaker variation, this article reports
14
15 a 'speech perception elicitation test' aimed at eliciting on which linguistic basis
16
17 Austrian listeners perceive style-shifts between standard Austrian German and
18
19 Austrian dialect. Forty-two informants were asked to listen to twelve audio-excerpts
20
21 from an Austrian TV discussion and to underline in standard transcripts any passages
22
23 in which they heard dialectal speech being used, as opposed to standard. The outcome
24
25 is a set of linguistic features that appear to be consensually used by Austrians as
26
27 dialect 'diagnostics', and hence can be maintained to evoke this style when used in
28
29 conversation. It is argued that establishing such a set of features on an empirical basis
30
31 meets an important requirement for any claims about effects created via style-shifting
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33 in interaction (such as participant alignments), because such claims are predicated on
34
35 the assumption that a respective shift be identified by listeners in inferencing
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37 meaning.
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46
47 KEY WORDS: Sociolinguistic variation; style shifting; speech perception; empirical
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49 methodology; Austrian German
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54 SHORT RUNNING TITLE:

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56 Austrians' Perceptions of Style-Shifting
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1
2 ABSTRACT IN GERMAN:
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4
5 Die gegenwärtige Studie beschreibt einen Test im Bereich der sprachlichen
6
7 Stilfeorschung, dessen Zielsetzung es war, die perzeptive Grundlage zu erstellen, auf
8
9 der österreichische HörerInnen Stilwechsel im österreichischen Deutsch
10
11 wahrnehmen. Im Testverlauf waren zweiundvierzig österreichische InformantInnen
12
13 aufgefordert, zwölf verschiedene Audio-Exzerpte aus einer österreichischen
14
15 Fernsehdiskussionssendung anzuhören und in einem hochsprachlichen Transskript
16
17 jene Passagen zu markieren, die ihrer Meinung nach einen Wechsel von Hochsprache
18
19 in den Dialekt bzw. in die Umgangssprache darstellen. Mittels der so gesammelten
20
21 Daten wurde eine Liste jener sprachlichen Varianten erstellt, die mit hoher
22
23 Wahrscheinlichkeit von österreichischen HörerInnen zur Sprachdifferenzierung
24
25 herangezogen werden und demnach in der Interaktion einen nicht-hochsprachlichen
26
27 Stil indizieren. Die empirische Erstellung eines solchen Variantensets stellt eine
28
29 wichtige Grundlage für weiterführende Analysen bezüglich interaktioneller
30
31 (rhetorischer) Effekte dar, die durch Stilwechsel hervorgerufen werden können.
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38 Schließlich gründen sich derartige Effekte auf die Perzeption der jeweiligen Stile und
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40 deren Einbeziehung in die Interpretation des Gesagten durch die ZuhörerInnenschaft.
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2 INTRODUCTION
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5 Investigations of intra-speaker, or stylistic, variation are currently high up on the
6
7 sociolinguistic agenda, in concurrence with constructivist conceptualizations of
8
9 linguistic systems as ‘symbolic resources’ that individuals draw on in social/
10
11 interactional meaning-making (for discussion see e.g. Schilling-Estes 2002; Coupland
12
13 2007; Eckert 2008). Typically, such investigations describe how speakers
14
15 strategically deploy certain (systems of) linguistic variants in instances of identity
16
17 management and to do interactional work. However, despite the by now well-
18
19 established fact that in the interactional construction of meaning of any kind, the
20
21 ‘listener’ is just as inherently implicated as the ‘speaker’ (see e.g. Bakhtin
22
23 1986[1952-53]; Goffman 1959; Gumperz 1982; Erickson 1986), until now, the
24
25 production (=speaker’s) end has received by far the most attention in studies on
26
27 stylistic variation. There is thus still a shortage of investigations of how such
28
29 variation ‘works’ from a *perception* (= listener’s) perspective, although the
30
31 interactional success of identity projections via the use of linguistic styles is arguably
32
33 contingent upon the addressee realizing a corresponding interpretation.
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41 The present paper picks up the issue of perception in the workings of intra-
42
43 speaker variation in the context of Austrian German. Specifically, I empirically
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45 address one of two perceptual prerequisites for stylistic meaning-making, which is
46
47 listeners’ identification of style-shifts and concomitant distinction of linguistic
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49 features as constituting a certain style. In what I call a ‘speech perception elicitation
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51 test’, forty-two native-speakers of Austrian German were asked to listen to audio-
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53 excerpts from an Austrian TV discussion show and to underline in transcripts any
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55 passage where they perceived a shift from Austrian standard into dialectal speech
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1
2 (which are linguistically very close).² The outcome is a collection of features that can
3
4 be regarded as ‘dialect-diagnostic’ to Austrian listeners. I suggest that establishing
5
6 such perceptual diagnostics is a fundamental requirement for any study on the use of
7
8 the respective styles in interactional meaning-making, and that test designs like mine
9
10 are therefore a valuable addition to the empirical toolkit of variationist research.
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14 In the following, I start out by situating my study in the general context of
15
16 research on the perception of styles. I then outline the design of my speech perception
17
18 evaluation test. Subsequent to the presentation of its results (i.e. an empirically based
19
20 set of features Austrians perceive as dialectal), I briefly illustrate their usefulness in
21
22 application to the exegesis of a short conversational excerpt that comprises an
23
24 instance of strategic style-shifting from Austrian standard into dialect. I conclude
25
26 with a critical assessment and discussion of the methodology presented here.
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32 THE PERCEPTION OF STYLES

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35 Irvine (2001) has convincingly admonished researchers concerned with the role of
36
37 linguistic styles in social meaning-making to always take the ‘differentiating process’
38
39 involved in the phenomenon into account. As she puts it,
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42 ‘Whatever “styles” are, in language or elsewhere, they are part of a *system of*
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44 *distinction*, in which a style contrasts with other possible styles, and the social
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46 meaning signified by the style contrasts with other social meanings [...] The
47
48 characteristics of a particular style cannot be explained independently of others.
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50
51 Instead, attention must be directed to relationships among styles – to their
52
53 contrasts, boundaries, and commonalities.’ (Irvine 2001: 22)
54
55

56 From the vantage point of sociolinguistic perception, Irvine’s exposition of styles as
57
58 ‘systems of distinction’ can be directly transposed into two equally important
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1
2 empirical exigencies in investigations of intra-speaker variation. Thus, there is a need
3
4 to establish (1) the actual *perceptual contrastiveness* of stylistic cues to the implicated
5
6 listeners; and (2) the actual *distinctness of the social associations* listeners attach to
7
8 these cues.
9

10
11 Dealing first with exigency (2), there actually exists a whole field of
12
13 empirical research occupied with exploring the distinctness of social associations
14
15 connected with linguistic variation – the field of ‘language attitude study’. While it
16
17 has drawn on a range of methodologies (see Garrett 2010), its classic staple is the
18
19 ‘speaker evaluation experiment’, in which informants listen to a set of voice
20
21 recordings and evaluate each of them by some measure. Arguably, then, a major
22
23 affordance of this method, in contrast to more direct types of attitude elicitation (e.g.
24
25 via interviews), is that what participants are doing here is really quite like what they
26
27 are doing in conversational interaction: they actively assess and interpret the use of
28
29 different linguistic varieties in juxtaposition, similar to situations of style-shifting in
30
31 ongoing talk. Thus, speaker evaluation experiments are a useful methodological ‘fix’
32
33 for exigency (2) noted above, effectively staking out the divergent ‘indexical fields’
34
35 (Eckert 2008) of social meanings associated with linguistic varieties in use. I have
36
37 extensively discussed the implications for respective experiment designs elsewhere,
38
39 in application to the Austrian sociolinguistic context (Soukup 2009). In the present
40
41 paper, I am only concerned with the first above-mentioned exigency - the need to
42
43 establish the *actual perceptual contrastiveness* of stylistic cues to listeners. This issue
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45 has hitherto received much less attention and is still calling for solutions in terms of
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47 empirical testing.
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56 Indeed, one point of criticism leveled against language attitude research has
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58 been that many experiments failed to investigate which linguistic features exactly
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2 were the subject of the attitudes recorded in connection with a certain speech sample.
3
4 The technical evolution of sound analysis and sound manipulation instruments has
5
6 since facilitated complex and sophisticated investigations of this issue which may be
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8 subsumed under the heading of ‘socio-perceptual research’ (see e.g. Thomas 2002;
9
10 Campbell-Kibler 2010; Drager 2010). Typically, experiments within this context use
11
12 short units of speech (words, sentences, often synthesized and acoustically
13
14 manipulated), asking informants to categorize and assess these according to different
15
16 criteria depending on the study’s particular descriptive focus, for example whether
17
18 the speech sample/ speaker sounds more or less ‘Southern’, ‘gay’, ‘lower class’,
19
20 ‘white-collar’, ‘educated’, and so on. This allows researchers to isolate the effects of
21
22 single linguistic variables (or even specific features of variables) on listeners’ social
23
24 perception while keeping other variables constant. The implied assumption is that,
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26 *ceteris paribus*, if the judgments differ in correlation with a controlled changing of
27
28 stylistic variants, those variants are indeed perceptually contrastive and thus
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30 distinctive semiotic resources to listeners.
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37 Such experiments have vividly demonstrated that untrained non-linguists,
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39 too, are able to perceive and process very fine-grained linguistic variation. Yet, so far,
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41 most studies applying this methodology have stayed within the limitations of testing
42
43 single linguistic variables at a time, as pre-selected and manipulated by the
44
45 researcher. However, as Auer (2007: 12) put it, ‘the meaning of linguistic
46
47 heterogeneity does not (usually) reside in individual linguistic features but rather in
48
49 constellations of such features which are interpreted together. [...] [W]e do not
50
51 interpret single variables but a gestalt-like stylistic expression.’ Hence, in order to
52
53 properly establish the perceptual basis of an Irvinean stylistic ‘system of distinction’,
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55 there is a need for empirical methodology that helps identify both which individual
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1
2 linguistic features are distinguished by listeners, but also, what *constellations* of such
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4 distinctive features listeners take to collectively index, and thus constitute, a
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6 particular stylistic category (a stylistic ‘gestalt’). Furthermore, in order to inform
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8 studies on the effects of style-shifting in real-life interaction, it seems desirable to
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10 elicit listeners’ perceptions via naturally occurring, rather than manipulated, speech
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12 samples.
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16 The test instrument I present in this paper was specifically designed for the
17
18 purpose of identifying and delimiting a collection of linguistic features that to
19
20 Austrian listeners are indicative of Austrian dialect style, as opposed to standard, and
21
22 are hence likely to trigger perceptions of style-shifting. But where socio-perceptual
23
24 experiments typically infer such perceptual contrastiveness from the fact that
25
26 different cues evoke different social judgments (or other behavioral response), my
27
28 approach is more explicit, directly asking listeners to identify style-shifts in the
29
30 speech samples provided (hence the label ‘speech perception elicitation test’). This
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32 was furthermore done using naturally occurring conversational data, in order to
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34 recreate as closely as possible real-life conditions of speech processing.
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42 METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN OF THE SPEECH PERCEPTION ELICITATION

43 TEST

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46 The inspiration for the test design presented here was Coupland’s (1980) study of
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48 perceptions of style-shifting in the speech of a travel agent from Cardiff, Wales.

49
50 Coupland presented his informants with nine speech samples of the travel agent; they
51
52 received a transcript of the samples in standard orthography and were asked to mark
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54 every point where they perceived a shift in ‘accent mildness/ broadness’ to occur, to
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56 record the direction of the shift, and to rate every half-line of discourse on a five-
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2 point scale from most standard (1) to least standard (5). The results showed ‘a
3
4 remarkable degree of consistency over the 38 sets of evaluations’ (Coupland 1980: 8)
5
6 and provided a much more fine-grained identification of styles via informant
7
8 consensus than did a preceding linguist’s analysis correlating usage with situational
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10 context.
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14 My own speech perception elicitation test was in fact part of a broader
15
16 research agenda investigating the strategic use and communicative effects of Austrian
17
18 standard-dialect shifting in public interaction (Soukup 2009). As such, the test design
19
20 was subservient to the exigencies of a subsequent discourse analysis of episodes of an
21
22 Austrian TV discussion show called *Offen gesagt* (‘Openly said’). This one-hour
23
24 show was produced and broadcast by the Austrian national television station ORF2
25
26 on Sunday nights over the years 2002-2007. It presented changing groups of four to
27
28 six participants, hosted by various ORF journalists, who discussed a hot public-
29
30 interest topic of the week (without studio audience). The general language norm and
31
32 expected ‘default’ variety on the show, just as on Austrian national TV in general (see
33
34 e.g. Steinegger 1998), was standard Austrian German. However, in the heat of debate,
35
36 a lot of linguistic switching out of the standard occurred, and some of it quite clearly
37
38 for rhetorical purposes. In order to establish the linguistic basis on which an Austrian
39
40 TV audience could be expected to perceive these shifts, as a prerequisite to the shifts
41
42 creating a communicative effect (see my discussion above), my speech perception
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44 elicitation test used excerpts from this show as input - particularly such as seemed to
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46 contain an instance of rhetorical style-shifting and thus were to be subjected to
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48 discourse analysis later.
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56 I asked forty-two Austrian native-speakers to listen to twelve audio-recorded
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58 passages from *Offen gesagt*, and to indicate any sequence where, according to their
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1
2 own perception, a shift from standard (*Hochsprache*) into dialectal speech (*Dialekt*)
3
4 was taking place. In fact, I specified to the informants that I was using *Dialekt* as a
5
6 cover-term for all linguistic production beyond the standard. The existence of a
7
8 category of *Hochsprache* is rather well established and uncontroversial from a folk
9
10 linguistic perspective in the context of Austrian German, *Hochsprache* being seen as
11
12 the oral realization of codified supra-national German *Schriftsprache* or ‘writing
13
14 language’ with a few Austrian ‘peculiarities’ (see e.g. Moosmüller 1991; Scheuringer
15
16 1997; Wiesinger 2006; Ebner 2008).³ Beyond this category, however, lies a broad
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18 continuum of speech production with respective regional vernaculars as the other
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20 pole, and much mixing of features from both *Hochsprache* and vernacular in
21
22 between. Where relatively fewer vernacular features are present, the resulting speech
23
24 is sometimes labeled *Umgangssprache* (roughly, ‘colloquial speech’). But a clear
25
26 linguistic delimitation of regional vernaculars and *Umgangssprache* is generally
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28 considered impossible (see e.g. Scheuringer 1997). In my investigation, I chose
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30 *Dialekt* to refer to the non-standard continuum of Austrian speech production because
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32 of common usage.

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40 The pervasive mixing of standard and dialectal features in production as well
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42 as a high propensity to style-shift are only one aspect of the complexities of intra-
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44 speaker variation in the Austrian context. In addition, there are considerable linguistic
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46 commonalities between the two types of systems. Thus, analytic assignation of
47
48 features to either of the two is at times easy (in cases of great systemic divergence
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50 e.g. in some lexical and morphosyntactic respects or non/application of phonological
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52 processes such as *ge*-reduction or *l*-vocalization), and at other times very difficult
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54 (due to lexical and morphosyntactic overlaps as well as shared phonetic processes
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56 such as vocalization of /r/ in syllable codas or collapsing of lenis and fortis plosives
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1
2 so that e.g. *Dank* ‘thanks’ and *Tank* ‘gasoline tank’ become homophones: [ɔ̃ɒŋk]) –
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4 (see e.g. Dressler and Wodak 1982; Moosmüller 1991 for descriptions and
5
6 discussion). These complexities provided the central motivation for conducting a
7
8 perception elicitation test in the first place, to see how Austrian listeners deal with the
9
10 linguistic differentiation process on a daily basis. That a predominant use of features
11
12 of either systemic origin has clearly divergent respective social consequences (see
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14 exigency (2) of an Irvinean stylistic ‘system of distinction’ above) has been amply
15
16 demonstrated in speaker evaluation research in Austria (e.g. Moosmüller 1988;
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18 Soukup 2009; Goldgruber 2011).
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23 To record responses on the task of assessing style-shifts into dialect, my
24
25 informants were given transcripts of the audio excerpts written out entirely in
26
27 standard Austrian German (so as not to anticipate judgments); and they used colored
28
29 markers for underlining or highlighting any relevant text passages.
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31

32 Each of the twelve speech samples selected for the purposes of my perception
33
34 test contained a variety of features of Austrian standard and dialect styles as well as
35
36 shared features according to the relevant literature, produced by the same speaker
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38 within one longer turn. The sample length ranged from 35 to 100 seconds, with an
39
40 average of 72 seconds (transcript word count between n=91 and n=275, average:
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42 n=187). The samples were always played in the same order (twice each in immediate
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44 succession), with faster samples and those that were likely to be more difficult to
45
46 comprehend played towards the end, to allow for some adjustment to the task of
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48 indicating style-shifts at natural speech rate.
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53 The test was piloted in two sessions with two informants each, and
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55 subsequently applied in seventeen sessions with group sizes of one to four informants
56
57 who were recruited from my own family, friends, and friends-of-friends.⁴ As stated
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1
2 earlier, a total of forty-two informants participated; they ranged in age from twenty to
3
4 seventy years (twenty-seven informants in the age group 20-35; fifteen in the age
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6 group 50-70). All of them were from the Middle Bavarian-Austrian dialect region,
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8 which also dominated with regards to the background of the speakers in the samples.
9
10 Most of the informants had a middle-class (i.e. ‘not working-class’) social
11
12 background; about half of them held a university degree. With this make-up, my
13
14 informant sample corresponded quite well with the typical (educated, adult) target-
15
16 audience of the show *Offen gesagt* that the audio excerpts were taken from (ORF,
17
18 p.c.). Thus, one can say that the speech samples from the show were played to a
19
20 group of listeners they were originally produced and intended for, enhancing the
21
22 validity of results from the test, particularly in view of my broader research agenda
23
24 (see above).
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30 Subsequent to administering the test, I conducted hour-long debriefing
31
32 interviews with the informants in which I asked them to provide comments on the
33
34 task as well as on the topic of variation in Austrian German in general.
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40 RESULTS

41
42 After collecting the elicited data, my first step in extracting the results was to compile
43
44 all instances where a word had been underlined by one or more informant(s) as
45
46 representing a style-shift into *Dialekt*. I counted as ‘underlined’ any word that was at
47
48 least *half* underlined or highlighted, based on my own observation during test
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50 application that speed of execution oftentimes caused informants to leave off
51
52 underlining halfway through words which they clearly intended to mark.
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1
2 A first tabulation of the outcome showed that of the total of 2,240 words
3
4 featured in the transcript of the speech samples, 1,536 (68.6%) had been underlined at
5
6 least once by one of the forty-two informants. The main purpose of this test, however,
7
8 was to establish a set of features for which it is highly probable that they consensually
9
10 serve as dialect ‘diagnostics’ to an average audience of Austrian listeners (rather than
11
12 to individuals) at any given time. My next step was therefore to identify general
13
14 trends by focusing my analysis on those words that had been underlined by at least a
15
16 quarter of the informants (or, more precisely, words that had received eleven
17
18 ‘underlinings’). This cut-off level appeared to be a good fit in terms of eliminating
19
20 idiosyncratic responses and outliers but taking the difficulty of the task, and
21
22 particularly the speed at which it had to be executed (i.e. at natural speech rate), into
23
24 account. Setting the cut-off higher, for example at the ‘mean’ of 50% (21
25
26 underlinings), would have failed to capture the more fine-grained responses of those
27
28 informants who were fastest in speech processing. In fact, it was particularly some of
29
30 the older informants who complained about the task speed; however, importantly,
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32 problems with speed resulted merely in fewer, but not qualitatively different,
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34 markings.
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42 With this cut-off level in place, the total number of words underlined by at
43
44 least eleven out of forty-two participants was exactly 350 out of 2,240 (=15.6%). My
45
46 ensuing linguistic analysis of the elicited data focuses on these 350 ‘highly
47
48 underlined’ words.
49
50

51 As a next step, I proceeded to identifying any established Austrian dialect
52
53 features in the underlined words, in order to extract the criteria which the informants
54
55 were likely to have based their judgments on. To this end, I used a close transcription
56
57 of the speech samples that captured the linguistic variation involved, tabulating the
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1
2 350 highly underlined tokens in this form. I then recorded all known dialect features
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4 as well as any other salient features that could be perceived in the tokens, drawing on
5
6 existing descriptions of standard and dialectal Austrian German (i.a. Dressler and
7
8 Wodak 1982; Zehetner 1985; Moosmüller 1991; Ammon et al. 2004; Wiesinger
9
10 2006). For illustration, Table 1 below lists the ten tokens that received the highest
11
12 overall number of underlinings by the informants (from 100% to 93%; n=42 to 39),
13
14 as well as the categories of the features identified.⁵
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18
19 **[Insert Table 1 here]**

20
21 Table 1 illustrates one of the central findings from this speech perception
22
23 elicitation test, which is that the biggest proportion of tokens identified as dialectal by
24
25 the informants contain so-called ‘input-switches’ (i.e. forms in which standard and
26
27 dialect differ but are historically related via a development from a common base – see
28
29 e.g. Dressler and Wodak 1982). An example here is token #1 [d̥ɛɪf] ‘may’, which was
30
31 underlined by 100% of the informants as dialectal. Overall, this concerns 185 (53%)
32
33 of the 350 most highly underlined tokens (with one token, [ˈaːfɔx] ‘simply’,
34
35 containing two input-switches – vs. std.: [ˈaɛnfax]). This seems to confirm previous
36
37 postulations that input-switches are highly perceptible to Austrian native speakers due
38
39 to the fact that there is typically a great phonetic difference between the standard and
40
41 dialect forms (Moosmüller 1991). Further dialectal processes evident in the
42
43 underlined tokens and exemplified in Table 1 include *ge*-reduction (token #4 [kʃeːn]
44
45 here: ‘be served’), contraction (token # 5 [tsam] ‘together’), as well as
46
47 morphosyntactic features (token #6 *tun*-periphrasis – ‘do’, realized here in the
48
49 conjunctive as [d̥ɛːd̥]), and lexical items (token #2 [ˈhaːtʃŋ] ‘to limp’). Table 2
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1 provides a summary that lists, by category, all established dialect features identified
2 in the 350 highly underlined tokens. The table also shows an overall ‘mark-up score’
3
4 in the 350 highly underlined tokens. The table also shows an overall ‘mark-up score’
5
6 for each category, which is the average number of ‘underlinings’ it has received, as
7
8 calculated from the total number of underlinings of respective tokens divided by the
9
10 total number of tokens in a category. Thus, as can be seen in the table, tokens
11
12 containing input-switches were underlined on average by twenty-three informants
13
14 (=55%). Overall, *ge*-reductions (71%), certain lexical items (62%), contractions
15
16 (56%), and input-switches (55%), as well as words containing multiple dialect
17
18 features (58%) received the most mark-ups on average in the test. Of course, this
19
20 ‘mark-up’ score calculation is very crude, in the sense that it pitches isolated lexical
21
22 items against segmental switches and multiple against single occurrences of features;
23
24 further, it does not take local production factors such as speech rate, linguistic
25
26 environment, sentence stress, overlaps, or speaker idiosyncrasies into account, all of
27
28 which are likely to have rendered some tokens more easily perceptible than others in
29
30 the natural talk. Nevertheless, the score can provide a general idea of how likely it is
31
32 that certain features will be perceived as dialectal by an audience of native speakers
33
34 of Austrian German.

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42 **[Insert Table 2 here]**

43
44 Additional evidence for the perceptual differentiation of the identified
45
46 features can be derived from a complementary analysis of those 704 tokens in the
47
48 transcript (31%) that had *not* been underlined by *any* informant at all, meaning that
49
50 presumably none of the informants perceived them as dialectal. This analysis shows
51
52 that there are only five tokens in the data that show one of the listed features (two
53
54 input-switches, two stop-deletions with nasal assimilation, one consonant-cluster
55
56 reduction) and which have gone altogether un-underlined. This, although according to
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60

1
2 an estimate based on a ‘translation’ of the un-underlined text passages into dialect,
3
4 there were a total of 310 possible places of occurrence (225 for input-switches, 19 for
5
6 contractions, 38 for *l*-vocalization, 14 for *ge*-reduction, 2 for consonant-cluster
7
8 reduction, 13 for stop-deletion with nasal assimilation). The two instances of un-
9
10 underlined input-switches furthermore fall into overlapping/ low amplitude speech,
11
12 which suggests that they ‘slipped by’ the informants rather than being deliberately
13
14 ignored.
15
16

17
18 It seems difficult to establish similar ‘possible places of occurrence’ for
19
20 morphosyntactic and lexical features in the data. However, those morphosyntactic
21
22 features that were attested in the underlined tokens (*e*-apocope, *tun*-periphrasis,
23
24 dialectal case endings and conjugation, dialectal diminutive) did not occur in the
25
26 completely un-underlined tokens at all (nor did any other established features of this
27
28 type), so that these, too, can be assumed to constitute likely perceptual diagnostics.
29
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31

32
33 As Table 2 shows, then, 77% or 268 of the 350 tokens that were underlined
34
35 by at least a quarter of the informants can be accounted for as containing a previously
36
37 established feature of Austrian dialect. Of course, the possibility cannot be excluded
38
39 that the informants may have picked up and based their decision-making on features
40
41 that have not heretofore been explicitly connected with dialect style in the literature.⁶
42
43 This particularly concerns those remaining 82 (24%) highly underlined tokens that
44
45 cannot be accounted for with the list of identified features. Interestingly, nine of these
46
47 can be classified as false starts or hesitation particles (*äh*, *ah*, *ahm*); the average mark-
48
49 up score for these items is 15 (36%). More than anything else, this seems to reflect
50
51 the fact that in many people’s psychological reality, Austrian dialect bears strong
52
53 associations of incorrect or faulty speech, a point that consistently came out in my
54
55 debriefing interviews (with informants labeling standard as ‘richtig’ – ‘correct’ and
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1
2 dialect as ‘schlampig’ – ‘sloppy’). And, very crucially, this also ratifies the basic
3
4 premise of and rationale behind this speech perception elicitation test – namely the
5
6 great need to *empirically* establish non-linguists’ notions of what constitutes stylistic
7
8 gestalts in interaction.
9

10
11 Of the still remaining 73 tokens, for only 18 a dialectal realization using any
12
13 of the segmental features identified above would have been possible, while for the
14
15 remainder standard and dialect realization would be very much the same in this
16
17 regard. In fact, however, almost all of the ‘left-over’ tokens occur in juxtaposition
18
19 with tokens that do show clear dialect features, so that contiguity is the most plausible
20
21 explanation for these underlinings. Furthermore, follow-up research has shown that
22
23 intonation and pitch are to be excluded as reasons for this clustering - and indeed for
24
25 Austrian perceptual standard-dialect differentiation more generally (Feizollahi and
26
27 Soukup 2011); nor are there correspondences with syntactic constituency. Additional
28
29 acoustical analysis of the data is precluded by the quality of the natural recordings.
30
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34

35 A final salient finding from the test concerns speech processes that Austrian
36
37 standard and dialect are known to share, such as collapsing of lenis and fortis
38
39 plosives, vocalization of /r/ in the syllable coda, and deletion of /e/ in unstressed
40
41 syllables concomitant with nasal assimilation (e.g. in [ˈleḅm̩] vs. [ˈle:ben] ‘live’) - (see
42
43 Dressler and Wodak 1982; Moosmüller 1991). As it turned out, these are indeed *not*
44
45 likely to be perceptually diagnostic to a critical mass of Austrian listeners, as they
46
47 occur equally in the highly underlined and in the completely un-underlined tokens.
48
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52 What I believe we can now draw from these results is indeed a basic
53
54 configuration of the Irvinean ‘system of distinction’ implicated in Austrian standard-
55
56 dialect shifting in instances of natural speech and real-life interaction. When hearing
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1
2 the features attested in the underlined tokens (input-switches, certain morphosyntactic
3
4 and lexical features, contractions, *l*-vocalization, *ge*-reduction, consonant cluster
5
6 simplifications, stop-deletion with nasal assimilation, multiple features in one token,
7
8 disfluencies), Austrian listeners will in all likelihood perceive a shift away from the
9
10 category *Hochsprache*; while upon hearing others (collapsing of lenis and fortis
11
12 plosives, vocalization of /r/ in syllable coda, deletion of /e/ in unstressed syllables
13
14 plus nasal assimilation), they will not. These processes form the basis on which the
15
16 social meanings associated with dialectal speech (language attitudes, stereotypes) can
17
18 be ‘metonymically’ (see Kristiansen 2008) drawn into the locally situated
19
20 interpretation of talk, and thus into the creation and negotiation of interactional
21
22 meaning.⁷ To illustrate these implications of the results reported here, I now briefly
23
24 present and discuss some relevant conversational data from the TV show *Offen*
25
26 *gesagt* (which were actually included in the perception test), showing how my
27
28 findings can be applied to their exegesis, before concluding with a critical reflection
29
30 on the methodology I have just described.
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40 APPLICATION OF THE TEST RESULTS – AN ILLUSTRATION

41
42 For application of the results from my speech perception elicitation test to the
43
44 illumination of interactional processes, consider extract (1) below, taken from an
45
46 episode of *Offen gesagt* on upcoming Austrian presidential elections. Here, journalist
47
48 and political activist AT is recounting an incident in which an Austrian alternative
49
50 theater group was arrested during the demonstrations surrounding the 2001 G8
51
52 summit in Genoa, Italy. AT is claiming that the Austrian Foreign Minister, who,
53
54 incidentally, is one of the presidential candidates, committed a big, ‘callous’ blunder,
55
56
57
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60

1
2 because she did not immediately intervene with Italian authorities on behalf of the
3
4 theater group (transcription using eye-dialect, dialect features in bold):
5
6
7

8
9 Extract (1) (*Offen gesagt*, ‘Wer soll in die Hofburg’, ORF2, January 18, 2004)
10

- 11 a AT:[...] Da geht’s nämlich um nicht mehr um nicht weniger
12
13 b als dass dort ein paar linke Theaterleute im Zuge
14
15 c dieser Veranstaltung festgenommen wurden österreichische
16
17 d Staatsbürger und Staatsbürgerinnen und dass die Frau
18
19 e Außenminister nichts anderes zu tun hatte als zu sagen **najo** und
20
21 f zwar öffentlich nachzulesen auf der Homepage des
22
23 g Außenministeriums der Text steht fest **najo des san kane Guatn**,
24
25 h gegen die liegt **eh** sozus- gegen die liegen **eh** sozusagen
26
27 i Anzeigen vor im Innenministerium und denen wird **scho** recht
28
29 j **gschehn** das war ihre Ant- das war ihre Reaktion zum Schutz
30
31 k österreichischer Staatsbürger die im Ausland verhaftet werden [...]
32
33
34
35
36
37
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39

40 (English near-text/ line-by-line translation:)
41
42
43

- 44 a AT: [...] Because this is about nothing more nothing less
45
46 b than that there a few leftist theater people in the course of
47
48 c this event [the G8 summit] were arrested Austrian
49
50 d citizens men and women and that the Madam
51
52 e Foreign Minister didn’t have anything better to do than to say **well** and
53
54 f this in public can be checked on the homepage of the
55
56 g Foreign Ministry the text is fixed there **well those are no good people**
57
58
59
60

- 1
2 h against them are **anyway** so to s- against them are **anyway** so to say
3
4 i charges recorded in the Interior Ministry and **thus** right
5
6 j will them **be served** that was her ans- that was her reaction to protect
7
8
9 k Austrian citizens who are arrested abroad [...]
10
11
12
13

14 What is immediately noticeable in Extract 1, then, is AT's highly increased
15 use of dialect features in the passage where he is allegedly 'quoting' the Minister. He
16 produces one input switch in line e: [ɔ] in *najo* [na'jɔ] (vs. std. [na'ja] 'well'); then
17 produces five more in line g: a second [na'jɔ]; [d̥e:s] (vs. std. [das] 'those'); [san] (vs. std. [sind]
18 'are'); [a:] in *kane* ['ka:ne] (vs. std. ['kaene]– 'no'); and [ʊɐ] in *Guatn* ['gʊɐɸn] (vs.
19 std. ['gu:ten] – 'good people'). In line h, he produces two instances of the dialectal
20 discourse marker *eh* ('anyway'), then another input-switch in line i *scho* [ʃõ:] (vs. std.
21 [ʃo:n] 'thus/already'), and in line j a *ge*-reduction in *g'schehn* [kʃe:n] (vs. std.
22 [ge'ʃe:n] – 'be served').
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36 The overall message AT is creating here is that he is very much in contempt
37 of the Minister's reaction to the incident. While this is evident from the content of
38 what he is saying (and the fact that in a preceding turn he directly accuses the
39 Minister of committing a 'blunder', which the above passage then elaborates), I am
40 arguing that it is AT's use of Austrian dialect features in what he constructs as a
41 direct quote by the Minister that clearly highlights this evaluation.⁸ By using such
42 features in his rendition of the Minister's alleged words, AT is in fact *embodying* his
43 negative stance towards the Minister's position, because the negative social images
44 Austrian dialect use can typically call up (as evidenced in respective speaker
45 evaluation studies – see Moosmüller 1991; Soukup 2009; Goldgruber 2011) *reflect*
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1
2 *back* on the Minister, who is supposedly speaking here. Put differently, through
3
4 shifting into dialect in the delivery of the Minister's supposed utterance, this
5
6 utterance becomes a potential *object of contempt* in its linguistic form - and, so, by
7
8 extension, does the utterance's alleged 'author' (Goffman 1981).
9
10

11 Of course, such an embodying effect with its resulting antagonistic
12
13 alignment between AT and the Minister can only be successfully communicated if the
14
15 audience interprets the language use accordingly. What I propose, then, is that the
16
17 results from the speech perception elicitation test reported further above allow me to
18
19 make the empirically-based claim that an Austrian audience is indeed very likely to
20
21 perceive the features AT produces in this passage (input-switches, *ge*-reduction,
22
23 discourse marker *eh*) as dialectal. In fact, as mentioned before, extract (1) above was
24
25 used in my perception test, and the informants highly underlined the dialectal
26
27 elements of AT's supposed quote of the Minister, with an average mark-up score of
28
29 over 75%.
30
31
32
33
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35 Indeed, the fact that the features used in extract (1) evoke a style-shift, and
36
37 that Austrian listeners then look to the social meanings associated with dialect in their
38
39 inferencing of AT's communicative message, was confirmed in my post-test
40
41 debriefing interviews: quite a few of the informants presented the same interpretation
42
43 of AT's and similar style-shifts as I have given it here. 'They are using dialect to put
44
45 each other down', as one informant phrased it. Such usage actually turned out to
46
47 constitute a fairly consistent rhetorical pattern in a corpus of eight *Offen gesagt*
48
49 episodes analyzed (Soukup 2009).
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54 As I have pointed out at the outset of this paper, on a more general level,
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56 similar claims regarding the strategic use and rhetorical effects of styles in interaction
57
58 can be (and have been) made based on production data alone (i.e. based on
59
60

1
2 sociolinguists' differentiation and analysis of intra-speaker variation). I argue now
3
4 that an elicitation of the basis on which listeners perceive a collection of features as
5
6 indexing a shift into a specific style, perceive this style as distinct, and thus may
7
8 incorporate its use and meaning into their interactional interpretation, makes
9
10 sociolinguists' claims about strategic, agentive uses of styles, such I have made it
11
12 above, all the more valid, convincing, and empirically sound.
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18 DISCUSSION

20
21 Because the methodology presented in this paper has hitherto not been critically
22
23 reviewed in any detail, a reflection is in order, particularly regarding the test design.
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25
26 One main issue concerns the response format. Thus, using written transcripts in
27
28 standard Austrian German as the basis for recording informants' judgments about
29
30 standard-dialect style-shifts may actually have primed written language norms as
31
32 reference points for perception. This may have resulted in the fact that if some token
33
34 in its realization sounded noticeably different from what was found in the transcript,
35
36 this alone could have been an impetus for underlining it. However, Austrians already
37
38 in general show little awareness of or recognition for any *oral* standard that would be
39
40 based on everyday language usage, and tend to conceive of spoken *Hochsprache* as a
41
42 very close realization of *Schriftsprache* ('writing language' – see further above) at
43
44 any rate; regardless of the fact that almost nobody masters such a 'textbook'
45
46 pronunciation ideal any longer nowadays (or ever really did). It is therefore difficult
47
48 to assess to what extent the written format really was a confounding variable in my
49
50 informants' assessment.
51
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55
56 Testing alternative response formats with the same audio files may get to the
57
58 bottom of this issue. Two such alternatives that are currently being worked out in a
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60

1
2 repeated-measures design (i.e. testing the same informants again after some time and
3
4 matching the datasets) are (1) having the informants themselves transcribe audio
5
6 samples, in eye-dialect, and then once more ask them to underline any non-standard
7
8 passages (Soukup 2010); and (2) having the informants ‘mark up’ the speech samples
9
10 *per se* by means of sound wave visualization software.⁹
11
12

13
14 A further complexity potentially generated by the present test design may lie
15
16 in some form of ordering effects. Thus, in the de-briefing interviews, some of the
17
18 informants claimed that they had become ‘stricter’ (‘strenger’) in their underlining as
19
20 the test progressed – they declared themselves increasingly more likely to identify a
21
22 token or a speaker’s stretch of talk as dialectal over the course of time. This,
23
24 presumably because it took them some time to familiarize themselves with the task
25
26 and to configure their perceptual benchmarks. In that sense, it can also not be
27
28 excluded that the informants zoned in on specific dialect features that they heard in
29
30 the first samples for the remainder of the task. While such priming effects could be
31
32 controlled for by switching up the order in which the speech samples are played, I
33
34 decided against this because I had lined up those samples that exhibited faster speech
35
36 rate and lower comprehensibility towards the end, to allow for some adjustment to
37
38 what was in reality a difficult task using natural talk. Repeating the test with a
39
40 different order of samples and/or with samples more evenly matched in quality and
41
42 speech rate may resolve this particular issue.
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49
50 Using natural speech data for evaluation, then, meant that the imposed task
51
52 involved very rapid speech processing (is the utterance standard or dialect?) and
53
54 simultaneous response (underlining), which may also have caused the number of
55
56 underlinings to undershoot overall. It should be noted, however, as I have stated
57
58 before, that the use of natural speech samples seems imperative if the test is to
59
60

1
2 simulate, and ultimately elucidate, real-life speech situations, as in my present case.

3
4 In that sense, slowing the speech rate would seem counterproductive. For my part, I
5
6 decided to play each sample twice in immediate succession to elicit more fine-grained
7
8 responses from the informants. Of course, this practice, too, must be viewed
9
10 critically, as listeners in a real-life situation do not have the option to rewind and
11
12 replay talk for judgment and interactional interpretation.
13
14

15
16 My motivation for listing these caveats is the hope that the methodology
17
18 described here will be replicated in research across a variety of contexts and in
19
20 different incarnations, so as to test its power, validity, and reliability, as required of
21
22 any scientific instrument. I believe this to be warranted by the interest and relevance
23
24 of the results this protocol can generate - most notably, the empirically established
25
26 perceptual coordinates of an Irvinean 'system of distinction' regarding sociolinguistic
27
28 styles, as, in my particular case, of the gestalts of Austrian *Hochsprache* vs. *Dialekt*.
29
30
31

32
33 I thus hope to have made a convincing case here for henceforth including
34
35 speech perception elicitation tests in the routine toolkit for investigations of meaning-
36
37 making via intra-speaker variation, in tribute to the listener's central role in this
38
39 process. Roland Barthes once declared the 'Death of the Author' (1967) in terms of
40
41 his/her supremacy in determining the meaning of a work of literature. While I
42
43 certainly do not wish to declare the speaker 'dead' (as we are only beginning to
44
45 understand the ways in which they agentively communicate social identities and
46
47 meanings beyond semantic denotation via the use of linguistic styles), I join others in
48
49 a strong advocacy of a dialogical view of interaction in which the speaker is not the
50
51 communicative *non plus ultra*. I believe that the current constructivist trend in
52
53 variation studies will entail that we continue to pay more and more due attention to
54
55 the listener's equal part in the shared enterprise that is human social interaction.
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NOTES:

-
- 1 I am grateful to H.G. Widdowson and Natalie Schilling as well as to two
anonymous reviewers and the editors for their valuable comments on earlier
drafts of this paper. Any remaining errors are, of course, my own responsibility.
 - 2 In this paper, I use the terms ‘dialect’/ ‘dialectal’, ‘non-standard’, and *Dialekt*
interchangeably to imply the use of features of Bavarian-Austrian regional origin
(see also the section on test design). For a map of Austrian dialect areas, see
<http://www.oeaw.ac.at/dinamlex/Dialektgebiete.html> (Austrian Academy of
Sciences; site last accessed March 31, 2011).
 - 3 See furthermore Ammon et al. (2004) for a discussion of German as a
‘pluricentric’ language with nationally differentiated standard varieties.
 - 4 Pilot study informants were later included in the sample as their responses did
not show any qualitative differences to those of the other informants.
 - 5 Transcription conventions for the dialect as used in the table are adapted from
Moosmüller (1991; p.c.). For comparative and illustrative purposes, Table 1 also
provides corresponding standard pronunciations from *Duden*
Aussprachewörterbuch (2000), adapted according to Ebner (2008). I thank Sylvia
Moosmüller for her detailed comments on my transcriptions.
The English translation for each token is based on its context of occurrence in the
respective speech sample, and thus may not reflect the most common usage.

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6 6 Nor should it be precluded that additional features which did not occur in the
7
8 speech samples used here (particularly a broader spectrum of lexical and
9
10 morphosyntactic features) are also indicative of style-shifts to Austrian listeners.
11
12 As pointed out before, audio sample selection was constrained by a broader
13
14 research agenda. Further research is needed to test for additional perceptual
15
16 diagnostics. A project by Andrea Kleene at the University of Vienna is currently
17
18 focusing specifically on perceptions of syntactic variation (p.c.).
19
20
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22
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24 7 This is, of course, precisely what Gumperz (1982) calls ‘contextualization’, in
25
26 the context of ‘interactional sociolinguistics’.
27
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29
30
31 8 See Fairclough (1992); Tannen (1989) for discussions of quotation as
32
33 ‘representation’ (i.e. deliberate ‘reframing’ of quoted content). It is in fact next
34
35 to impossible that the ‘quoted’ original was using dialect, because all official
36
37 Austrian homepages publish exclusively in the written standard; and the Minister
38
39 is known as a consistent standard-speaker in public.
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44
45 9 I owe this latter suggestion to Christoph Draxler (University of Munich, p.c.). It
46
47 seems that this would be preferable to formats involving having informants push
48
49 buttons ‘live’ upon perceiving style-shifts, due to projected complexities in
50
51 factoring out response-time lags, particularly when using natural speech data.
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Table 1: List of the ten most often underlined tokens, including transcription of actual realization and categorization of dialect features identified

Token #	Token (<i>English translation</i>)	n of 'dialect' under- linings	'Dialect' under- lining: percent	Standard pronunciation	Actual realization	Dialect/ non-standard feature(s) identified
1	darf (<i>may</i>)	42	100%	[da:f]	[d̥ɛɐ̯f]	input-switch
2	hatschen (<i>limp</i>)	42	100%	-	['ha:tʃŋ]	lexical
3	zusammen (<i>together</i>)	41	98%	[tsu'samen]	[tsɔ̃m]	(1) input-switch; (2) contraction of unstressed syllables (schwa-deletion, nasal assimilation/ deletion)
4	geschehen (<i>be served</i>)	40	95%	[ge'ʃe:n]	[kʃe:n]	<i>ge</i> -reduction
5	zusammen (<i>together</i>)	40	95%	[tsu'samen]	[tsam]	contraction of unstressed syllables (schwa-deletion, nasal assimilation/ deletion)
6	täte (<i>would</i>)	40	95%	['tɛ:te]	[d̥ɛ:d̥]	morphosyntactic features: (1) <i>tun</i> -periphrasis; (2) <i>e</i> -apocope
7	das (<i>pron. that</i>)	39	93%	[das]	[d̥ɛ:s]	input-switch
8	machen (<i>make</i>)	39	93%	['maxŋ]	[mɔx]	(1) input-switch; (2) contraction with [ma] (token #9) > [mɔxma]
9	wir (<i>we</i>)	39	93%	[vi:ɐ]	[ma]	(1) input-switch (enclitic); (2) contraction with [mɔx] (token #8)
10	rasch (<i>quickly</i>)	39	93%	[raʃ]	[rɔʃ]	input-switch

Table 2: Number of tokens and proportions of dialect feature categories in the set of the 350 highly underlined tokens, together with their average ‘mark-up’ score (referring to the average number of informants’ underlinings)

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Example</i>	<i>Percentage</i>		<i>Average ‘mark-up’</i>	
		<i>n of tokens</i>	<i>(within highly underlined tokens)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
input-switch	[dʒɛɪf] (vs. std. [da:f])	151	43.1%	23	(55%)
morphosyntactic	<i>tun</i> -periphrasis	25	7.1%	20	(48%)
lexical	['ha:tʃɪ] ('limp')	12	3.4%	26	(62%)
misc. contractions	['tskœnen] (vs. std. [tsu 'kœnen] 'to be able to')	12	3.4%	23	(56%)
<i>l</i> -vocalization	['fœɛɛ] (vs. std. ['falʃe] 'wrong' - fem.)	12	3.4%	19	(44%)
<i>ge</i> -reduction	[kʃe:n] (vs. std. [ge'ʃe:n])	7	2.0%	30	(71%)
consonant cluster simplification	[jɛ:ts] (vs. std. [jɛtst] 'now')	4	1.1%	23	(54%)
stop-deletion (w/ nasal assimilation)	[ham] (vs. std. ['ha:ben] 'have')	3	0.9%	18	(44%)
multiple features		42	12.0%	24	(58%)
Total		268	76.5%	23	(55%)