

“Das ist dann schon total cool zu sagen, so *Machano!*”

Revealing speakers’ justifications for linguistic choices

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In this talk I show how in a multilingual community speakers’ justifications for linguistic choices concerning loans from different donor languages can be revealed through meta-discussion and a task based on single lexical items from these languages.

Like other contemporary Jewish communities (Bunin Benor and Hary 2017; Kahn and Rubin 2016), German Jews make use of what Benor (2008: 1068) has defined as a “distinctively Jewish linguistic repertoire”. This repertoire consists mainly of lexical items from Yiddish and Hebrew that are integrated into German. In addition to the expression and construction of Jewish identity, the repertoire offers possibilities for inter- and intraspeaker variation as, due to the different donor languages, there are often two and sometimes more variants possible for a respective concept. This is a prerequisite for taking over a social meaning as it allows for the speakers to position themselves towards other speakers (Eckert 2012, 2008; Johnstone, Andrus and Danielson 2006) and or to express language ideologies towards the donor languages through the choice of a certain variant. In order to reveal language ideologies that Silverstein (1979: 193) defines as “sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” it is therefore important to grasp speakers’ own perception and interpretation of variation.

Therefore, I developed a method that was influenced by methods of Perceptual Dialectology (Cramer 2016). In a first step, I collected lexical items from the repertoire mainly through expert interviews. A selection of these items were presented to the 12 Jewish speakers in Berlin that I conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with. The participants were asked to evaluate each item and categorize it according to their individual use. The aim of these interviews was twofold; to get first insights to speakers’ individual use and to grasp their explicit and implicit explanations for the use and avoidance of distinct items. The format of the semi-structured interview made it possible to dig deeper whenever it seemed necessary and to enhance meta-linguistic comments from the respective interviewee.

Through an analysis of the transcribed interviews influenced by methods of Grounded Theory (Charmaz 2010) speakers’ shared language ideologies towards Hebrew and Yiddish, but also other categories that are of relevance when it comes to their linguistic choices, could be revealed.

Thus, I can show through the applied method that speakers' perception of variation concerning the use of elements from their distinctively Jewish linguistic repertoire and in consequence their own linguistic choices are heavily influenced by shared clusters of language ideologies towards the donor languages. The shared multilingual resources as well as the discourse about them allows speakers to exploit variation in a meaningful way.

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