

# Measuring language attitudes towards ethnolectal features in Swiss-German-speaking children: A mixed-methods approach

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**Background:** This paper reports on a mixed-methods project that investigates how children aged 6 to 12 use and evaluate ethnolectal features in Swiss-German. Features of ethnolectal Swiss-German (e.g. example 1) are typically discussed in connection with adolescents with a migrant background (e.g., Tissot et al. 2011) and in the way these features are appropriated by non-migrant adolescents for stylistic purposes (Auer 2002; Schmid 2017). Little is known about the way adolescents acquire the usage and the social meaning attached to these forms.

(1) Omission of prepositions, articles, pronouns or auxiliaries, as in *Chani bleistift?* <Can I pen?> for *Chani en bleistift ha?* <Can I have a pen?>

**Aim:** This project investigates Swiss-German preadolescents' production, perception and evaluation of ethnolectal features through a mixed method approach, (a) taking stock of the linguistic repertoire available to children (production study) and, (b) measuring the social meanings attached to these features (evaluation study).

**Production study:** To identify the linguistic features of interest, we investigate anecdotal claims about the usage of ethnolectal features as defined by Auer (2002, see also Tissot et al. 2011) using spoken data collected through the diapiX task (Baker & Hazan 2011) and free storytelling. For the production-oriented part, two studies were conducted in and around the city of Winterthur in one urban and one rural primary school with children aged 6-12. Preliminary analysis of the sampled speech indicates that the use of ethnolectal features is already common among children under 12. This is the case in both areas; this usage, however, seems to be restricted to migrant children in the rural area while also being used among non-migrant children in the urban areas.

**Evaluation study:** The social evaluation children attach to these features is assessed in a second, experimental step that includes a visually enriched and child-friendly version of the matched guise technique and a language awareness test (N=86). Results show that the youngest children have no preference for either the Swiss German or the ethnolectal guise and seem to lack awareness of the ethnolectal features. However, that awareness develops with age and so does a more positive overall evaluation of the Swiss German guise compared to the ethnolectal guise. The latter is furthermore increasingly associated with social meanings of 'non-Swissness'. Interestingly, social meanings of urbanity, which have been reported in adult populations, do not (yet?) appear in the evaluations held by pre-adolescents.

**Implications:** Obtaining a better understanding of the acquisition trajectory of Swiss-German ethnolectal features, more generally informs us about innovation and language change (cf. Cheshire et al. 2011) and about ongoing restructuring processes in Swiss-German (see, e.g. Leemann et al. 2014).

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