

BEIHEFTE

John Bellamy

## Language Attitudes in England and Austria

A Sociolinguistic Investigation into  
Perceptions of High and Low-Prestige  
Varieties in Manchester and Vienna

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John Bellamy  
Language Attitudes in England and Austria

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**BEIHEFTE**

In Verbindung mit Michael Elmentaler und Jürg Fleischer  
herausgegeben von Jürgen Erich Schmidt

**BAND 151**

John Bellamy

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

During my undergraduate degree in languages at the University of Manchester, I chose to spend my year abroad in Austria as a teaching assistant in Vienna. I noticed how teaching staff at the school where I was posted chatted casually in dialect in the staff room but switched to a spoken variety approximating to Austrian Standard German when teaching in class. This made me curious about the influences on the choice of variety amongst Austrians for each of their daily interactions. As a native speaker of English, I was intrigued about how this dichotomy of standard and dialect might be compared to the linguistic situation in England.

In 2000 an undergraduate student at the University of Manchester, ELISABETH LEES, submitted her final year dissertation on “Dialect or disadvantage?”, where she looked into people’s attitudes towards dialect speakers in England and Austria. The study not only aimed to explore language attitudes in each country but ultimately attempted a comparison of these language attitudes between the two countries in order to investigate how attitudes might differ or show similarities across different national, cultural and linguistic contexts. LEES (2000) ultimately sought to find out whether people faced discrimination on the basis of speaking a certain variety and to what extent the situation was the same in these two countries. Interest in language attitudes has been on the increase in Austria, for example with studies by KAISER (2006) and SOUKUP (2009). This present study follows LEES (2000) in comparing language attitudes between England (Manchester) and Austria (Vienna) by applying the same method of investigation in each country.

This book begins by describing the linguistic situation in Austria and in England with regard to concepts such as standard variety, dialect and accent. This forms the basis of chapter 2 where key terms such as language attitudes and language variety will be defined and discussed. There is already a body of research which has attempted to find out the extent to which the perception of a speaker is affected by the variety that speaker is using and in chapter 3 previous studies into language attitudes in Austria and in England are presented along with their respective findings. In order to make a successful comparison of this kind between Austria and England, a suitable methodology has to be selected and also kept the same as far as possible for the fieldwork in each country. Chapter 4 outlines the steps taken in the choice, the design and the implementation of the methodological approach used to obtain the results in the two countries. The results for the study in England are presented in chapter 5, the results for Vienna are discussed in chapter 6 and then a comparison of the general findings for each of these countries is made in chapter 7.



## 2 TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF LINGUISTIC VARIATION

This chapter will clarify the terms that will be used to describe the concepts relevant to this investigation. The term *language variety* will be discussed first of all because it is of particular relevance for the study in general. Topics relevant to the linguistic situation in Austria will form the basis of the next part of the chapter, especially with regard to the national standard variety and dialect. Language varieties and speech in England will then be discussed, before moving on to definitions of high and low-prestige varieties and the standard-dialect continuum. Finally, this chapter will define what is meant by *language attitudes* in preparation for the following chapter, which presents earlier research into language attitudes in England and in Austria.

### 2.1 LANGUAGE VARIETY

In a discussion of the concepts *standard language*, *non-standard language* and *dialect*, it is necessary to establish what they mean within the framework of this research. This is of even more importance when the scope of the research goes as far as to include more than one language, where the same terms appear on the surface to have the same meaning but can be interpreted differently in their respective national contexts. Not only can words like *dialect* and *standard* carry certain presuppositions regarding social acceptance, linguistic superiority and what is considered correct usage, but they can even be used in different senses depending on whether they are being employed in an English-speaking or a German-speaking setting. The different nuances in the usage of the English word *dialect* and the German word *Dialekt* illustrate this issue of the potential variation in meaning of similar sounding terms.

Dialekt usually means basilectal dialect, in other words, the regional dialect that is maximally distinct from the standard language. This contrasts with the usage of “dialect” in English to indicate any form of a language that differs appreciably in grammar or lexicon from other forms of the language. “Dialect” in this sense in English may or may not include the standard language. (BARBOUR 2006, 363)

*Dialect* in England is a term that can be legitimately applied to differentiate between any patterns of speech that vary from one another in more than just pronunciation (WELLS 1982, 2). In the English context this definition of dialect even goes as far as to include *Standard English*, which “is just as much a dialect as any other form of English” (CHAMBERS / TRUDGILL 1998, 3; COX 1991, 32; CROWLEY 2003, 156–157). However, what is generally understood as *Dialekt* in German-speaking countries refers to a traditional form of *Dialekt*, which is often the

dialect of rural areas, and by its very nature implies “non-standardness” (AMMON 2004, 273). In his “four-point scale” to categorise the social speech varieties of Austrian German, WIESINGER (1990a, 443) labels the first two tiers of low status spoken varieties as *Basisdialekt* and *Verkehrsdialekt* but for the next two varieties of higher social status, he no longer uses the term *Dialekt* at all, preferring to call them *Umgangssprache* and *Standardsprache*. In fact, there is criticism of the Anglo-American usage of the term “dialect” to refer to anything other than traditional regional patterns of speech, claiming that it can lead to confusion:

In der anglo-amerikanischen Linguistik wird synonym für Varietät oft der Terminus *dialect* verwendet, so dass auf denselben Begriff sowohl mit (*language*) *variety* als auch mit *dialect* verwiesen wird, was zu Missverständnissen führen kann, zumal in den meisten Traditionen der entsprechende Terminus (dt. *Dialekt*, fr. *Dialecte*, it. *Dialetto*, hisp. *Dialecto* usw.) nur für Sprachvarietäten auf areale Basis verwendet wird. (BERUTTO 2004, 189)

Furthermore, even within the same language there is the possibility of varying interpretations of a word like *Dialekt*. BARBOUR / STEVENSON (1990, 139) explain that the speech heard in German cities in north and central Germany “may be labelled *Dialekt* by many people, but [...] will be much closer to standard than is traditional dialect, and which will not usually be labelled *Dialekt* by German linguists”. There is also a greater tendency in Austria amongst people in general (i.e. *nonlinguists* in the words of NIEDZIELSKI / PRESTON 2000, 2) to label a pattern of speech as *dialect*, although linguists would not agree that it is actually dialect. MOOSMÜLLER (1998, 262) gives the example of someone from Tyrol speaking a variety approximating the national standard but whose variety would still be considered *Dialekt* by middle-class Viennese. MUHR (1995, 81) describes the feeling of inferiority that many Austrians share towards Austrian Standard German because of constant comparison of their national variety with the *Bundesdeutsch* from Germany, with the result that many Austrians regard Austrian Standard German as a mere dialect of the German language. MUHR (1995, 81) observes that there is, „Unsicherheit den Normen der eigenen Sprache gegenüber, die nicht selten zu Verleugnungshaltungen, Abwertung und Ablehnung des sprachlichen Eigenen als ‚Dialekt‘ führt.“ The reasons behind this “linguistic cringe” (CLYNE 1995, 33) in Austria will be looked at in greater detail in section 2.3, but already we can establish that within the German-speaking context itself, there are varying interpretations of what is included under the overarching term of *Dialekt*.

Rather than falling back on terms such as *standard* and *dialect*, which are heavily loaded with assumptions and are not always consistent in what they refer to, a more suitable term is required. The term *language variety* performs a useful task here on account of its neutrality (TRUDGILL 2000, 5; WELLS 1982, 3) and general applicability to any of the “different manifestations” of language (HUDSON 1996, 22). However, HUDSON (1996, 68) ultimately rejects the word “variety” after coming “to essentially negative conclusions about varieties.” HUDSON (1996, 68) reasons that “there are considerable problems in delimiting one variety from another of the same type”, or even “in delimiting one *type* of variety from another”, concluding that “the only satisfactory way to solve these problems is to avoid

the notion ‘variety’ altogether as an analytical or theoretical concept”. In spite of this criticism, *variety* is a useful term in the context of this research precisely due to its general applicability and impartiality. It is relevant here for the very reasons put forward by BERRUTO (2004, 189–190) in his definition:

Zunächst ist Varietät ein sehr allgemeiner Begriff, der fast jeder sprachlichen und soziolinguistischen Untersuchung oder Annahme bezüglich des zu untersuchenden Sprachrepertoires vorausgeht. Zweitens ist Varietät ein neutraler Begriff, der den Urteilen (im Besonderen bezüglich sozialer Werte und Konnotationen) vorausgeht und unabhängig ist von den Spezifizierungen, die Termini wie *Sprache* und *Dialekt* mit sich bringen.

Being a generic and neutral term, *variety* is therefore suitable for the concepts discussed in this research and avoids many of the pitfalls mentioned earlier in using words such as dialect (or *Dialekt*) and standard. Since variety acts as, “a neutral term to apply to any particular kind of language which we wish, for some purpose, to consider as a single entity” (CHAMBERS / TRUDGILL 1998, 5), we can have national varieties (AMMON 1995, 5), standard and non-standard varieties (AMMON 2004, 273), a Cockney variety (CARR 1999, 85) or a Viennese variety (STEVENSON 1995, 259–260), as well as many other varieties.

## 2.2 LANGUAGE VARIETIES AND SPEECH IN ENGLAND

In discussing accents, WELLS (1982, 9) summarises the situation in England neatly when he points out that “probably most people in England could confidently identify the accents associated with the individual cities of London, Birmingham, Liverpool, and Newcastle-upon-Tyne”. This is not necessarily the case in other English-speaking countries, such as Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, which are “geographically most homogeneous” (WELLS 1982, 10) and the reason given is the shorter length of time that these places have been settled by English-speaking peoples.

This makes England and most of the British Isles unique in the English-speaking world because they have been anglicised for the longest period and hence that is where “the finest distinctions can be made” (WELLS 1982, 10). Even in the much larger United States “it is true not just of a small minority, but of the majority, that their accent reveals little or nothing of their geographical origins” (WELLS 1982, 10). However, this study is not concerned so much with “accent”, but with the “variety” used by a speaker (section 2.1) and the above serves simply to illustrate the exceptional situation in England with regard to the diversity of accents and dialects in comparison to other English-speaking countries. This has therefore already inspired much academic interest (see, for example, the range of different papers on the subject contributed to TRUDGILL 1978).

The varieties spoken by people in England usually reveal more than simply their regional origins. The variety is more than likely an indicator too of social status. Research into common perceptions about how to judge the class or social status of an individual indicates that the way a person talks is the clearest sign of



their position in the social hierarchy, followed by other factors: where they live, their friends and their profession and so on (REID 1977, 27). It is not at all uncommon in England to observe an individual who seeks to change the way they speak in order to grant themselves greater upward social mobility (DOUGLAS-COWIE 1978, 47–48). Regional variation and social variation are not mutually exclusive, and there is a correlation between them, as WAKELIN (1977, 4) observes, “class dialects are always associated in some way with regional dialect, and regional dialectal features are often to be explained as social in origin”. This relationship will be looked at in more detail in the following section on Standard English and is illustrated by the two diagrams (Figures 2.1 and 2.2) from TRUDGILL (2000, 30–32).

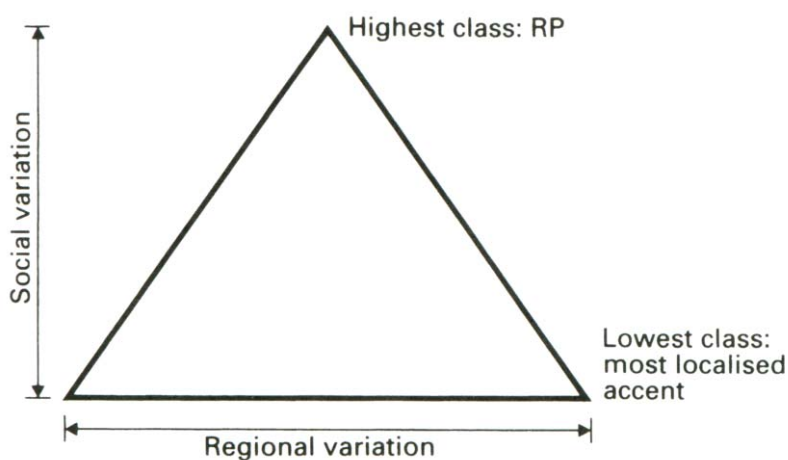


Figure 2.1: Social and regional accent variation (TRUDGILL 2000, 30)

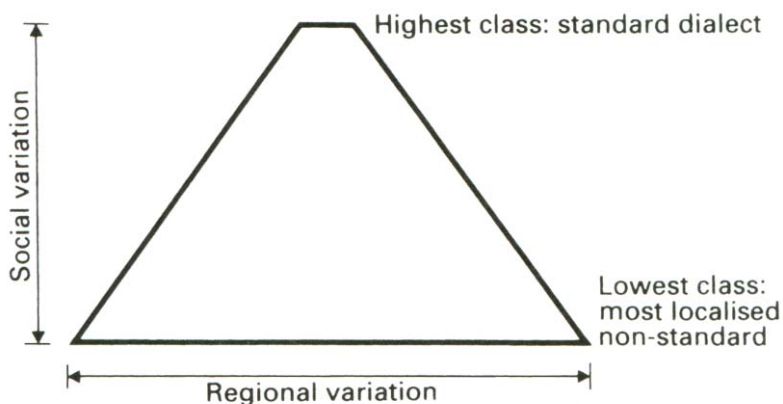


Figure 2.2: Social and regional dialect variation (TRUDGILL 2000, 32)