

Re: nationalists, languages and dialects

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- *From:* Helmut Richter <a282244@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* 24 Jan 2006 18:41:07 GMT
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António Marques:

> hazchem wrote:

>

>> If you are a child and you go to school and none of the teachers ever
>> speak the language or dialect that you use in the home, if you never
>> see your language or dialect written down, if you never hear a radio or
>> TV program in your language or dialect, then it is not surprising that
>> when you have children of your own you don't speak to them in that
>> language or dialect. Fewer and fewer people speak the language or
>> dialect, and it will come more and more to resemble the 'standard'.

>

> Wrong. That applies to languages, but not dialects. And before someone
> asks 'what is the difference between a language and a dialect', it is
> not relevant here.

While I agree with the remaining (snipped) portion of António's posting, I am unable to follow the argument, put forth more than once by different contributors, that dialects are less vulnerable than languages when it comes to gradual adaptation. The contrary is plausible, and is also indeed observed.

As a working definition of language and dialect for the sake of this argument, let me define for the parents of a family: They are speaking different languages if the family is bilingual, that is, each other family member speaks only one of the languages in the family and not the other, or switches languages deliberately or unconsciously. They speak different dialects of the same language, if the other family members speak more or less always the same language with the explicit or implicit understanding that it is the language of both parents even though each of the parents may have language features that are specific for them.

The situation in Germany is normally one of the following:

- a) The parents speak the same language and about the same dialect.
- b) The parents speak different dialects of the same language according to the above definition.

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c) The parents speak different languages according to the above definition.

Case (a) is uninteresting.

Case (c) happens only if one of them is a non-German speaker. It will not happen with two mutually unintelligible "dialects" of German, such as one High German and one Low German, or Riparian and Swiss: in such a situation, the two will agree on a variety of standard German that is easily accessible to both, and we have case (a) or a mild form of case (b).

Case (b) could theoretically happen with a local German language and the language of a neighbouring country, e.g. Western Low German and Dutch, or Moselle-Franconian and Luxembourgish. I do not know what happens then and therefore exclude this subcase.

The most normal thing besides case (a) is case (b), not regarding the special case of the preceding paragraph. Two people from about the same region, but with different fine-grain dialects, start a new family. They have no reason to give up each one's dialect, but their children will not learn two dialects the same way as one learns two languages in a bilingual family. The effect is a watered-down version of the dialects of the parents, and this is what we do observe in many regions: the main features of the larger-region dialect are kept, but the fine-grain differences of the local dialects get lost. An additional impact comes from the standard language or the standard dialect ("common Austrian", "common Swiss, also called 'Bahnhofsbuffet Olten'") which people hear in the media for the same reasons.

In former times, there were two effects that slowed down or prevented this development: marriages were much more local, and the new family came to settle in the one-dialect environment of either the husband or the wife so that the children learnt from their peers which of the dialects of their parents is "normal" and which is "weird". Both is no longer the case, or only to much a lesser extent.

Helmut Richter

• **References:**

- ◆ **nationalists, languages and dialects**
◇ From: hazchem
- ◆ **Re: nationalists, languages and dialects**
◇ From: António Marques
- ◆ **Re: nationalists, languages and dialects**
◇ From: ranjit_mathews@xxxxxxxxxx
- ◆ **Re: nationalists, languages and dialects**
◇ From: hazchem

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 - ◇ *From:* Des Small
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 - ◇ *From:* hazchem
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 - ◇ *From:* António Marques

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