

The functional spectrum of the particle *eh* in Austria and beyond

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The particle *eh* originated in Southern Germany and Austria (Schlieben-Lange 1979; Weydt 1983; Geyer 2012) and has since become a common feature of everyday German across the German-speaking world¹. While previous research typically characterizes *eh* as marking propositions as context-independent or diminishing the relevance of preceding utterances (e.g., Thurmair 1989; Meibauer 1994; Eggs 2003), this primarily reflects its use in Germany. In contrast, Austrian German is reported to exhibit a broader functional scope for *eh* (Breindl 2015; see also Weydt 1983). However, these differences remain largely underexplored, with few studies addressing the pragmatic functional spectrum of *eh* in Austrian German (e.g., Zobel 2017; Csipak and Zobel 2014). Empirical investigations based on authentic conversational data, in particular, are scarce.

In this talk, the results of an exploratory study will be presented, addressing this research gap by adopting a variational pragmatic perspective to investigate the functional spectrum of the particle *eh* in Austria and beyond. Using a mixed-methods approach that combines corpus analysis with an online questionnaire survey, the study seeks to answer two key research questions: (1) What recurring functions can be identified for the particle *eh* in Austria? (2) How widespread are these functions in other German speaking regions, with a focus on Bavaria and Northern Germany? For research question (1), the analysis of spoken data from the “Ulrichsberg corpus” (cf. Wallner i. prep.) confirms that the functions identified in previous research, such as marking irrelevance or limiting the relevance of a preceding statement, are also used by Austrian speakers. However, additional functions were discovered that had not been previously documented, such as establishing coherence, indicating common ground, and evidential marking. Regarding research question (2), the questionnaire data reveal that these functions are prevalent across Austria. However, there are notable differences between participants from Austria, Bavaria, and Northern

¹ Cf., e.g., <https://www.atlas-alltagssprache.de/runde-1/f07/> (22.01.2025).

Germany. The findings suggest that *eh* has a broader functional spectrum in Austria, with some functions also present in Bavaria, but less so in Northern Germany. Thus, the study reveals that the functions of *eh* are pluriareally distributed, with a more diverse and developed functional spectrum in Austria.

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