

Regional variation in German address practices

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Extensive research on address behavior in varieties of languages such as English, Spanish or Swedish demonstrates that addressing is a complex social phenomenon, which is governed by various factors, often resulting in intralingual variation. However, comparatively little attention has been devoted to address variation within multi-standard German (Auer 2021). Existing studies, while yielding differences in (pro)nominal addressing practices across varieties of German, predominantly rely on qualitative methods, relatively small-scale data, or are restricted to the comparison of only two varieties of German (e.g. Clyne et al. 2009 for (pro)nominal address in Germany and Austria; Ackermann 2023 for vocatives in Germany and Switzerland).

In my talk, I will discuss the impact of the variable ‘region’ on address behavior in German, as well as its interaction with other macro- and micro-social variables. The analysis is based on a large-scale online study with more than 3,000 participants from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Discourse Completion Tasks were employed to elicit terms of address in a range of different scenarios which varied in terms of social distance, age relations, and communicative task. In addition, comprehensive socio-demographic data were collected for each participant.

The study is situated within the framework of variational pragmatics (Schneider and Barron 2008). This approach investigates how geographical and other social factors shape pragmatic behavior and has been successfully applied for explorations of intralingual variation of various speech acts. I believe that it is also well-suited for analyzing address variation, as it enables the systematic consideration and control of the various factors influencing the choice of terms of address.

Overall, the aim of this study is to propose a systematic, quantitatively grounded approach to the analysis of address behavior with a focus on

regional variation, while also addressing the methodological challenges and limitations that arise in such research.

References

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Janel Zoske is a PhD candidate in the DFG-funded project "*Variational Pragmatics of German: Comparing Communicative Patterns*" at Freie Universität Berlin. She is also research associate at the Institute of English Philology at the same institution. In her PhD project, she investigates variation in syntactically (dis-)integrated forms of address in German within the framework of variational pragmatics. To this end, she employs a wide range of empirical methods, including questionnaires designed to elicit social norms, perception studies examining the social meaning of address forms, and sociolinguistic interviews.