

Standard language ideology and linguistic discrimination

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1. Preliminaries

This chapter aims to provide an overview of the interrelation between language standardization and social inequality in the German-speaking countries. For a number of reasons, however, the following considerations will by no means cover the entire range of countries, regions, communities, and issues that fall within this subject area and that could or should therefore also be addressed here. First, the focus will be restricted to intralingual discrimination, i.e., to language subordination (Lippi-Green 1997) of German speakers by their German-speaking compatriots. The issue of societal multilingualism in standard language cultures (cf. Vogl 2012), the social and linguistic challenges and disadvantages of all the autochthonous and immigrant linguistic minorities who live in the shadow of the official German linguistic standards (cf. Beyer & Plewnia 2020) would deserve a chapter of their own and will not be considered here. Second, the focus will be primarily, although not exclusively, on contemporary Germany and far less on other German-speaking countries and communities. The main reason for this is by no means Germany's demographic, political, economic, or linguistic dominance among the German-speaking countries or the lack of space. Instead, the focus of this chapter must remain largely limited to Germany primarily because recent research findings on the issue of social inequality between speakers of different standard and nonstandard varieties of German in other German-speaking countries barely exist. Even in Germany, more focused research into the far-reaching social implications of language ideologies in general and the standard language ideology, in particular, only began after the turn of the millennium. In line with the overview by Davies (2010), it can be generally stated that sociolinguistic research in the German-speaking area has paid far less attention to the social life and real social problems of individual speech communities than, for instance, Labovian sociolinguistics in the English-speaking world (cf., e.g., Cameron 1995, Labov 1982, Lippi-Green 1997, Piller 2016). Within the realm of German linguistics, a truly speaker-oriented, conscientious, and committed variationist sociolinguistics is not quite established. German sociolinguistics typically has far more linguistic varieties and variables as its focus than societies and communities. Accordingly, relevant scholarly activities mostly end at surveying, mapping, and describing patterns of language use and speakers' beliefs and attitudes toward linguistic varieties and variables. A genuine socio-anthropological perspective and social commitment in sociolinguistic research, i.e., a keen interest in the social backgrounds and effects of these language use habits, beliefs, and attitudes on the everyday lives of the affected speakers and communities, is too often lacking.

In the next section of this chapter, we will first begin by defining key terms such as 'language ideology', 'standard language ideology', 'linguistic discrimination', and 'linguicism', and will then briefly discuss some of the most crucial domains and forms of intralingual discrimination together with some examples from other 'standard language cultures' (cf. Milroy 1999 and 2001) such as the US, UK, and Hungary. Section 3 will be dedicated to the question in which sense and to what extent Germany, Austria, and (German-speaking) Switzerland can themselves be characterized as standard language cultures. We will demonstrate here the highly

divergent manifestations and roles of the standard language ideology in each of these countries and their similarly diverse effects on the affected languages and societies. Finally, Section 4 will provide some representative examples and short case studies for (intralingual) linguistic discrimination in 21st century Germany in order to demonstrate the way that the standard language ideology together with other language ideologies can ultimately be implemented for the production, legitimization, and invisibilization of severe forms of linguistic and social inequality even in well-established Western liberal democracies such as Germany.

2. Basic terms and issues

In line with other common definitions of the term within the field of linguistic anthropology (cf. Woolard & Schieffelin 1994: 57-58), **language ideologies** can be regarded as the culturally specific, commonsense, and self-evident beliefs about language that are held and used within a social group to evaluate, rationalize, and justify linguistic and related social practices. Language ideologies play a fundamental role in shaping not only linguistic but also social reality. They have a significant impact on, among other things, people's social attitudes towards languages and their speakers, on their ideas and perceptions of good and bad language, and thus ultimately also on their own language use habits and language choices. Language ideologies can be directly linked to or embedded in political ideologies as is the case, for instance, with **linguistic nationalism** with Herder (1795) as one of its first and most influential proponents. This language ideology contains the widespread assumption that a unified nation is constituted and/or represented by its uniform 'national language' (cf. Gal 2006). In the course of the rise of modern nation states from the late 18th century onwards, the appropriate way to create such a homogeneous, uniform national language was and still is typically seen in the deliberate creation of a uniform standard language, i.e., in **language standardization**. Accordingly, in modern history, nation-building processes triggered language standardization processes and related language-planning activities in several countries all over the world.

The standard language is a product of ideology, says Bell (2014: 286). Depending on whether the process of language planning in the course of language standardization is governed by the ideology of **linguistic internationalism** or **vernacularism** (cf. Cobarrubias 1983), the corpus, i.e., the linguistic shape of a given standard language can be either based on an international, non-indigenous language or an indigenous, local one. The former option was chosen especially, although by far not exclusively, by post-colonial, newly independent states after the collapse of the former colonial empires. Linguistic vernacularism, on the contrary, served as the underlying ideology of corpus planning, for instance, in almost all modern European nation states from the late 18th century onwards. Regardless of its ideological background and foundations, language standardization always and necessarily promotes linguistic invariance, since it consists of the imposition of linguistic uniformity upon a given society (see Milroy 2001: 531).

Societies with standardized (national) languages can be regarded as **standard language cultures** (Milroy 1999, 2001) in the sense that they are fundamentally shaped by both the standard language and the surrounding standard language ideology. According to Milroy (1999: 18),

In . . . 'standard language cultures' the awareness of a superordinate standard variety is kept alive in the public mind by various channels (including the writing system and education in literacy) that tend to inculcate and maintain this knowledge – not always in a very clear or accurate form – in speakers' minds. The main effect of these is to equate the standard language – or what is believed to be the standard language – with the language as a whole

and with ‘correct’ usage in that language, and this notion of correctness has a powerful role in the maintenance of the standard ideology through prescription.

Beliefs about nature and functions of standard languages are – just like any other language ideology – culturally specific. Thus, no wonder that different scholars living in and working on different standard language cultures have provided different definitions for different **standard language ideologies**. The term itself was coined by James and Lesley Milroy. Building on their work and that of others’, Lippi-Green (1997: 64) defines the ‘standard language ideology’ as

a bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogenous spoken language which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions and which names as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class.

In actual fact, this rather narrow definition contains and unifies a number of different, relatively independent beliefs about language that are not inherently and exclusively associated with standard languages and which we will therefore consider here as distinct language ideologies. First, among other things, the belief in the necessity and superiority of linguistic uniformity to variability (**linguistic homogeneity**) and second, the belief that written language is superior to spoken language (**linguistic literalism**). In the present chapter of this handbook with the German-speaking countries and especially Germany in its focus, we will use the term in a broader sense. Thus, by the term ‘standard language ideology’ we mean – in line with the above-quoted assumption by Milroy (1999: 18) and also with Lanstyák (2014: 262) – the belief about the superiority and inevitability of the standard language; the idea that the standard language is superordinate to other languages and language varieties both in terms of its linguistic shape and functions, the absolute benchmark of linguistic correctness and the inevitable prerequisite for successful communication and thus for civilizational progress.

Of course, language standardization by no means always and exclusively occurs with the aim of constructing nation states and national identities. Instead, as pointed out by Kibbee (2021: 228-229), it may invoke several other beliefs and guiding principles such as efficiency or equality. In actual fact, however, in standard language cultures, the latter principles and categories are often (mis)used for the justification and/or legitimization of views and practices enforcing linguistic uniformity and for the invisibilization of linguistic and social inequality produced by the hegemony of the standard language itself.

Indeed, experience from several countries clearly demonstrates that standard language cultures tend to produce language-based social inequality by favoring social groups speaking the standard language and discriminating against others. This way of discriminating against people on the basis of their language is what we refer to by the term **linguistic discrimination**. To what extent a given standard language culture inherently produces social inequality between speakers of standard and nonstandard languages fundamentally depends on the underlying language ideology of status planning in the course of language standardization. In general, Cobarrubias (1983) distinguishes between two of these alternative key ideologies: **linguistic pluralism** and **linguistic assimilation**. Adapting his general typological dichotomy and definitions for our present purposes with a focus on intralingual language variation, pluralistic language cultures could be called those in which, apart from the standard language, other nonstandard languages and language varieties are also recognized and thus, in principle, everyone is allowed to use his or her first dialect. In standard language cultures governed by the ideology of linguistic assimilation, on the contrary, everybody is required and forced to learn and use the dominant standard language. Both types of standard language cultures are easily recognizable by their actual sociolinguistic profiles and typical everyday practices. The former by the flourishing, unnoticed, and self-evident everyday use of local dialects, the latter,

instead and somewhat paradoxically, by the repeated laments and loud mayday calls about the impending death of traditional local dialects and by the existence of clubs and associations dedicated to dialect preservation. The actual dimensions of language variation in each standard language culture depend on how rigidly the underlying language ideology is imposed and implemented. A rather typical and well-known example of a predominantly pluralistic standard language culture with particularly high tolerance towards intralingual linguistic diversity is Norway (cf. Jahr 1997, Røyneland 2009), while an example of linguistic assimilation with clear hegemony of the standard language is Hungary (Kontra 2018) or, as we will see, also Germany (Maitz & Elspaß 2012).

It may be already concluded from the above that living in standard language cultures and especially in those dedicated to the ideology of linguistic assimilation typically has far-reaching consequences both for the vitality of local nonstandard dialects and their speakers. First, the putative superiority and inevitability of the standard language and its imposed hegemony necessarily undermine the legitimacy and thus also prestige and functionality of co-existing indigenous (and non-indigenous) nonstandard dialects. As a result of this devaluation, they inevitably become endangered and eventually vanish due to the enforced shift of their speakers to the dominant standard language. This form of dialect death represents a clear case of what Skutnabb-Kangas (1988) calls **linguicide**, i.e., the extermination of languages (in contrast to language death in the sense of withering away of languages) and has already been reported in several standard language cultures in and outside of Europe (see also Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 1996). Second, the hegemony of the standard language severely affects the equality of rights and opportunities between standard and nonstandard dialect speakers including the freedom of language choice and language use. In actual fact, the above-mentioned dialect shift – and the resulting dialect death – represent the linguistic reaction of nonstandard dialect speakers to the linguistic and linguistically determined social disadvantages they have to suffer as a result of the implementation of the standard language ideology and the consequential language subordination. In other words, the death of nonstandard dialects in standard language cultures must be deemed as the linguistic outcome of **linguicism**, i.e., the result of the

ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups which are defined on the basis of language (on the basis of their mother tongues). (Skutnabb-Kangas 1988: 13, Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 1996: 667)

Note that if we delete the second phrase in parentheses, the definition covers both interlingual and intralingual discrimination (Kontra 2006: 97). Speakers of nonstandard dialects, however, are not the only victims of the standard language ideology. In his highly influential paper on standardization in descriptive linguistics, James Milroy (1999) assumes that

standard languages are fixed and uniform-state idealisations – not empirically verifiable realities. That is to say, if we study the speech of people who are said to be speaking a standard language, it will never conform exactly to the idealisation. (Milroy 1999: 18)

But even if it is undoubtedly true that nobody speaks the standard language exactly in this idealized and officially codified form, in every standard language culture there are people (self-appointed language cultivators, teachers, representatives of other state institutions, and others) who believe they do so or pretend to do so and who have or claim the right to judge the speech of others. Since such individuals are regarded as linguistic authorities and/or experts, potentially everyone, even standard speakers, can be victimized by the linguistic stigmatization and discrimination resulting from their judgments. For instance, in a questionnaire study of a

random stratified sample of adult Hungarians in Hungary ($n = 832$), it was found that the linguistic correctness judgments of 92% of the population differed from those prescribed by language cultivators. Oral sentence-completion tasks revealed that the speech of two-thirds of adult Hungarians is “targeted” by the language mavens (Kontra 2006). For another illustrative example, it is worth considering the following statement by a senior official of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), responsible among other things for the appointment of lecturers to teach German at foreign universities. His apocalyptic assessment of the linguistic reality in large sections of German society once again demonstrates the far-reaching stigmatization effect of the dogmatic belief in a homogeneous standard language, identified in this case with the (written) standard language as used by intellectuals:

Wer den realen Sprachgebrauch von Kindern und Jugendlichen, von Abiturienten und Studierenden, auch Erwachsenen außerhalb der intellektuellen Milieus, selbst von Journalisten und Fernsehmoderatoren anschaut, der sieht nun wahrlich überall deutliche sprachliche Defizite.

‘If we look at the actual language use of children and adolescents, high school graduates and university students, also of adults outside of the intellectual milieus, or even journalists and television presenters, we will truly see clear linguistic deficits everywhere.’ (Roggasch 2007: 528)

When someone with a view like this is taken seriously and lands in a position of power, discrimination against people on the basis of their language, i.e., linguistic discrimination, is virtually preprogrammed to happen. It is thus anything but surprising that in a public panel discussion in Windsor in 2010 (with one of the authors of this chapter) the same DAAD official in fact proudly reported that he had rejected an applicant for a lectureship because of his allegedly too strong regional accent.

Public linguistic “judges” of this kind are typical and as actors and protectors also highly important for any standard language culture. Of course, they can have different backgrounds and act with different motivations and intentions. Language cultivators and popular writers such as Bastian Sick (2004, 2005, 2006) or Wolf Schneider (2008, 2010) in Germany, for instance, are typically self-appointed, dedicated private individuals pursuing their private linguistic, intellectual, and/or financial interests. Others, again, as in the case described above, act on behalf of state institutions. In any case, such norm keepers typically belong to the linguistically and socially favored and thus powerful groups within any standard language culture and as such they have a vested interest in protecting and maintaining the linguistic and social status quo.

Several institutions can play discriminatory roles and they can do so in several different ways. Before we come to the detailed characterization of the German-speaking countries as standard language cultures, we will name and briefly discuss five of the probably most important of these institutions and domains, by looking at the US and UK and a few references to Hungary.

(1) **Education.** Regarding dialect diversity and education, academic linguists and scholars in the USA in allied fields have produced over 50 years of research and practical applications to address social and regional dialects in school settings (see Sweetland and Wheeler 2015). In the UK such work began with the publication of Trudgill (1975) and continued through Hudson (2004) and beyond. In the US and elsewhere, researchers have demonstrated that teachers, like the general public, associate stigmatized dialects with lower intelligence and aptitude. Sociolinguists, e.g., Labov (1982) have shown that nonstandard-speaking students are not deficient but different: their vernacular dialect is structurally different from the standard dialect, and it is socially stigmatized. Unfortunately, the pedagogical “solution” of the language difference is oftentimes eradicationism: teachers aim to teach the standard at the cost of (not in

addition to) the pupils' dialect, by eradicating it. In contrast to this, Wolfram and colleagues have developed a dialect awareness curriculum in the US (see Adger and Christian 2007). Education typically suffers from the lack of dialect-fair assessment. For instance, in the US, "Historically, misdiagnosis of dialect differences as language disorders has contributed to unnecessary assignment of African American children to special education services" (Sweetland and Wheeler 2015: 454). Language assessments often turn out to be social gatekeepers, not door-openers (Bachman and Purpura 2010). In Hungary, Németh (2020: 32) has recently documented a case when a kindergarten teacher misdiagnosed a 5-year-old who spoke with the local *ö*-dialect rather than the standard *e*-dialect and referred her to begin primary school one year later than usual. Jánk (2020) studied linguistic discrimination and bias shown by in-service and pre-service teachers of Hungarian in Hungary and neighboring countries (n=550). In a modified verbal guise study he found, among other things, that student performances using a regional dialect "were always rated negatively, even when in terms of content the performance was free from shortcomings. In the grade averages, this meant at least one grade difference for performances of the same content" (p. 217).

(2) **Law.** Jones and colleagues (2019) have reported that court transcribers in Philadelphia are often unable to accurately depict African American Language because they cannot understand what they are transcribing. As Craft et al (2019: 18.11) conclude in their review article: such observations "suggest a pattern that at all levels of the [U.S.] justice system, institutional agents are not fully capable of understanding or interpreting citizens' language equitably. The consequences of this inequality are predictably devastating."

(3) **Employment.** Standard language ideologies may dominate in the workplace. For instance, in Hungary and neighboring Romania (where 1.2 million ethnic Hungarians live) actors and actresses emerge from the colleges of dramatic art as 'dialect-free' speakers of Hungarian. Speaking the language with an immutable accent disqualifies one from the acting profession as well as becoming a newscaster.

(4) **Housing market.** Baugh (2018: 67) reports that the existence of linguistic profiling in the United States was initially discovered by proponents of fair housing. (*Linguistic profiling* is the practice of identifying the social characteristics of an individual based on auditory cues, in particular dialect and accent.) Such a practice, Baugh (ibid.) continues, "was detected during many of these telephone calls [described in detail elsewhere in the book] when minority callers, who were usually African Americans or Latinxs, were told that the apartment they were seeking was not available; yet White callers requesting the availability of the very same apartment were subsequently told that the unit was available for rent." Such linguistic discrimination is prevalent but illegal in the US.

(5) **Health care.** Health care is provided through patients and doctors talking to each other. In a recent interview with two British linguists who run The Accentism Project, Paterson (2019) quotes the following story:

Today I spoke to a GP who said that if they heard a Scottish accent from a new patient, they would know that this person had a problem with alcohol or drugs. They said this was not prejudice, but merely a reflection of the location where their practice is based, and the fact that in their experience 100% of the Scottish people in this location have issues with alcoholism or other substance abuse. (accentism.org/stories). (Paterson 2019: 81)

If a patient's accent can trigger such negative attitudes in their doctor, some bias in the provision of health care may well be expected.

3. The German-speaking countries as standard language cultures

Germany, Austria, and German-speaking Switzerland (henceforth: Switzerland) provide an outstanding example of how different the sociolinguistic profile of three directly neighboring standard language cultures within a single contiguous linguistic area can be. While traditional nonstandard local dialects are flourishing in Switzerland and are especially in rural areas – alongside regional accents and Standard German – still relatively widely spoken in Austria as well, in large parts of Northern and Central Germany traditional local dialects have already been exterminated and replaced by the standard language or at best by nonstandard regional accents. These striking differences are, of course, not random. Mostly, they result from the different underlying language ideologies behind language standardization, but also from their different implementation. In terms of corpus planning and acquisition planning (Cooper 1989), the three countries are indeed largely similar. They can all be undoubtedly characterized as standard language cultures in that the linguistic structure of the standard language is fully standardized and codified (including pronunciation; see Kleiner & Knöbl 2023) and everybody entering their school systems is required/forced to learn it. In terms of status planning and prestige planning, however, there are already striking differences between them.

Switzerland is one of the few European countries with a (standard) language policy dedicated predominantly to linguistic pluralism. As such and given its economic strength, it provides – just like Norway – strong empirical evidence for the avoidability of linguistic uniformity through the rigid imposition of a single uniform standard language on an entire society. Switzerland is quite well-known for its – by now somewhat changing (cf. Schmidlin & Franceschini 2019) – “**medial diglossia**” (*mediale Diglossie*) with a still quite sharp split between written and oral domains of communication. Even if traditional, especially formal, written domains of language use are occupied by Standard German, oral domains of everyday language use are dominated almost exclusively by traditional local dialects. In the 1990 census, for instance, 66.4% of respondents living in the German-speaking part of Switzerland declared they never or rarely spoke Standard German (Löffler 1997: 1856). On Swiss German radio and television, where nonstandard dialects have always been common, the use of dialects has even increased since the 1980s (Schmidlin & Franceschini 2019). All this already clearly indicates that – in contrast to Austria and especially Germany – in Switzerland, dialect speaking is a socially unmarked, self-evident everyday practice and, as such, a prerequisite for social integration and, in most cases, also for professional success. The vital diversity of local dialects, their high linguistic value, and social prestige are closely related to the fact that, in sharp contrast to the vast majority of other European societies, Standard German has no part whatsoever to play in the construction of the social or national identity of Swiss Germans. Given all the above, it is no wonder that Standard German has repeatedly been suggested to have the status of a foreign language even for native Swiss Germans. In sum, we can thus conclude that compared to other standard language cultures, Switzerland’s sociolinguistic reality is only very slightly shaped and affected by the standard language ideology. As the language of instruction and of formal written communication, Standard German is inevitably present in everybody’s life. Given the by far predominant role of dialects in everyday life and their country’s economic situation, however, there is indeed no reason at all for Swiss Germans to share the belief in the superiority and inevitability of standard languages.



Figure 1: Cover of a Swiss German (dialect) textbook (Jakob & Dietler 2017)

While in the case of Switzerland, based on the above, it is doubtful whether or to what extent one can truly speak of a successful prestige planning of the standard language at all, Standard German in Austria enjoys, overall, relatively high social prestige and sociolinguistic status, albeit regionally varying. The prestige gap between nonstandard dialects (including regional accents) and the standard language, however, is not nearly as wide as in Germany. In contrast to Switzerland and just like in Germany, the standard language in Austria has already significantly penetrated not only the written but also the oral domains of communication. Even if among Austrians the concept *Hochdeutsch* (Standard German) is typically associated with higher educated Viennese people (Lenz 2019: 323), findings (not only) from a recent pilot project (Koppensteiner & Breuer 2020) clearly indicate that especially in formal and/or professional oral out-group interactions Standard German is prevalent across the entire country. What is more, in most parts of Austria and especially in its Eastern federal provinces, even the former **spoken diglossia** (Auer 2005) characterized by the quite strict allocation of Standard German to formal/out-group and that of dialects to informal/in-group speech is already broken through. Except for at most Vorarlberg in direct neighborhood to Switzerland (see Ender & Kaiser 2009), Standard German is already more or less commonly spoken in less formal or private everyday interactions as well. The result of this competing co-presence of nonstandard dialects with the standard language in orality is a **diaglossic** relationship between the two characterized by the emergence and use of intermediate variants between Standard German and local (base) dialects (Auer 2005, De Cillia & Ransmayr 2019: 47-53), most frequently referred to by the umbrella term *regiolect*. The other necessary consequence is the decreasing use of local dialects, replaced – to a varying degree – either by nonstandard regiolects (in more or less structural distance from the standard language norms) or Standard German. This brief characterization of the current sociolinguistic situation already clearly demonstrates the relatively prominent and altogether increasing role of the standard language in contemporary Austria. It also indicates that unlike in Switzerland, if there is a necessary linguistic prerequisite for social integration and, especially, professional success in Austria today, it is mostly already the standard language rather than the local dialects.

In general, and especially in comparison with Switzerland and Austria, Germany can be characterized as a fully-fledged standard language culture in which the standard language ideology has been largely implemented and turned into reality. The widespread and rather dogmatic belief in the necessity and superiority of the standard language as a means of communication, and its parallel instrumentalization as a key marker of national identity since

the 19th century onwards have radically changed the former linguistic shape of the country. They have resulted in the biased promotion of the standard language through the rigid implementation of a standard language policy largely committed to the ideology of linguistic assimilation. This in turn has gone hand in hand with the stigmatization and devaluation of traditional local dialects and their displacement from more and more domains of both oral and especially written communication. The latter processes were considerably reinforced also by the fact that the standard language has at the same time become instrumentalized as a key identity marker by the educated urban bourgeoisie representing the leading and most powerful social formation within modern German society (Mattheier 1991). In sum, these circumstances taken together have led to the devaluating association and identification of local dialects with less educated people from rural areas and, ultimately, to their “iconization” (Irvine & Gal 2000) as less sophisticated languages of less sophisticated people. This iconization has, of course, necessarily led to a huge prestige gap between Standard German and local dialects, extending to the by now wide approval of – or at least silence around – recurring public statements about the putative inappropriateness or even illegitimacy of dialect speaking in public life. For an illustrative example of this widespread image of dialects in contemporary German society let us take a closer look at the covers of two Bavarian dialect textbooks (Figure 2) in comparison with a Swiss German one (Figure 1).



Figure 2: The covers of two Bavarian (dialect) textbooks (Halbedl 2010, Ronge 2017)

The difference between the contextualization and representation of dialect speaking in the two countries is obvious and striking. It once again demonstrates both the very different nature of the two standard language cultures and, especially, the highly different status and prestige of dialects and dialect speakers within them. While in the case of Swiss German (with the term referring to Swiss German dialects), the image associated with the dialect is that of a young woman full of smile and vitality (Figure 1), in the case of the Bavarian dialect of southern Germany it is, instead – a cow (Figure 2). The latter image together with the rural and alpine landscape on the book cover on the right fits precisely into the above characterization of the social prestige and image of dialects in contemporary Germany as rural, less sophisticated languages with limited functionality. Further, the Swiss German textbook advertises itself in its subtitle with the explicit promise of perfect social integration by learning to speak and understand Swiss German. In line with our characterization of the country above, it is indeed right in doing so. On the covers of the two Bavarian textbooks, of course, such a promise is and

must be missing, since nowadays, speaking a local dialect would even in large parts of Bavaria (regarded as Germany's most dialect-friendly area) hinder rather than facilitate one's success in everyday life.

In addition to but hand in hand with the standard language ideology, there are two other widespread language ideologies in Germany that significantly influence people's perceptions and evaluations of language varieties and their speakers. The first is what we may call linguistic homogeneity (see Section 2), leading people to believe that good language, especially the standard variety, is or ought to be uniform. Since language variation necessarily jeopardizes or damages this uniformity, it must therefore be regarded as undesirable or even dangerous. The following statement is an excerpt from the guiding principles of the public linguistic information and advice service of DUDEN, Germany's largest and most influential publisher of the complete German language codex:

[E]ine grundsätzliche Standardisierung und Vereinheitlichung bestimmter Bereiche der Sprache [ist] eine Notwendigkeit. . . . und wir würden *jede substantielle Aufweichung dieser Einheitlichkeit als eine ernstzunehmende Gefahr betrachten*.

'A fundamental standardization and homogenization of certain areas of language [is] a necessity. . . . and we would regard *any substantial softening of this uniformity as a serious hazard*.' (Scholze-Stubenrecht 1995: 57, italics added)

Since it is a representative of such a key institution of language standardization and knowledge transfer who declares here that variation within the standard language is a serious hazard, the weight and impact of his assessment should not be underestimated. The other highly influential, nationwide shared, and deeply interiorized language ideology in German society is what might be called **linguistic Hanoverianism** (Maitz 2014: 4–8, Maitz 2015: 207–208 and 217), referring to the belief that the best or correct Standard German is spoken in northern Germany, specifically in and around Hanover.

The implications of all the above-mentioned historical, social, and linguistic circumstances and language ideologies are manifold and cannot all be discussed here in detail. Their probably most far-reaching, general outcomes are

- (1) the identification of good/correct German (*Hochdeutsch*) with the (formal) language use of the educated middle classes from the North (Elmentaler 2012, König 2011),
- (2) a distinctly narrow range of variation in language use accepted as correct Standard German by schoolteachers, language cultivators, and other norm keepers, but also by the wider population (Davies 2006, Durrell 1999, Maitz 2015, Maitz & Elspaß 2007 and 2013),
- (3) the low prestige and acceptance of basically any form of language use deviating from the codified and/or perceived standard norms (including especially rural and new urban contact dialects but also southern Standard German), extending to the overt stigmatization and discrimination of the speakers of these language varieties (Maitz & Elspaß 2011a and 2011b, Wiese 2015),
- (4) the widespread everyday doubts about the linguistic correctness of one's own speech, reflected, among other things, in
 - (a) the numerous questions about (in)correct language use received by the numerous linguistic helpdesk service providers (Donalies 2023, Klein 2018, Neubauer 2009, Scholze-Stubenrecht 1995),
 - (b) the establishment of a particular research field within German linguistics dedicated to these linguistic doubts as a mass phenomenon within German society (Klein 2018, Dovalil & Hanulíková 2023),

- (c) the great popularity of language cultivators and their books even if – or precisely because – these are characterized, again, by a conspicuously high intolerance towards language variation (Maitz & Elspaß 2007) and their principal tool and merit is nothing but the overt or covert linguistic stigmatization of large parts of German society including their own readership (Maitz 2010),
- (5) the almost hegemonic status of Standard German in more formal, especially public out-group interactions in everyday life,
- (6) the already addressed wide-scale displacement and death of traditional local dialects and their replacement by the standard language and/or by regiolects.

Based on the above and in line with Maitz & Elspaß (2012) as well as Durrell's (1999) comparative analysis, German society can be described as highly normative, in that it is characterized by a pronounced defensive and purist attitude towards the standard language and a high intolerance towards linguistic variation in general and deviations from the codified and/or perceived linguistic norms in particular. In what follows, we will shift our focus to the linguistically motivated forms of social inequality produced, legitimized, and invisibilized by the above-discussed language ideologies, attitudes, and social practices. Based on previously published relevant papers (Maitz 2015, Maitz & Elspaß 2011a and 2011b, Maitz & Foldenauer 2015), we will present and briefly discuss some typical overt and covert linguistic discrimination cases to demonstrate the dimensions, major domains, and forms of language subordination (Lippi Green 1997: 67-70) and resulting social discrimination in 21st-century Germany.

4. Linguistic discrimination in contemporary Germany

In the previous section, we have seen how the ruling language ideologies in German society do not simply influence but also strongly distort the perception and evaluation of different forms of language use. Linguistic differences from the standard language norms, for instance, appear in general as linguistic shortcomings. Features of Southern standard language use deviating from corresponding Northern features are regarded as nonstandard and therefore also incorrect. Accordingly, people living in southern Germany are judged incapable of speaking correct Standard German simply because they do not speak Northern Standard German (König 2011, Maitz 2014). Most fundamentally, language variation is considered dysfunctional and harmful when in fact it is a highly functional, essential, and universal property of every natural human language. In sum, these ruling language ideologies make a large number of common standard and especially nonstandard language use habits appear to be deficient, incorrect, and thus illegitimate. Thereby, at the same time, they legitimize the use of sanctioning social practices against the speakers behind these common speech forms, in other words, they invisibilize linguistic discrimination. This might explain the lack of awareness of linguistic discrimination against German speakers in Germany until very recently. However, as soon as we cease to consider such practices against the backdrop of these language ideologies, they immediately become recognizable as illegitimate overt forms of linguistic discrimination.

One of the most prominent domains of linguistic discrimination where social inequality between speakers of different varieties of German is produced and reinforced, is the German education system. In terms of their linguistic aims and goals, the curricula for German as a school subject of most German federal states focus especially in secondary and higher schools on the acquisition and exclusive use of Standard German by the pupils, and they do so explicitly to the detriment of regional nonstandard language varieties spoken as first languages by many schoolchildren. The key role of the school in the extermination of German dialects is clearly highlighted by the case of a schoolteacher from the Saarland in Southwest Germany, reported

by *SPIEGEL Online* in August 2009 (Geiger 2009). After the teacher at his own request was transferred to a school in Lower Bavaria, he complained about alleged communication difficulties because of the dialect of his pupils. Regarding the fundamental question of whether in such a case the teacher should respect the language of his pupils or, instead, entire school classes should adapt their language to that of the new teacher, the president of the Bavarian Teachers' Association made the following statement:

Die Schüler müssen verstehen, dass es unterschiedliche Gesprächssituationen gibt: Mit ihren Kumpels dürfen sie gern so breit wie nur möglich in der Mundart reden, doch wenn sie zum Beispiel einen neuen Lehrer vor sich haben, müssen sie in der Lage sein, ihre Sprache anzupassen.

‘The pupils must understand that conversational situations are different. With their mates, they are welcome to speak their broadest dialect, but as soon as they have for example a new teacher standing in front of them, they must be able to adapt their language.’ (Geiger 2009)

In line with the above, Neuland & Hochholzer (2006: 185) rightly note that systematic dialect-oriented language didactics or even dialect didactics for teaching German as a first language could never be established in Germany’s schools. The fact alone that especially in secondary and higher schools, Standard German is not just the only target variety of German classes, but mostly also the – at least officially – only language of instruction, entails serious disadvantages for schoolchildren with a first language variety other than the standard language. First, it denies them access to education in their own first language varieties, i.e., the varieties they know best. Second, it forces them to acquire and/or switch to a German language variety they are less or not at all familiar with, putting them thus at a significant disadvantage compared to children with Standard German as their first language (see Barbour & Stevenson 1998: 204-208).

Findings from recent critical analyses of state-authorized textbooks of German as a first language used in Bavarian secondary schools (Maitz 2015, Maitz & Foldenauer 2015) revealed that basically all nonstandard language varieties spoken by pupils are systematically stigmatized and rejected. This applies both to local dialects and regiolects spoken by them as their first dialects, and to youth languages invented and commonly used among peers. Dialects are characterized in textbooks exclusively as dysfunctional and incomprehensible ways of speaking, suitable and appropriate only for folk songs, jokes, and dialect poems. But it is suggested that, in order to be understood, even words like *Semmel* ‘bread roll’, which are commonly used in both spoken and written Standard German in Bavaria and also in Austria (see AdA 2003ff.), are to be replaced by the corresponding northern equivalent word *Brötchen*. Standard German, on the other hand, is misleadingly presented as a universally appropriate and useful means of communication, which should therefore be exclusively used in everyday life (Maitz 2015). Youth languages, again, are depicted as an icon of misbehaving youth and are directly associated with bad manners (Maitz & Foldenauer 2015). The consequences of these overt stigmatizations can reach very far. We are already dealing with overt linguistic discrimination when, as is repeatedly documented, for example, in a school essay by a Bavarian pupil the inflected Southern Standard German perfect auxiliary verb *sein* in the construction *ich bin gesessen* ‘I was sitting’ is corrected to the equivalent northern form *habe*, and for reasons like this a lower grade is even awarded. The same is true when a student gets a lower grade on an oral state exam at a university in Bavarian Swabia (or anywhere else in Germany) on the basis of her allegedly too-heavy Swabian accent (see Maitz & Elspaß 2011b also for a discussion of further similar cases). The pathologizing of certain ways of speaking represents one of the probably most extreme cases of linguistic stigmatization and discrimination. It must already be called a blatant example of linguistic ignorance and discrimination when, for instance, a child coming from the Black Forest in Southwest Germany is sent to a speech

therapist by a teacher in his new school in Westphalia in Northwest Germany because of his (regional standard) pronunciation of German words, unusual for Westphalians (Maitz & Elspaß 2011a: 231). All in all, the circumstances and cases discussed above highlight the German education system as a key institution of linguistic indoctrination into a fully developed standard language culture, characterized by an extremely low level of tolerance for language variation in general and nonstandard dialects in particular.

The situation seems to be very similar in the field of employment, too. A first dialect other than (narrowly defined) Standard German seems to significantly reduce one's employment opportunities in Germany. What is more, apparently it also has a significant negative effect on the amount of salary received. In Maitz & Elspaß (2011a and 2011b), for instance, various job announcements are quoted in which "dialect-free pronunciation," or "dialect-free best way of expression" – whatever these may be – are explicitly listed among the requirements for employment. It is obvious that such job advertisements discriminate not only against dialect speakers but also against people with regional accents. In 1998, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reported on a lawsuit brought by an East German sales representative who was dismissed after the closure of his branch. According to the newspaper report, his offer to continue working in West Germany was rejected with the argument that he would not be accepted by West German customers because of his "strong Saxon accent" (see Maitz & Elspaß 2011b: 8). The denial of continued employment on such grounds represents, without question, an overt form of language-based social injustice and discrimination and is as such unacceptable. Unfortunately, however, the content of the justification truthfully reflects the attitudes of most Germans toward the local speech of native Saxons (Gärtig et al 2010: 163). Language ideologies constitute and carry the fundamental linguistic values and norms of a given society. To a certain degree and in principle, at least, they are and must therefore be interiorized and accepted by the entire society, including those who become disadvantaged by them. This has the more or less inevitable effect that the latter groups accept, acknowledge, or even openly confess their alleged linguistic inferiority or incompetence as a matter of fact. A striking example of this phenomenon is the main slogan *Wir können alles. Außer Hochdeutsch*. 'We can do anything. Except speak good German' of the enormous advertising campaign of the federal state of Baden-Württemberg, which ran between 1999 and 2021. The negative linguistic self-assessment contained by this slogan is the obvious effect of the interiorization of the language ideology we have previously labeled as linguistic Hanoveranism (see Section 3). Another glaring example of the far-reaching consequences of this interiorization effect is the fact that job seekers and employees in Germany are apparently even willing to pay to be trained away from their first (nonstandard) dialects – that is, from their vernacular varieties – to compensate and overcome their obviously realized linguistic disadvantages in the labor market. It should be only mentioned in passing that because of the serious age constraints on learning second – including standard – dialect accents (Chambers 2009: 175), such efforts are for the most part illusory and hopeless. Regardless of this, Maitz & Elspaß (2012: 48–49) cite descriptions of courses, including very expensive ones, offered by different institutions promising their participants the elimination of dialect-specific features in their speech and the successful transition to Standard German. To the best of our knowledge, the only quantitative study on the effects of dialect speaking in the field of employment in Germany so far is the paper published by Grogger, Steinmayr & Winter (2020). The authors' findings both confirm and refine our picture of the current situation in the German labor market drawn above. Especially two of their major findings deserve to be highlighted. First, they found statistical evidence for the fact that workers with a distinctive regional accent tend to avoid occupations with a high level of face-to-face contact, clearly indicating that they are aware of the discriminatory linguistic expectations and/or social practices in the labor market described

above. Second, they have also found a significant negative effect of distinctive regional accents on wages that is comparable to the gender wage gap.

5. Concluding remarks

A quarter of a century ago, in concluding his essay on linguistic norms and their social consequences in Britain, James Milroy stated that

[i]n an age when discrimination in terms of race, colour, religion or gender is not publicly acceptable, the last bastion of overt social discrimination will continue to be a person's use of language. (Milroy 1998: 64–65.)

Based on our considerations in the last section, his statement seems to apply to the current situation in 21st-century Germany as well. This remains true even if, for the sake of truth, we must qualify this general conclusion in two respects. First, Article 3 of Germany's Basic Law (= federal constitution) explicitly prohibits discrimination on the basis of language and is thus in cases such as those described above, expressly on the side of the victims. This was also the case, for instance, with the aforementioned sales representative from Saxony. After he had filed a lawsuit because of the manner of his dismissal, it was declared invalid by the labor court (Maitz & Elspaß 2011b: 8). Second, one can already notice the first signs of a positive change in the current situation. Following the first academic and popular publications on this topic, Bavarian state institutions, for example, started to provide suggestions and materials for Bavarian schools on the issue of linguistic discrimination of dialect speakers (see ISB n.d.). Recently established state institutions like the *Fachstelle Interkulturelle Öffnung* ('Competence Centre for Intercultural Opening') in Thuringia are making efforts to raise and increase awareness of the same phenomenon in the wider public. Last but not least, the issue of the linguistic value and the future prospects of traditional local dialects in Germany have recently also been included among the topics of high-school leaving examinations, for instance, in the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia (MSB 2017).

These circumstances and positive trends again demonstrate both the necessity and the social benefits of a permanent and wider critical reflection on language ideologies, the linguistic values and norms they carry, and the social practices they legitimize and invisibilize. Standard language cultures are not necessarily worse than nonstandard language cultures. On the basis of the brief comparison of the German-speaking countries in Section 3, we could hopefully demonstrate that they can have quite different faces, less and more smiling ones. In the same way as societies free of any form of discrimination must remain a Utopia, there is no language culture that is a priori free of any form of linguistic discrimination. This is, however, certainly not a sufficient reason to abandon our fight for a Utopia of discrimination-free societies.

We strongly believe that all native speakers of a language, not only the privileged few, must have a right to equitable language use in basically all domains of everyday life. And we especially agree with Halliday et al (1964: 105) who well over half a century ago stated that

[a] speaker who is made ashamed of his own language habits suffers a basic injury as a human being: to make anyone, especially a child, feel so ashamed is as indefensible as to make him feel ashamed of the colour of his skin.

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