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Standard, Variation und Sprachwandel in germanischen Sprachen

Standard, Variation and Language Change in Germanic Languages

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Variation and Change in Colloquial (Standard) German – The Atlas zur deutschen Alltagssprache (AdA) Project

Abstract


The fundamental changes in the architecture of varieties in German during the last century have drawn the attention of linguists to variation and change in standard and colloquial standard German. However, the noticeable deficit in the documentation and/or examination of regional variants to be found in grammars and most dictionaries of German demonstrates the need for continuous empirical studies on such variation. This paper describes the project Atlas zur deutschen Alltagssprache (AdA), which has been utilising the internet to a) collect data on a broad empirical basis and b) make those data available via an online atlas since 2003. The paper presents and discusses selected results from the first three rounds of questionnaires.

1. Introduction

In recent years, “language variation” and “language change” have become major issues in German linguistics. Several conferences and new large scale projects have addressed or are currently addressing problems of present-day regional variation in particular and its consequences for changes in progress.

1 I would like to thank Christian Fandrych for critical and helpful comments on a first draft of this paper.

2 The most prominent current projects are the Sprachvariation in Norddeutschland project (Elementaler et al. 2006), the Regionalssprachen project of the Forschungsinstitut für deutsche Sprache, Deutscher Sprachatlas in Marburg, and the Deutsch heute (Varia-
There seem to be three major reasons for this new interest in variation:

Firstly, the massive change in the whole spectrum of varieties (Varietäten-
sperrum) in German has not gone unnoticed in the linguistic community. In
general terms, until about half a century ago (in what I would call the end of
Mittelneuhochdeutsch, the ‘Middle New High German language period’)
the majority of people in the German-speaking countries grew up with a
local dialect. Today, only children in Switzerland and in some rural areas of
Germany (mainly in the south) and Austria learn a dialect as their mother
tongue. The majority of people in Germany speak no dialect at all – in the
sense of a traditional local dialect. Language 1 for them is ‘German with a
regional colouring’ (or ‘German with a foreign accent’, though even second
and third generation Turkish, Greek, Italian people etc. have usually adopted
regional accents, often blending them with Turkish, Greek, Italian and so on,
cf. Keim/Knöbl in this volume). No linguist seriously believes that dialects
in Germany were replaced by a homogenous standard language. Dictionaries
and grammars of standard German, however, still present the picture of a
largely uniform German language – with the exception of the new Vario-
tenwörterbuch (Ammon/Bickel/Ebner et al. 2004).

Secondly, the new interest in language variation results to a certain extent
from the emergence of spoken language analysis and conversation analysis.
One drawback, however, is that many conversation analysts focus on a pre-
sumed ‘grammar of spoken German’ and are not overly interested in aspects of
regional variation in their data. What they sometimes fail to see is that
some of the alleged ‘variants of spoken German’ are restricted to certain
regions. And even if regional variation is mentioned, it does not become
clear which regions these linguists have in mind (cf. examples below).

Thirdly, there has always been a motley crew who have taken a deep interest
in the varieties and variants of a language, namely the people who have to
teach this language and who have a desire to teach a living language,
including those variants which are easier to teach than others. This is not a
marginal or academic question, but a matter of practical importance.3

3 To mention but a few: König (1991), Baßler/Spiekermann (2001), Ehner/Fuchs/Hetrampf
(2002), Durrell (2004), Durrell/Langer (2005); cf. also the discussion in Langer (in this
volume).
One major problem that everybody who is concerned with variation in standard German comes across is that he or she has no clear-cut criteria where standard German ends and non-standard German begins, or – if a particular variant is marked as a regional variant – which region is meant by the dictionary or grammar writer. What does the reader, for instance, make of the Duden DUW (2001) dictionary entry that the word Bub ‘boy’ is used in Switzerland, in Austria, and in the south of Germany (“stüdd., österr., schweiz.”)? Can the north-south divide be identified with the popular Main-Linie? Are the deletion of schwa in the ge-prefix, final t deletion in un[d], nicht[t], jetzt[t], or possessive-dative constructions like diesen leuten da ihr häuslein features of ‘spoken (standard) German’, as the new Duden-Grammatik (2005, pp. 1209, 1224) will have it? What information does one get, for instance, when different grammars of contemporary German give confusing information about progressive constructions in German (e.g. Sie ist noch am Schlafen) such as “in gesprochener Umgangssprache” (‘in colloquial German, IDS-Grammatik 1997, p. 1880), “Umgangssprache, insbesondere in einigen Dialekten” (‘colloquial German, particularly in some regional dialects’, Hentschel/Weydt 2003, p. 44), “landschaftliche Umgangs- sprache (vor allem im Rheinland und Westfalen)” (‘colloquial regional German, particularly in the Rhineland and in Westphalia’, cf. Duden-Zweifelsfälle 2001, p. 63), “bestimmte Varietäten des Gesprochenen (‘Ruhrgaebietsdeutsch’)” (‘certain spoken varieties, such as in the Ruhr area’, Eisenberg 1998, p. 193), whereas others claim that it is “standardsprachlich, besonders in der gesprochenen Sprache” (‘standard German, particularly spoken standard’, Duden-Grammatik (1998, p. 91, fn. 1) or “zunehmend (nicht nur regional) in der gesprochenen Sprache” (‘on the increase in spoken German (not only regionally restricted’, Helbig/Buscha 2001, p. 80)? This again is not a minor issue. Firstly, this particular case touches upon the question whether German has a progressive aspect or not. Secondly, it raises the issue whether it may be allowed to use the am-progressive in essay writing (this may make life easier for British or Dutch students of German, and even for many German students in Germany).

The disparate and vague nature of such handbook information is obviously due to a lack of empirical data on regional variants of (colloquial) standard German. Thus, a clear need can be discerned for corpora which account for

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present-day regional variation of German. Most of the new projects in this field aim at the collection of first-hand information gained from the speech of speakers from different regions. The necessary fieldwork for this is often time- and money-consuming, however. In this paper I would like to present an alternative project which Robert Möller and I began in 2003, the *Atlas zur deutschen Alltagssprache*.

2. **Methodology of the *Atlas zur deutschen Alltagssprache* (‘Atlas on colloquial German speech’)**

The *Atlas zur deutschen Alltagssprache* (henceforth AdA) is based on internet surveys of contemporary colloquial German which is spoken particularly by the younger urban generation of the German-speaking countries. To obtain the data, we draw on one of the most traditional methods of dialectology, i.e. questionnaires. We use basically the same kind of questionnaire that Eichhoff, then professor of German at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, developed for his *Wortatlas der deutschen Umgangssprachen* in the 1970s (WDU 1977ff.). Like Eichhoff, we are only marginally interested in old rural dialects and, thus, in our search for potential informants, we do not look for NORMS. We ask our informants to inform us about the *Alltagssprache* in their towns and cities, that is the colloquial speech “one would normally hear” in these places, “be it more dialect or more standard German”.

In contrast to Eichhoff, we prefer *Alltagssprache* to *Umgangssprache*, as *Umgangssprache* has proven to be a notoriously ambiguous term (cf. Durrell 2004, pp. 70ff.). Thus, for many speakers in the German-speaking countries, *Alltagssprache* can mean dialect, but for most people of the younger generation in Germany and Austria, their *Alltagssprache* is in fact a regional form of standard German. ‘Younger’ refers to anybody between 10 and 30, ‘young-ish’ may include the 30-somethings. Almost 60% of our informants are younger than 30, almost 80% are younger than 40. After two pilot studies that were conducted in 2002 (Möller 2003a, Elspaß 2005a), we have, so far, completed three surveys in 2003–2006, the results of which are totalling in 122 linguistic maps (a fourth round, ending 2007, will supply us with another 40 or so maps). All maps can be viewed on the internet (www.uni-augsburg.de/alltagssprache). In rounds 1 to 3, we have asked be-

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5 “Bitte geben Sie bei den folgenden Fragen jeweils an, welches Wort man in Ihrer Stadt normalerweise hören würde - egal, ob es mehr Mundart oder Hochdeutsch ist.” (cf. Eichhoff’s questionnaire in the appendix of WDU II 1978).
between 2,000 and 2,300 informants (the present questionnaire has been filled in by more than 5,000 people). The questionnaire method was re-introduced into the ‘new dialect geography’ by Eichhoff for his WDU, when he sent out questionnaires (and to a certain extent also his staff) to the German-speaking countries in the 1970s. It is important to note that the people who fill out the questionnaires act as informants. They are not meant to state what their individual language use is, but what people in their city or town usually say.

The crucial difference between the Wenker\(^6\) and Eichhoff-style surveys and the AdA project is that the survey is conducted via internet. At first, a questionnaire is put on the project webpage. Then, e-mails are sent to people in about 400 cities and towns in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg and the German-speaking parts of Northern Italy and Eastern Belgium. The questionnaires contain questions on certain words for objects (with optional pictures of these objects), on the pronunciation of words, on typical sentence structures, or even on the acceptability of certain constructions, like the am-progressive. To each question, at least two possible variants (of which we have become aware) are provided. Additionally, a blank space is left for any further variants not provided on the list. These blank spaces are frequently used by our informants. In the last part of the questionnaires the informants are asked to give some personal data, like sex, age, period of residence in the town, etc., and we also leave some extra space for comments.

3. Some results

The first and fundamental question is whether the data the researcher gets via internet surveys do actually present real language use. To answer this question, he or she could either check it against data such as spoken language corpora, or examples from the internet, print media, or various linguistic surveys. To give but one example: If a map shows a clear division between Junge ‘boy’ in the northern parts and Bub in the southern parts of the German-speaking countries, and the same regional distribution can be found in a corpora-based dictionary of national and regional variants like the Variantenwörterbuch as well as on a map in the corresponding WDU map from the 1970s, which is based on written questionnaires, then there are sound indicators that the internet survey data are reasonably reliable.

\(^6\) Georg Wenker (1852–1911) is considered as the pioneer of dialect geography for his ground-breaking *Deutscher Sprachatlas* (‘German Language Atlas’) which is based on almost 50,000 questionnaires.
3.1 Variation

Once this is established, we can move on and look at individual maps or groups of maps. Firstly, they may be interesting for their display of variation in German. A few examples from pronunciation, lexis and grammar may suffice for illustration. The corresponding coloured maps can be obtained from the alphabetical list ("Register der Varianten") of the project webpage: www.uni-augsburg.de/alltagssprache.

Pronunciation:

- Pronunciation of -g in König: According to the standard orthoepic dictionaries in German, the final letter in König and other words in German where g follows a front vowel is pronounced as a fricative (König). 'Real German', however, has two standard variants König and König (cf. König 1989, vol. 2, p. 319), colloquial (standard) German has even three: König, Könik and Könisch.7 Traditionally, these variants have a clear regional distribution: König in the north, the coronal variant Könisch in the areas of the West Middle German dialects and in Saxony, and König (with a stop at the end) in the south of Germany, in Austria, and in Switzerland.

- Pronunciation of das: The map shows the different forms of the written standard pronoun das in a phrase like Das weiß ich auch nicht. ('This I don't know either.') This again is informal standard spoken German. The form dat with a t matches the corresponding word in Low German and Rhenish dialects, and it is surely no surprise that it is still used in areas which are geographically close to the countries where this dat is spoken and written standard. Det is known as the variant of the colloquial variety of the Berlin/Brandenburg area (which is not the old regional dialect form!), and the areal distribution of des on the Ada map corresponds to the distribution of the variant des/dös in the traditional dialects.8

- Pronunciation of nicht: Another very frequent word is nicht – which hardly anybody pronounces like this in colloquial German. The most prominent variants are nich (with final-t deletion) and net or nit (with dropping of the fricative).

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7 The examples are presented in a simplified phonetic transcription that is also used in the questionnaires.
- Linking element in Schwein-...-braten: If you order 'roast pork' in the German-speaking countries, it does not only come with different side dishes, but also with different linking elements: Schweinebraten with an -e- exclusively in the North and in most parts of Southern Germany, Schweinsbraten is the usual word in Bavaria, in Austria and in Switzerland.

Lexis:

- What do people use as a greeting formula when they go into a shop in the afternoon? Greeting formulae are very frequently used lexical items, and thus it is useful to be aware of the different national and regional variants: In most parts of Northern Germany and the west of Germany, you are okay with guten Tag or just hallo, but in the South and in Austria most people would say Grüß Gott (even if they are atheists). Grüest is mainly Swiss German, and grüß Euch (griet Eich ...) Austrian German. In the far North of Germany, people may as well say moin or moin, moin (literally 'morning') all day long.

- If you want to buy oranges, just say Orange (though it has many different variants of pronunciation in German). This will be understood everywhere, although people in most areas in the north would prefer to say Apfelsine.

- Likewise, if you need leek, say Lauch, although northerners would rather say Porree.

- If you move from the greengrocer's to the butcher's shop in a German-speaking country, you may find yourself in a Fleischer's (in the northeast and east of Germany), a Schlachter's (far north and in the northwest), a Fleischhacker's or Fleischhauer's (Austria excluding the west), or a Metzger's (in the west and south of Germany, the west of Austria, in Switzerland, South Tyrol, Liechtenstein, and East Belgium).

Grammar:

- The AdA maps damit, daran, darauf and davon present a detailed picture about the distribution of pronominal adverb constructions, and a much more differentiated picture than can be found in grammars of German. Most grammarians seem to be aware of the splitting construction only, e.g. da habe ich nichts von ('I don't get any benefits from this'), and consider these forms either as 'dialect' features ('in vielen Dialekten ...', Ei-
senberg 1999, p. 195) or as 'mistakes', which are typical of 'spoken language' (“Ein weiterer Fehler, wieder vor allem in der gesprochenen Sprache ...”, Götzte in Wahrig-Grammatik 2002, p. 301), or they attribute them to 'regional language' in the 'northwest' (“nur regional verbreitet, besonders im Nordwesten”, Eroms 2000, p. 136) or in the 'north' (Zifonun in IDS-Grammatik 1997, p. 2085; Duden-Grammatik 2005, p. 587). Only the IDS grammar and the Duden grammar paint a realistic picture. The splitting construction is clearly restricted to the north in standard spoken German. People in the south either prefer constructions in which the pronoun is doubled (dadavon habe ich nichts or da habe ich nichts davon), or they use inverted forms (von dem habe ich nichts). Surprisingly, the regional distribution is not very different from that of pronominal adverb constructions in traditional dialects (cf. Fleischer 2002).

- One grammatical construction which is very typical for the southwest of Germany and Switzerland is Es hat ..., as in In dieser Gegend hat's viele Wälder, where other regions have es gibt ('There are many woods in this part of the country').

- A third grammatical variant, which has been mentioned earlier, i.e. the am-progressive, will be discussed further below (section 3.2).

Quite a few maps display a regional distribution of variants that points to the effect of language contact:

- The word Tschik for 'cigarette butt', which has developed into a full Austrianism, is a loan from Italian cicca or Friulian cic.

- The word Söller for 'attic' which is used in the small region northwest of Düsseldorf is a leftover from the Dutch dialect that is spoken in this area and of course related to Dutch zolder. Like the Rhenish variant Speicher and the Swiss German word Estrich it was probably adopted from the Romance-speaking people with whom people living in the west of Germany and who spoke a (proto-)German dialect were in contact for hundreds of years.

- Finally, consider the variants for Wasserhahn 'water tap'. Most common are Hahn or Hahnen. Pipe, which is used in Austria and Southern Tyrol, is – like English pipe – derived from Latin, in the Austrian case probably via Italian pipa – and not from Germanic, because then it would have become Pfeife, which is the German word for 'smoking pipe'. Kran in the west, however, is the same word than in Dutch (kraan) (see map 1).
Map 1: Variants for Wasserhahn 'water tap'
3.2 Language change

Regional variation in colloquial German is not as diverse as dialectal variation, and the distribution of regional variants is changing more rapidly.

Usually, grammatical features are much more stable than changes in lexis or phonology. This has been established for pronominal adverb constructions (cf. 3.1). Another case is the use of the auxiliary verb *sein* in perfect tense forms of the full verb *sitzen* 'sit' (likewise *stehen* 'stand', *liegen* 'lie'). The regional distribution of *ich habe gesessen* in the north and *ich bin gesessen* in the south has scarcely changed over the last thirty years (cf. Elspaß 2005a, pp. 28f.).

In view of the relative stability in the regional variety of grammar (compared with lexis and phonology), the spread of the progressive form with *am + INF + sein* is particularly striking. The *am*-progressive is not yet fully accepted and grammaticalised across all the German-speaking countries. Informants in most of the German-speaking countries, except those from Austria and Southern Tyrol, reported in our 2004 survey that progressives of intransitive verbs, as in *sie ist am Schlafen* (‘she is sleeping’), are commonly used, or have recently come into use. In an expanded verb phrase with an object, however, like *ich bin gerade die Uhr am reparieren* (‘I am repairing the clock’), the *am*-progressive is only used in its ‘traditional’ areas, i.e. the West and Switzerland (cf. van Pottelberge 2004). Thus, the two maps may be interpreted as displaying two stages of a change in progress.

In contrast to grammar, the change of *lexical* variants appears to happen much more rapidly. However, as always with language change, one may wonder why some features are changing while others are not.

One example of a relatively stable lexical variation has already been mentioned: the distribution of *Bub(e)* and *Junge* for ‘boy’ which has hardly changed over the last 30 years and shows precious little difference from the traditional dialects. But it is debatable to what degree the two maps show actual language use. In general, *Junge* seems to be the unmarked variant, which is also used more often in written German. So if informants are asked about the use of two regional variants, the question arises whether they give the conventionally used variant, or the more salient variant which they consider to be more typical of their region? Thus, a map with a clear north-south divide like the *Junge/Bub(e)* should perhaps be interpreted as displaying the
maximum distribution of the variant *Bub(e)* rather than the distribution of two equivalent variants. This, of course, points at the wider-ranging problem of how to read data obtained from questionnaires.

Another striking case is the variation of expressions for the spatial concepts of 'here' and 'there'. If people want to say that they 'have been living here (at the place where they are at the time of speaking) for more than 10 years', in the north of Germany the common adverb to be used appears to be *hier*, in the south, however, it would be *da* (lit. 'there'). In comparing the AdA map *hier/da* with the corresponding dialect map of the *Deutsche Sprachatlas* (cf. www.diwa.info, map IV-4, 181), it becomes evident that the crucial isogloss has hardly moved at all over more than 100 years (despite the shift from dialect to colloquial standard German).

Examples of lexical variation such as these two, which show hardly any differences in the maximum distribution of two (or more) variants over the years, are very rare, however. Most maps from the new surveys show notable differences from the WDU maps. In Elspaß (2005a), I focussed on the results of a pilot study and expanded on three types of (and possible explanations for) change in regional lexis. The maps from the 2003 to 2005 surveys seem to confirm the following findings:

a) People often give up using a particular word in favour of another one which is used in a different region, for example because they think word A has become old-fashioned and word B sounds trendier or more standard. A typical example is the changing picture of the variants for 'small bread roll made from wheat flour'. On the 1978 WDU map, a wide variety of different regional words can be observed. In 2002, *Semmel* is hardly used any more in eastern parts of Germany, but has spread out in Bavaria and is still the dominant variant in Austria. The Swiss seem to keep traditional words like *Weggli*. But the most dominant form in the north and in central Germany has become *Brötchen*, and this has increasingly been adopted in the southwest, too. Some less widespread variants from the 1978 map have almost entirely disappeared (*Rundstück, Laabla, Kipfl*). There are several other pairs of maps which show that minor regional variants have more or less been abandoned (cf. Elspaß 2005a, pp. 32f.).
b) What is sometimes very striking when looking at various old and new maps is the geographical direction of change. There have certainly been diffusions from "northern" words and expressions to the south in the past (as in tschüss 'bye'). However, comparing the Eichhoff data with our data, quite a few maps show that variants from the south have increasingly been adopted by northerners, e.g. Samstag 'Saturday' instead of Sonnabend, Lauch 'leek' instead of Porree, or Orange 'orange' instead of Apfelsine. Take Apfelsine/Orange, for example: Orange has become more popular. It does seem to have higher prestige. Thus, hardly anybody would order Apfelsinensaft in a café (except in a few places in Pomerania and in eastern Belgium — in the latter possibly because Apfelsinensaft resembles the Dutch word sinaasappelsap). Thus, a company that sells 'orange juice' would hardly name it Apfelsinensaft; Orangensaft sounds better — plus people in Germany can shorten it into O-Saft. (A-Saft doesn’t work. You may get apple juice, Apfelsaft.) The diffusion of southern words spreading to the north is particularly remarkable in the case of modal particles and discourse markers. Thus, halt and eh have spread rapidly to the north over the past 30 years and have either replaced the traditional particles eben and sowieso, or northerners use both variants.9

There may be purely practical reasons for some of these changes, as with Orange/Apfelsine, or take Samstag/Sonnabend (‘Saturday’), for instance: The names of the days of the week are often abbreviated on calendars, timetables etc. If Sonnabend is abbreviated to So, it would not be possible to distinguish it from Sonntag (cf. Duden-Zweifelsfälle 2001, p. 735). But these are rather rare instances.

As far as I am aware, the question of the direction of change has not been analysed systematically yet. If additional data in the future should confirm the impression of a more general ‘lexical (not phonological!) spread from the south’, it may be argued that the economic dominance of the south (including the dominance of TV media companies based in Munich) has had an audible and visible effect on recent changes in German.

9 The diffusion of southern variants has been used by some grammarians to explain one of the most prominent tendencies in German word order, i.e. the increasing use of the conjunction weil + V2. According to Pasch (1997), for instance, weil has in many contexts replaced denn and simply ‘adopted’ the word order with V2 from it.
c) Not all regional variants have fallen into disuse, however. A closer look at the *Samstag/Sonnabend* (‘Saturday’) maps, for instance, reveals that *Sonnabend* has not been abandoned everywhere. In Lower Saxony, it has become the dominant variant, particularly among the younger generation (cf. Elspaß 2005a, pp. 11f.). In the far north, *Sonnabend* appears only as the less frequent variant, and it was mainly given by older informants in our survey. In the east of Germany, however, it is still the leading form, and it is noticeable that the isogloss that one could draw corresponds perfectly to the border between the former two German states. *Sonnabend* has become an eastern German shibboleth, so to speak. This is not the only instance for divergence along the former German-German border. The map for ‘butcher’ discloses a similar pattern. Schlächter or Schlächter, which used to be the main word in the north, has virtually disappeared from the north of the former GDR. Instead, the word *Fleischer* has become the usual word in what are today the eastern German Länder. Our maps even display a remarkably frequent use of some terms of familiar address like *Vati* (‘dad’) and *Mutti* (‘dad’ and ‘mum’, see ibid., pp. 13f.) or *Omi* and *Opi* (‘granddad’ and ‘grandma’) in the east of Germany. Moreover, most ‘traditional’ GDR words like *Plaste* ‘plastic’ (as opposed to *Plastik* in all other German-speaking countries and regions) have never made it to the west or south. Again, more data from future research need to be considered. But the results for the variants presented here are certainly not coincidental. They may point to the fact that a national levelling process was taking place in the former GDR,\(^\text{10}\) which has left its traces even after 15 years of German unification.

Thus, differences between Eichhoff maps from the 1970s and our internet survey maps show three major types of lexical diffusion during the last decades: convergence, noticeable developments in the geographical direction of change, and divergence due to the communicatively disruptive effect of political borders.

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\(^{10}\) I will not go into detail on the conceptual and terminological problems (and even absurdities) that the discussion on “DDR-Deutsch” as a full/possible/potential national variety of German has produced in the past, cf. Elspaß (2005b, pp. 301f.) for a discussion on this matter.
4. Conclusion

Linguistic divergence caused by political borders between nation states is the cause for national variation of German. But diatopic variation in German is certainly not restricted to national varieties. There is still a great amount of regional variation within the German-speaking countries, even at the level of (colloquial) standard German. Recent research and ongoing projects have demonstrated that there is not only a growing interest in regional variation of German, but also a strongly felt need for empirical data in lexicography and grammaticography.

Using traditional questionnaires cannot replace fieldwork and first-hand data of actual language use. The results of the Atlas zur deutschen Alltagssprache have shown, however, that using the internet and drawing on the linguistic competence of informants is a means of generating a good overview of current regional variation. Such surveys can therefore complement other methods of data collecting. The speed and cost-effectiveness by which this can be accomplished via the internet is, however, clearly unbeatable. A further advantage of this method is that it is possible to transform the collected data directly onto maps and to present these maps on the internet. It will certainly not be possible to create as many maps as there are variables in a dictionary. But maps contain more precise information about the areal distribution of different variants—and they are surely more fun to look at.

5. References


