

The role of identity and mobility in reconciling individual and community change: Insight from a combined panel and trend study

Longitudinal studies investigating language change have been the mainstay of variationist sociolinguistics since its inception. Since Labov's seminal apparent-time study on Martha's Vineyard (Labov 1963) and Blondeau and Sankoff's ground-breaking real-time study on Montreal French (Sankoff and Blondeau 2007), a wealth of research has sought to reconcile the sometimes conflicting findings between panel and trend studies (Sankoff 2006). Recently, a crucial conundrum has emerged: if individuals, post-adolescence, do not retain their early-acquired grammars, then change may be proceeding more quickly or more slowly than the apparent-time study suggests (Wagner and Buchstaller 2017; Sankoff 2018).

This paper explores this issue through a combined real-time panel study and apparent-time trend study of Swabian, an Alemannic dialect spoken in southwestern Germany. Two communities were selected for this research: the large urban metropolis of Stuttgart and the semi-rural town of Schwäbisch Gmünd. Twenty participants, initially interviewed in 1982 and then re-interviewed in 2017, comprise the panel component, and 107 participants, stratified for age, sex, and education, comprise the trend component. Thirty-two linguistic variables (15 phonological, 15 morphosyntactic, and two lexical) and six social factors (speaker community, age, sex, education, local orientation, and mobility) were selected in order to ensure a comprehensive investigation of variation and change across multiple levels of the grammar. Both trend and panel methodologies were used to support a quantitative and qualitative comparison between community-wide generational change and individual lifespan change.

A token-based Dialect Density Measure (DDM) was developed (Van Hofwegen and Wolfram 2010) to quantify the concentration of dialect variants in each speaker's repertoire. The results show an average DDM in 1982 for the 20 panel speakers at 43% ($n=12,714$), declining in 2017 to 27% ($n=29,161$), a decrease of 16% over 35 years. Moreover, there is a significant difference by community, with speakers from the semi-rural town of Schwäbisch Gmünd retaining more dialect variants than those from the urban centre of Stuttgart (see Figure 1a), an effect that is more prominent for the men than the women (see Figure 1b). The trend study supports these findings, yet with convergence of the two communities in the youngest generation (see Figure 2). As expected, there are significant differences between the variables based on stigma/prestige, salience, and frequency (see Figure 3 on frequency).

Research has shown that mobility and identity construction are pivotal factors in dialect performance and language change (Blommaert 2014; Britain 2016; Coupland 2001; Johnstone 2011; Schilling-Estes 2004). The results of the multivariate analyses show that, over time, speakers with high orientation retain more dialect variants, while those with high mobility lose more variants, an effect that eclipses all other factors. The findings further reveal that some Swabian women are strategically holding on to their dialect, signalling their identity and reinforcing *Heim* 'home' and *Heimat* 'homeland' in the face of intensifying mobility, education, and standardisation pressures. The results of this study offer new insight into the interplay between lifespan and community change and the vital role that dialect identity and mobility play in the strategic indexical choices that speakers make.

Figures:

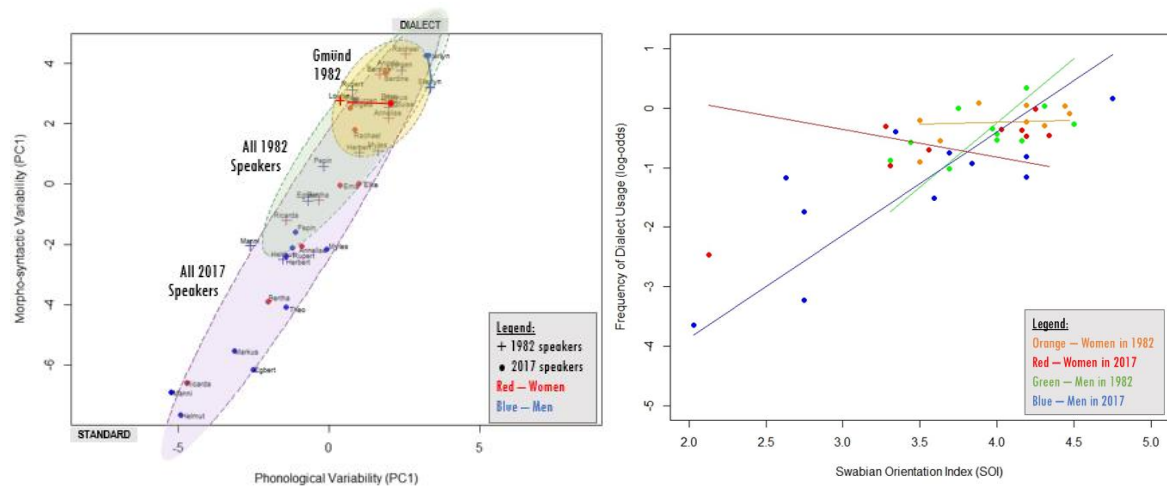


Figure 1a. Dialect Density for 20 Swabian Panel Study participants recorded in 1982 and 2017. Using Principal Components Analysis (PCA), this plot depicts dialect change between 1982 and 2017, PC1 for the phonological variables on the horizontal axis (accounting for 69% of the variability) and PC1 for the morphosyntactic variables on the vertical axis (accounting for 78% of the variability). The upper right corner approximates 100% usage of all dialect variants, while the lower left corner verges toward 100% usage of standard German variants. Crosses represent the speaker's dialect density in 1982, and dots indicate their dialect density in 2017. The three ellipses, drawn to show two standard deviations from the mean of the group, highlight three groups of speakers: the upper ellipse surrounds the speakers from Gmünd in 1982; the middle ellipse encircles all speakers in 1982; and, the largest ellipse encloses all the speakers in 2017. **Figure 1b. Dialect Density for Panel Speakers based on Swabian Orientation.** This plot shows the predicted probabilities of speaking dialect across the two recording years based on speaker sex and Swabian orientation. The sharper slope for the men shows that level of orientation is a significant factor for the men, but not for the women.

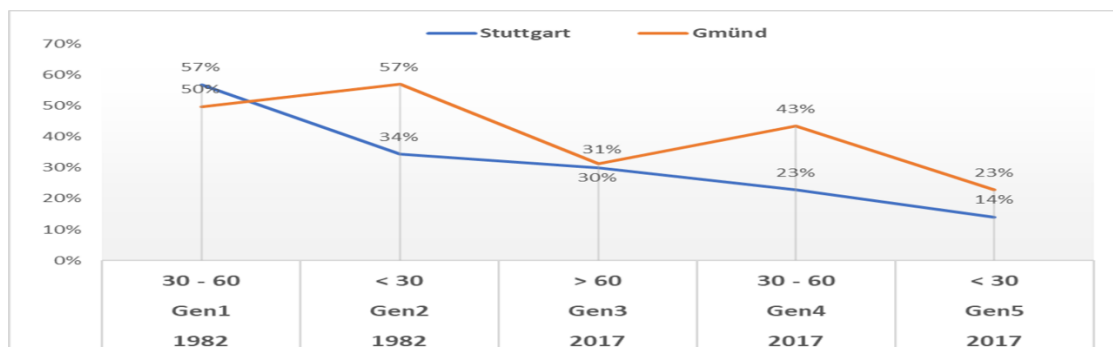


Figure 2. Dialect Density for 107 Swabian Trend Study participants recorded in 1982 and 2017. Covering five generations (based on birth year and recording year) and two communities, blue represents the urban centre of Stuttgart and orange the semi-rural town of Schwäbisch Gmünd. Both communities show significant attrition.

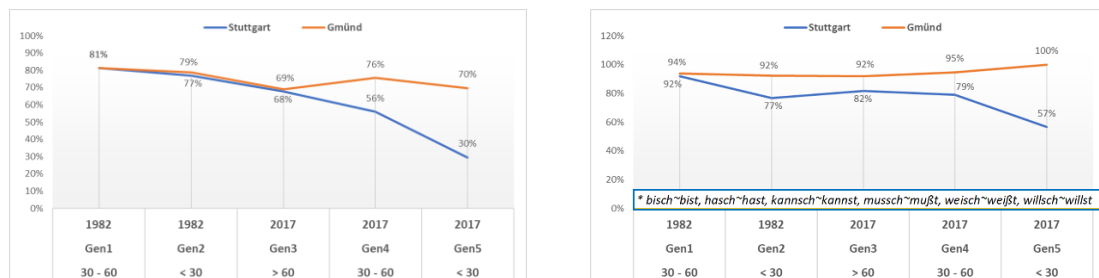


Figure 3. Swabian Palatalisation of -st in syllable-code position for 107 Trend Study participants recorded in 1982 and 2017. Left panel: palatalisation for all occurrences of syllable-code -st in the corpus (n=19,057); Right panel: palatalisation of syllable code-st for six high frequency verbs in the corpus (n=1,410), reflecting the impact that word frequency plays in the retention of dialect variants. Both analyses show significantly greater attrition in the urban centre of Stuttgart than in the mid-sized town of Schwäbisch Gmünd.

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