

## **Mobility and dialect identity as factors in language change: Findings from a 35-year panel and trend study in Swabia**

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Traditional dialectologists have concentrated on homogeneous groups of speakers – typically elderly, rural men, who have spent their entire lives in a single location – as the ‘true dialect speakers’. Sociolinguists have sought orderly heterogeneity and the ‘authentic speaker’ – “the ‘ideal’ informant with all of the ‘right’ social characteristics that suit the analysis to be conducted” (Britain 2016:217). Britain goes on to lament “how sedentarism and nomadism have shaped dialectological practice .... mobility is either ignored, seen as peripheral to models of linguistic change, or positively shunned and treated as suspect” (Britain 2016:220).

Recent research has shown that mobility and identity construction influence dialect performance and play a critical role in language change (Blommaert 2016, Britain 2016, Coupland 2001, Johnstone 2011). ‘Dialect identity’ – the “positioning as a user or non-user of the local dialect” (Johnstone 2016:51) – and ‘place identity’ – the use of local/regional dialect forms in innovative and strategic ways (Coupland 2001) – have been shown to be pivotal factors in dialect usage.

This paper presents the preliminary results from a 35-year panel study, in combination with an apparent-time trend study, of 50 Swabian speakers from two communities: the urban towns surrounding Stuttgart and the semi-rural villages neighbouring Schwäbisch Gmünd. Ten linguistic variables, five phonological and five morphosyntactic, have been chosen to investigate the changing dialect situation in Swabia. Measures of dialect density, along with indices of orientation and mobility, have been developed to show how Swabian identity and workplace and residential mobility influence speakers’ choice of dialect variants.

The findings show that, over time, speakers with high Swabian orientation retain more dialect variants, while those with high mobility scores lose more variants. Yet Swabian women are strategically holding on to even more dialect variants, signalling their dialect identity and reinforcing *Heim* ‘home’ and *Heimat* ‘homeland’ in the face of increasing mobility, education, and standardization pressures. The results offer new insights in how dialect identity and differing mobilities, in both rural and urban communities, play a vital role in dialect usage and hence language change.

### **References:**

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