



Measuring attitudes towards standard German and German dialects: Results of recent representative survey data from Germany

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INTRODUCTION

Like all modern Western societies, Germany is a multilingual country. While German is the most widely spoken language, both as a first language and as an everyday language, residents who do not have German as their first language but another language (or several other languages) and/or who use another language (or several other languages) in their everyday life besides, are estimated to make up about 20 percent of the total population (Stickel 2012: 235). Reliable data on the languages spoken in Germany and the number of their speakers are not available because there is no language census in Germany.¹

But even if a certain public awareness of the presence of other languages has developed in recent decades, primarily due to an increasing multilingualism resulting from various forms of migration (the autochthonous linguistic minorities are less significant in terms of numbers), Germany is still ‘conceptually monolingual’, meaning that the majority view of the language situation in Germany is shaped by the tradition of the European concept of the nation-state, where language and statehood are closely linked. In Germany, German is spoken, that is the consensus – even without a corresponding provision in the Constitution. There is also a consensus that the kind of German that is used in realms like administration, legal affairs, schooling, and the media, is the standard variety. Further, there seems to be a kind of pragmatic concurrence of opinion within the language community about what this standard variety is like, so that – apart from the spelling, for which there is an official regulation – a detailed definition of what is standard does not seem ideologically required. Although a certain amount of variation (pluricentric as well as pluricentric) has been attested within the standard – as documented, for example, by the Dictionary of Varieties (*Variantenwörterbuch*, Ammon, Bickel and Lenz 2016), the

¹ Since 2017, the microcensus has included a question on “language spoken predominantly in the household”. However, the entire setting of the question has considerable methodological weaknesses, so that it does not generate meaningful data. On this problem, see Adler (2019).

Grammar of Varieties (*Varietengrammatik*, Dürscheid Elspaß and Ziegler 2018) or the Atlas for the Pronunciation of the German Usage Standard (*Atlas zur Aussprache des Deutschen Gebrauchsstandards*, Kleiner 2011 et seq.), this variation does not seem to call into question the hypostasized concept of a standard as such, in the common mind.

However, the subject of this article is not the issue of the (many) forms of the standard variety, but rather the question of what status this standard has regarding the reality of language use, and what attributions to it are made by speakers. The material this report is based on is a new nationwide representative survey; core information on the data set used is provided in the next section. Then the results of the survey are presented as they relate to the dialectal competence of the respondents and their everyday language use; the following section shows how standard German and some of the regional varieties of German are assessed by the respondents. The report concludes with a summary of findings.

DATASET

One of the largest ongoing panel studies in Germany is the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) of the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) in Berlin. The SOEP has been in existence since 1984 and is a survey of currently around 30,000 people in around 11,000 households, repeated annually. It focuses in particular on questions concerning the economic and social situation of the respondents, including matters of education, health and lifestyle, and similar topics of economic and social relevance in the broadest sense. The SOEP has a so-called ‘innovation sample’ (SOEP-IS) which offers external researchers the opportunity to contribute their own questions to SOEP in a competitive process. The Leibniz Institute for the German Language (IDS) participated in the 2017/18 survey round with its own IDS language module. The SOEP-IS of this survey round comprised 4,380 participants from 2,837 households, which is a very large sample for linguistic studies. The data are representative of the German resident population. A variety of socio-demographic information (including longitudinal data going back a long way and detailed information on, for example, spatial biography) is available on the respondents. Here, we have access to a data volume that is unprecedented in its size and depth.²

The IDS language module – hereinafter the *2017 Germany Survey* – consists of two parts: the first part is made up of face-to-face interviews (the practical handling

² After an embargo period, the SOEP-IS dataset is made available to all interested researchers via the SOEP infrastructure (cf. https://www.diw.de/de/diw_02.c.222843.de/formulare.html; March 1, 2022).

was carried out by Institut Kantar Public). Here, we asked questions about the language repertoire of the respondents (first language(s), foreign language skills, dialectal skills) and their attitudes towards languages and varieties of German. It should be noted that the data collected – as it is usual in panel surveys of this type – are always subjective data. By their very nature, attitudinal data cannot be checked by the interviewers; also in the case of the questions on language competence and dialect competence, the interviewers cannot conduct any tests or examinations with the interviewees. The second part of the IDS language module was designed as an online questionnaire for the respondents to complete; this questionnaire includes around forty questions with a very broad thematic spectrum ranging from questions on language accuracy assessments to questions on media use. Of course, these data are subjective data, too. In the following, only the first part of the IDS language module is reported.

REALITIES OF LANGUAGE USE

Dialect competence

Standard language is not an isolated concept that stands on its own. Being part of a linguistic diasystem, it is defined rather in distinction from other varieties. In the perception of most speakers, variation in German is primarily determined by area. Encounters with and use of dialectal speech play a relevant role in everyday reality. Many speakers have at least a rough idea of language areas for German, even if these ideas are typically rather vague in detail and do not always correspond with dialectological findings. Speakers also frequently associate stereotypical attributions, evaluations and attitudes with individual dialects. This includes a concern about the possible extinction of dialects, often articulated in lay-linguistic discourses, which is also reflected, for example, in the existence of numerous dialect associations whose aim is the promotion and preservation of local dialects.³ On the other hand, during literacy education in schools at the latest, all speakers typically develop a concept of a standard variety (with certain regional characteristics), which they usually call “*Hochdeutsch*”, ‘High German’. In this context, the mental starting point for the ideas of what High German is, is usually the dialect. A typical example of such an approach is the explanation of meaning that the ten-volume *Duden* dictionary of the German language gives for the lemma “hochdeutsch”. It is a classic

³ The “Dialect Initiative” launched in 2019 by the Minister President of the German State of Baden-Württemberg, Winfried Kretschmann, to strengthen dialects in Baden-Württemberg is a case in point.

definition *ex negativo*, enriched by an element of obligation: “High German: [...] German as it corresponds not to the regional dialects or colloquial language, but to the generally binding German language (esp. with regard to dialect-free pronunciation)” (*Duden* 1999: 1836).⁴ So if you want to learn about High German⁵ from the speakers’ point of view, you have to start with the dialects.

The above-mentioned everyday knowledge of linguistic laypersons does have some foundation in linguistic fact. The linguistic situation of German in Germany is generally described as a diasystem which is essentially characterised by diatopic variation. For most of Germany, a continuum is assumed whose poles are defined by the various dialects on the one hand and standard language on the other. In this model, the regional varieties with the smallest areal range are located towards the dialect pole, while the standard pole is taken up by a – largely hypostasized – standard variety of maximum areal range which (theoretically) has no characteristics of regional variation whatsoever. Between these poles, there is a broad transitional area with (depending on the direction) decreasing or increasing regionality. Within this transitional area, in turn, certain ‘hot spots’ can be observed (described in detail for the first time in Lenz 2003), which, however, do not play a major role in the awareness of the speakers. As a rule, linguistic laypersons conceive the space for varieties dichotomously (either dialect or High German)⁶ – quite contrary to their everyday language practice. In fact, however, speakers have very individual competence levels and repertoires. How close to dialect or standard a certain way of speaking is considered to be has also to do with their own usage.⁷

In large parts of northern Germany, the situation is even more complex. Since the 16th century, there has been a change of language from Low German to High German, in the course of which Low German was first pushed back into the oral domains and then in many cases completely abandoned (v. Polenz 1994: 218–220). As a result, on the one hand, in those areas where Low German is no longer present, we find now only standard language forms, close to the standard pole of the continuum described above, which do not exhibit any strong regional characteristics. On the other hand, for the remaining speakers of Low German, diglossia with the two

⁴ In the original: “hochdeutsch: [...] deutsch, wie es nicht den Mundarten od. der Umgangssprache, sondern der allgemein verbindlichen deutschen Sprache entspricht (bes. in Bezug auf die dialektfreie Aussprache)”.

⁵ A note on terminology: The common term for the standard variety in everyday language is – as the *Duden* dictionary also shows – High German, “Hochdeutsch”. In academic discourse, this term is usually avoided because it could be misunderstood as implying a valuation (“good German”). For linguistic laypersons, however, it is the normal term, which is why it was also used in this way in the questionnaire study reported in this chapter.

⁶ For example, this is shown for the town Wittlich (West Middle German) by Lenz 2003: 341; for Vienna (East Upper German) by Glauninger 2011: 148.

⁷ Cf. Kehrein 2012.

languages High German and Low German can be assumed. In terms of language structure, Low German can arguably be regarded as a language in its own right. In the minds of many speakers, however, it is conceived as part of the diasystem of German, i.e. Low German dialects are perceived as dialects of German (cf. Goltz and Kleene 2020: 188–190).

This describes the basic situation. However, as of today, little is known in detail about the quantitative distribution of dialects and standard language.⁸ Just as there are no reliable census data on the languages spoken in Germany, there is no comprehensive survey of the number of speakers of the various regional varieties in Germany. Here, the *2017 Germany Survey* as a representative survey for the whole of Germany provides valuable new information.

The standard language as the language of schooling and norm variety of written media is now widespread. Regional pronunciation norms do not diverge very much, and the concept of a standard variety is not typically called in question. Therefore, it is not really possible to ask respondents about their standard German skills. A question such as “Do you speak standard German?” or “How well do you speak standard German?” is unlikely to produce negative answers, if only because of social desirability. Since surveying depends on the cooperation of the respondents, one must avoid giving them the impression of being tested.

But one can ask about the opposite pole, about dialect competence. The results of the *2017 Germany Survey* are shown in Figure 1. Around 41 per cent of those surveyed answered “yes” to the question of whether they speak a German dialect.⁹ Around 59 per cent of those surveyed, however, declare that they do not speak a German dialect; this can be taken to mean that they indicate speaking (only) standard German or a variety close to standard German. The proportion of dialect speakers in the entire language community would then be only about two-fifths, which is not particularly high, considering that it was one hundred percent at the time of the surveys for the German Language Atlas (*Deutscher Sprachatlas*) at the end of the 19th century.¹⁰

⁸ For an overview of various older surveys carried out as part of opinion polls, for example by the Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, see Niebaum and Macha 1999: 143–150.

⁹ Those respondents who answered “yes” were then asked what dialect they spoke. The question was formulated openly and therefore allows a mapping of the language area from the speakers’ point of view; for details see Adler, Plewnia and Ribeiro Silveira (forthc.).

¹⁰ Of course, these values are also influenced by the wording of the question. In the course of the *2008 Germany Survey*, we also asked about dialect competence. The wording at that time was: “Can you speak a German dialect or Platt?” 59.6 per cent of the respondents answered “Yes”, 39.7 percent “No” (Gärtig, Plewnia and Rothe 2010: 135–149). As many other data collected both in 2008 and in 2017 have proven to be stable, the wording of the question is likely to play the decisive role here. On the problem of wording, see also Adler and Plewnia 2020: 18–19.

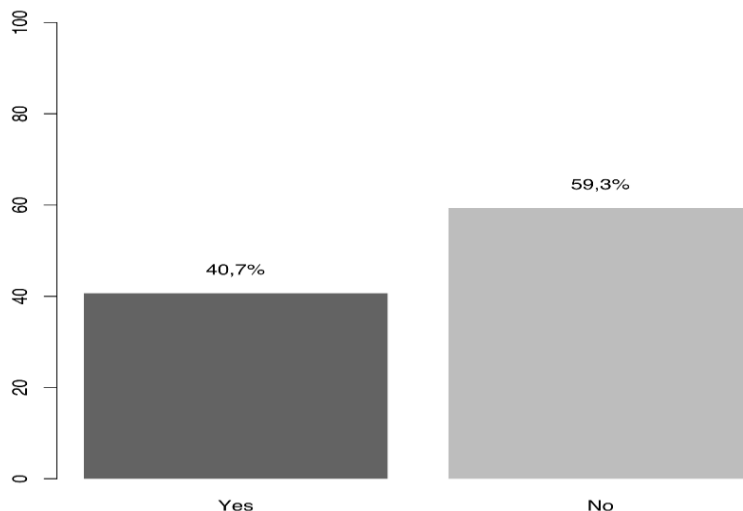


Figure 1: Claimed dialect competence
Question: “Do you speak a German dialect?”¹¹

Figure 1 shows the results for the entire sample. However, considerable regional differences can be expected here. A topos in the everyday linguistic knowledge of linguistic laypersons is the fact that there is a south-north divide regarding dialect competence: In the south of Germany (and the German-speaking area in general), the dialects are generally more stable and vital than in the north. As expected, this finding is also reflected in the data of the *2017 Germany Survey*. Figure 2 shows the answers to the question of dialect competence broken down by language areas. Calculations based on previous surveys on this question are very rough, however, because no suitable spatial variables for areas were generally available.¹² For the *2017 Germany Survey*, we can now, for the first time, carry out an analysis along the different language areas with the help of a specially generated spatial variable. Thereby, it should come out whether the average level of competence indicated differs according to dialectal area.

¹¹ The German wording was: “*Sprechen Sie einen deutschen Dialekt?*”

¹² In the best case (as in the *2008 Germany Survey*) the German States were available as spatial variables. Even in Adler and Plewnia 2020, the data from the *2017 Germany Survey* were still presented at the level of the federal states, because only this spatial variable is easily available as a subset of data via the SOEP infrastructure. This makes sense as a first approximation but remains unsatisfactory because language area borders and political borders do not always coincide.

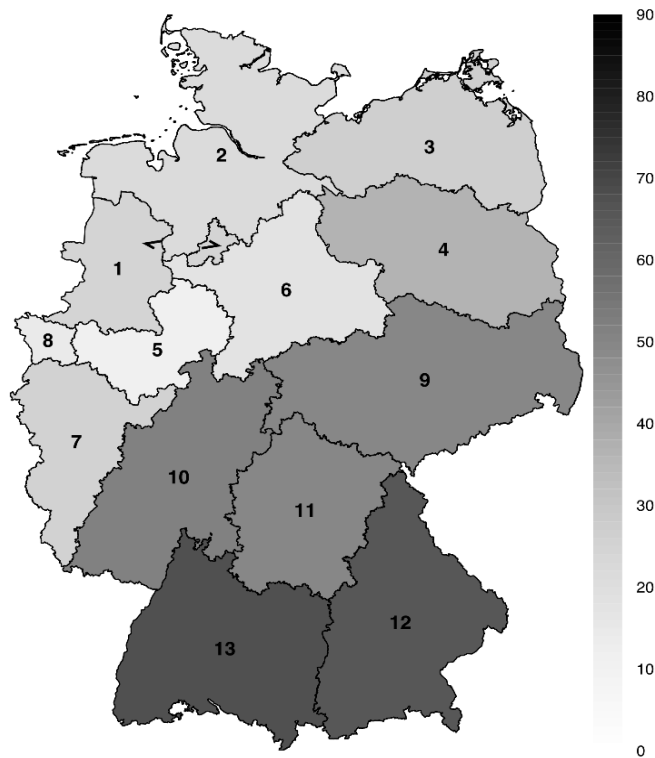


Figure 2: Claimed dialect competence (by language area)
Question as in Figure 1

Here, we follow the regiolectal division of the German language area (cf. Lameli 2013) established by Alfred Lameli on the basis of the Wenker data with statistical calculations.¹³ The map shows the expected regional differences between North and South (the darker an area is coloured, the higher the average dialectal competence indicated). The individual language areas show fairly clear contours; the south-north divide described is clearly visible. The highest values are reported from the West Upper German and Bavarian regions; the lowest values are found in the Lower German regions, especially in Westphalia and Eastphalia.

¹³ For this purpose, a corresponding spatial variable was created in cooperation with the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) and all respondents were assigned to their respective language area. The language areas identified by Lameli are the following: West Low German (1), North Low German (2), Northeast Low German (3), Brandenburgisch (4), Westphalian (5), Eastphalian (6), Middle Franconian (7), Lower Franconian (8), East Middle German (9), West Middle German (10), East Franconian (11), Bavarian (12), West Upper German (13). – This spatial division (which is used here for the first time for the presentation of language attitude studies) is the basis for all the following maps.

Scalar dialect competence

Figure 1 gives a visual impression of the regional distribution of general self-reported dialect competence in Germany. It should be noted, however, that the mapped question is a yes-no question. This means that the figure says nothing about how well the dialects are claimed to be mastered in each case. The degree of competence was elicited in a follow-up question: All those who indicated that they speak a dialect were then asked how well they speak that dialect. The overall result for this group is shown in Figure 3.

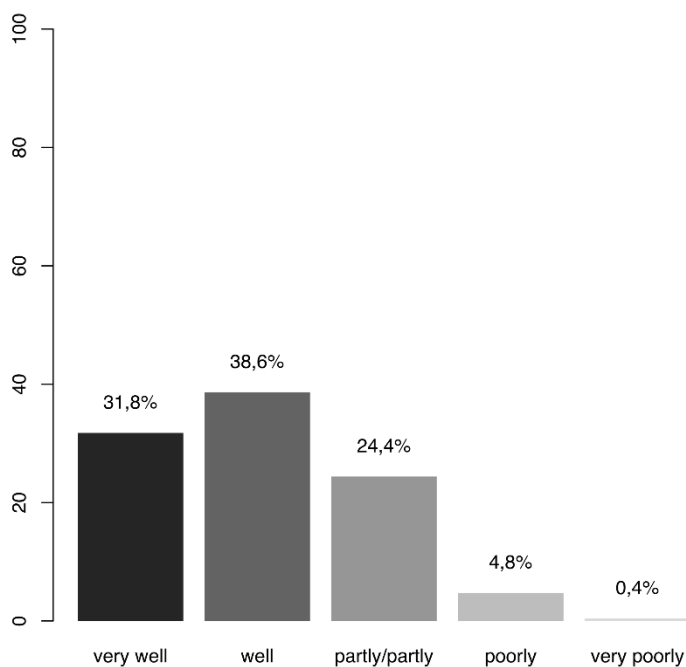


Figure 3: Claimed dialect competence (scalar)
Question: “And how well do you speak this dialect?”¹⁴

The result shows a certain linguistic self-confidence on the part of the respondents; 70.4 per cent of the respondents state that they speak their dialect well or very well, around a quarter answer more cautiously with “more or less well”.

¹⁴ The German wording was: “Und wie gut sprechen Sie diesen Dialekt?” with the answer options “sehr gut – gut – teils/teils – schlecht – sehr schlecht”.

These data can also be presented broken down by language areas. A similar south-north divide as the yes-no question exhibited could be expected. This would mean that the respondents in the northern part of Germany who state that they do speak a dialect would rate their own dialect competence lower than those in the regions with strong dialects in the south. In fact, the map in Figure 4 shows a different picture.

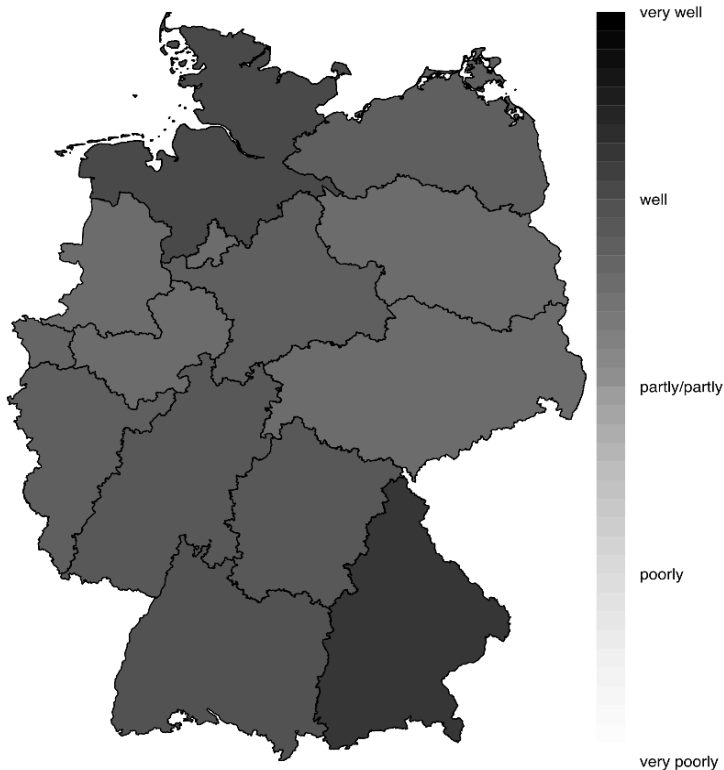


Figure 4: Claimed dialect competence (scalar, by language area)
Question as in Figure 3

It can be seen that the whole language area is more or less uniformly darkly coloured; in the area of Bavarian and North Low German the values are slightly higher, while in West Low German, Westphalian, Brandenburgisch and East Middle German they are slightly lower. However, the differences are not great overall, and in particular, unlike in Figure 2, there is no clear divide from south to north. This means that although the proportion of people who indicate speaking dialect varies regionally (more in the south than in the north), the self-declared competence of those who speak dialect does not vary much regionally (as well in the north as in the

south). To simplify matters a bit, one could say: Those who say they speak dialect, say they speak dialect well.

Everyday speech

However, the data on competence say little about the role of dialects on the one hand and standard language on the other hand in everyday language practice. In addition, one should not be deceived by the largely uniform dark colouring of Figure 4: Only the answers of those 41 percent of the respondents who state that they speak a dialect are included. One expectation, however, can certainly be formulated on the basis of the competence data: If, as Figure 2 shows, there are relatively fewer people in the northern parts of Germany who say they speak dialect at all, the standard language should have a greater significance in everyday language use there.

For this reason, one question in the *2017 Germany Survey* was aimed at the everyday speech situation of the interviewees; the wording of the question was, “How do you normally speak in everyday life?” The following five options were available as predefined answers: “only standard German/more standard German/standard German and dialect/more dialect/only dialect” (as well as the possibility of not answering). The question was presented to the entire sample. The answer options are worded in a rather general way to make it easier for the respondents to allocate themselves; a further differentiation, for example according to conversational partner or domain, proved to be not helpful in pre-tests and was rejected. The distribution of the answers within the overall sample is shown in Figure 5.

The data show very clearly the dominance of the standard language: Almost exactly two thirds of the respondents (66.6 per cent) state that they speak “only standard German” or “more standard German” in everyday life.¹⁵ Around a quarter speak “standard German or dialect”. Only 9 per cent (i.e. about one in eleven) say they speak “rather dialect” or “only dialect” in everyday life. It should be emphasized once again that these are self-assessments of the interviewees and not objective data. These figures are not based on any tests. And, of course, the rough answer scale contains a certain amount of imprecision. It is not possible to state exactly where – at the continuum between the dialect pole and the standard pole – each individual interviewee locates themselves in their everyday speech. Nor does it say anything about the actual proximity or distance to standard of each individual respondent. It also says nothing about the – undoubtedly existing – variation within the standard and nothing about the – undoubtedly divergent – level of ‘tolerance’

¹⁵ As mentioned above (footnote 4), for linguistic laypersons, High German, “Hochdeutsch”, is the usual term for standard German in everyday language. Therefore, we also used it in this way in the questionnaire. Accordingly, “Hochdeutsch” is also mentioned in the diagrams and maps without implying any form of evaluation.

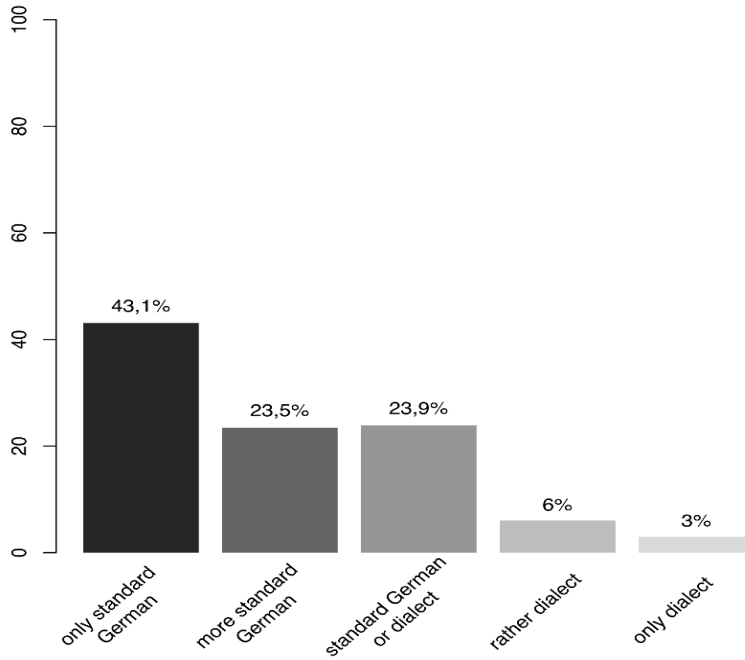


Figure 5: Everyday speech

Question: “How do you normally speak in everyday life?”¹⁶

towards variation by the speakers. What is important to note here, however, is that the concept of the standard variety as such seems to be uncontroversial. As a result, it can be said that the dialect – at least according to the perceptions and statements of a clear majority of the interviewees – only seems to play a very subordinate role in normal everyday speech.

Considering the data presented in Figure 2, it is helpful to apply a regional breakdown, by language area. In the following, such a cartographic representation is provided for each of the five answer options (Figures 6 to 10). In fact, in the synopsis of the maps, the expected north-south differences make a return appearance.

In the Lower German area, as mentioned above in the section concerning dialect competence, dialects have been completely abandoned in many places; in parallel to this, the highest values for the answer “only standard German” are found here (Figure 6). The darkest areas are the Eastphalian area with the large cities of Hannover and Braunschweig, which is often referred to in popular language discourses as a

¹⁶ The German wording was: “Wie sprechen Sie normalerweise im Alltag?”

reference area for “good” or “pure” standard German. These are followed by North Low German, West Low German and North East Low German. It is noticeable that the area of Brandenburgisch (including Berlin) goes along with the more southern areas and reports only very low values.

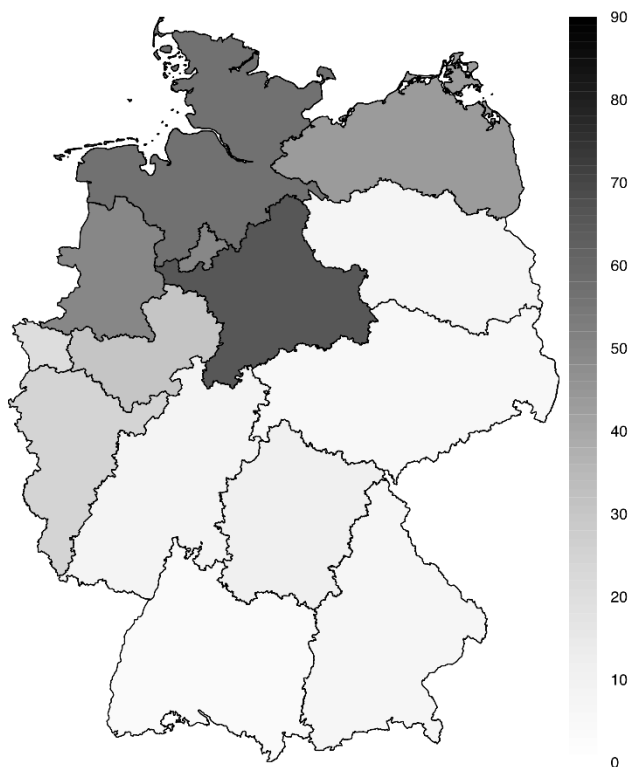


Figure 6: Everyday speech (by language area): only standard German
Question as in Figure 5

The answer “more standard German” is most frequently given in the north-eastern Lower German area and also in the Central Franconian area (Figure 7).

Figure 8 shows the regional distribution by language area for the answer “standard German and dialect”. The values here are highest in eastern Middle Germany and in the Brandenburgisch region; medium values are obtained in the southern regions. This means that even in the regional strongholds of dialect, many people still indicate that they speak standard German regularly.

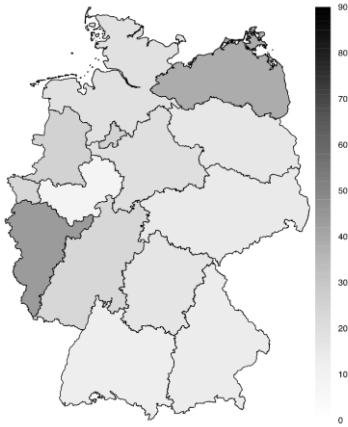


Figure 7:
Everyday speech (by language area):
more standard German

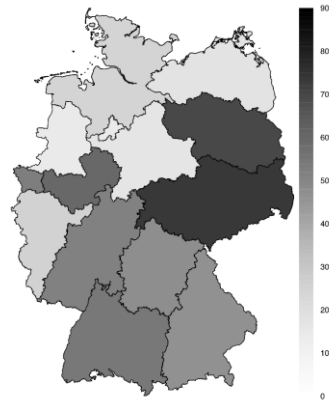


Figure 8:
Everyday speech (by language area):
standard German and dialect

Question as in Figure 5

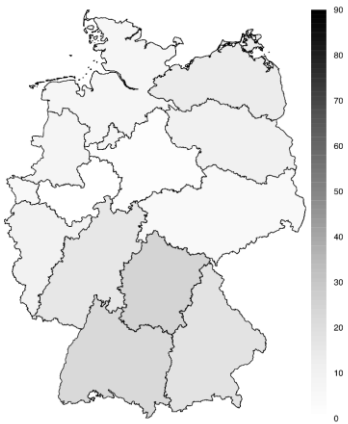


Figure 9:
Everyday speech (by language area):
more dialect

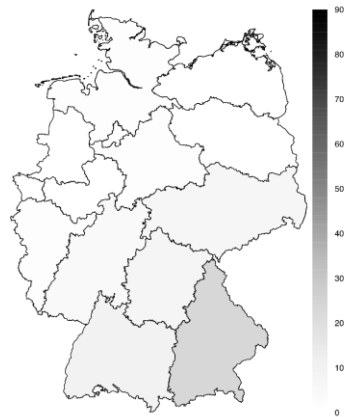


Figure 10:
Everyday speech (by language area):
only dialect

Question as in Figure 5

Dialect, on the other hand, is only rarely reported by the respondents as their predominant everyday form of speech. In the north and in the centre of Germany, this response practically does not occur at all; but even in the southern areas, dialects apparently play only a subordinate role as an everyday form of speech, as per self-reporting (Figure 9: “more dialect”, Figure 10: “only dialect”). Both maps are, all in all, strikingly light in shade. Only the West Upper German, East Franconian and Bavarian areas are of slightly deeper colour (for the answer “more dialect”), and the Bavarian area (for the answer “only dialect”).

Taken together, these five maps show two things: firstly, one can easily see the expected differences between the northern and southern regions, which are hidden in the values for the total sample as shown in Figure 5. This means that standard German is reported as even more dominant as an everyday language in the North than in the South. On the other hand, however – and this is what is important in this context – it is easy to see that even in the Middle German and Upper German regions, it is not the dialects but the standard variety that is said to constitute the everyday speech variety; overall, standard German clearly predominates everywhere in the responses.

Regional accent

The data presented so far aimed, on the one hand, at the dialect competence of the respondents, and, on the other hand, at the interplay between dialects and standard variety in everyday speech practice. The data clearly document the clear dominance of the concept of “standard German” in the language community. For the vast majority of respondents, standard German is said to be the predominant variety in everyday communication. It should be stressed again, however, that these are self-reports by the respondents, from which no assessment can be derived regarding the exact linguistic form of what is conceptualised as standard German in each case. What exactly each individual respondent holds to be ‘standard German’ cannot be said. Here – especially in the area of pronunciation – a certain variance can surely be expected, and not pronunciation without recognisable regional colouring, as is expected of professional speakers (at least of newscasters in public broadcasting).¹⁷ In most regions of Germany, pronunciation norms have been established even for communication contexts in which the most standard forms of speech are required, which reveal certain regional characteristics, without this standing in the way of popular categorisation as standard German. However, this does not change the fact

¹⁷ Newscasters are also reference speakers (and – in a slightly circular approach – target group at the same time) in the German Pronunciation Dictionary (*Deutsches Aussprachewörterbuch*) (Krech et al. 2009). The question of a standard pronunciation is a broad field of its own.

that the concept of standard German as such, even if its boundaries must remain blurred, obviously has a broad socio-cognitive validity.

But what about the speakers' awareness of this variance? How close to an idealised construct of accent-free standard German do the respondents see themselves? To find out, we asked them what degree of regional colouring they would ascribe to themselves (Figure 11).

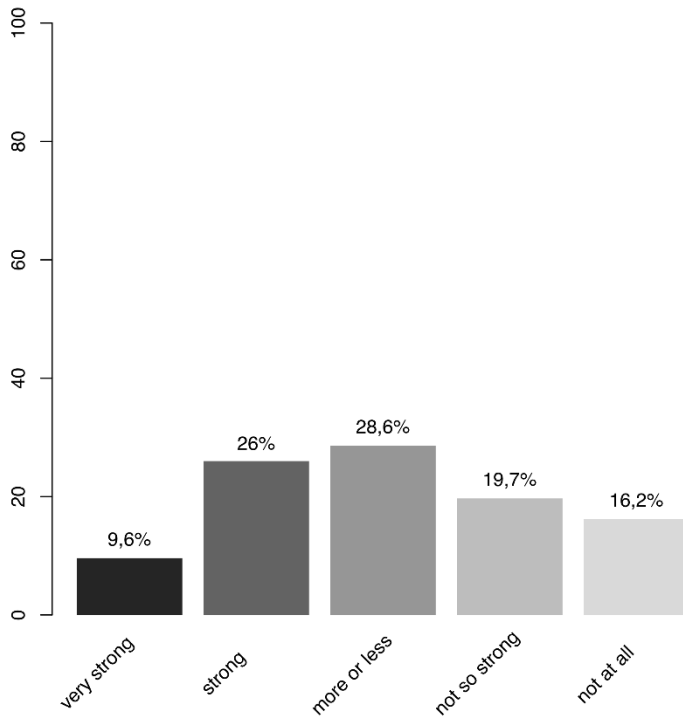


Figure 11: Regional colouring

Question: “When you speak standard German, how much do you think it is possible to tell from your pronunciation which region you come from?”¹⁸

The result is surprisingly balanced: just under 36 per cent of respondents profess themselves to have a strong or very strong regional accent; about the same number (just under 36 per cent) consider their linguistic provenance to be “not so strongly”

¹⁸ The German wording was: “Wenn Sie Hochdeutsch sprechen, was glauben Sie, wie stark kann man an Ihrer Aussprache erkennen, aus welcher Gegend Sie kommen?”

or “not at all” recognisable, and 29 per cent answer with “more or less”. Cross-relating this with the data presented in Figure 5 is revealing. If one takes into account that, on the one hand, 43.1 per cent of the respondents state that they normally speak “only standard German” in everyday life, and on the other hand only 16.2 per cent of the respondents claim that, when they speak standard German, one could recognise their regional origin “not at all”, this could be taken to mean that the respondents themselves have a relatively high tolerance towards variation overall. It suggests that the fact that the regional origin remains recognisable may not be an obstacle to being classified as standard German. Apparently, standard German is a concept with blurred edges for the majority of speakers.

Now, one might expect that the question of whether someone ascribes a regional accent to himself or herself would be related to whether he or she declares speaking a dialect, or also to whether he or she lives in a region that is a dialect stronghold. Taking into consideration the south-north divide shown in Figure 2, one could certainly expect greater regional differences here. Figure 12 shows the mean values of the answers to the question about regional colouring, broken down by language area. The map shows surprisingly few regional differences. The West Upper German and Bavarian areas are coloured a little darker, the areas of West Low German, Lower Franconian and Middle Franconian as well as West and East Middle German are slightly lighter. Overall, however, there are no significant differences; in particular, it is striking that even the speakers in the ‘dialect-weak’ regions of Northern Germany do not claim greater standard proximity on average than in the rest of the area.¹⁹

Sometimes certain patterns become more visible when smaller groups are combined into larger ones. In Figure 13, the answers are therefore broken down according to the major linguistic regions (Low German, Middle German, Upper German). Middle German is slightly lighter than Low German, and the latter is slightly lighter than Upper German, but this figure also shows that the regional differences are not particularly pronounced. The speakers’ self-assessment of whether or not their own standard German has a regional colouring is obviously not related to regional origin.

¹⁹ Incidentally, this also corresponds with – not yet published – results of the *2016 Northern Germany Survey* (cf. Adler et al. 2018). In this representative survey conducted in the entire (formerly) Low German language area, we also asked, using the same wording, about one’s own regional colouring. The valid answers for the entire survey area are distributed as follows: “very strongly”: 15.9 per cent, “strongly”: 41.4 per cent, “more or less”: 22.1 per cent, “not so strongly”: 12.1 per cent, “not at all”: 8.5 per cent. Here, too, there are no noticeable regional differences.

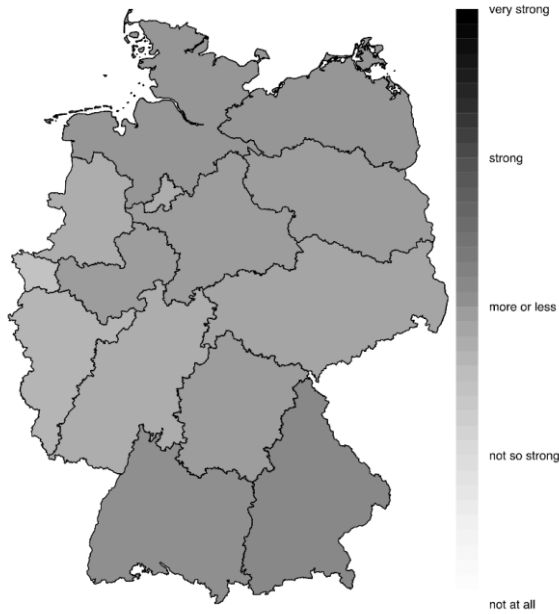


Figure 12: Regional colouring (by language area)
Question as in Figure 11

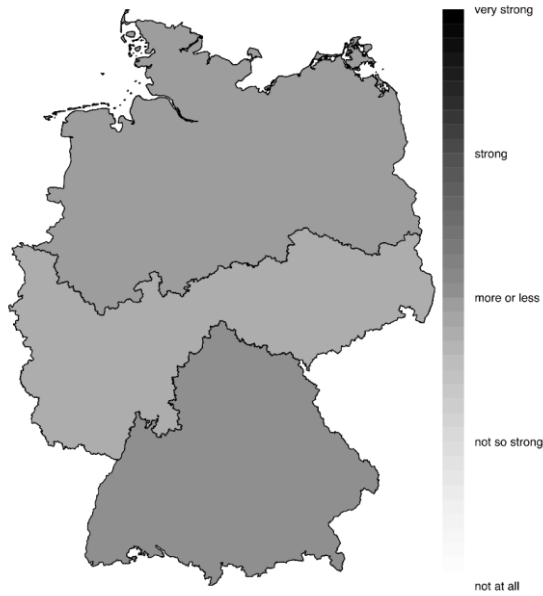


Figure 13: Regional colouring (by large areas)
Question as in Figure 11

The assumption that regional origin could play a role was based on the idea that there could be a connection between self-declared dialect competence – which is distributed differently from region to region – and regional colouring. The maps do not show such an effect. In order to verify whether there is nevertheless a connection, we crossed the stated dialect competence with the regional colouring (Figure 14).

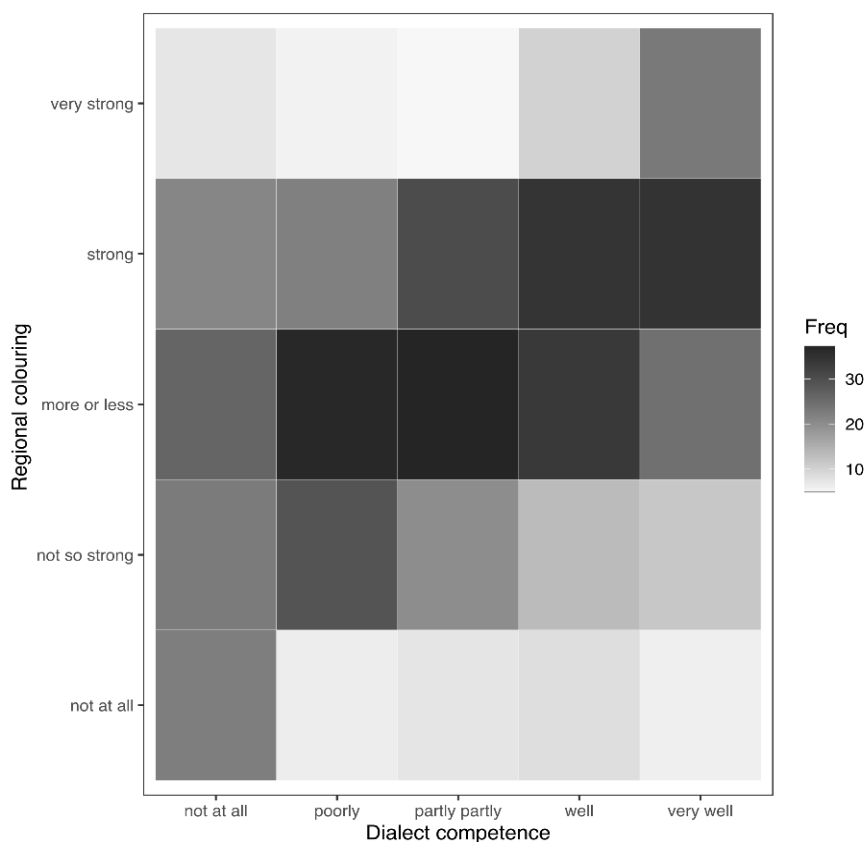


Figure 14: Regional colouring (by dialect competence)
Questions as in Figure 3 and Figure 11

Figure 14 should be read as follows: for each answer option to the question on dialect competence, the vertical bars indicate the answers by percentage to the question on regional colouring (the darker a field is, the higher the corresponding percentages). Accordingly, the sum of the vertical fields is always one hundred percent. Thus, the figure always shows the relative distribution of the answers to the question about regional colouring within each individual answer category of the question about dialect competence. On the left bar (“not at all”) are entered the answers

of all those who state that they do not speak any dialect (i.e. the 59.3 per cent of respondents from Figure 1). The second bar from the left (“poorly”; in German: “schlecht”) groups together those respondents who state that they speak dialect “poorly” or “very poorly” (i.e. the 5.2 per cent of respondents from Figure 3; for the original German wording cf. footnote 14). One can see a kind of diagonal from bottom left to top right. Those who say they speak dialect poorly tend to also say they have no regional colouring; and those who indicate speaking dialect very well tend to also profess a very strong regional colouring. The left bar, i.e. those who do not claim to speak dialect at all, is particularly noteworthy. Here, as expected, there is a large proportion of people who do not attest to any or no strong regional colouring (the lower fields in the left bar). However, there is also a considerable proportion of respondents who perceive a certain or strong regional colouring in themselves, even though they do not claim to speak a dialect themselves. Thus, in an idealised concept, the standard language is supposed to be free of regional influences; while in linguistic reality, standard German and regional colouring are by no means held to exclude each other.

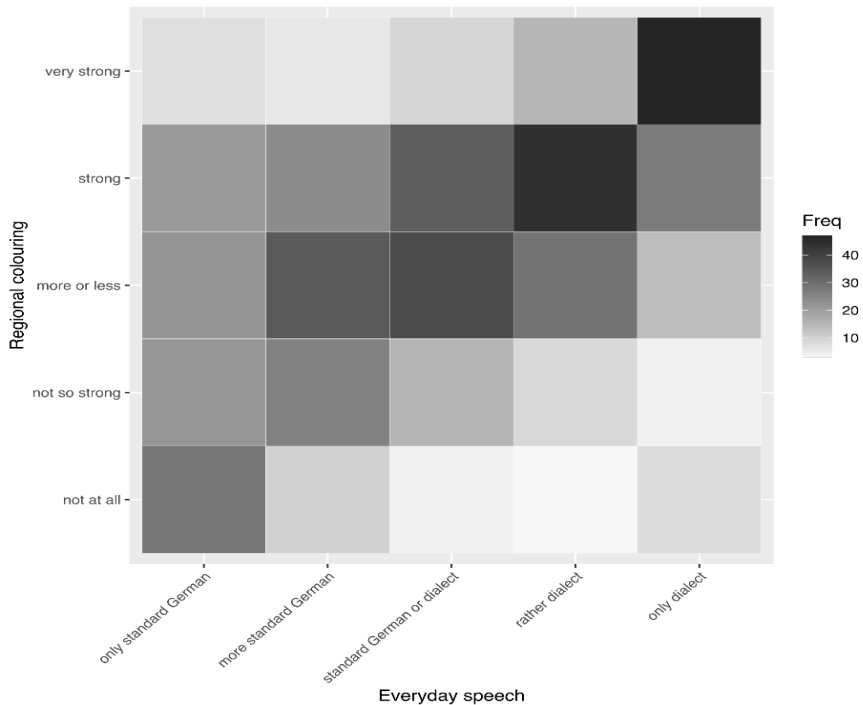


Figure 15: Regional colouring (by everyday speech)
 Questions as in Figure 5 and Figure 11

We have also made such a crossing for everyday speech and regional colouring. (Figure 15). The figure works just as Figure 14: for the answers entered on the x-axis to the question about the everyday speech situation, the corresponding percentage values are visualised in the vertical bars for each field by the degree of colouring. Here, too, the diagonal is evident from the bottom left to the top right; and here, too, it is shown that the neighbouring fields are also coloured, especially to the left of and above this diagonal. Of those who claim to speak only standard German in everyday life, most say that they have no regional colouring at all. However, here, too, there is a relevant proportion of respondents who say that they have a certain or even a strong regional colouring. Roughly, it can be said that, if someone indicates speaking only or predominantly dialect in everyday life, he or she assumes to have a stronger regional colouring. The opposite is not true to the same extent: speaking only or predominantly standard German in everyday life does not prevent one from professing a regional colouring. Again, we see that standard German and regional colouring do not exclude each other in the responses.

EVALUATIONS OF SPEECH VARIETIES

Obviously, dialects are not the most common form of language for the majority of speakers in everyday speech. Nevertheless, as already indicated above, knowledge about areal variation is widespread. Typically, assessments and attitudes are also linked to expertise. We have extensively surveyed likeability of dialects in the *2008 Germany Survey* (cf. Gärtig, Plewnia and Rothe 2010: 155–167), and also – with a focus on Low German – in the *2016 North Germany Survey* (cf. Adler et al. 2018: 22–28). In the *2017 Germany Survey*, we also collected different representative data on attitudes towards dialects with the help of various questions (on the different instruments used, cf. Adler and Plewnia 2018: 69–89). In the following, we focus on direct questions regarding likeability (“Sympathie”). In the *2017 Germany Survey*, we recorded likeability in two formats: with an open and a closed question. For this purpose, the sample for the relevant question block was divided, i.e. half of the respondents received the open question and the other half the closed question. In the open format, the questions are asked without answer options, i.e. the respondents can and must word their answers themselves. Among other things, this has the advantage that only active knowledge is collected and that the respondents do not react to primes. However, the answers given are often very heterogeneous and are therefore difficult to evaluate. In the closed format, the respondents are offered a ready-made list of answers. This produces comparable answers and makes it possible, for example, to also have data evaluated that are less relevant to the respondents but are interesting for systematic reasons. (On the other hand, of course, only as-

assessments are obtained on the varieties the survey asks about. On the advantages and disadvantages of the two formats see Plewnia and Rothe 2012: 27–33). In the following, only the results of the closed question wording of the 2017 Germany Survey are presented (for the open question wording, cf. Adler and Plewnia 2020: 24–28).

We asked about the likeability of various given varieties on a scale of five (from “very likeable” to “very unlikeable”). Firstly, we selected those dialects that are known from previous surveys to have a certain prominence (Northern German, Low German/Platt German, Bavarian, Swabian, Saxon, Kölsch/Rhenish Platt, Berlin dialect, Hessian). Secondly, the survey asked about Austrian and Swiss German, whose dialects belong to the dialectal continuum of German, but which, from the point of view of many linguistic laypersons, are nevertheless perceived as foreign varieties. Thirdly, those respondents who stated that they speak a dialect were asked to rate their own dialect. And finally, all respondents were asked how they like standard German.²⁰

Figure 16 shows the results for the entire sample (i.e. for all those who were asked this question; because of the methodological split, this was only half of the respondents). The mean values are shown in each case (the value “2” on the y-axis stands for “very likeable”, the value “–2” correspondingly for “very unlikeable”). With the exception of Saxon, the ratings for all varieties are in the positive range.

The dialect speakers rated their own dialect most positively. The highest mean value across the entire sample (the question about one’s own dialect could only be asked of the dialect speakers), however, is actually standard German (with a mean value of 1.13). This fits with findings from the *2008 Germany Survey* where the standard language was also rated very positively overall in response to various questions (cf. Gärtig, Plewnia and Rothe 2010: 17–47). Standard German, as shown in Figures 5 to 10, has a high reported social relevance for most respondents in everyday life. The fact that it is rated so clearly positively here can certainly be read as a sign of a stable linguistic self-confidence on the part of the respondents.

Northern German follows in the ranking (with a mean value of 0.71). This is followed by increments with very flat steps from Austrian to Hessian; the lowest likeability (as also documented in numerous other surveys) is accorded to Saxon. Unlike the other dialects listed here, Northern German is not a regionally clearly determined variety in terms of its linguistic features. It is more of a collective term for the various kinds of speech that are spoken in the (former) Low German language area, which have a certain regional character, but are characterised by a relatively high degree of standard proximity. This last aspect makes the positive evaluations

²⁰ Interestingly, the request to assess standard German – although the introductory question explicitly mentioned ‘dialects’ – did not lead to any irritation or even refusal to answer on the part of the respondents.

plausible: Northern German obviously benefits from its close proximity to standard German, which is assessed very positively overall, as we have seen.

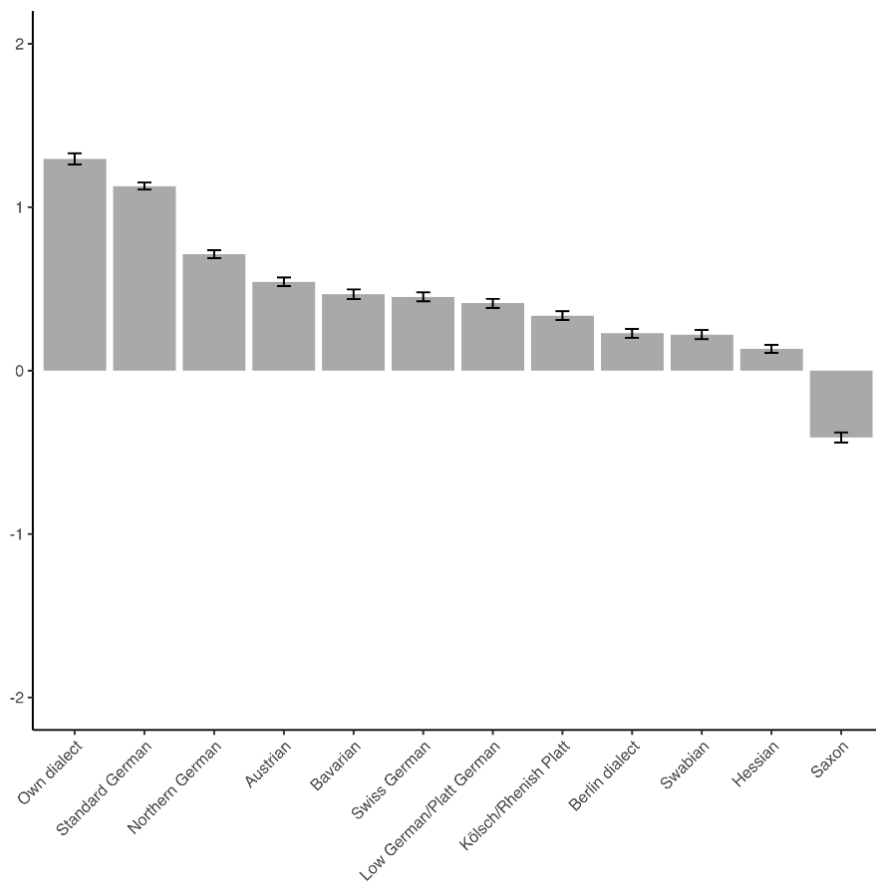


Figure 16: Likeability (closed; mean values)

Question: “In general, how do you like the following dialects?”²¹

²¹ Answer options for each dialect: “very likeable – likeable – more or less likeable – unlikeable – very unlikeable”. The order of the dialects was randomised, with “standard German” never being asked first and “Low German/Platt German” always having to be answered before “Northern German” was presented. The situation in the Northern German language area is complex; the mental maps of linguistic laypersons for “Northern German” and “Low German” are similar but not identical (cf. Plewnia 2013), so both varieties were surveyed separately.

The German wording of the question was: “*Wie sympathisch finden Sie ganz allgemein die folgenden Dialekte?*” with the answer options “*sehr sympathisch – sympathisch – teils/teils – unsympathisch – sehr unsympathisch*”.

However, statements that refer to mean values of the total sample sometimes conceal certain differences within the sample. As the discussion of the cartographic representation above has shown, regionality is an important factor here. The individual language areas sometimes behave very differently, sometimes strikingly similarly. In the following, therefore, the regional breakdown by language area is also presented for three of the varieties asked about. Figure 17 shows the mean values of the ratings of standard German by language area: the higher the mean value in an area, the more darkly the corresponding area is coloured.



Figure 17: Likeability: standard German (by language area)
Question as in Figure 16

The colour differences in Figure 17 are quite small. This matches the overall mean values from Figure 16; since the values are quite high overall, only small deviations within the regional subsamples are to be expected. At most, a slight north-south divide can be seen; the Bavarian and East Franconian regions are coloured somewhat lighter, the Northern German regions somewhat darker. Overall, however, it

can be stated that the standard variety, as it is also established everywhere, is met with great liking across Germany.

The situation is quite different for the other dialects surveyed. Self-assessments tend to be more positive than assessments by others; this effect can be seen in all dialects. Figure 18 shows an example of the values of likeability for Bavarian broken down by language area.

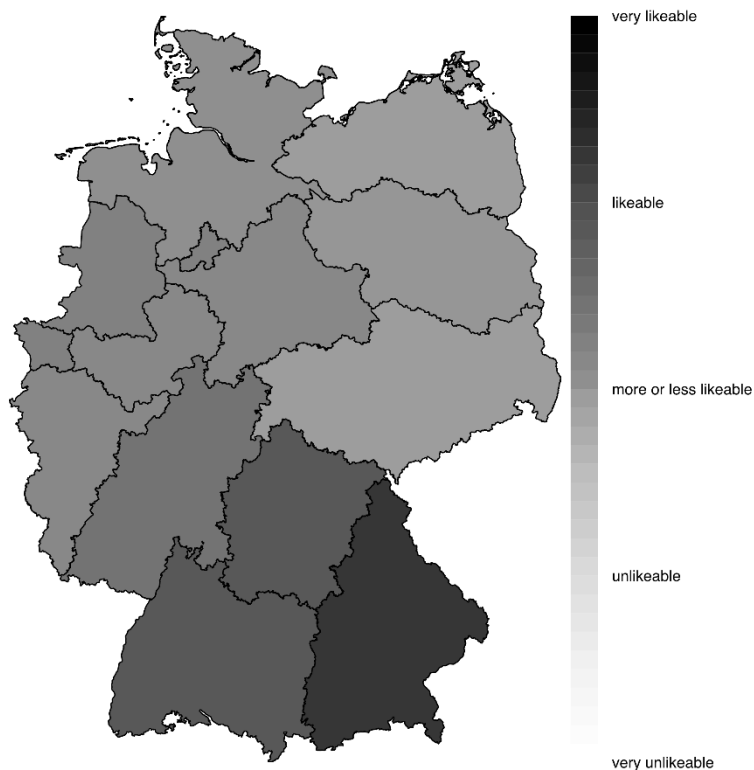


Figure 18: Likeability: Bavarian (by language area)
Question as in Figure 16

Bavarian is clearly in the positive range on average in the overall sample (cf. Figure 16), with an overall mean value of 0.47. However, Bavarian obviously benefits considerably from the positive self-assessments in the Bavarian region. The two neighbouring areas of West Upper German and East Franconian still have above-average positive evaluations, while further north the areas become visibly lighter; the values of likeability for Bavarian are lowest in East Middle Germany.

This effect of positive self-assessments is more or less pronounced for all the varieties surveyed (for Saxon, which finds very little sympathy nationwide, the map

image is clearly lighter overall, but even here the East Middle German region is clearly the darkest). This effect is least evident in the case of Northern German, which is undoubtedly related to a widely perceived closeness of Northern German to standard German, which is, after all, rated very positively. The slight north-south divide in the evaluation of standard German shown in Figure 17 can also be interpreted in this sense. It is not surprising, then, that standard German receives even higher likeability ratings than the overall average, especially in Northern Germany, with which standard German is often associated.

The final map is intended to show that evaluations of this kind have a lot to do with social constructions and stereotypes and not merely with the actual linguistic spatial circumstances. Figure 19 shows the mean values of likeability for Austrian, broken down by language area.

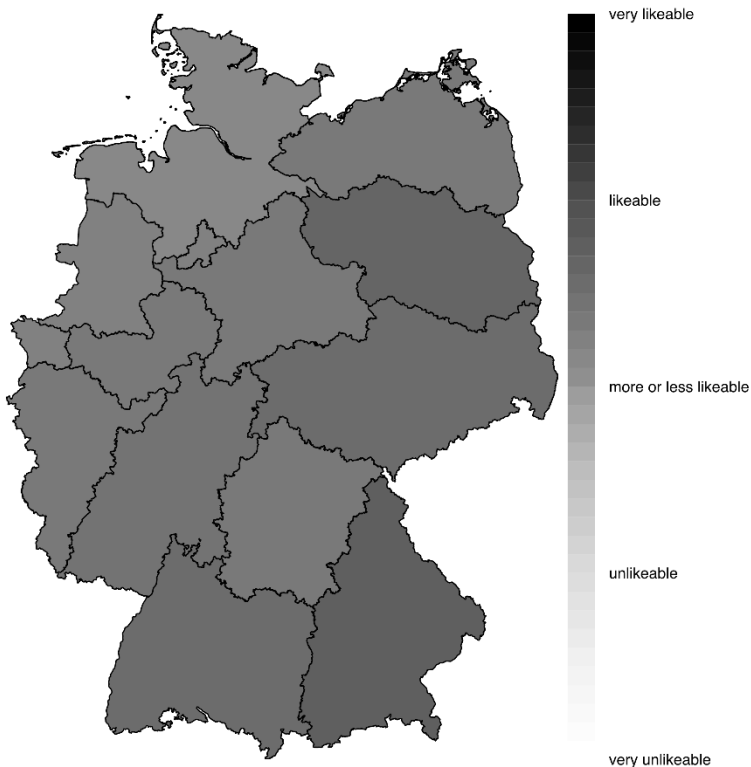


Figure 19: Likeability: Austrian (by language area)
Question as in Figure 16

Bavarian and Austrian belong to the same dialectal continuum. For speakers from other large language areas, it will be difficult to assign people who speak a Bavarian

dialect to the correct geographical region. Nevertheless, Bavarian and Austrian are attributed very differently from region to region. While Bavarian has a clear spatial pattern with very positive self-assessments in the Bavarian area and positive assessments in neighbouring areas, this is not the case with Austrian. In the case of Austrian, regional differences are much smaller. Austrian is apparently interpreted as an exogenous variety that can be liked more easily than other German dialects. Remarkably, this is apparently also true from a Bavarian perspective. In the Bavarian area, Austrian does not achieve the high values of likeability of Bavarian by far, i.e. it is obviously evaluated as a foreign variety. Incidentally, the same effect is seen with regard to Swiss German: The map for Swabian (an Alemannic dialect like Swiss German) has a similar structure to the map for Bavarian, i.e. with very positive self-ratings in the West Upper German region; the map for Swiss German looks almost exactly like the map for Austrian, i.e. with only very slight regional differences. In Germany, obviously, Swiss German is predominantly treated as an exogenous variety, so that there are only minor regional differences in sympathy ratings. This example shows once again that the language attitudes of linguistic laypersons are not exclusively linked to real linguistic circumstances, but are also subject to other influences.

CONCLUSION

In general, standard language and dialects are conceptualised together. In fact, in a vertically conceived variety space, they form the poles of a continuum. However, linguistic laypersons usually conceptualise this variety space in binary terms. In this sense, the standard is the counterpart to the dialect; standard language and dialects are, so to speak, two sides of the same coin. Attitudes towards the standard language cannot therefore be meaningfully examined without also looking at attitudes towards dialects. The data from the *2017 Germany Survey*, which the IDS was able to conduct within the framework of the SOEP-IS, provide us with new information about the status and evaluations of the different varieties in Germany from the speakers' point of view. In particular, new insights have been gained with regard to the current status of the standard variety.

How are these findings to be interpreted? First of all, it should be noted that there are certain limitations resulting from the method used and the nature of the data collected. The central point is certainly that the data reported here – as has already been emphasised several times – are always personal statements by the respondents, i.e. they are subjective data. It is not objective data in the sense that examinations or tests of their dialectal knowledge were carried out with the respondents. However, that was not the aim of this survey. The aim was to find out something about the social relevance of the standard and the dialects in the minds of

the speakers, and that is precisely what this subjective data is important for. Of course, there are also practical limitations due to the way of collecting the data. The number of possible questions is limited because question time is expensive. The number of answer options must also be limited so that the data set can still be analysed. The terminology must not be complicated, and it is not possible to ‘calibrate’ the terms in conversation with the respondents, even though it may not be possible to be completely sure that all respondents understand exactly the same thing by “speaking dialect” or by “High German”, for example, always and everywhere. This also applies to the evaluation of regional varieties; linguistic laypersons can also have stable opinions about dialects that they do not allocate consistently.²² In any case, such assessments say nothing about the dialects themselves, but only about the stereotypes that speakers associate with them. This is especially true with regard to the question of which forms of standard German the interviewees individually have in mind when they make their assessments. Of course, these will be very different ideas in each individual case. However, this does not invalidate the overall findings here.

Summarising the results, the following points should be emphasised:

- About two-fifths of the respondents state that they speak a dialect. Inversely, this means that for about three-fifths of the respondents, their individual linguistic scope is limited to the standard or near-standard language or, at best, regional colloquial languages. The relevance of small-scale areal varieties should therefore not be overestimated. Not only is the standard language widespread and anchored throughout the whole language area; for the vast majority of respondents, it is even the variety that represents the competence basis of normal linguistic action.
- As expected, there is a south-north divide in relation to (self-reported) dialect competence; fewer people indicate speaking dialect in the north than in the south of Germany. The scalar question on competence, on the other hand, shows only very slight regional differences. Those who say they speak dialect say they speak it well, regardless of what dialect it is.
- In reports of actual everyday speech, the standard language continues to dominate to a large extent. This is even more evident in the north than in the south (most strongly in the Eastphalian region in southern and eastern Lower Saxony). Dialects play only a very subordinate role here. Whereas at the beginning of the 20th century dialects were still the normal and usual form of language practical-

²² In general, knowledge is not a necessary condition for opinions. Knowledge of dialectology is not necessary to have attitudes towards dialects. Linguist laypersons do evaluate dialects and express sympathy or antipathy even if they cannot localise them. Adler and Plewnia 2012 show this for a sample with pupils and for a sample with students. Cf. also Hundt 2017.

ly everywhere, according to our informants, the standard language has taken over this role in large parts today.

- On the other hand, most respondents attribute a more or less pronounced regional colouring to their own standard German. The respondents thus indirectly show a considerable degree of tolerance towards variation in their concepts of standard language; speaking standard German while conveying a regional linguistic recognisability is not seen as a contradiction.
- Most of the varieties are regarded with liking (only Saxon is rated negatively on average), whereby the self-assessments are always much more positive than the assessments by others. Standard German is seen as particularly likeable. This is the case throughout the entire area. Here, too, the stable anchoring of the standard language is evident, which enjoys great sympathy regardless of the dialect region.

What should be noted as the main finding of the *IDS 2017 Germany Survey* is that the standard variety is of great importance in everyday language throughout Germany, and that it garners high sympathy everywhere.

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