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Review of *Sprachwandel als soziales Phänomen: Eine empirische Studie zu soziolinguistischen und soziopsychologischen Faktoren des Sprachwandels im südlichen Burgenland*, by Rudolf Muhr

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pairs of friends. No detailed vernacular culture index was devised that adequately described their relationship to the vernacular culture. Cheshire, in fact, says they "did not have a clearly defined system of cultural values" (107). Whether they did not have such a system or whether Cheshire failed to discover it is, of course, open to question. It could well be that the technique of collecting data at playgrounds was adequate for finding out about boys but not the best way of finding out about the behaviour of girls.

Cheshire's book points out a number of things to which sociolinguists need to pay more attention. First of all, that the design of the research limits what can be done: You simply cannot eliminate sources of variation if one of your main objectives is to describe linguistic change. You cannot have one approach to data collection, here, recording conversations at places where teenagers hang out, if this is not a "natural setting" for one group of speakers (here, girls). And if I may repeat myself, the presentation of data must be done in such a way that the reader can have some way of reconstructing the argument from the data.

Cheshire's aim to extend the variationist paradigm is not realized in this study; however, I believe that her treatment of the sociolinguistic variation for the boys shows promise. This description of working class speech has very little to say to the Bernstein debate. We must begin to deal with semantic variation if we want to enter into that arena.

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RUDOLF MUHR, *Sprachwandel als soziales Phänomen: eine empirische Studie zu soziolinguistischen und soziopsychologischen Faktoren des Sprachwandels im südlichen Burgenland*. (Schriften zur deutschen Sprache in Österreich, 7.) Wien: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1981. Pp. 208.

The volume under review represents Muhr's dissertation, submitted at the University of Graz (Austria) in 1978. The author states in his foreword that he revised the dissertation, attempting to work in the substantial materials relevant to his theme which appeared between 1978 and completion of the manuscript for publication in 1980, but that neither the theoretical nor the empirical basis of the volume was changed by revisions aimed at increased precision and "formal" improvements. The work consists of five chapters: "The Homogeneity Paradox in Linguistics," "The Language Change Theories of Various Linguistic Schools of Thought: A Critical Commentary," "Reflections on a Sociolinguistic and Social-psychological Theory of Language Change," "A Fuller Description of the Investigation," "Summary of the Findings of the Investigation." The first and last chapters are short and treat a single subject; the three central chapters are

longer and include many subdivisions, each with subheadings, so that the structure of the book is relatively perceptible from the table of contents. This proves particularly important because – inexplicably and (in an academic work) inexcusably – the book contains no index.

The heart of the book is the empirical study of the subtitle, since it provides the test for the theories of language change discussed by Muhr and the evidence for the explanations of change which he wishes to embrace. Thus, although Muhr's study is preceded by a good deal of interesting discussion about schools of thought on language change, the competence/performance dichotomy, verbal repertoire, communicative competence, reference-group theory, group-membership change, the theory of differential occupational-group verbal intensity, and (more or less unavoidably for any study dealing with a local speech form within the German-speaking world) the concepts of *dialect/Umgangssprache*/standard language, any appraisal of the book's real value must rest on the validity and success of his particular study of the southern Burgenland region of Austria itself. For a number of reasons, most of them centered on methodology and on the amount of information provided to the reader, this reviewer's appraisal can not be enthusiastic.

The setting which attracted Muhr's attention is indeed a highly interesting one. The population of the southern Burgenland was quite homogeneous before World War II, engaged largely in agriculture and apparently long established in the region. After World War II, and especially after 1965, the economy of the region as a whole became partly industrial, and population movement began in earnest. Muhr investigated a small area (five villages of the Lafnitztal) where population movement has been strictly outward and the occupation movement among younger groups has been away from agriculture. What makes the setting especially interesting is the existence of a substantial number of *Pendler*, or 'out-workers'. *Pendler* might be translated into English as 'commuter' in some but not all cases; Muhr's own definition of *Pendler* stipulates that the individuals in question must work at a distance of at least one-half hour's travel time outside the "home" area, but return to that area at intervals ranging from daily to once a month. Workers who returned "home" only once a month – or even once a week – would not normally be classed simply as commuters in English; hence the rather awkward translation 'out-worker' (insofar as the term *Pendler* is not borrowed outright) for the duration of this discussion.

The *Pendler* would seem very obviously to have opportunities for intense and active contact with other Austrian speech varieties well beyond the opportunities of those who continue to live and work exclusively in the Lafnitztal. The use which these out-workers make of their linguistic opportunities might reasonably be supposed to vary with such factors as the nature of their work, including the possibilities which it offers for contact with high-prestige speech and for serious upward mobility, and the degree to which they continue to identify with the home area, its lifeways, and its speech forms.

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Muhr, himself a native of the southern Burgenland (whether of the Lafnitztal itself he does not state), designed an investigation in several parts to gauge the degree of variability in language use among residents and out-workers and to assess attitudes towards occupational groups, geographical mobility, and young people in the region, and to assess degree of linguistic insecurity and speech adaptation.

A great deal rests upon the validity of the investigator's procedures, and it is here that the study fails to persuade. Muhr's undertaking included the following steps with the subjects of the study: 1) a list of 119 words or phrases drawn from the 780-item word list of the Hungarian-German Linguistic Atlas (*das ungarndeutsche Sprachatlas*) was elicited; 2) subsequent to the formal elicitation interview, an attempt was made to conduct an informal conversation with each informant on tape; 3) surreptitious recordings were also made of the informant's speech; 4) informants were asked to respond in writing to a written questionnaire which included self-identification in terms of occupation, evaluation of the status of Pendler as opposed to that of agriculturalists, 30 "personal judgment" statements (to be rated along a scale of 0 to 10) dealing with the attitudes mentioned in the preceding paragraph, and a final section providing autobiographical information about property ownership, property values, income level, size and condition of dwelling, occupation and relationships with colleagues, educational level, occupations and work locations of other family members and of the five "most important" friends and acquaintances of the respondent.

There are problems, or potential problems, with almost every part of this task. The use of a word list is questionable in the first place, and Muhr anticipates criticism on this point. He reports that he pronounced the target items slowly and clearly in the "high" form approximating the standard, creating a hypercorrect effect. The very artificiality of the model produced a reaction toward "native" forms in the hearers, he claims, and very few echoes of the model (78). The advantages of this direct elicitation method, according to Muhr, were that it reduced the frustrations of forcing the informants to guess what word the investigator was trying to elicit (a frequent result of indirect definitional inquiries after a desired item), and that it dramatically reduced the amount of time asked of the informants for the completion of their task. Muhr considers one-half hour the optimal amount of time for an interview, suggesting that the ability to concentrate on the task drops off noticeably if the interview continues beyond that length of time. Agricultural populations in particular are short on time for such pleasantries as interviews. (Muhr does not state whether he did his fieldwork in the summer or the winter; in working with an agricultural population, the latter choice of time period will clearly produce better results.)

For the reader, a good deal is left in question. Muhr makes much of the fact that he is a native of the southern Burgenland and of his native speaker competence (61, 62, 103). He notes that his family is generally well known because of the political activity of his father and grandfather (78), and that he made an effort

to speak – apart from elicitation of the word list, presumably – as he would speak to his own family (78). But precisely because native speakers have a well-recognized place in the local social hierarchy, they tend to call up rather strong reactions among other residents of any area where marked variation among speech forms exists, as in most of the German-speaking world. And since the normal spacing of generations almost certainly places Muhr's grandfather, if not his father, in the turbulent Austria of *Anschluss* and the overspill of Hitler's Nazism, it is perhaps not enough to state simply that their "political activity" resulted in the family's being well known. Precisely because Muhr himself evidently feels that his local origins were a factor in his work, the reader is due a fuller account of Muhr's family background and social status, and the local reactions to native sons and daughters who go off to university is also not without relevance.

Muhr presents his local origins solely in terms of the advantages they offer him in undertaking his study. A balancing account of the hazards they present is equally necessary, as is, especially, a careful and full presentation of his family's and his own positions in the local social structure and the way he dealt with this as a factor in his fieldwork. In an area where the range of variability (phonological and to some extent lexical) is quite great, some account of the way the author does in fact speak *inter familiam* seems called for, if this is the speech he used in the "informal conversation" with each informant. An interlocutor effect has to be assumed, and we are not given enough information about Muhr's speech even to guess at the form it is likely to have taken in his interactions with informants of peasant background, in particular, or indeed of any given background. Since interlocutor effects tend to operate in both directions, there is also the question of the extent to which Muhr himself found his speech forms changing in response to the "thickness" of the dialect typically used by his informants, and whether there was consequently a mutual accommodation which affected his data. Giles and his coworkers (Giles, Taylor, & Bourhis 1973; Giles & Powesland 1975) find accommodation a common feature of interactions among speakers of different dialects or languages, and ignoring the issue here leaves the reader wondering about possible differences between the speech samples Muhr collected and samples which might have been collected in interactions in which he was only a witness rather than a participant or which might have been collected from the same set of informants by a team of researchers representing various social and regional backgrounds.

Reaction to the investigator and his social background was probably inevitable not only in the responses to the word list but also in responses to the attitude statements. To this reader, Muhr seems particularly naive about this segment of his investigation. Among the 30 statements dealing with attitudes, 22 were directed to the real goals of the study and 8 were distractors – statements which had nothing to do with speech, social groups, occupations and their evaluation, the local setting, or the like. It seems extremely unlikely, however, that even the

simplest soul could be asked for 119 dialect pronunciations, asked for information about his or her occupational group, respond to three very clear-cut questions about the relative standing of argiculturalists and Pendler, and then not notice that most of the attitude statements also had something to do with such matters. The inclusion of the 8 distractors seems like so much methodological silliness at that point, more a sop to an academic convention than a factor invalidating the results of the questionnaire.

In formulating the attitude statements, Muhr made use of the phraseology of a group of young people, friends of his brother's, with whom he discussed experiences in their occupational lives which reflected linguistic insecurity and conflict over speech forms, and of "typical expressions" of group stereotypes, attitudes toward geographical mobility, and so forth (74). By carrying over such local phraseology into his attitude statements, Muhr believed that the statements were guaranteed freedom from ambiguity for his respondents (74). Why local formulations should be less ambiguous than any other formulations is unclear, and indeed the ambiguity of one of the linguistic attitude statements, drawn apparently from a local expression, is the subject of much difficulty in the interpretation of the results subsequently (103, 120, 127). Similarly, the simple phrase *schöner sprechen* 'to speak more nicely' appears to be a source of possible misunderstanding among respondents, according to Muhr (103), even though, as he notes, one hears the phrase used frequently by mothers who are correcting their children's speech. Ordinary people are not in fact notably more precise and unambiguous in their expression of attitudes and ideas than academics, perhaps *especially* when certain phrases have become clichés in a given district.

The directions for responding to the thirty attitude statements are also a possible source of difficulty in this segment of the investigation. Translated as idiomatically and comfortably as I can render them, they read: "You see here a series of opinions, much as two people might express them in a conversation in a bar or restaurant. I will ask you to give your personal reaction to them on this scale. You can do this by moving to the right of '5,' going father to the right according to the degree that you agree with what's written. If you disagree, then move correspondingly to the left on the scale. The number '5' indicates neither agreement nor disagreement. It's important here that it's only a question of your personal opinion and there is no right or wrong" (76). Of course the respondents had the scale before them, with the words "disagree" above "0" and "agree" above "10," but these are nonetheless complex instructions, easily subject to misunderstanding. My own experience in using questionnaires among inexperienced (though literate) rural populations is that they are quite daunting and produce considerable difficulty for the respondents (Dorian 1981a:170, 1981b:158). Add in the fact that Muhr apparently tried to complete his work with each informant within half an hour, and one may well wonder how successful the questionnaires were.

More basic than any of these possible problems with the questionnaire is of course the question of the validity of questionnaires in general. My own experi-

ence with them has led me to the belief that they are a poor source of data. I was in the unusual position of having worked for a number of years on a participant-observer basis with a population before later studying the same population by questionnaire. I used questionnaires at the end of the study for the sake of conformity to one prevailing mode of investigation in the social sciences. I found that my subjects, even those of great good will, gave incongruous responses, misrepresented certain aspects of their speech behavior, and showed some evidence of "questionnaire fatigue" in the longer instruments (Dorian 1981b:157-60). I was also present on one occasion when a member of my immediate family was interviewed according to a prepared questionnaire, and I noted with fascination certain misrepresentations in the responses – beyond a doubt unconscious, but very clearly in a direction favorable to the respondent's self-image, in this case. Muhr's questionnaire work makes an interesting preliminary study, but it sorely needs a follow-up study in which participant observation is used in order to determine the extent to which the questionnaire responses coincide with actual behavior in the community over a longer period of time.

In the final section of Muhr's questionnaire, some of the questions are fairly sensitive – questions about personal property, income, and the condition of the dwelling place. Although there would presumably be a certain amount of visual evidence on some of these matters, these are the sort of questions to which answers are particularly likely to be less than fully candid. The income question is extremely blunt, for example. Rather than offering income ranges for the informant to check, it asks, "How high is your annual family income?" Muhr's local origins seem to me to make it *less* likely that respondents would give an accurate response. I might tell a dispassionate total stranger such things, but I would be less likely to tell someone from my district who might possibly release the information locally, inadvertently, or otherwise.

There are also problems with the design of the questionnaire. The first question inquires after the occupation of the respondent, offering a choice of eight categories in which he or she may place him- or herself. An occupational group which proves quite critical in Muhr's analysis, the *Bauerbeiter* 'construction workers', does not appear among the eight, although plain *Arbeiter* 'worker' does. Much more importantly, Muhr opposes the term *Bauer* to all other occupations, overlooking the fact that the term covers everything from wealthy landowners with substantial holdings to hardscrabble peasants who can barely subsist on their lands. For a European, and a native German speaker, this is an astounding blunder, and of course it makes a hash of the responses to such attitude statements as "It is/would be nice to be a Bauer" (#24), or "I think that one has a better life with an occupation outside agriculture than as a Bauer" (#13), and "The Pender are more respected in the village than the Bauern" (#27). Muhr in fact discovered, rather to his surprise, that even the Pender did not agree with this last statement, even though they considered that they had an economically more favorable position than the Bauern (100). Muhr recognizes belatedly that

people who fall within the Bauer category hold positions of political and administrative significance within the parishes, and that at least in the village setting, Bauer as a traditional occupation has not lost its standing and respectability (100).

There are other problems with the questionnaire and its interpretation – for example, Muhr chooses to consider one result which is not statistically significant ($p = 10\%$) ‘‘a strong tendency’’ nonetheless and to use it in his analysis (105), but makes no such use of two other results which show exactly the same statistical level of significance ($p = 10\%$) [variable 20 versus variables 9 and 10 (95, 96, 105)]. Some of the tables are incomplete, incompletely labelled, or opaque: \bar{y} is not identified (103); ‘‘significant group differences include one which is not statistically significant ($p = 6\%$) (108); the identification of entries in the table on p. 112 is particularly difficult to follow; the selection of attitude variables in the table on p. 125 seems incomplete and one-sided. But all these matters are relatively unimportant, of course, if one doubts, as does this reviewer, the validity of questionnaire studies in the first place. Likewise, Muhr’s extremely unsatisfactory excursion into syntactic variation, which is inadequately represented in his data and equally inadequately discussed by him, is a serious failing only if one expects that such matters could actually be dealt with on the basis of data gathered in this fashion.

It is disappointing to have to spend so much time on methodological issues when Muhr raises and discusses many interesting broader matters in connection with language change. I choose deliberately to concentrate on the methodological weaknesses of the study, however, because it seems to me that Muhr’s study is representative of a marked tendency in linguistics to use unreliable data as the basis for rather lofty discussions of theoretical import. A very heartening, though very belated, recognition of this tendency appears, for example, in John Ross’s article, ‘‘Where’s English?’’ (Ross 1979), in the course of which Ross acknowledges the refusal of syntactic theory to take lack of agreement in acceptability tests into account.

What was not realized for many years was the staggering extent of interspeaker variation on any given set of sentences. It was apparently believed that if one took a set of sentences and elicited judgments about them from some group of speakers, these speakers would agree among themselves as to the degrees of grammaticality of the test sentences (128).

It seems to me critical for the discipline that this weakness be corrected; hence the disproportionate emphasis in this review on the weaknesses of the data-gathering process itself. Muhr was apparently allowed to proceed into the field without the slightest basic training in interview techniques. This is the conclusion one reaches upon reading (77–78) that he had to discover for himself, by trial and error, that he got more realistic results when he turned the cassette recorder so that the back faced his informants and they could no longer see the tape running

as they talked! If he was unprepared for this utterly commonplace result, then one can take nothing for granted where his field techniques were concerned, and one is really obliged to raise methodological questions at every stage.

There are signs of naiveté in the broader discussions in Muhr's book as well – in his belated recognition of the distinction between *Grossbauern* and *Kleinbauern* 'large and small farmers' and its import for social stratification in the area (116), and in his apparent acceptance, before his own field study, of the notion that social prestige could be equated quite simply with the "economic potency" of a social group, a notion which even the barest acquaintance with the Indian caste system would have disabused him of.

Since I cannot accept that his study provides a realistic basis for the discussion of language change, I will not engage deeply here with Muhr's views on that phenomenon, except to point out that my own findings on change in the East Sutherland dialect of Scottish Gaelic contradict Muhr's assertions repeatedly. For example, Muhr claims that it is a precondition for the development of a linguistic variant into actual linguistic change that social meaning be attached to the variant (32). Any number of changes seem to be proceeding in East Sutherland Gaelic without a trace of social meaning attached to them (Dorian 1982a:31–32). Similarly, Muhr regards the existence of competing social groups, with which a given speaker may or may not identify, as a requirement for language change; a speaker who identifies with a particular group will adopt their variants and not the variants of any groups with which he or she identifies to a lesser degree or not at all (122–23). But in East Sutherland, speakers who all belong to the same small stigmatized social group and are all dominant in Gaelic can still reveal, in their Gaelic speech, changes in progress which are clearly internal to Gaelic and not the result of English influence, such as the merger of the two passive structures, both very unlike anything in English (Dorian 1973, 1981b:152).

Muhr further makes the tacit assumption (see especially p. 51) that anyone who *wishes* to adapt his or her speech will be able to do so, and that such adaptation is limited not by any native ability to imitate or encompass variations, but by the degree of inferiority felt about his or her social origins. But if, as students of natural second-language acquisition find (Fillmore 1979), there are individual differences in the success of adaptation; and as classroom foreign-language teachers and psychometricians find (Carroll 1979), there are marked differences in the foreign language learning abilities of individuals, then perhaps the factors governing the individual dialect speaker's ability to make use of variants, especially phonological variants, cannot be assumed to be so one-dimensional. I have noted striking differences in the degree to which formerly fluent exiles retain control of their original mother tongue and have suggested that more than simple degree of loyalty to the home community or ethnic identity is involved (Dorian 1982b:52–53). The fact that Muhr finds the early beginning of the out-worker career, just after puberty, more important for the adoption of

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new-fashioned variants than the duration of the out-worker career (129–30) suggests that the factor of linguistic flexibility is operative in his subjects, too. He does not consider the possibility that some Pendler who took up their out-worker existence later on may not be *able* to adopt the new-fashioned or higher-prestige variants to the degree they might like.

Muhr's study was an interesting undertaking, and it no doubt constituted a useful learning experience for him. It is not sturdy enough in its underpinnings to warrant publication, however. It deserved to be followed up by a period of participant-observation, preferably by more than one investigator, and used as just one facet of a larger, more reliable and comprehensive investigation that could carry the weight of theoretical discussion more satisfactorily.

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PETER TRUDGILL AND JEAN HANNAH, *International English: A guide to varieties of standard English*. London: Edward Arnold, 1982. Pp. xiii + 130.

Are you planning a tour of the English-speaking world? Or, do you just want to visit another English-speaking country for the first time? In either case, you should be ready for a few surprises and might even experience some breakdown in communication between you and some of your prospective interlocutors, irrespective of your communicative competence as a native speaker of English.

This seems to be the "warning note" written and signed by P. Trudgill and J. Hannah under the title *International English: A guide to varieties of standard*