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# Standard language variation in German at educational institutions in South Tyrol (Italy)<sup>1</sup>

#### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to provide answers regarding norm tolerance towards the standard varieties of German among South Tyrolean university teacher-training students. As demonstrated in an empirical study conducted by Hofer (2017), who examined the correction behaviour of German teachers in South Tyrol, there seems to be uncertainty about the standard variety to be taught in schools. Similar results have also been found elsewhere (Davies, Wagner & Wyss, 2014; de Cillia, Fink & Ransmayr, 2017; de Cillia & Ransmayr, 2019; Fink, 2014; Scharloth, 2005). Focusing on the role of German in educational institutions, the data presented in this paper derives from a questionnaire survey conducted among teacher-training students attending university in South Tyrol, aiming to discover their correction behaviour and their attitudes towards their own and other varieties of German. The paper will be concluded with recommendations for dealing with the pluricentric concept in educational institutions in South Tyrol.

#### 1. Introduction

German is a pluricentric language (Ammon, 1995, 2005, 2015; Ammon et al., 2004; Ammon, Bickel & Lenz, 2016; Clyne, 1992, 2004; Muhr 2017). The four social forces (*Soziales Kräftefeld*) – the model speakers and authors, the codifiers, the language experts and the language-norm authorities – considerably influence our understanding of what is a formal standard (Muhr, 2018: 41-42) in a language (Ammon, 1995, 2015). School teachers and pedagogues, as language-norm authorities (*Sprachnormautoritäten*), are "endowed with the power to directly prescribe the choice of language forms", i.e. issue language norms (Ammon, 2015: 56), and "have an important function for promulgating and stabilizing a standard variety"

Due to lack of space, in this paper we will only discuss one of the two empirical studies presented at the LNC 2019 conference in Stockholm.

(Ammon, 2015: 64). Particularly important in this respect is the correction behaviour of school teachers towards the formal standard, as it can have noticeable effect on speakers' attitudes towards standard varieties (Bickel & Schmidlin, 2004: 117). While there are a number of studies analyzing the corrective behaviour of teachers in general (Hennig, 2012) and, more relevant for the present paper, with regards to Austriacisms (Austriazismen), Deutschlandisms (Deutschlandismen), and/or Helvetisms (Helvetismen)<sup>2</sup> (Ammon, 1995; Davies et al., 2017; de Cillia, 2016; de Cillia & Ransmayr, 2019; Fink, 2014, 2016; Langer, 2010; Scharloth, 2005; Wyss, Davies & Wagner, 2016), only a handful of papers have looked into related questions in the South Tyrolean context. Ammon (1995) and, more recently, Ciccolone (2010) presented word lists to South Tyrolean informants – in the case of Ciccolone (2010), however, most of them were laypersons – while Hofer (2017, forthcoming) asked teachers to correct a fictitious student essay containing regionally marked variants.

Moreover, it has been shown in the literature that there is often ignorance of one's own variety, lack of clarity, little knowledge, and unawareness regarding the pluricentric variation/concept of the German language (also during teacher training), which can lead to the tendency to correct/modify appropriate (one's own and other) national variants (e.g., Ammon, 1995: 480; Hofer, 2017; Muhr, 1995: 96). In this respect, educational institutions as well as teachers themselves play a central role in communicating language norms.

As claimed by Muhr (1997b) and more recently by Fink (2014, 2016), the teaching of standard language norms should be a central aspect of the teaching profession. In their task of proof-readers, teachers judge what is correct or stylistically adequate and what is not. Apart from Ciccolone's PhD thesis (Ciccolone, 2010), Hofer's PhD thesis (forthcoming), and a smaller, older pilot study conducted by Ammon (1995: 405-411), there are no empirical findings about which norm conception prevails among language-norm authorities (teachers, teacher-training students) or laypeople in South Tyrol. This study aims at filling this gap by examining teacher-training students' corrective behaviour. In South Tyrol, teachers play a particularly important role for several reasons. First of all, most of the German-speaking inhabitants are characterized by internal and external multilingualism (section 2.1). Secondly, South Tyrol, as one of the four *Halbzentren* (semi-

In the (English) literature, different terminologies have been used in order to categorize the varieties of Standard German. The terms Austriacisms, Deutschlandisms and South Tyrolisms (see section 2.2) have been used, among others, by Abel & Anstein (2010), Ammon (1995), Ammon, Bickel & Lenz (2016), Fink (2016), and Muhr (1997a).

centres)<sup>3</sup>, does not have an officially recognized language codex and is therefore relying more heavily on other language-norm authorities (section 2.2). Therefore, one of the research questions addressed in this paper will reveal which reference books are nowadays consulted by South Tyrolean university students. Finally, due to the minority situation of the German-speaking community in Italy, great importance is attributed to German-language schools<sup>4</sup>. The main aim of the present empirical study is to investigate the corrective behaviour of future primary school teachers with regard to the formal standard variety used in South Tyrol. These results will then be compared to Hofer's study (2017, forthcoming), who examined the corrective behaviour of high school teachers.

Keeping in mind how important the corrective behaviour of teachers is in shaping our understanding as to what is and what is not part of a standard variety, in this paper we seek to answer the following research questions:

- 1. Which reference books or dictionaries are used by teacher-training university students in case of linguistic insecurities?
- 2. Which linguistic norms are applied by university students when correcting a pupil's essay?
- 3. Do university students correct differently from teachers when using the same student essay?

This paper is structured as follows. After presenting South Tyrol and its so-ciolinguistic situation in section 2.1, we will briefly describe the standard variety of German used in South Tyrol in section 2.2. Data collection is described in section 3, while our subjects and the task used are presented in section 3.1 and 3.2 respectively. Results will be presented in section 4. In the final section, section 5, the results will be discussed and summarized.

Besides several other reasons, Muhr (2018: 42-44) claims that Ammon's concept of centres lacks descriptive neutrality and therefore he suggests the usage of the terms "dominant" and "non-dominant" variety/centre instead.

The South Tyrolean school system is slightly different from the Italian system, since each child has the right to be educated in his or her native language by teachers whose native language is the language of instruction (Article 19 of the Second Autonomy Statute), leading to ethnically separate schooling and separate administrative divisions for the schools of the three linguistic groups (Italian, German and Ladin). There are schools in which Italian is the main language of instruction and German is taught as a second language (Italian-language schools), and there are schools in which German is the main language of instruction and Italian is taught as an L2 (German-language schools). For the small Ladin minority there is a so-called parity school system (paritätisches Schulsystem), in which Ladin is taught as a subject and is used as an assisting language in teacher-pupil interaction. English is a compulsory subject from primary school onwards (for an overview, see Alcock, 2000; Voltmer et al., 2007: 236-238).

# 2. South Tyrol

## 2.1. Sociolinguistic situation

South Tyrol is an officially trilingual province in northern Italy, where three languages are recognized: Italian, German, and Ladin<sup>5</sup>. Until 1919, South Tyrol belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and became part of Italy after World War I (for a more detailed description, see Alcock, 2000; Ammon, 1995; Glück, Leonardi & Riehl, 2019; Voltmer et al., 2007). The Fascist policy of assimilation, the elimination of the German language from almost all aspects of public life<sup>6</sup>, especially in schools and the administration, had a substantial impact on the standard variety used nowadays in South Tyrol. After the Fascist regime, there was an eager need to re-build the German language.

However, instead of orienting themselves towards the Austrian language tradition and restoring the link with Austrian Standard German, which would have also been geographically closer, the social and political forces oriented themselves towards Germany. This explains why "South Tyrolean German contains numerous elements borrowed from Germany, which are not present in the Austrian German standard" (Voltmer et al., 2007: 226; see also Lanthaler, 2012a: 75-78). Regarding textbooks and teaching material for German-language schools, most of them are obtained from Germany or Austria (for a detailed description in high schools, see Hofer, forthcoming).

Within the Italian state, the German-language group is a minority, while in South Tyrol itself it forms the overwhelming majority. From the approximately 505.000 inhabitants, 69.64% declare themselves as belonging to the German-speaking language group, 25.84% to the Italian-speaking group and 4.52% to the Ladin-speaking group. The majority of the Italian-speaking group is characterized by external multilingualism, whereas the German-speaking group is characterized by both external and internal multilingualism (Lanthaler, 2012b: 140-143, 149-151). External multilingualism refers to the knowledge of unrelated varieties – in the case of South Tyrol it refers to a speaker who has knowledge of German and Italian. Internal multilingualism, on the other hand, refers to the control and/or usage of related varieties – referring to a speaker with knowledge of a regional va-

Ladin, a Romance minority language spoken mainly in Gröden/Val Gardena and Gadertal/Val Badia, as well as Italian are not taken into account in this paper.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Between 1923 and 1945 it was prohibited to use the German language in public.

Unfortunately, these figures disregard the percentage of speakers from mixed-language families. Speakers who have been primarily socialized with two or more languages/varieties do not have the opportunity or option to declare themselves as belonging to more than one linguistic group or to a completely separate bior multilingual group on the census (e.g., Leonardi, 2020).

riety of German (i.e. Tyrolean dialect), which belongs to the Southern Bavarian dialect group, and a German standard variety. The non-standard variety is the most used code in in-group communication (with family members and friends), in everyday communication and at one's place of employment. The standard variety or written dominant norm, on the other hand, is used in more formal/official situations (education, politics, media, religion), for written communication, and in interaction with tourists (ASTAT, 2015).

## 2.2. Standard German in South Tyrol

Although South Tyrol – as one of the four *Halbzentren* (semi-centres) – does not have its own linguistic codex (*Sprachkodex*), i.e. comprehensive dictionaries, grammars, or pronunciation guides (Ammon, 1995, 2006), unlike Germany, Austria and German-speaking Switzerland, the variety of Standard German used in South Tyrol possesses a number of features that distinguish it clearly from other varieties of Standard German. These distinctive features, especially at the lexical level, have been, if not exactly codified, at least described most notably in the *Variantenwörterbuch des Deutschen* (VWB, Ammon et al., 2004; Ammon, Bickel & Lenz, 2016), in additional work carried out by Abfalterer (2007), and also within corpora such as the *Korpus Südtirol*<sup>10</sup> (Abel & Anstein, 2011; Anstein, Oberhammer & Petrakis, 2011).

In her publication, Abfalterer (2007) distinguishes between primary South Tyrolisms (*Primäre Südtirolismen*) and secondary South Tyrolisms (*Sekundäre Südtirolismen*). Primary South Tyrolisms are lexical items/lemmas which are used exclusively in South Tyrol and in all their meanings represent an exclusively South Tyrolean variant, such as *Familienbogen* (ital. *stato di famiglia*), *Studientitel* (ital. *titolo di studio*) or *Waal*<sup>11</sup> (Abfalterer, 2007: 263-266). Overall, Abfalterer (2007: 192) lists 302 words which belong to the standard variety used in South Tyrol and which are common in South Tyrol only. Secondary South Tyrolisms are lemmas used in one or more other centres, such as *Trimm-dich-Pfad* (Germany and South Tyrol) or *Unterdach* (Switzerland and South Tyrol; Abfalterer, 2007: 266-268; Ammon, Bickel & Lenz, 2016: 753, 769).

At this point it should be noted that there does not exist just one local non-standard variety spoken in South Tyrol, but several non-standard varieties (e.g., Lanthaler, 1997).

Some authors claim that the sociolinguistic situation among the German-speaking community should be described as a (medial) diglossic situation (e.g., Egger, 1977: 8; Lanthaler, 1990: 63-65), while others argue that it is more appropriate to use the term dialect-standard-continuum rather than diglossia (e.g., Ammon, 1995: 406; Ammon, Bickel & Lenz, 2016: LX; Glück, Leonardi & Riehl, 2019: 256).

http://www.korpus-suedtirol.it/Pages/zusammenfassung\_en.aspx [accessed on 14.01.2020].

These three variants (abbreviated STIR) are also listed in the Variantenwörterbuch des Deutschen (Ammon, Bickel & Lenz, 2016: 222, 723, 805).

The fact that South Tyrolean speakers often have two or more variants in their standard repertoire to choose from (e.g., Mehrfamilienhaus vs. Kondominium; Installateur, Klempner vs. Hydrauliker), together with the widespread belief that only one of them can be correct (Milroy, 2001), can lead to doubts and insecurities as to which of the variant is the correct one. The absence of a South Tyrolean linguistic codex, together with the fact that the standard variety used in South Tyrol, as one of the non-dominating varieties (Clyne, 1992, 2004; Muhr, 2012, 2018), carries little prestige, exacerbates these doubts and insecurities among speakers of the variety, who often share a feeling of inadequacy.

## 3. Method

Data collection took place during a regular lecture at the teacher training course at the University of Brixen-Bressanone<sup>12</sup>. Before correcting the student essay, a questionnaire (adapted from Hofer, forthcoming) about subjects' language background, language use and their attitudes towards the standard variety used in South Tyrol had to be completed. Each subject has conducted the task individually.

## 3.1. Informants

	Teachers	University Students	
Number	41	55	
Year of Data Collection	2014/2015	2019	
Institution	different high schools in South Tyrol	University of Brixen- Bressanone	
Gender	70% female and 30% male	97% female and 4% male	
Age	mean age = 42.04 years	mean age = 20.94 years	

Table (1): Informants description.

In total, 55 students – 53 females (96.4%) and 2 males (3.6%) – with an age range of 19 to 30 years ( $M_{age}$ =20.94 years) participated in the survey (see Table 1). All except for one female student, who declared her first language to be Moroccan but has been living in South Tyrol for 9-10 years, named a German variety <sup>13</sup> as

Since the foundation of the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano in 1997, teacher training for primary schools has been taken place exclusively at the university in Brixen/Bressanone. For secondary and high-school teacher training the situation is more complex. For further information see: <a href="http://www.provinz.bz.it/bildung-sprache/ausbildungs-studien-berufsberatung/beruf/zulassungstitel-zurlehrtaetigkeit.asp">http://www.provinz.bz.it/bildung-sprache/ausbildungs-studien-berufsberatung/beruf/zulassungstitel-zurlehrtaetigkeit.asp</a> and <a href="https://www.asus.sh/studium/lehrerinnenausbildung">https://www.asus.sh/studium/lehrerinnenausbildung</a> [accessed on 14.01.2020].

Subjects provided the following answers (categorization partly based on Schwarz & Stoeckle, 2017): Südtiroler Dialekt (16.7%), Pustertal (14.8%), Etschtal (11.1%), Vinschgau (11.1%), Eisacktal (7.4%), Ahrntal (5.5%), Samtal (5.5%), Überetsch (5.5%), German (3.7%), Passeier (3.7%), Unterland (3.7%), Wipptal (3.7%), Bozen (1.9%), Etschtal & Vinschgau (3.7%) or Etschtal & Passeier (1.9%).

(one of) his/her first language(s). Since results will be compared to Hofer's findings (2017, forthcoming), teachers' background information is provided in Table 1, too.

#### 3.2. Task

In order to investigate the correction behaviour of teacher-training students, students were asked to correct an essay written by a fictitious student that contained no actual 'mistakes', but a series of regionally marked variants. Expressions and formulations could either be crossed out, if participants considered them incorrect, or underlined, if they were deemed stylistically inadequate. Furthermore, participants had the possibility to add comments. In order to be able to compare teachers' and future teachers' correction behaviour, the same essay has been used as in Hofer (2017, forthcoming)<sup>14</sup>. Table 2 provides an overview of the Austriacisms, Deutschlandisms, Helvetisms as well as pri mary and secondary South Tyrolisms which occurred in the essay<sup>15</sup>.

Type of Variant	Items used in the student's essay	
<b>Deutschlandisms</b> (rarely used in South Tyrol)	fegen 'sweep', kross 'crispy', Plätzchen 'biscuit'	
<b>Austriacisms</b> (rarely used in South Tyrol)	Eierschwammerl 'chanterelle', Fleischhauer 'butcher', See- höhe 'sea level'	
Secondary South Tyrolisms (used also in one or more other centres)	Bub 'boy', Faschiertes 'minced meat', heuer 'this year', Identitätskarte 'identity card', in der Früh 'in the morning', sekkieren 'annoy', article+name (der Elias/die Mama/die Oma), the use of perfect tense as written narrative time	
Primary South Tyrolisms (used exclusively in South Tyrol)	Aranciata 'type of a soft drink', Griffelschachtel 'pencil case', Huder 'cleaning cloth', Kondominium 'multiple family dwelling', törggelen 'local tradition in autumn', Zuckerle 'candy'	

Table 2. Variants that occur in the essays.

#### 4. Results

#### 4.1. Reference books and dictionaries

Regarding research question 1, namely which reference book(s) the subjects consulted in case of linguistic insecurities, the majority (92.7%) claimed to use the Online-Duden, while 38.2% stated that they consult the Duden Universalwörterbuch (multiple reference books could be named in the questionnaire). As shown in Fi-

Some of the variants as well as the instruction text to the essay were adapted from the project Österreichisches Deutsch als Unterrichts- und Bildungssprache (de Cillia & Ransmayr, 2019).

For reasons why these variants were chosen, see Hofer (2017: 81-84).

gure 1, no student indicated that s/he uses the Österreichisches Wörterbuch (ÖWB), while only one participant declared that she uses the Variantenwörterbuch des Deutschen (VWB) – the only book containing a large number of South Tyrolean variants.

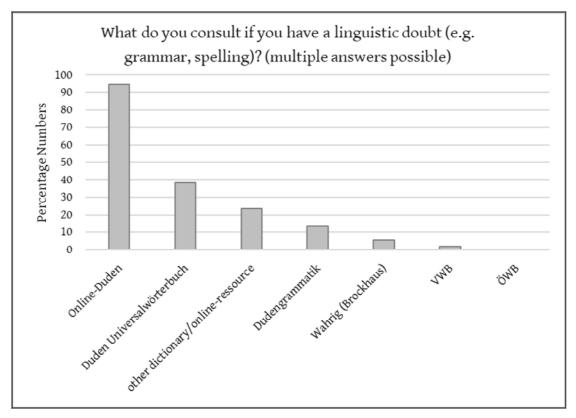


Figure 1. Reference books and dictionaries claimed to be consulted by the university students.

# 4.2. Student essay

We now turn to the results of the student essay. First, we will discuss the corrected and underlined items provided by the university students. Then, we will compare our results to those obtained in Hofer (2017, forthcoming).

Type of Various	University Students Corrections		
Type of Variant	underlined	crossed out	total
Deutschlandisms	4.84%	4.24%	9.08%
Austriacisms	20%	10.30%	30.30%
Secondary South Tyrolisms	24.90%	16.18%	41.08%
Primary South Tyrolisms	35.75%	20.30%	56.05%

Table 3. Percentage of underlined and corrected items in the essays per category.

As demonstrated in Table 3, the majority of the variants were not perceived as errors (crossed out), but as stylistically inadequate or incorrect (underlined).

Overall, it can be seen that more than half of the primary South Tyrolisms (56.05%) were underlined or crossed out, followed by the secondary South Tyrolisms (41.08%). Items belonging to foreign national varieties (i.e. Austriacisms and Deutschlandisms, which are less common in South Tyrol), were marked as either incorrect or linguistically inadequate less often (30.30% of the Austriacisms, 9.08% of the Deutschlandisms). Focusing on the South Tyrolisms only, results show that primary South Tyrolisms were crossed out (20.30%) as well as underlined (35.75%) more often than secondary South Tyrolisms (16.18% and 24.90% respectively).

Compared to data from Hofer's study (2017: 86, forthcoming), we made the following observations. First of all, university students in our study rejected Deutschlandisms, secondary and primary South Tyrolisms less often than teachers (Table 4). Secondly, students and teachers rejected Austriacisms at similar rates (30.30% and 28.46% respectively).

Type of Variant	Teachers Corrections	University Students Corrections
Deutschlandisms	23.58%	9.09%
Austriacisms	28.46%	30.30%
Secondary South Tyrolisms	50.95%	41.08%
Primary South Tyrolisms	74.80%	56.05%

Table 4. Percentage of underlined and corrected items in the essays per category. Percentages from teachers' corrective behaviour are extracted from Hofer (2017: 86).

The overall greater acceptance of Deutschlandisms (vis-à-vis Austriacisms and, even more so, South Tyrolisms) by both current and future teachers shows that variants from the dominant variety – German German – are accepted as (formal) standard language more often than variants from non-dominant varieties, i.e. the standard variety used in South Tyrol. We shall discuss these results in more detail in the following section.

#### 5. Discussion and conclusions

In this paper we examined linguistic norms within the educational context in the semi-centre South Tyrol. In doing so, we explored (1) which reference books are consulted by teacher-training university students, and (2) which linguistic norms are applied by the same subjects when being faced with a (fictitious) student essay. In other words, which variants do future teachers accept as the standard variety, and are there different patterns for dominant and non-dominant varieties? These results were then compared to Hofer's findings (2017, forthcoming), who examined school teachers' corrective behaviour.

As presented in section 4.1, almost 93% of the university students claimed to consult the *Online-Duden*, almost 40% stated to use the *Duden Universalwörterbuch*, while no student indicated that s/he uses the *Österreichisches Wörterbuch* (ÖWB). This is in line with Ciccolone (2009: 4-5), who claimed that the ÖWB had to give up its role as a reference book in favour of the *Duden*.

Apart from a few exceptional studies (e.g., Ammon, 1995; Ciccolone, 2010; Hofer, forthcoming), there are no empirical findings about which norm conception prevails among language-norm authorities (teachers, teacher-training students) or laypeople in South Tyrol. This study's aim was to work towards filling this gap by investigating how future teachers react towards the use of Deutschlandisms, Austriacisms, secondary and primary South Tyrolisms appearing in a student essay (section 4.2). In line with previous research, there seems to be a tendency to correct primary South Tyrolisms more often than secondary South Tyrolisms, Austriacisms or Deutschlandisms. Results therefore demonstrate that future teachers are not necessarily conscious that primary South Tyrolisms and secondary South Tyrolisms are also correct and should be accepted, too.

We were also interested in investigating whether the new generation of teachers are more accepting towards the different types of variants. Overall, it can be summarized that there seems to be more acceptance regarding the different standard varieties of German among university students than school teachers. Results demonstrate that future teachers show a greater degree of acceptance towards Deutschlandisms, as they have been accepted by almost 91% of the students (compared to 76% of the teachers).

Possible explanations for this pattern could be (1) that Deutschlandisms are more familiar to younger than older people (e.g., due to media consumption), or (2) that younger people are less rigid towards Deutschlandisms, by assuming that they are more correct.

Similarly, de Cillia and Ransmayr (2019: 170) also demonstrated in their study that Deutschlandisms were accepted more easily by younger teachers (22 to 31 years) than older ones (32 years and older). Moreover, due to the fact that the majority of the university students claimed to consult the Online-Duden in case of linguistic insecurities (section 4.1), it seems less surprising that Deutschlandisms have been accepted by almost 91% of the students. Concerning secondary and primary South Tyrolisms, it can be observed that university students were more tolerant than teachers in correcting the same essay: 41% of the students and half of the teachers (51%) consider secondary South Tyrolisms stylistically inadequate

or incorrect; while 56% of the students and even 75% of the teachers consider primary South Tyrolisms stylistically inadequate or incorrect.

It should be one of the aims for educational institutions to raise awareness of and to deal with the various forms of internal multilingualism, to create self-confident language use among South Tyrolean pupils and students as well as developing more norm tolerance and acceptance for different norms. In order to reach such a goal, linguistic variation of the German language has to be made a subject of discussion at school as well as teacher training courses (as recently claimed for Austria by de Cillia, Fink & Ransmayr, 2017; de Cillia & Ransmayr, 2019). Summing up, the results of the current investigation suggest that linguistic variation between the standard varieties of German should be dealt with in teacher-training education, in school teaching as well as in teaching material in order to communicate a confident use of the standard variety of German used in South Tyrol.

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