

Czech-German Language Contact in an Isolated and Moribund Setting

Previous work on the German minority in the Czech Republic has suggested that there is no, or very little, evidence of language contact phenomena in the remaining speech varieties of ethnic Germans in the 21st century, and that in more rural settings these have remained essentially archaic in nature, e.g. BACHMANN (2003); FÜRST (2003); and recent fieldwork carried out using traditional data elicitation techniques with interviewer and informant for the *Atlas der historischen deutschen Mundarten in der Tschechischen Republik*.

Using a different methodological approach and minimising the effect of the ‘Observer’s Paradox’ however, data gathered from the remote German-speaking enclave of Vyškov/Wischau, around 30 km northeast of Brno in South Moravia – which has hitherto been the subject of very little linguistic investigation, with no more than snippets of German archaisms being documented in the largely comparative works of BERANEK (1936) and KRANZMAYER (1956) – appear to suggest a number of structural changes which are taking place as this variety approaches language obsolescence, and which may plausibly be attributed to the imposition of the Czech language since the end of WWII. These include, for example, semantic shifts and syntactic modifications as evidenced in the data presented in a) extension of the semantic repertoire of a word, and b) uniformity of reflexive pronouns:

- a) ‘ich bin **gern**, dass ich in den Klub gehe’
I am happy that I in the club go
jsem **ráda**...
- b) ‘aufm Friedhof treffen wir **sich**’
at the cemetery meet we REFL.
... setkáváme **se**

A further aim of this paper is to attempt to link the language-descriptive contact features recorded during recent fieldwork with the wider sociolinguistic context of stigmatised speech varieties. In particular, I shall examine the external factors which triggered language shift within this former enclave which may be seen as paradigmatic of the wider German community which remained in the Czech lands after 1946.

References

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