

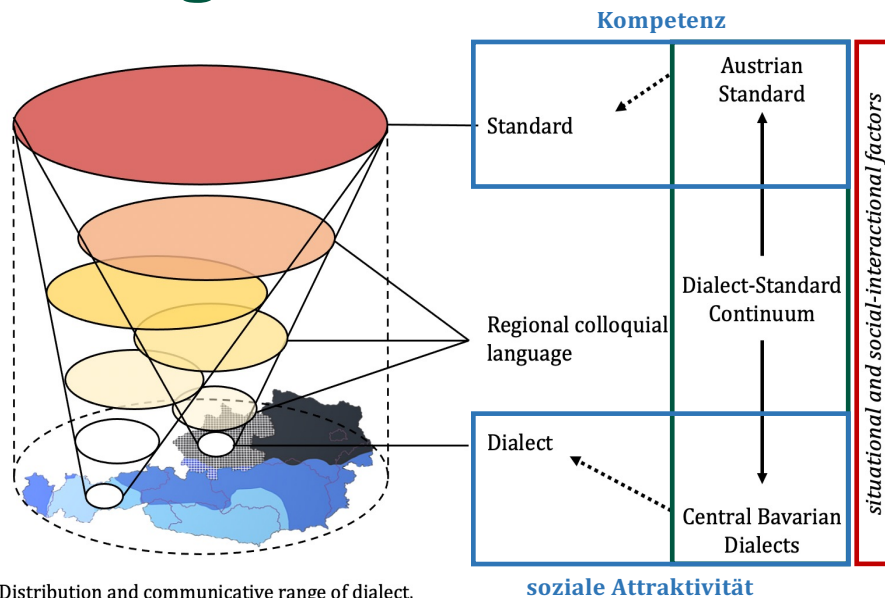
**Acquiring sociodialectal competence  
in a second language –  
one learner belief at a time**

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# Outline

1. Mapping the terrain: the sociodialectal situation in Austria
2. Methodology
3. Out of the eyes of learners: Conceptualizations of and experience with sociodialectal variation
4. Sociodialectal competence in research and practice
5. Conclusion

# Sociodialectal background



Distribution and communicative range of dialect, colloquial language and Austrian standards  
adapted after König 2015: 132

Use of varieties ranging from dialect to standard

Use of varieties depending on social factors – fulfillment of different communicative intentions

Varieties as a sign of (not) belonging to a social group

Functional prestige (simplified): social attractiveness vs. competence

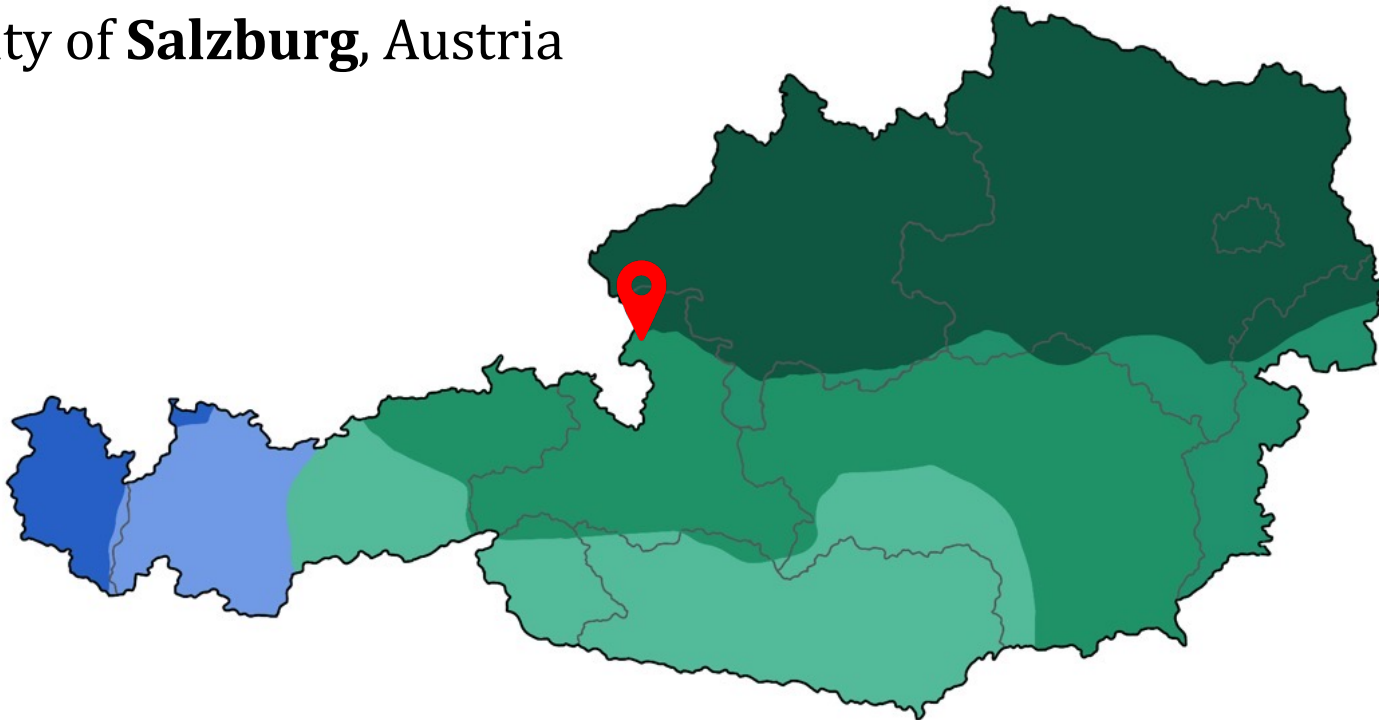
# Participants

3 German as a second language learners:

- 1 female (Kelly) and 2 males (Marcus & Nick)
- L1 English
- Place of birth: Kelly & Nick (USA); Marcus (Great Britain)
- Age: Kelly (27); Nick (23); Marcus (29)
- Length of residence: Kelly (3); Nick (4); Marcus (3)

# Survey area

City of **Salzburg**, Austria



# Data

Semi-structured interviews (free speech)

- virtual interviews conducted in English (30–50 minutes)
- interviews were transcribed; coded in MAX QDA
- Broad categories defined from the interview guidelines; additional coding categories emerged from an inductive, bottom-up approach
- Content analysis

Example questions concerning conceptualizations and L2-experiences

- In what situations do Austrians tend to use dialects? (Do you try to mimic this?)
- Are there instances in which you think it is appropriate or not appropriate to use dialects?
- What aspects or feelings do you associate with Austrians who use dialect with you?
- What are aspects of informal language and/or dialect that you hear during your day-to-day life that you never learned from a German teacher?

# Conceptualizations of sociodialectal variation in Bavarian-speaking Austria

Conceptualization of sociodialectal variation described here as learners' metacognitive knowledge on ...

- (1) Austrian speakers situational and social-interactional use of dialect
- (2) Dialects' "functional prestige" (i.e. social attractiveness) (Soukup 2009: 128)

# Situational / social-interactional dialect use

Kelly	Marcus	Nick
<p>(1) “dialect is more <b>informal</b> and really with <b>family or friends</b>”</p> <p>(2) “you might <b>not see as much dialect in interviews</b> or in <b>formal situations</b>”</p> <p>(3) “I think it's more so in a <b>group of people that are familiar with each other</b> not in like seminars or University or doctor's offices things like this”</p>	<p>(1) “<b>in informal situations</b> the dialect is used an awful lot more”</p> <p>(2) “I have seen it [dialect] used in <b>formal settings</b> as well [...] <b>when there has been an established relationship</b> a formal relationship but an established relationship”</p>	<p>(1) “I don't think it's [dialect] strictly informal no; <b>in Austria it's not strictly informal</b>”</p> <p>(2) “I <b>don't think</b> there's [...] necessarily <b>a time that you should be using dialect</b>”</p> <p>(3) “it's [dialect] <b>mostly between people you know</b> [...]”</p>
Comparatively strict ‘rules’ about dialect use: <b>informal situations</b> and <b>social closeness</b>	Less strict ‘rules’ about dialect use: largely in <b>informal situations</b> , BUT dependent on social <b>relationship</b>	Very loose ‘rules’ about dialect use: <b>not necessarily informal</b> ; loosely dependent on social <b>relationship</b>



# Perceptions of 'functional prestige' (Soukup 2009)

## Austrian Dialects

naturalness

honesty

emotionality

likeability

relaxedness

humor

trust

(linguistic barrier)

"So also just softer as a person, more emotional when I hear [Austrians] speak dialect"

**Nick**

"I think I would consider them [dialect speakers] more open when I hear them"

**Nick**

"I was frustrated because I was learning [standard German] and then you go on the street and you can't understand anything people are saying"

**Kelly**

"comfortableness [...] because [...] if dialect is mainly used in informal situations then it's obviously a situation that that person feels comfortable in"

**Marcus**

## L2 experiences / goals

Variable conceptualizations of the sociodialectal variation as a result of e.g. ...

(1) previous L2 experiences / contact with dialects and

(2) L2 learning goals

# Kelly

Exposure to and interaction with dialect largely only in informal situations; L2 acquisition a necessity, e.g.:

a few of my good friends here in a native austrians (.) and so (.) while I primarily speak with them in english (-) while I've also been at their families (.) at times (.) when maybe the their families don't speak english so I heard more german (-) u::m (-) it was in those types of informal (.) like personal friendship settings that I would be exposed to DIAlect (--). in a way that I could actually interact with it; because in salzburg you can walk down the street and you can HEar it (.) or you might hear it when other people are speaking (.) but it's NOT in a situation where I can really interact or ask questions (.) so (---) really what I've gotten out of dialect has been more so from (1.2) a couple of closer FRIEnds who I've become exposed to it with

Indication that German language acquisition is a mere necessity

Exposure & interaction w/ dialect exclusively in perceived informal situations

# Marcus

Exposure to dialects by listening to language in use with informal contacts, exposure to dialects in 'formal' situations (news reports)

everything that I've kind of picked up (.) and that I've (-) learned regarding dialect has been from listening to other people (-) use the language or from having colleagues or friends (---) telling me (.) this is how you would say this in German (.) but actually in Austria we have another expression for it or we have a different way of saying it; (1.2) so it's purely bee:n through immersion; u::m (1.0) watching videos as well (---) kind of getting into:: things like *Willkommen in Österreich* and even sometimes watching news reports (--) because sometimes even in there when they interview somebody in (.) I don't know in *Lungau* or *Pongau* or whatever it might be (-) you hear little snippets of dialect

Exposure to dialect through informal contact

Dialect exposure in formal media

# Nick

Exposure to dialect in informal contexts; high motivation to integrate, dialect use to achieve this

Just going out (--) u::m (.) I went out quite a bit the first year a::nd the second year (-) that I was here; I hang out with (.) most of the americans that I came from (--) I made my own friend group, and they're still together today (--) a::nd we don't speak English with

Exposure and acquisition through informal contacts

High motivation to integrate into the culture / social surroundings

((...))  
I think I picked it [dialect] up (.) mostly from going out (--) um (.) from speaking with my friends (.) from hanging out with my friends (--) um (-) the first yea:r (.) I mainly just listened (.) that's what I did (--) I just sat with them (-) listened (.) asked questions if I needed to and picked it up.

# Mid-way conclusions

Similarities between all participants (e.g. dialect contact in informal situations), but ...

different L2 goals, e.g.:

- Kelly: German acquisition as a necessity; language of choice English with informal contacts (i.e. less drive to integrate through language acquisition)
- Nick: Mostly surrendering own culture in place of new culture; German (largely dialect) acquisition as means of integration

and different interpretations of previous L2 experiences, e.g.:

- Kelly: dialect as frustrating hurdle, set rules for dialect use in different situations
- Nick: dialect as a means of integration into informal social groups, integration of dialect into own language use, situational / social factors for appropriate dialect use not necessarily considered
- Marcus: dialect use variable, dependent on situational / social factors, set of vague guidelines for dialect use in different situations

# Sociodialectal competence

Learners in most language environments are tasked with acquiring “the knowledge of how and when to speak, to whom, how to style-shift” and “fine-tuning of variation patterns which are used by all speakers of their language”, i.e. *sociolinguistic competence*

(Regan 2010: 22)

In the Bavarian-speaking Austrian linguistic landscape with its myriad of language varieties in the sense of a standard-dialect continuum, learners must also understand the situational and social-interactive use of *dialectal varieties*, i.e. *sociodialectal competence*

# Sociodialectal competence in practice and research

Need for research (especially in Bavarian-speaking Austria) on how beliefs and conceptualizations of sociodialectal variation can be influenced e.g. in the classroom context

Perceptions of dialect-speaking L2 learners from L1 speakers – might this influence learners' willingness to acquire sociodialectal competence?

Very little material on acquiring dialectal competence, even less on acquiring knowledge on the adequate situational and social-interactional use of dialect



# Discussion and questions

Thank you for your interest!

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