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ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE BERLIN DIALECT

On the relative significance of informants' sex and region of origin amongst a group of West Berlin pupils*

1. Introduction

During the past two decades various aspects of sex and language have been studied by researchers from a variety of fields. Such work has ranged from Lakoff's provocative book "Language and Women's Place" (1973) to a number of sociolinguistic studies within the Labovian paradigm (Labov 1966), Trudgill (1974) and others, as well as research dealing with aspects of sex and language attitudes (Elyan et al 1978), Giles et al (1979, 1980a,b). Whilst the theoretical aims of such studies may have differed considerably, what unites the majority of them is an approach to language and sex which has tended to analyze and emphasize sex differences as opposed to similarities.

More recently this approach to language and sex has been the subject of criticism amongst certain feminist linguists, who have questioned the value and the politics of the continual search for linguistic sex differences. Cameron (1985:28ff.), for example, argues that such work may only serve to further a number of stereotypes already available about the speech of women, particularly where such claims are not even the re-

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sult of the analysis of objective linguistic data (e.g. Lakoff 1973). Given the fact, however, that, as a rule, men and women speak the same language, in the sense that they have recourse to a common system of linguistic structures, we may ask to what extent linguistic sex differences have been exaggerated to the detriment of similarities.

Recently feminist researchers in the social sciences generally have argued in favour of an approach to sex (or strictly speaking "gender")\(^1\), which clearly aims to avoid the androcentric bias resulting from a neglect of the category per se. At the same time, however, an attempt is made to avoid a perpetuation of the kinds of stereotypes which may result from thinking exclusively in terms of gender (Morgan 1986). From a pragmatic point of view, such a "deconstruction" of gender implies a research methodology, which seeks to avoid use of gender as a key variable in research by exploring as far as possible interactional sources of variation (ibid.:44ff.).

Work by Dittmar et al. has suggested that attitudes towards the Berlin urban vernacular vary according to sex of informant (1986:100). The main aim of this piece of research is to examine the relative significance of such gender-related attitudes, amongst a group of West Berlin pupils. This is achieved by taking into consideration not only the views of native Berliners (cf. Dittmar 1986) but also other permanent inhabitants of the city. Thus, using the "Matched Guise Technique", pioneered by Lambert et al. (1960, Lambert 1967), an attempt is made to investigate whether informants' attitudes are more likely to be shaped by their sex or their region of origin. Given the extremely heterogeneous nature of the population of West Berlin, both linguistically and socially speaking, a consideration of both these factors appears not only expedient, but also more likely to reflect the reality of attitudes towards the dialect,

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1. Unfortunately, the literature has not tended to be consistent in its use of the terms "sex" and "gender", as biologically and socially conditioned entities, respectively. Here, I adhere to the term "gender", but continue to refer to "sex of informant" as a research variable.
than is sex alone. In this way the concept of "gender" is returned to the context of the speech community as a whole, whence its comparative significance can be assessed. Finally, there is also a brief discussion of whether the Berlin variety can be said to carry connotations of masculinity, as has been suggested to be the case in other dialect studies (Trudgill 1974).

2. The study

The following study was carried out in June 1988 on three groups of pupils in a comprehensive school in Kreuzberg, West Berlin. The study was administered in the now familiar manner associated with the "Matched Guise Technique" - informants are asked to listen to tape-recorded stimulus voices speaking in various dialects, and fill in a questionnaire, assessing personality traits of the different speakers. Informants, however, are unaware of the fact that two speakers appear twice on the tape, once speaking in the standard, once in the dialect form, thus allowing variation in attitudes to the two codes to be tapped.

2.1. Listener-judges

Seventy-seven pupils of the 10th grade acted as informants for the study. Of the 77 questionnaire booklets completed 11 had to be discarded, hence all subsequent figures refer to the 66 remaining informants. Of these exactly half were male and half female. Furthermore, 27 were native Berliners of German nationality, 15 came from other German speaking areas or were non-German pupils with native-speaker command of German and 24 were non-German pupils, mostly of Turkish parentage. The age of the participants varied from 15-19, though the average age was 16 years and five months. Most of the pupils were due to leave school at the end of the school year. The research took place in tutorial lessons, hence the groups were not differentiated or streamed according to academic ability.

2.2. Stimulus voices

The stimulus voices for the matched-guise test were provided by two native bi-dialectal Berliners; a 24 year old woman and her 29 year old
brother. Both appeared twice on the tape, once speaking standard German, once speaking in Berlin dialect. Although the scores of the two speakers were subsequently added together, it was felt that speakers of both sexes should be included in order that potential attitudes to both be tapped. (For questions concerning masculinity and femininity the two speakers are, of course, considered separately.) In order to distract from the fact that the two speakers appeared twice on the tape two filler voices were included, one male, one female, the former speaking in his native south German dialect (Freiburg), the latter in Swabian dialect. The order of the speakers on the tape was as follows:

(1) Filler voice (male/south German dialect)
(2) Speaker A (female/standard German)
(3) Speaker B (male/Berlin dialect)
(4) Filler voice (female/Swabian dialect)
(5) Speaker A (female/Berlin dialect)
(6) Speaker B (male/standard German)

2.3. Stimulus passage

The stimulus passage was comprised of a short text (approx. 150 words) relating an incident whereby the speaker was involved in a minor traffic accident. The subject was chosen in view of the fact that different codes are undeniably more suited to certain messages, this being especially true where standard and dialect forms of language are to be compared. The Berlin dialect has been found, like many British urban dialects, to carry negative connotations of a less refined way of life and

2. For the purposes of this study I define "Standard German" as a form of German with no hints of regional pronunciation or style, as generally used by newsreaders, for example. However, my informants pointed out that, in their view, the standard German speakers on the tape could only be of North German origin. The dialect realization of the text was characterized by consistent usage of the six main phonological variables in the environments identified by Schlobinsky (1987), namely /j/ for /g/, /o:/ or /u/ for /au/, /e:/ for /ai/, /k/ for /ç/ and /t/ for /s/, as well as other minor features of pronunciation and regional intonation patterns.
lower standard of education (though correlating positively with a strong sense of local identity; Dittmar et al. (1986:115-132). However, a passage of the type chosen by Lambert et al. (1960:44) on a "philosophical" theme is unlikely to do justice to the Berlin dialect. The most reasonable solution is, therefore, a passage which is as thematically "neutral" as possible and will subsequently sound equally credible when rendered in both the dialect and the standard version.

Not only is the subject of the stimulus passage problematic, but also the manner of presentation. The usual approach is to ask stimulus speakers to read a short passage aloud, attempting to maintain a similar reading style and impression of personality over the two versions (cf. Elyan et al. 1978:126). The stimulus speakers for my study, however, were confronted with particular difficulties when attempting to read the text in dialect form, since they felt especially bound to the standard pronunciation usually associated with written German. In order to overcome this problem, it was decided to allow the speakers to simply read the text and re-tell the story in their own words. In reality, this was a satisfactory procedure. No difficulty was presented by the necessity to keep the content consistent and in this way it was ultimately possible to achieve a natural-sounding piece of speech, which was not the case where speakers read the text aloud. A pilot study carried out at an earlier date confirmed genuine differentiation between standard and dialect speakers on the tape, as well as consistency of content.

2.4. The questionnaire

Questionnaire booklets were prepared, which required the listeners to assess each of the six speakers on the following eight personality traits:

(1) Honest
(2) Intelligent
(3) Maculine
(4) Well-mannered
(5) Friendly
(6) Feminine
(7) Helpful

(1) (ehrlich)
(2) (intelligent)
(3) (männlich)
(4) (hat gute Manieren)
(5) (sympathisch)
(6) (weiblich)
(7) (hilfsbereit)
On the basis of the "Adjective Check List" (ACL), compiled by Giles et al (1980a:266), traits 1, 2, 4, 5, 7 and 8 were chosen as examples of "non-sex-typed" characteristics, i.e. traits not generally considered more typical of one sex than the other. This was so as to facilitate the addition of the male and female speakers' scores, but also to avoid the use of "sex stereotypes" per se, which merely "tend to reproduce and perpetuate notions of gender differences ... rather than emphasizing points of similarity and overlap", Morgan (1986:37; cf. also Introduction).

The categories "masculine" and "feminine" were included, however, to look further into the question of whether the Berlin dialect can be said to carry "working-class" or "masculine" connotations, as implied by Schlobinski (1987:117, 154) on the basis of similar explanations offered by Trudgill for women's apparent avoidance of dialect use.

In addition, the two groups of traits "honest/friendly/helpful" and "intelligent/well-mannered/got good marks at school" were included as examples of so-called "working-class" and "middle-class" characteristics, respectively (cf. ACL, Giles et al. 1980). Studies of British regional dialects have found, for example, that "class stereotypes" are fairly reliable parameters of prestige. Hence RP-speakers of English tend to be rated higher on so-called "middle-class" values (e.g. competence, job status), whereas dialect speakers will be rated higher on so-called "working-class" values, i.e. traits relating to personal integrity and social attractiveness (Edwards 1982:23). However, we should be wary of the kind of judgements whereby non-standard forms can only be seen to deviate from standard forms. We may, in fact, prefer to modify the terminology after Bourdieu (1977): by so-called "middle-class" norms we are merely referring to mainstream norms associated with the use of "legitimate" as opposed to "non-legitimate" (presumably "working-class") forms of language. Above all, we need to consider who is judging which forms - a point which has received little attention in other work of this kind.
Further to this, we have, so far, only been referring to studies based on British English. The question of whether such cultural values can be related to standard forms and dialects of other languages is worthy of attention. The qualitative work of Dittmar et al. (1986), in particular, suggests a number of similarities in terms of the values attributed to the Berlin vernacular and High German, when compared to English regional dialects and RP—we shall return to this point later.

2.5. Procedure

The experiment was carried out firstly on a pilot basis (the results of which are not included) and then on three separate groups, in the context of a tutorial class, with the teacher present. All sessions were administered by myself and on each occasion around half of the pupils were known to me personally. The task was introduced in the standard fashion associated with this kind of research. No reference was made to my interests in dialect or male/female attitudes thereto, and particular emphasis was placed upon the fact that the experiment was not a test and that there were no "right" and "wrong" answers as such.

The judges were asked to listen to each voice on the stimulus tape, imagining that they were speaking to an unknown person on the telephone (cf. Lambert et al. 1960:44). They were then asked to rate each voice on a scale of 0-8, as to the extent to which each of the eight characteristics discussed in 2.4. might apply to each speaker, whereby:

- \( 0 = \text{not at all appropriate; and} \)
- \( 8 = \text{very appropriate.} \)

Each voice was listened to separately and the judges were asked to fill in the questionnaire as spontaneously as possible, either whilst still listening to the stimulus voice or during the two-minute interval

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3. I was employed at the school concerned as a language assistant during the previous academic year.
between each voice. Afterwards a general discussion on the experiment itself and on the content was invited (and recorded).

3. Results and discussion

For the analysis listener judges were divided into the following groups:

1M - native Berliners (male)
1F - native Berliners (female)
2M - non-Berliners from other German-speaking regions or non-Germans with native command of German (male)
2F - as for 2M (female)
3M - non-Germans (male)
3F - non-Germans (female)

Scores on personality traits for the two speakers were added together and subsequently average scores for the Berlin dialect and High German calculated for all listeners. (Masculinity and femininity scores were of course calculated separately for the two speakers and are discussed below).

3.1. All listeners:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personality Trait</th>
<th>High German</th>
<th>Berlin dialect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>9.86</td>
<td>7.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friendly</td>
<td>9.03</td>
<td>7.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>7.64</td>
<td>6.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>7.62</td>
<td>6.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-mannered</td>
<td>8.31</td>
<td>6.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School marks</td>
<td>8.15</td>
<td>5.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1a: Average scores (over both speakers)

4. Kreuzberg is a typically dialect-speaking area of West Berlin, along with Wedding and Neukölln (cf. Dittmar et al. 1986:122,126). Both my familiarity with the school and its pupils, as well as my observations
Tables 1a and 1b demonstrate a clear preference for High German speakers over Berlin dialect speakers on all personality traits. The most significant preference is where school-marks are concerned - listeners clearly believe that a dialect speaker is less likely to do well at school than a speaker of High German. This is in accordance with the qualitative findings of Dittmar et al. (1986:122) and is not, in fact, surprising given the general view of education as a guardian institution of normative language in most cultures. Of course, whether it is actually the case that dialect speakers do less well at school is not the point in question - here, we are concerned with beliefs only.

Another interesting point which emerges here: at least at this level or analysis no differentiation appears to be made between so-called "middle-class" and "working-class" dialect-related values. Standard German speakers are rated more highly on both types of characteristic. This may indicate one of two things:

1. Either the kind of association between sociability/likeability and during the discussions which followed the research sessions, confirmed that those pupils which constitute "Group 1" are, in fact, themselves, dialect speakers.

5. Actual language ability was felt to be a better marker of group membership for non-German informants than their origin alone. Recognition and acceptance of mainstream subjective attitudes towards a second language clearly form an integral part of language competence and are closely related to actual performance (cf. Gardner 1982). Ultimately however,
dialect speakers reported in similar studies is limited to British regional dialects, or

(2) speakers of the Berlin dialect are themselves not particularly renowned for their friendliness etc. This may be related to a phenomenon known as the "Berliner Schnauze", a typically Berlin mixture of big-mouthedness, cheekiness and quick-wittedness, confrontation with which is often a rather daunting experience for non-Berliners (cf. Dittmar et al. 1986).

3.2. Sex of listener

Tables 2a and 2b show scores for the six personality traits divided, however, according to sex of listener.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Male HG</th>
<th>Male BD</th>
<th>Female HG</th>
<th>Female BD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>9.81</td>
<td>7.73</td>
<td>9.89</td>
<td>7.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>9.62</td>
<td>7.45</td>
<td>8.45</td>
<td>7.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>7.40</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>7.88</td>
<td>6.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>8.37</td>
<td>6.45</td>
<td>8.18</td>
<td>6.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-mannered</td>
<td>8.37</td>
<td>6.54</td>
<td>8.24</td>
<td>6.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School marks</td>
<td>8.10</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>8.21</td>
<td>5.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2a: Average scores according to sex of listener

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>1.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-mannered</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>1.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School marks</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>3.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2b: Difference (d) scores according to sex of listener (+High German)
Studies of various dialects have suggested both an objective and a subjective preference of males for dialect forms, and females for standard forms of language (Labov in New York (1966), Trudgill in Norwich (1974), Dittmar et al (1986) and Schlobinski (1987) in Berlin). The results of this study, however, do not appear to indicate any significant difference between the attitudes of young males and females towards standard German and the Berlin dialect. Both sexes indicate a preference for the standard form on all personality traits. The only significant difference between the male and female listeners is that the male judges rated the standard German speakers more highly on friendliness than the female judges. Whether this similarity of attitudes between males and females is a trend more typical of young people would need to be clarified by further studies. As far as this study is concerned, however, attitudes of young people towards the Berlin dialect cannot be differentiated according to sex.

3.3. Origin of listener

Finally, tables 3a and 3b show average scores for the speakers, classified according to the origin of the listeners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HG</td>
<td>BD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>9.69</td>
<td>8.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>9.08</td>
<td>7.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>7.88</td>
<td>6.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>7.64</td>
<td>6.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-mannered</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>6.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School marks</td>
<td>7.79</td>
<td>5.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3a: Average scores according to origin of listener

only two non-German informants were considered by their teachers to have a native command of German and were therefore transferred to Group 2.
It becomes clear from tables 3a and 3b that judgements towards standard and dialect speakers are significantly more differentiated at this level of analysis than where sex of listener is concerned. Several points of interest emerge.

Whilst all three groups rate standard speakers more highly than dialect speakers, table 3b demonstrates an interesting variation in judgements. Group 2 (non-Berliners of German origin) are clearly much more differentiated in their judgements than Groups 1 and 3. If we compare the difference scores between groups 1 and 2 we see that the latter’s scores are considerably higher on five of the six characteristics (only "helpfulness" is rated lower but the difference is not significant). However, in order to understand the origin of these differences we must refer back to table 3a. If we now compare the scores of Groups 1 and 2 for High German and the Berlin dialect respectively, it becomes clear that the significant differentiation in judgements is not the result of a down-grading by Group 2 of the Berlin dialect - rathermore it is the result of an up-grading of High German. In other words German non-Berliners are not necessarily more critical of the Berlin dialect, however, they appear to estimate the value of speaking standard German more highly than Berliners.

Further to this, we also find at this level of analysis a gradual differentiation between the so-called "middle-class" and "working-class" traits. We will not be surprised to find that Group 2 members rate the legitimate form (standard German) more highly on so-called mainstream
values. In fact, they rate standard German speakers more highly on all traits (except helpfulness) than Berliners, but this difference is extremely significant where the mainstream values "intelligence" and "good marks at school" are concerned. Again, this finding corresponds to the qualitative findings of Dittmar et al., which suggest that "educated" Berliners are expected to speak High German (1986:122-126).

Finally, a word or two on group 3 (non-Germans). The results of this group must be viewed cautiously due to the heterogeneous nature of its composition. These pupils, mostly of Turkish parentage, have spent various amounts of time in West Berlin, though none were judged by their teachers to have a native command of German. Clearly, the results are somewhat less differentiated than say, for group 2. Nonetheless, we still find a marked preference for standard German over the Berlin dialect. This seems to suggest that these speakers have certainly adopted the mainstream attitudes of the speech community, reflected by at least a subjective preference for standard German.

3.4. Masculinity and femininity

One of the frequent explanations proposed for the apparent preference of male speakers for dialect forms or avoidance of such by females, is the association of dialect and/or non-standard forms of speech with masculinity and working-class culture (cf. Trudgill 1974). Although such explanations have been the object of considerable criticism, particularly regarding their treatment of women as "outside of working-class culture" (Cameron/Coates 1985:146), it has also been pointed out that the kind of link between certain forms of language and undesirerable female behaviour should not be overlooked (Cameron 1985:49):

"It is anecdotally attested in many communities where one finds agreement that certain speech styles are all right for boys, but you wouldn't want your daughter/sister/girlfriend talking like that. 'Like that' in this context means swearing and coarseness, but also and especially, pronunciation."

Since the work of Schlobinski (1987) on objective linguistic data
and Dittmar et al. (1986) subjective linguistic data both point to a lesser preference of females towards dialect, it is of interest to investigate whether the Berlin dialect is also associated with connotations of masculinity.

Tables 4a and 4b show the scores for each of the two speakers on masculinity and femininity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male speaker</th>
<th>Female speaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HG</td>
<td>BD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>6.07</td>
<td>6.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4a: Average scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male speaker</th>
<th>Female speaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HG</td>
<td>BD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>0.04 (+HG)</td>
<td>1.33 (+BD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
<td>0.25 (+HG)</td>
<td>1.05 (+HG)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4b: Difference (d) scores

These results must be viewed cautiously since it cannot, of course, be guaranteed that the two speakers are representative examples of their respective sex. However, it does seem that there is some evidence to support the hypothesis of an association between masculinity and dialect use. Interestingly, these connotations appear to apply to a greater extent to the female speaker than the male. As far as the male speaker is concerned there is no differentiation between masculinity and his form of speech. He is considered to be slightly more feminine when speaking standard German, though this result is hardly significant. As far as the female speaker is concerned however, judgements are somewhat stronger. She appears to be considered both significantly more masculine and less
feminine when she speaks in dialect form.

In the discussion that followed in one of the groups an interesting point was made by one girl as to why specifically the Berlin dialect might be considered less desirable for female usage (though this is not to suggest that to be judged less feminine is necessarily undesirable). This relates to the broader pragmatic dimension of the dialect mentioned above, namely the "Berliner Schnauze":

"When you hear someone speaking really broad Berlin dialect, then you think, a-ha, he/she's not gonna let you pull one over on them, he/she's a real Berliner ... perhaps that's why people don't like hearing girls speak the dialect so much, because ... well, girls are supposed to be shy, it's not quite right for a girl [to talk like that]."^6

Pragmatic aspects of dialect usage have, in fact, only recently begun to receive attention in language research. Dittmar et al. (1986: 14-58) includes an interesting first attempt to come to terms with various pragmatic features of the Berlin dialect. In this work the authors discuss for example aspects of the "Berliner Schnauze", particularly with reference to the typically Berliner fashion of relating "conflict situations" or how they managed "to get one over" someone else. As the above quote suggests, however, it would not be unreasonable to hypothesize that the kind of behaviour described by Dittmar et al. may be considered undesirable for female usage. If this is really the case then it would be useful for future research to investigate either the undesirable nature of certain pragmatic features of the Berlin dialect with relation to female usage, or on a more positive note, more "feminine" aspects of this kind of usage.

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6. Original quote: "Wenn man einen hört, der so richtig berlinert, da weiß man, haha, der läßt sich nicht die Butter vom Brot nehmen, das ist ein Urberliner ... wahrscheinlich hört's man deshalb nicht so gerne bei Mädchen, weil ... die immer schüchtern sein sollten; es ist halt nicht so mädchenhaft."
4. Conclusion

The main aim of this paper has been to make a methodological point: there may well be sex-related variation in both objective and subjective dimensions of language usage but these should not be abstracted and should be considered in the context of their relative significance. In this study no significant sex-related differences were found amongst a group of teenage pupils in a West Berlin school with respect to attitudes towards the Berlin dialect. On the other hand, considerable differentiation of attitudes was found regarding listeners' region of origin. These findings do not implicate a denial of all sex-related variation with respect to usage of, and attitudes towards, the Berlin dialect, although they may be typical of younger people (further empirical work would be needed to clarify this point). What is merely being suggested here is that in the classroom context of a West Berlin school, pupils' attitudes towards the Berlin dialect are more likely to be related to their region of origin than sex. It is hoped that future studies will consider an approach of this kind as an alternative to concentrating on, and perhaps over-estimating, the significance of sex-related differences both in language variation and attitudes.

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