

Christopher Tabisz
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Standard German and Magdeburg Regiolect in the Classroom and Beyond: Use, Attitudes and Perceptions

In 2002, the Department of Education in Saxony-Anhalt published a book on how to educate both teachers and students about the treatment of Low German in the classroom: *Niederdeutsch im Unterricht: Arbeitshilfen für den schulischen Umgang mit dem Niederdeutschen in Sachsen-Anhalt*. The book emphasizes acceptance and inclusion of different linguistic varieties (i.e. dialects of Eastfalian Low German) in the classroom, which can lead to greater acceptance of other world languages and less prejudice and negativity in relation to the linguistic background of other individuals.

In one year of working in a school in Magdeburg and surrounding villages, I encountered very little evidence of Eastfalian Low German presence. According to Schönfeld (1982), the origin of Magdeburg koiné features from Low German and East Central German can be found in the early modern period in and around Magdeburg, including the small city to the south, Schönebeck (Elbe). If Low German does not exist in the community, then the question arises of whether students and teachers believe the Magdeburg regiolect should be accepted and/or used in schools.

The present study analyzes attitudes and perceptions of the linguistic varieties of Magdeburg regiolect as reported by students and teachers at a German secondary school in Schönebeck (Elbe), Dr.-Carl-Hermann-Gymnasium. Participants completed a survey which elicited data on the usage of and attitudes toward Magdeburg regiolect in the classroom, at home and with friends. The results give evidence of students' and teachers' familiarity with Standard German and the Magdeburg regiolect. Participants were presented examples of morphosyntactic (use of accusative for Standard dative), phonological (/j/ and /x/ for Standard /g/ as in *jut'n Dach*) and lexical features (*mank* for Standard *zwischen*) of the Magdeburg regiolect. The surveys also provided an opportunity to express opinions about Standard German and regiolect.

In pilot data analyzed so far, there were no reports of Low German in the families or surroundings of any of the surveyed students, but one teacher reported having a grandmother who had spoken Low German. However, every student and teacher mentioned the presence of the regional koiné, using terms such as *Magdeburgisch* and *Sachsen-Anhaltisch*. The students reported higher rates of using and accepting Magdeburg regiolect at home and among friends than in school, similar to the results for teachers. However, the teachers reported using far fewer features of the Magdeburg regiolect than the students at home, among friends and in the classroom. This project helps us better understand the rationales for students' and teachers' acceptance of and opinions regarding the usage of the Magdeburger regiolect within the classroom setting. This research contributes to a body of knowledge that would help pave the way for curricula that would be more effective with linguistic variation in the classroom.

References

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