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Style and Social Identities

Alternative Approaches to
Linguistic Heterogeneity

edited by

Peter Auer

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Preface

This book has various sources. Its first and early roots were a colloquy on “Acts of Identity” held at the University of Freiburg in 2002 which, in turn, emerged from a research project on the “Linguistic symbols of ethnic identity” (*Sprachliche Symbolisierung ethnischer Identität*) co-directed by the editor and Christian Mair within the framework of the Research Institute (*Sonderforschungsbereich*) “Identitäten und Alteritäten” (SFB 471). Some of the papers presented at the colloquy are contained in the present volume, while others have been published in Christian Mair (ed.) *Interactional Sociolinguistics and Cultural Studies* (a thematic issue of *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 28-2). A second and equally important source of input for this volume was a Panel on “Identity and Style” organized by Werner Kallmeyer and myself at the 2003 International Pragmatics Conference in Toronto. A number of chapters of this volume were presented first as papers to this Panel. However, there are also additional chapters written especially for this publication.

My thanks go to Werner Kallmeyer, who not only co-organized the Toronto Panel with me but also helped in recruiting the contributors to the present volume, and provided stimulating intellectual input on communicative social style. I would also like to thank Monica Heller who suggested including the book in the LPSP series and guided me with her advice through the editorial process which, in this case, was not without obstacles. Finally, my thanks go to Hanna Beier and Elin Arbin who substantially helped in the copyediting.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Peter Auer

This volume presents a collection of studies which focus on heterogeneity in linguistic practice such as the use of more than one language within a conversation by bilingual speakers, the use of different grammatical, phonological or lexical options for realising one linguistic category, within what is generally considered to be one language, or the selection of features from various linguistic systems (such as dialects) which are structurally closely related. In this sense, all the papers in this volume deal with phenomena which fall within the core domain of sociolinguistics as they are known from variationist sociolinguistics, (social) dialectology, or research on bilingualism. That the subtitle of this book nonetheless refers to alternative approaches implies that the way in which they investigate heterogeneity does not follow the standard pattern of research methodology in variation studies though (cf. Chambers, Trudgill and Schilling-Estes, eds., 2002 for a useful summary). The reason for abandoning these established methodologies despite their undeniable success is, for many of the contributors to this volume, a certain uneasiness about the (growing?) neglect of social meaning and how it is created through language in variation studies. The present volume focusses on two relatively recent concepts of sociolinguistic research which have a potential for remedying this neglect: social identities and (social) style. This introduction aims at introducing these two terms and their relevance for sociolinguistic studies on linguistic heterogeneity.

1. Identity/Identities

1.1. Collective identities

The linguistic concern with identity began with an interest in collective rather than social identities, i.e. with the discourse of 'languages' as the 'natural' reflexes of national identities, as it started in the 18th and gained momentum in the 19th century. In a way, this discourse uses the notion of

identity in a metaphorical sense, modelled on the discourse of the individual as defined by his or her, self-reflexive sameness.¹ Collectivities are treated as unique quasi-beings which express their identities through certain features equally unique to them. Among these features, the national (standard) language has a privileged role.

The idea that collective identities and languages are connected in an essentialist way has been a key concept of European modernity; it underlies the formation of the European nation states and continues to be deeply rooted in our language ideologies. According to this idea, each collectivity (particularly a nation, or a Volk) expresses its own individual character through and in its language. The term 'essentialist' is justified here since it is assumed that there is a 'natural' link between a nation and 'its' language. Against this view, the dominant paradigm in the social sciences today is more or less radically constructivist. Collectivities – nations, but also ethnic or social groups – are no longer assumed to 'naturally' exist, for instance on the basis of genetics (race), ancestry (blood) or birth (social class), but are seen as social and ideological constructs (see Niethammer 2000 for a summary of the arguments) which, in the European tradition, happen to rely on language.

The discourse of European nation-building has been thoroughly investigated (see, e.g., Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm 1990). Nation-building is not only a matter of the past but continues to be in progress in parts of Eastern and particularly south-eastern Europe. Examples such as the (re-)creation of Croatian and even Bosnian as independent national languages also make it clear that language has not lost its prominent role in this discourse. However, collectivities other than nations may also use language in order to establish their identity (and may equally fall into the essentialist trap). Bilingual minorities are an example. Instead of the national standard varieties, it is now the specific ways in which the majority and/or the minority language are spoken, as well as the various mixing and switching styles, which are considered to be the straightforward, 'natural' expression of the bilinguals' identity. Frequently, a simple iconic relationship between 'mixed' or even 'hybrid identities' and 'mixed' (or fragmented?) languages and an equally iconic relationship between fuzzy language boundaries and fuzzy group boundaries is assumed.² The link between these linguistic practices and the collective identity appears as self-evident as the link between a standard language and a nation was in the nationalist discourse of the 19th century (and beyond). Again, language – albeit in different forms – is assumed to be 'determined' by the nature of the collectivity to which it belongs. And once again, this equation of language and the identity of a col-

lectivity fails to capture the way in which collectivities are constructed (through language and other means of expression).

1.2. Social identities

However deep the link between linguistics as a discipline and the discourses about collective identities may have been, collective identities are not the topic of this volume. We are not interested here in the discourses (in the Foucaultian sense of the word) in and through which collectivities are defined, justified, delimited against each other, etc., and how languages are used as arguments in these discourses. Rather, we are interested in the construction and management of *social* identities in interaction. Here, the categorisation of participants in an interactional episode as social personae is an issue, not the definition and delimitation of collectivities.³

Social identity work of this kind is linked to social-communicative practices and needs to be investigated as such. A good deal of sociolinguistic and sociological research has addressed the question of how terms for social categories (such as 'male', 'upper class', 'Jewish') are employed in conversation and how their link to category-bound activities/characteristics is exploited as a resource for creating social and interactional meaning.⁴ This explicit categorisation work plays role in some of the papers in this volume (such as the ones by Liebscher and Dailey O'Cain, Deppermann, Georgakopoulou or Günthner), but no role at all in others (such as Auer, Arnhold and Bueno-Aniola or Coupland). Once again, the employment of category names to refer explicitly to the person whose identity is at stake, or the naming of category-bound activities which make such identity-related categories inferrable, is not our main concern. What will really take us to the heart of sociolinguistic research is another issue: to what extent can participants mobilise heterogeneity within or across the linguistic system(s) of their repertoire – grammar, phonology, lexicon – in order to symbolically express their social identities? How can social identities be accomplished, not by explicitly categorising people and by explicating category-bound activities/characteristics, but by selecting one variable realisation over another (for instance in the inflectional system of English or in the vowel system of German, one language instead of another in a speaker's repertoire, or one lexical expression instead of another) where these realisations have no denotational-semantic content whatsoever which could be the basis for this accomplishment?

1.3. "Acts of identity"

The interest in (social) identity and its linguistic-communicative 'management' has become mainstream in sociolinguistics during the last decade, but its roots are older. It was as early as 1982 that Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz edited a book in which they state programmatically (1982: 1, our emphasis):

We customarily take gender, ethnicity, and class as given parameters and boundaries within which we create our own social identities. The study of language as interactional discourse demonstrates that these parameters are not constants that can be taken for granted but are communicatively *produced*. Therefore to understand issues of identity and how they affect and are affected by social, political, and ethnic divisions we need to gain insights into the *communicative processes by which they arise*.

Even before Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, Robert Le Page introduced his notion of "acts of identity", coming from a different perspective and a background in creole studies (cf. Le Page 1978; Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985). His model plays a considerable role in a number of papers in this volume. Its main components are summarised in Sebba's chapter. In a nutshell, Le Page claims that our socio-stylistic choices are made in order to conform to the behaviour of those social groups we wish to be identified with. Le Page's model was conceived as an alternative to correlational sociolinguistics as it was about to emerge in Labov's work in New York City at the same time (Labov 1972). While the latter reduced the individual to multiple memberships in a social class, gender and age group, respectively, which were seen to determine his or her linguistic behaviour, Le Page foregrounded the individual as an actor who – within certain limits – chooses his or her affiliations and expresses them symbolically through language. But Le Page's acts of identity also anticipated important aspects of the constructivist approach to social identities. He dissolved the unity of the individual as a social actor into an array of acts of identification.⁵ He thereby transformed identity into identities, and thus reanalysed sociolinguistic variables from symptoms into symbols (cf. Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985: 182).

Le Page views incumbency to social categories as an achievement; it is informed by the situation in which it occurs, and lacks the kind of trans-situational stability (reflexive equivalence) which the very notion of iden-

tity presupposes. Le Page's acts of identity thus have little to do with identity in the traditional sense of the word. The stress is on 'acts', not on identity: it is these acts that bring about those only seemingly reliable features which social actors ascribe to themselves and to their fellow interactionalists as features of the social world taken-for-granted. Note that this questions the validity of constructs such as 'social class', 'gender', 'ethnicity' and the like which are no more (but also no less!) than lay categories which we use in order to make sense of the social world around us.

A final point bears mentioning: in Le Page's terminology, a speaker "projects" an image of him- or herself when s/he wishes to identify with a (real or imagined) social reference group. But Le Page also stresses that such projections seek and need to be reinforced by others. If the speaker receives this reinforcement, his or her behaviour may become more regular, or "focussed." On the other hand, if acts of identity are not met with positive feedback, the speaker's behaviour will tend to remain (or become) more variable ("diffuse").

From a modern viewpoint, some parts of Le Page's model are of course debatable. To begin with, there is a touch of overdone individualism in Le Page's approach. Le Page does acknowledge that our autonomy as speakers to create "systems for ... verbal behaviour" is restricted by four "riders" – i.e.:

(i) the extent to which we are able to identify our model groups, (ii) the extent to which we have sufficient access to them and sufficient analytical ability to work out the rules of their behaviour, (iii) the strength of various (possibly conflicting) motivations towards one or another mode and towards retaining our own sense of our unique identity, (iv) our ability to modify our behaviour (1978: 15).

However, there is good reason to believe that there are further constraints on the autonomy of the speaker which could be modelled along the lines of Bourdieu's notions of habitus and field (to mention just one possibility) and which involve issues of power and hegemony (cf. Bourdieu 1979). Also, the idea of a "unique identity" is at odds with the identity-in-interaction approach outlined above according to which acts of identity are situationally occasioned and therefore potentially conflicting (even contradictory) across situations.

Another problem with Le Page's model may be even more important. Some of the linguistic choices which are made by speakers by reference to the factual or imputed behaviour of a certain social reference group are systematically non-affiliative, i.e. they are made in order *not* to be subsumed under the respective membership category. These acts have been

widely discussed in the recent sociolinguistic literature under headings such as crossing, mocking, styling/stylising, parodying, etc. (cf. the contributions by Deppermann, Günthner, Kotthoff, Bailey and others in this volume). The distinction between affiliative and non- or even disaffiliative stylistic choices is not a trivial one (cf. Coupland, this volume, and Woolard, this volume). One may even go one step further: the use of a particular feature which is associated with a certain social group is open to an affiliating as well as a disaffiliating interpretation. The preestablished association between linguistic variants and social reference groups as such can be questioned. In fact, speakers may re-create their own social identity by drawing on linguistic materials taken from various groups and rearranging them into a new 'style'. We will come back to this approach to identity as stylistic performance (stylisation) in section 3 of this introduction.

For the time being, we can summarise the discussion of Le Page's model as follows. It is necessary to differentiate between the social group A from whose (stereotyped) linguistic behaviour a linguistic act of identity draws its semiotic resources, and a social group B with whom the speaker wishes to identify. A (linguistic) act of identity can then be defined as the selection of a linguistic element which indexes some social group A and which is chosen on a particular occasion (in a particular context) in order to affiliate oneself with or disaffiliate oneself from a social group B. A and B often but do not necessarily coincide.

Of course, Le Page's early model has not remained the only approach to identity-formation through linguistic choices. Widely used is, for instance, Harré and van Langenhove's theory of social positioning (1991) which forms the theoretical basis of Liebscher's and Dailey O'Cain's as well as Georgakopoulou's chapters in the present volume. Coming not from (socio-) linguistics (like Le Page), but from social science, the authors propose an alternative approach to social categorization which is more flexible than traditional role theory and also emphasizes the negotiable nature of self- and other-positioning. Consequently, the focus on linguistic indexes to categorization is less strong here.

Although some linguistic features are linked in the most straightforward way to a social or ethnic category, a region or a milieu, their meaning is always open to situational revision, transformation, and refinement. The best-known of these reinterpretations is the case of regional to social indexing. Variable features indicative of some regional provenance of the speaker are often metonymically extended to some (stereotypical) attribute imputed to speakers of that region which eventually comes to index a social attrib-

ute. A case of such a reinterpretation is Canadian raising as described in Labov's classic study of Martha's Vineyard in which a regional feature of Atlantic coast island dialects (raising of the onset in the diphthong /ay/) is reinterpreted and takes on a new, social meaning: it symbolises the speaker's stance toward mainlanders (cf. Labov 1963 and Eckert's 2004 interpretation of his results). Linguistic features therefore do not 'mirror' social identity categories in the simple sense of the word (cf. Cameron 1990).

A simple lexical example can show this. In the pre-unification period, *Zielsetzung* was a purely 'East German' lexical item for '(West) German' *Zielstellung* ('aim'): West German dictionaries (such as DUDEN 1973) only listed the latter word (while the East German *Handwörterbuch der deutschen Gegenwartssprache* had both). Given this clear association of the word *Zielstellung* with East Germany, what does it mean if somebody uses the word today, say, in a written document in a company? A simple view of language as an index to social identity would lead to the conclusion that the writer wants to claim/invoke his or her East German identity by using an East German word, even more so as the general trend has been to replace East German by West German words. However, although this is one possibility, there are other ways in which this particular lexical choice can come to index (in a given situational context and in a given community of practice) the user's identity:

- The writer may have used the East German word 'innocently', i.e. without knowing about its identity-rich potential. She or he may not be aware of the lexical difference at all and not be able to interpret the lexical variation at hand in social terms. Depending on who the recipients are, the lexical choice may then remain irrelevant for social categorisation (for 'innocent' readers), or it may assume a non-intended meaning (when the readers ascribe East-Germanness to the writer against his or her intentions, and perhaps against his 'real' background).
- The writer may have used the East German word 'metaphorically' i.e. in order to invoke an East German 'voice' although he or she is known to be West German. Here, we would be dealing with a kind of crossing (cf. Rampton 1995; Auer 2006; Quist and Jørgensen 2007). For readers who share this knowledge about the writer's background, a 'double-voicing' becomes visible in which the writer's 'real' voice and that of the East German influence each other (cf. Voloshinov 1929).
- The writer may want to pretend to be East German, in some kind of role-play as is not infrequent in internet chat communication (and doubt-

lessly in other contexts as well). In this case, a social identity is 'faked'. To complicate things even further, the recipient may know and take into account that in the type of activity at hand (e.g., chats), identities can be and even tend to be faked.

- The East German word may have taken on a different meaning in the community of practice in which it is used (for instance, it may be a fashionable way of speaking which indexes up-to-dateness, but not East/West German background).

What these alternative interpretations show is that often, there is no way of describing the indexical value of a linguistic variable (i.e., its capacity to point to a social category) without looking into the conversational and situational context in which it is employed. In addition, the interpretation of a linguistic feature is often supported by (and sometimes only made possible on the basis of) its co-occurrence with other features with which it forms a social style. We will turn to this issue in section 2.

1.4. Social identities in interaction

The critical appraisal of Le Page's models of "acts of identity" of the last section leads us to an approach to social identities which is grounded in interaction. Such an approach is not new and has been proposed by several sociolinguists (starting with Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz in their "interactional sociolinguistics", cf. the quotation above). The basic principles upon which the identities-in-interaction approach is based are summarised by Antaki and Widdicombe (1998: 3) as follows:

- (i) Having an identity means "being cast into a *category with associated characteristics* or features"; incumbency in this category may both be claimed by a participant of an interaction and ascribed to him/her by co-participants.
- (ii) Identity-relevant activities in interaction are "indexical and *occasioned*", i.e., they cannot be understood unless their embedding into the conversational and larger context at hand is taken into account.
- (iii) Identity as an occasioned and achieved category incumbency needs to be *made relevant* in an interaction in order to become consequential for it; this holds for brought along and brought about identities. In accordance with ethnomethodological principles, the analyst's task is to

reconstruct this 'making relevant' of a category. It need not imply the overt naming of an identity-relevant category, but can be achieved through symbolic means.

- (iv) 'Having an identity' is *consequential for interaction*, since the respective category is linked to category bound expectations of action; this consequentiality may become visible in a shift of footing of the interaction; however, it may also lead to the somewhat trivial consequence that 'nothing special' happens precisely because co-membership is established.
- (v) This consequentiality opens up the possibility for the analyst to reconstruct the identity-relevant category in question from category bound activities.

Of course, speaking of the occasioned nature of identity is not to be taken to mean that identity-relevant categories have no reality outside the interaction. In fact, their interactional relevance hinges on (more or less) shared social knowledge. This has been shown compellingly in Harvey Sacks' work on membership categorisation (Sacks 1972; cf. Watson 1997); one of the upshots is that many categorisation devices are duplicatively organised such that bringing into play one social category evokes the antonym as well.⁶ Sacks, in turn, relied on older approaches particularly in the tradition of Alfred Schütz and his theory of types (Schütz and Luckmann 1975). The more general point is that identity-work is very often done by referring to alterities – the construction of some ALTER through which one's own identity is indirectly highlighted.

The multi-faceted nature in which variants are employed and interpreted as indexes to social identity has been investigated empirically in recent sociolinguistic research (e.g. Ostermann 2003; Podesva, Roberts and Campbell-Kibler 2002; Schilling-Estes 2004; Zilles and Cambell 2005). These studies analyse the choice of linguistic variants within their conversational and social context, often in ways analogous to the investigation of code-switching in conversation (cf. Ostermann 2005, drawing on Auer 1995). The way in which these studies link up with more traditional, quantitative studies of linguistic variation still remains to be discussed. It is obvious that it is at odds with a correlationist view of sociolinguistic structure, but not necessarily with quantitative methods which may be useful and even necessary to establish the common knowledge against which a single case of variable selection may become meaningful.

Identity work in interaction is – as stated above – the work invested by participants in ascribing and claiming incumbency to social categories or Schützian types. To narrow down this focus somewhat, Zimmerman (1998: 90f.) suggests distinguishing between discourse, situational and transportable identities, each of which is characterised by “different home territories”, i.e., by a different temporal reach and contextual constancy. *Discourse identities* such as ‘current speaker’, ‘teller of a story’, ‘repair initiator’ would not normally be subsumed under identity relevant categories in the everyday use of the word. They are, however, intimately linked to Zimmerman’s *situational identities* which are bound to particular, mainly institutional agendas (and informed by the respective schematic/frame knowledge which are the blueprints for acting within these institutions); thus, an ‘interrogator’ at court will have access via his or her situational identity to other discourse roles than the ‘interrogated’; the ‘examiner’ at the university will have different discourse roles at his or her disposal than the ‘examined,’ ‘student’, etc. Most central for the sociolinguistics of identity work in interaction, however, is Zimmerman’s third type, that of *transportable identities*, by which he means “latent identities that ‘tag along’ with individuals as they move through their daily routines”, often based on “physical or culturally based insignia”. It is these transportable identities which are meant when we speak of ‘social identities’ in the following. Zimmerman’s model is drawn on in particular in Woolard’s chapter in the present volume.

Treating orderly selection from heterogeneous linguistic resources as a way of symbolising identities in interaction also raises a number of *methodological issues*. Here are just a few of them.

One obvious question is whether all variable realisations can be treated in the same way or whether the approach is limited to salient features (Labov’s stereotypes) – those features of which members of a given speech community are more or less aware. Clearly, these do not exhaust the range of heterogeneity in language. Linguistic heterogeneity may be socially patterned (for instance, across social class, gender or age) without speakers being aware of it. It can be argued of course that awareness does not equal salience. But we are then faced with the methodological issue of how to establish salience, and how to prove co-participants’ orientation a certain identity-relevant category. (For instance, one would want to be careful not to conflate Le Page-type symbolic identification with a certain prestige group with mechanistic accommodation to a particular co-participant’s speech.)

Another methodological problem refers to the suitability of single variable analysis for the investigation of linguistic acts of identity. While variationist studies often focus on one particular variable, interactionally oriented studies usually provide a more holistic picture of a web of interrelated features which is used by a given speaker on a given occasion. This constellation of features may or may not shift over the course of an interaction. This question has received some attention recently and brings us to the notion of sociolinguistic (social, communicative) style.

2. Style in sociolinguistics

2.1. Style as a holistic concept

Sociolinguistic discussions of style often start with a critical appraisal of Labov’s concept of contextual styles (Labov 1972, cf. Coupland 2000 for a critique) and then open up the perspective to theories of social and cultural styles which have played an important role in ethnographically oriented, interactional sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology over the last years. But in fact, Labov’s linear style dimension which is constructed to capture speakers’ monitoring of their own speech production has little if anything to do with modern studies on style in sociolinguistics; the latter follow a very different rationale. In these studies, style is seen as a concept which can overcome the shortcomings of single-variable studies and can integrate linguistic variation (in the narrow sense of the word, i.e. Coupland’s “dialect style”, 2000) into a comprehensive theory of the ways in which choices on all levels of semiotic organisation relate to social practices of sense-making, categorisation, and identity management (cf. Rickford and Eckert 2001: 1). Despite earlier pioneering attempts to move from traditional stylistics (with styles as objects) to a theory of social style and stylisation (with styles as processes, cf. Hinnenkamp and Selting, eds., 1989), and to revise the Labovian approach to variation (Bell’s theory of audience design, 1984, which owes much to Le Page’s acts of identity), style did not make its big appearance on the stage of sociolinguistic research until the 1990s. A number of aspects are important to understand the relevance of style for sociolinguistic research.

First of all, social style is a holistic and multilevel phenomenon. It directly challenges the more traditional approach to linguistic variation which

usually focusses on single variables. As the "California Style Collective" (incl. P. Eckert) stated in an influential paper at NWEAVE 22 (1993): "We are defining style as a clustering of linguistic resources, and an association of that clustering with an identifiable aspect of social practice. ... Rarely can an individual variable be extracted from this style and recognized as meaningful; variables carry such meaning only by virtue of their participation in identifiable personal or group styles" (Manuscript: 14).

Exactly how broad styles need to be defined in order to capture relevant linguistic and social practices is open to debate. It is generally assumed that social-communicative styles, in addition to language choice and linguistic variation in a narrow sense, include prosodic patterns, but also verbal practices of categorisation, pragmatic patterns such as politeness, preferences for specific communicative genres, rhetorical practices, etc. Often, the notion of social style is also taken to include embodied features of verbal and nonverbal actions (voice quality, facial expressions, gesture, 'expressive body language') as well as aesthetic choices ('taste') in appearance, clothes, etc. In the widest sense, style becomes similar to life-style as described by Bourdieu as the surface correlate of habitus (1979 [1984: 171 *et passim*]). Note that any notion of style which includes preferences for certain genres, rhetorical patterns, etc. goes beyond variation studies which are usually restricted to referentially (denotatively) neutral variables. It is obvious that 'style' in the sense of different "ways of speaking" (Hymes 1972) implies more than saying the same thing in different ways. In fact, what can be said and what cannot be said is a central part of a social-communicative style.

The sociolinguistic analysis of style claims, then, that the social meaning of linguistic heterogeneity does not (usually) reside in individual linguistic features but rather in constellations of such features which are interpreted together. If we hear somebody 'speak posh', 'speak like a havak' (immigrant youth, see Deppermann, this volume) or 'speak like an old Nazi' (Günthner, this volume), we do not interpret single variables but a gestalt-like stylistic expression.

Having said that, we immediately need to add that stylistic analysis can also be less comprehensive than traditional variation studies. First of all, there are situations in which a single word or a single vowel can function as a shibboleth – no holistic style analysis, and no statistical averages are necessary to arrive at this interpretation. Perhaps more important, there are many social-communicative styles in which certain features stand out as the most salient ones which are, for instance, used as mock features in stylisa-

tion and crossing. These strategies of social discrimination through language reduce complex styles, but in such a way that they are still easily recognisable. In sum, style in modern sociolinguistic theory is a concept which mediates between linguistic variability and practices of social categorisation of self or other: linguistic variability is seen as a resource for constructing socially interpretable and interpreted styles (Eckert 2004: 43). In doing so, style filters out certain variables and attributes special status to others. Or, to take the perspective of the speakers: participants' representations of styles combine unambiguously indexical core features with fuzzy borders.

But style is not only a holistic and multilevel phenomenon, it is also *socially interpreted*. There is social knowledge involved about how to relate constellations of features to social groups, milieus, life-worlds, etc. How is this knowledge organised, how does it come into being, and how does it relate to communicative practices? At the heart of the answer to this question are processes of opposition-building. Social communicative styles can be considered the outcome of communities' adjustment to their ecological and social-political environment; they have a fundamentally strategic grounding. Social positioning, i.e. finding one's place in society, is one of its motivating forces. Seen from this perspective, styles are constructed so as to build up contrasts between 'us' and 'them', as shown in many studies from Norbert Elias (1939) to Pierre Bourdieu (1979). Or, as Judith Irvine put it recently: "Whatever 'styles' are, in language or elsewhere, they are part of a *system of distinction*, in which a style contrasts with other possible styles, and the social meaning signified by the style contrasts with other social meanings" (2001: 22). The ecological nature of style as a way to position oneself or others in social space implies that the knowledge about relevant oppositions and (consequently) social meanings is in itself socially distributed: what from a distance may look 'all the same' may display a filigrane pattern of distinctive differences when seen under the looking-glass of the social groups directly involved. Here, social space is not organised differently from geographical space (cf. Auer 2005): the raising of std. /ai/ (> MHG /i:/) to [æi] in Swabian and to [ɔi] in Lake Constance Alemannic may sound all the same for a speaker from Hamburg or Munich, since no relevant oppositions are at stake other than between 'Swabian' and 'Northern standard German' or 'Bavarian'; but for speakers in the area itself, the distinction is an unmistakable index to Swabian vs. Badenian affiliation which has played an important role for regional and political identity-building for a long time.

2.2. *Style as social practice*

However, neither Elias, nor Bourdieu nor Irvine give us a clue about how this process of opposition-building is grounded in practice. Features are combined into holistic meta-signs, and they are invested with social meaning through talk; styles emerge from discourse – but how? Explicit social categorisations may serve to establish shared knowledge about how certain constellations of verbal and non-verbal features can and should be socially interpreted. These cooccurrences of overt categorisation and (often stylised) displays of behaviour can link identities and styles and establish indexing relationships between them. But in a community of practice which already shares knowledge about how certain agents stereotypically perform activities, social identities can be indexed (contextualised) by these features alone. On the other hand, explicit self- or other-categorisation which is not supported by stylistic evidence is difficult to imagine. Claims to incumbency in a social category must receive evidence from social style: categorisation without style – without indexing – does not work.

Penelope Eckert has argued in a series of recent publications (see Eckert 2004, 2000, 1996) that style-building occurs in smaller sections of the life-world, which she calls “communities of practice” (after Wenger 1999). The emergence of local styles in such a social environment involves opposition-building, and often the profiling of the opposing spheres (‘we’ and ‘they’) by exaggeration (see Deppermann, this volume; Günthner, this volume; Kotthoff, this volume). Eckert argues that styles are always “processes of bricolage”. In this bricolage, elements from other styles are incorporated (appropriated) as resources which come from “a broad sociolinguistic landscape” (Eckert 1996). But although they carry social meaning (being part of other social styles), this meaning is not simply imported but changed and adapted, sometimes even subverted or converted in stylisation. For instance, Keim (2002) describes how an adolescent girl of a Turkish immigrant background in Germany uses broken *gastarbeiter* German in interaction with her mother. As Keim shows, no identification with the social group of her mother is intended (with whom it is associated in general socio-stylistic knowledge). Rather, the *gastarbeiter* style is subverted to provide the girl with a means to distance herself from her mother. Eckert argues that the origin of social styles lies in individual acts of linguistic choice such as this one. And surely, styles are adapted to changing contexts. However, even though the interpretation of a particular linguistic choice may be locally established and valid, we believe that there needs to

be some consistency in the choice of semiotic features in order for it to be considered a sociolinguistic style in its own right. The construction of a style within and for a community of practice requires *continuity* of semiotic practices across situations. How much continuity is required, and how much variability is possible across situations unless a style become unrecognisable is an open empirical question.

3. Outlook on the following chapters

The following fifteen chapters explore the link between social identity and (social-communicative style) in more detail. They draw on multilingual contexts (in the first part), variation within a single language system (in the second part), and they address issues of styling the other (in the third part). Each part of the book is introduced by a short theoretical and methodological chapter. In the final chapter, John Gumperz and Jenny Cook-Gumperz frame modern sociolinguistic research on identities in the development of the discipline at large and discuss some main points and open questions.

There are two recurring themes which run through the whole book. One is the question of which linguistic variables can become part of social-communicative styles, and thereby serve to positioning the speaker in social space. The first part of the volume looks into bilingual contexts in which switching between or mixing of the two languages indexes some kind of social (self- or other) categorisation. In language choice and code-switching, it may be the mere fact of choosing one language over the other which indexes social categories. Often it is not only the social identity of the speaker but also (or even dominantly) that of the addressee which is at stake here. But some chapters in this part of the book also show that code-switching may be part and parcel of a social-communicative style which includes other stylistic choices, such as the way in which the two languages are spoken. (Standard vs. dialect is an important distinction here.) In yet another case, it is the specific way in which the two languages are combined which becomes relevant as a social index. In the second part of this volume, the linguistic variables used for identity-display and identity-ascription partly fall under the rubric of what could be investigated using the established methodology of variation studies (such as phonetic features), but the papers in this section also make it clear that a style- and identity-oriented approaches quickly go beyond the limits of this approach. Most of the papers in this section include stylistic features which would not

easily fit into the quantitative paradigm, such as politeness strategies, lexical choices, including technical terms and categorizations, and discursive routines and phrases. The chapters in the third part of the book address cases of stylizations in which the linguistic portrayal of the other serves to construe the identity of the self. In these cases, single variables, often used in an exaggerated way, can take on very dense social meanings. But again, several of the studies included in this section show that the traditional variables considered in variation studies are not sufficient to account for the linguistic basis of social categorization; this holds in particular for prosodic stylizations.

The second theme which runs through the chapters of this book is the link between contextualised practices of identity-display and identity-ascription which can and need to be described in their interactional contexts, and their place in/relevance to society at large. Most contributors to this volume subscribe to a (semi-)constructivist point of view according to which small-scale processes of social categorization are constitutive for the working of society; but they would equally agree that social actors which take part in these processes are subject to often unconscious and 'habitualized' constraints. Identity-relevant features may be performed in a context-creating, sometimes intentional way, but they may also be part of the 'habitus' of a speaker which is cannot be manipulated easily. Some papers address these issues directly, such as Inken Keim who argues that style is linked to success in the school system, or Nikolas Coupland who shows the tension between class-based (miners), regionalised (Wales) and milieu-related (power élite) stylisations in Nye Bevan's political speeches in postwar Britain. Other papers refer more indirectly to larger-scale processes of social marginalisation (Auer *et al.*; Deppermann; Bailey) and the rebellion of the marginalised against it (Bierbach and Birken-Silverman; Sebba); to fundamental schisms in a society (East/West Germany: Lieb-scher and Dailey-O'Cain; Catalan/Castilian: Woolard; 'Nazi' vs. 'good' Germans: Günthner); to the interaction between global and local social processes (Androutsopoulos) and to gender as a fundamental orientation line in society (Georgakopoulou). The major structurations of modern societies, from social to ethnic, from global to local, from gender to class, are all reflected in and translated into the socio-linguistic practices of style-formation and identity work in everyday interaction; but they are also formed by these practices which are the site where social structure and its cognitive representation in the individual meet.

Notes

1. We are not concerned with the justification of this discourse about individual identities here, as this has its own cultural and historical embedding.
2. Cf. for instance: "Such mixed varieties may be seen as emblematic of the mixed cultural affiliation" (Pfaff 2003: 209).
3. This, of course, is not to deny that discourses about collective identities and the management of social identity in interaction can be related to each other; however, the link is indirect, complex, and little understood in sociolinguistics.
4. Cf. recently: Bueno Aniola (2007) on the use of the categories *Brasilianer/neeche* ('Brasilians', 'Negroes') vs. *Daitsche* by Brasilians of German descent in Rio Grande do Sul, as well as many contributions in de Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg (eds.) 2006.
5. He and Tabouret-Keller (1985) use the term 'identity' in the sense of social (or ethnic) category, therefore in the plural.
6. A recent German example of how MCDs are developed and used in a community when socio-political changes make it necessary to cope with new realities is the pair *Ossi/Wessi* (an invention of the *Wende* period around 1990 for designating East and West Germans and for linking them to category-bound activities and characteristics; see Hausendorf 2000 for details).

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