

Identity and social meanings in multilingual interactions: linguistic ethnography of an urban street market

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SETTINGS

MAYBACHUFER MARKET

- **Location:** Berlin-Neukölln, Reuterkiez (diverse population)
- Local shopping center & tourist attraction
- Sellers and customers of diverse social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds
- **Multilingual and multiethnic diversity**

OBJECTIVES

- The study explores
- the linguistic resources that the sellers and customers have access to
 - how these resources are used and mixed at the market to (co)construct identities, while indexing different types of belonging

DATA COLLECTION

In the scope of Project A01: linguistic landscape (LL) (55 stalls, 426 signs); linguistic soundscape (4 stalls, 82h recordings): detailed sociolinguistic interviews with cooperating sellers; short interviews with multiple (other) sellers; 224 short interviews with customers; participant observation (3 months at a stall, selling Turkish bread and pastry); ethnographic field notes.

FINDINGS

○ Multilingual features of the market

LL: 9 languages: German, Turkish, English, Arabic, Spanish, French, Italian, Latin, Danish

Seller interviews: (mostly) Turkish and Arabic as L1, German as L2/foreign language, "a little bit of everything"

Customer Interviews: 45 different L1 and 17 different L2

○ Language Choices:



1. in Arabic: "The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: In black seed there is healing for every disease, except the death. (Ibn Majah)"
2. in German: "Black cumin oil. Bye bye Pharmacist"
3. in Turkish: "Cure for all black cumin"

Example 2: Greetings, intercomprehension, code-switching in 3 languages (Seller-Seller conversation in Arabic-German and Turkish-German)

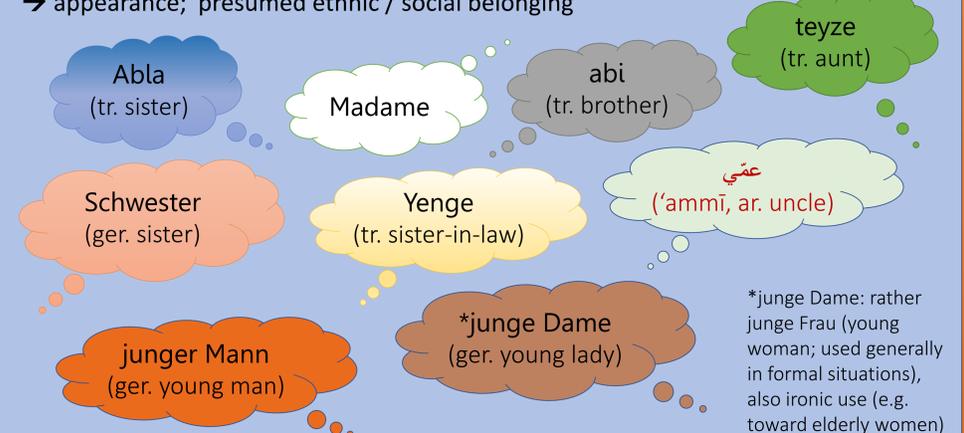


Forms of Address



• Direct addressing in different languages:

→ appearance; presumed ethnic / social belonging



„Angebote let's go aus meine Garten, meine Hühner bittschön!“

„Frische Brot, taze Brot!“

S: Hallo
C: Hello! Eh, what are the ingredients of this?
S: Eh, das is eh Spinat cheese, cheese eh patata
S: Seller C: Customer

Decision factors:

- Assumption of a lingua franca (→ German or Turkish)
- Pre-knowledge about the language spoken by the interlocutor
- Simple reaction to the spoken language
- Spontaneous decision
- Appearance, clothing



○ Co-construction of Identity / Indexing Belonging

Example 1: an excerpt of the sales interactions at the Turkish bread and pastry stall

May_bwB101: a young female customer from the US, whose family lives in Rize, Turkey

May_kwK001: female seller of Turkish origin ; May_kmB001: male seller of Turkish origin

001 May_bwB101: uh turkçe yok <<talks about her friend>>
no Turkish

002 May_kmB001: siz çok güzel türkçe var
≈You have very good Turkish

003 May_bwB101: teşekkürLER (-) uh ailem (-) rizede
Thanks my family (is) in Rize

004 May_kmB001: Rizede /
In Rize?

005 May_bwB101: aMERigali (-)
American

006 May_kmB001: amerikalısınız (-) Rizede /
You are American, in Rize?!

007 May_bwB101: yes (-) evet
yes

008 May_kmB001: trabzonda değil mi ?
Not in Trabzon?

009 May_bwB101: no (-) rize

010 May_kmB001: gelin trabzona (-) biz trabzonluyuz
Come to Trabzon. We are from Trabzon.

011 May_bwB101: uh-huh

012 May_kmB001: hamsi yeriz orda (-) hamsi
we eat hamsi (European anchovy) there, hamsi

[...]

024 May_kmB001: rizede ne yapıyorsunuz ?
What are you doing in Rize?

025 May_bwB101: hiç (-)
nothing

026 May_kmB001: Hiç /
nothing?

027 May_bwB101: (-) aMA: geçen uhm (-) <<she can't find the word>>
But last -

028 May_kmB001: sene
year

029 May_bwB101: yıl (-) ya geçen (-) or geçen yıl
Year last last year

030 May_kwK001: geçen yıl /
Last year

031 May_bwB101: hopefully

[...]

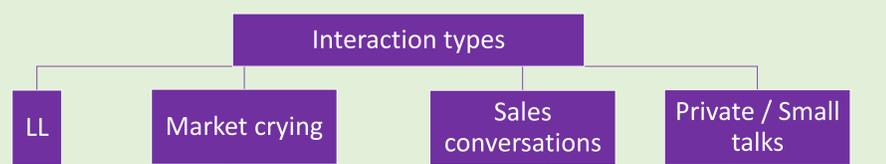
042 May_kmB001: (-) yenge görüyo musun (-) bizim hemşeri
Do you see, Yenge? Our fellow-townswoman

[...]

045 May_kmB001: amerikalı hemşerimiz
≈ Our American fellow-townswomen

- Sympathy towards the speaker of their heritage language → shifting in language, simplifications, repetitions and ratifications
- Lexical and grammatical choices indexing spatial, temporal and social belonging, distancing, Zusammengehörigkeit (in bold)

RESULTS



use of dominant languages → addressing larger customer groups

Multiple language use (heritage and other) → context and individual customer related

- German as lingua franca; Turkish as dominant heritage language; English as international language + commercial value (language prestige)
- Access to rich and mixed linguistic resources → use of new and non-canonical forms, code & register switching, intercomprehension
- **Language attitudes and identity constructions:**
 - The game of guessing the language, country of origin, ethnic belonging
 - Addressing according to presumed ethnic and/or social belonging
 - Trying to speak the language of the interlocutor:
 - Seller towards seller: out of solidarity and neighborhood
 - Sellers towards customers: marketing strategy, show/gain sympathy, reflect multicultural nature, find common ground
 - Customers towards sellers: to show/gain sympathy, find common ground, get discount