

National Varieties of German outside Germany: A European Perspective

Gabrielle Hogan-Brun (ed.)

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Reviewed by Sally Johnson

This volume brings together a collection of papers which explore the status of German outside Germany, but within a specifically European context. In her introductory chapter, Hogan-Brun describes how the huge socio-political transformations which have taken place since the fall of the Eastern Bloc have impacted considerably on the situation of German. Adopting an 'ecolinguistic' perspective, she therefore argues how this new situation requires a careful reconsideration of the interrelationship between the German language and its environment, a relationship consisting of four main dimensions: socio-psychological, political/legal, cultural, and economic (p.27).

Whilst it is clear that the specific 'ecosystems' in which German exists vary greatly between the different German-speaking regions and nations, Stephen Barbour's contribution shows how German speakers outside of Germany have one key problem in common: they all suffer in some way from the ambiguity which has historically surrounded the term 'deutsch' as a linguistic label, on the one hand, and as an ethnic category, on the other - an ambiguity which continues to fuel the myth of Germany as the home of 'authentic' German and of varieties of German spoken elsewhere as somehow 'deviant' and/or 'inferior'.

Following Stefan Wolff's comparative analysis of the legal and political status of German as a minority language in Denmark, Belgium, France, and Italy, the remaining chapters each focus on the use of the language in one particular region or country, drawing on various dimensions of the ecolinguistic perspective set out by Hogan-Brun, e.g. Switzerland (Felicity Rash), Austria (Victoria Martin), Old and New Belgium (Peter Nelde and Jeroen Darquennes), Luxembourg (Gerald Newton), South

Tyrol, Italy (Antony Alcock), Nordslesvig, Denmark (Karen Margrethe Pedersen), Alsace, France (Judith Broadbridge) and finally Hungary (Patrick Stevenson).

In my experience of teaching undergraduate courses on German sociolinguistics, I have always found students keen to learn more about the German language outside of Germany. This is especially true for those who combine the study of German with another language such as French or Italian. This book will therefore be a very welcome addition to reading lists for such courses, given its scope and the wealth of up-to-date information it contains. Like Barbour (p.46-7), I would genuinely hope that such a broader perspective on the German language might help in some way to dispel the myths and ambiguities to which he refers in his chapter. Whether the book can also help to arrest the depressing decline in interest in the German language in the British education system more generally, I cannot say. However, it is certainly a step in the right direction, and for that Hogan-Brun and her contributors are to be thanked.

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