Formation of and change in regiolects and (regional) dialects in German

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Abstract
Unlike other major European languages, in German, regiolect and regional dialect represent two clearly distinct varieties. This is true not only in terms of their linguistic status, but also with regard to their differential evaluation by those who speak and hear them and their disparate roles in recent language change. This article begins with some conceptual clarification and a consideration of the often misunderstood relation between regiolect and the dialect-standard continuum. It then examines the separate emergence of the two varieties and their individual development since 1880 (for the regional dialects) and 1930 (for the regiolects). The conclusions offer an insight into the current state of German regional languages as a whole on the basis of various current long-term projects focussed on dialect-standard variation in German.

1. Introduction
Readers less familiar with the German language situation may be surprised to discover that the English terms regiolect and regional dialect, at first glance quite close in meaning, actually denotate a highly relevant linguistic distinction. Is there not almost automatically a degree of overlap between an evolving dialect and a variety shaped by variants intermediate between standard and dialect, such as a regiolect or tussentaal? After all, a dialect-standard continuum has long been posited for certain areas within Germany (cf. Bellmann 1997), and the dialect of younger generations has even been classified as an Umgangssprache (in the sense of “regiolect”, cf. Mihm 2000:2119). Recent studies of regionally marked German show, however, that regiolect and the evolving dialect are two quite distinct varieties, both from a speaker/hearer perspective and according to linguistic criteria. Simplifying slightly, a German speaker can generally understand any German regiolect, regardless of whether it is Bavarian, Ripuarian or Saxon. The difficulty in understanding is no greater than it would be for a native English speaker confronted with, say, Southern American English. However, German native speakers do not usually understand regional dialects from outside their home region. Contemporary
German native speakers dealing with dialect speakers from other regions – independent of whether they speak in an old base dialect or a modern regional one – find themselves in a situation similar to that of an English native speaker not raised in Yorkshire when confronted with the spoken version of a text like the following:

‘Maister coom hither! Miss Cathy’s riven th’back off “Th’Helmet uh Salvation,” un’ Heathcliff’s pawsed his fit intuh t’first part uh “T’Brooad Way to Destruction!” It’s fair flaysome ut yah let ‘em goa on this gait. Ech! Th’owd man ud uh laced ’em properly – bud he’s goan!’

The reason for this clear distinction between the regiolect and regional dialect varieties in German lies in their differing historical origins. The modern German regiolects evolved from the precursor varieties of the contemporary spoken standard, whereas the modern regional dialects represent a continuation of the German base dialects of the 19th century, which have merely evolved a little from a means of primarily single-location communication to one covering confined regions.

Chapter 2 of this contribution is devoted to a conceptual clarification of the (for the development of modern regional languages decisive) distinction between regiolect and (regional) dialect, together with a consideration of the often misunderstood connection between regiolect and the dialect-standard continuum or the concept of diaglossia.

Chapter 3 then offers a brief sketch of the emergence of the modern German regional languages. The starting points were the duplex (horizontal and vertical) variety formations, which arose in the 18th and 19th century out of the old ‘broad landscape’ dialect formations and their corresponding pronunciations of the written standard (i.e., regional or ‘landscape-based’ High German). The actual establishment of the modern regional languages began around 1930 with the radio-based spread of the supraregional standard pronunciation norms of 1898, which set in train a devaluation of the old prestige varieties.

Chapter 4 presents an overview of how the dialect variety has developed since 1880, which can be followed precisely in Upper and West Middle German using data from the DiWA project (“Digital Wenker Atlas”; Herrgen and Schmidt 2001-2009).

1 Emily Brontë’s 1847 rendering of the Yorkshire (regional) dialect, from, of course, Wuthering Heights. The quotation is from the original edition, prior to her sister Charlotte’s 1850 revisions designed to make the dialect of the servant Joseph more readable for a southern audience [taken from the 1976 edition, edited by H. Marsden and I. Jack. Oxford Clarendon Press, p 26; cf. Wiltshire 2005].
In Chapter 5, a cluster of major projects launched between 2006 and 2008 and aimed at a fresh systematic investigation of dialect-standard variation in German are briefly introduced, and then, drawing on initial findings from the furthest advanced of these projects, REDE ("regionalsprache.de"), an insight into the current state of development of the German regional languages in total, but especially the regiolects, is offered.

2. Distinguishing between regiolect and regional dialect

2.1. Solving the problem of how to distinguish the two

Assessed using external criteria, i.e., in terms of sets of variants, the variants intermediate between standard language and base dialect that linguists find in any collection of recordings of regionally marked speech cannot be satisfactorily assigned to specific varieties: just as there is no homogeneous language, there are no homogeneous varieties. Yet at the same time, all of the varieties of a language possess a pool (however small) of common variants. But the sets of variants a linguist encounters in recordings of various speakers in a range of contexts are neither disjunct nor discrete (i.e., there are no strict either/or-relations): they do not change dramatically from one recording context to the next. When the sets of variants produced by differing groups of speakers in various situations are compared, we find only loose implicational relations between subsets of variants that correlate more or less clearly with types of contexts (for German cf., say, Lausberg 1993:42-53; Salewski 1998:108-123; Lenz 2003:187-192). Distinctions based on quantitative criteria may be of practical benefit when conducting research, but in the final instance they are unsatisfactory (cf. Schmidt 2005:63-66 on the theoretical problems associated with delimiting varieties).

Apparently irresolvable when viewed from the outside, this problem of the absence of an unambiguous correspondence between sets of variants and varieties stands in stark contrast to a surprisingly clear-cut cognitive/linguistic distinction, recognized even by non-linguists. Within a language complex (Gesamtsprache) there are linguistic differences that individuals can essentially surmount without difficulties. This is especially true of differences in the lexicon or usage rules. Anyone moving to a new region in Germany, for instance, will soon master the regional terms for various groceries and the appropriate greeting rituals with little effort. Other differences, even within the same region, however, can prove to be "hard" linguistic/cognitive barriers for an individual: barriers which can well present a lifelong problem and are sociolinguistically extremely significant. Indicators for such barriers include hypercorrections, avoidance strategies and sanctions (e.g., the ridicule attracted by shibboleths). Such clear linguistic/cognitive barriers are first illustrated using the example...
of regional speech from Moselle Franconia (in the region of the Eifel and Hunsrück mountains, including the cities of Trier and Koblenz) and then formally defined in terms of theory. (The dialect examples are drawn from the small Moselle-Franconian town of Mayen, the author’s childhood hometown.)

In formal contexts, the educated Moselle-Franconian regiolect differs in only minor points from the standard pronunciation of the German Federal Republic:

1. the Standard German phonemic opposition between /ç, .../ and /ʃ/ (also found in the old dialect) has collapsed in the regiolect to /ʃ/ alone (i.e., coronalization; e.g., [ʃ] for ich ‘I’ and [tʃ] Tisch ‘table’);
2. there are minor word prosodic variations, which are based on the residual Middle-Franconian tone accents;
3. in various postvocalic consonant clusters, /ʀ/ is pronounced [x] (e.g., [vɔxt] Wort ‘word’);
4. in initial consonant clusters, voiced plosives are devoiced (e.g., [plau] blau ‘blue’);
5. initial /pf/ is pronounced /f/ (e.g., in Pfund ‘pound’).

Speakers usually retain differences (3) to (5), even when attempting to speak in standard pronunciation, because they are generally unaware that the standard language differs in this respect. Differences (1) and (2), each uniquely salient,2 are also retained in intended Standard German, because – in linguistic terms – they involve differences between two phonological/prosodic systems which cannot be circumvented with simple adaptive rules. In (1), speakers need to learn not only a new sound they do not yet command ([ç]) – a task some successfully master, others not – but far more decisively, for every word that contains a regiolectal /ʃ/-phoneme, they need to learn whether they can retain their regiolectal phoneme or whether they have to pronounce the newly learned [ç]-sound instead. A word-for-word recoding of the individual’s phonological system is necessary here, requiring a long phase of independent learning. Most speakers stumble at this hurdle.3 Attempts to acquire the

2 See Herrgen and Schmidt (1985:33) on coronalization’s high degree of salience; on their own, the Middle-Franconian tone accents are not a salient feature, but their presence does lead listeners to classify speech samples otherwise free of (segmental) regionalisms as being from the Moselle-Franconian regional language (cf. Purschke 2011).
3 The relative insurmountability of this hurdle is indicated by Lenz (2003), in which, on average, the Wittlich informants attempting to speak Standard German produced the [ç] variant only four percent of the time and even among the younger urban speakers, with a demonstrably high awareness of how the Standard differed, the rate at which the Standard variant was produced in correct distribution peaked at 32 percent (cf. Lenz...
standard phonological system often lead to hypercorrections, e.g., [tɪç] for Tisch ‘table’, [müçən] for mischen ‘to mix’), which are often ridiculed by speakers who have mastered the standard language phonemic system.

It is important to make clear at this point that the problem of the hard boundary between standard language and regiolect also affects speakers of the standard who wish to use the regiolect. One example of such a case is the following. Even where their speech is otherwise segmentally completely identical to standard spoken German, speakers of the Moselle-Franconian regiolect can be recognized by prosodic differences attributable to the tone accents of their regiolect (cf. Purschke 2011). Once their primary linguistic socialization has been completed, it is simply not possible for speakers of Standard German to acquire the Middle-Franconian tone accents. Theoretically, they could learn the appropriate tone curves for isolated words. They could even learn which tone accent should be pronounced in every word with a long core syllable, including the additional morphological rules (changing tone accent with datives, plurals, comparatives) which apply. But it remains completely impossible for them to acquire the complex phonetic modulation that results from the interplay of lexical and intonational tones under a wide range of expressive conditions and accentuations (cf., most recently, Werth 2011). Comic or exaggerated imitations (as in cabaret acts or during Karneval) may be achievable, but nothing that native speakers would consider acceptable.

It is of decisive importance for an understanding of dialect-standard variation in German to appreciate that clear linguistic/cognitive “barriers” based on systemic (linguistic) differences separate not only regiolect from standard spoken language, but also, in equal measure, regiolect from dialect. It is true that there is a continuum within the regiolect of variants closer to or further from the standard, but this only exists “beyond” the clear boundary that marks off the dialect.

In our example, the connection is as follows. An increasing number of speakers of the Moselle-Franconian regional language (generally younger, urban speakers) possess only monovarietal competence, namely in the regiolect. In their efforts to teach their children “good” German, even those parents who are competent dialect speakers avoid speaking dialect during their children’s primary language acquisition phase and use only their “best High German”, i.e., the regiolect. The monovarietal regiolect speakers thus raised usually acquire only partial and passive competence in the dialect. As a result, they are able to make consistent use of additional easily learnable regionalisms (i.e.,

2003:167-169, 213). These results can only be explained if, for systemic contrasts, the acquisition of production rules for a nonprimary oral variety is largely independent of both an active competence in the written standard and a passive, media-borne competence that must be presumed for all contemporary informants.
individual high-frequency words like *dat, wat, et, of, net for das, was, es, auf, nicht*; positional *g*-spirantization; certain allophonic adaptations) when the situation requires it, but they fail at the hurdle of the dialect boundary, that is to *say* there where the phonological or morphosyntactic system of the dialect is structurally different to that of the regiolect. For instance, the distinction between MHG *ei* and *i* is maintained in the dialect but has collapsed in the regiolect (and in Standard German), e.g., dialectal [baːn] *Bein* ‘leg’ vs. [ɾɛɪf] *Reibe* ‘grater, rasp’. Another example is the complex inflectional morphology of the dialectal verbs with its many small classes. To circumvent the first of these two examples, regiolect speakers would need to perform a word-for-word recording of their individual phonological systems, just like the requirement at the variety boundary separating off the standard language; in the latter case, a complete relearning of the verbal inflectional classes and paradigms would be needed. Here too, individual attempts to overcome this second variety boundary often lead to hyperforms (in this instance hyperdialectalisms) that are sanctioned with ridicule by dialect speakers. It is completely irrelevant, in terms of both the individual and the linguistic analysis of varietal boundaries, whether the dialectal phoneme, which a regiolect speaker cannot reliably assign to specific words, is a purely local or restrictedly regional base dialectal phoneme (e.g., /aː/ for MHG *ei*, as in [baːn] *Bein* ‘leg’ etc.) or a progressive regional dialectal one (e.g., /ɛː/ for MHG *ei*, as in [bɛːn] *Bein*, etc.).

2.2. Theoretical implications and definitions

The problem posed by the fact that varieties cannot be adequately distinguished from one another using purely external criteria, i.e. in terms of sets of variants, can be resolved by applying the defining criterion of clear differences in speakers’ core linguistic competence, differences which are also highly sociolinguistically significant. The core area consists of the fundamental sign-generating and linking rules, i.e., the rules of the phonological/prosodic and morphosyntactic subsystems. If structural differences pertain here within a language, then these constitute *full varieties*. They need to be distinguished from linguistic differences that rest solely on lexical specializations and usage preferences (giving rise to *sectoral varieties*) and from social/contextual variation within full varieties (known as *speech levels*):

*Full varieties* can be specified as sectors of linguistic knowledge defined by independent prosodic/phonological and morphosyntactic structures on the basis of which individuals or groups of speakers in-

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4 The ability to control such behaviour is described later as being able to shift between speech levels.
teract in particular situations. The full varieties of a language are semi-discrete and interdependent. The minimal and necessary criterion is the presence of at least one “idiovarietal” element or structural feature in the prosodic/phonological or morphosyntactic subsystems. Full varieties must be distinguished from (1) sectoral varieties such as technical jargons (*Fachsprachen*), which are based on a full variety (whether standard or dialect) and feature restricted, sectoral, usually lexical distinctions and substitutions and in which an individual’s competence is subject to continual, lifelong change, and from (2) speech levels (*Sprechlagen*), which arise from conventional allophonic and allomorphic variation within a full variety in correlation with social, contextual and spatial factors. (Schmidt 2010a:215)

Regiolect und dialect can be easily defined on the basis of the full variety concept. The distinguishing criteria are geographical range and – where there is more than one non-standard full variety – position within the vertical hierarchy of varieties: accordingly, *regiolect* should be defined as a supraregional nonstandard full variety and *dialect* as the least standard and most local (regionally restricted) full variety.

If we now provisionally group together the varieties and associated speech levels found below the standard variety as a *modern regional language*, then we obtain the following picture for the most comprehensively analysed regional language to date, Moselle-Franconian (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Varieties and associated speech levels found below the standard variety in modern regional Moselle-Franconian](image-url)
Alexandra Lenz has analysed the Moselle-Franconian regional language spoken in the small town of Wittlich and its environs using tape recordings of fifty speakers with various social attributes in four survey contexts. None of the fifty had mastery of the standard spoken language. Beneath the standard pronunciation norm, two clear full varieties could be found, delineated by structural differences in core phonological linguistic competence and by hyperforms: the regiolect and the dialect. By applying statistical techniques (cluster analysis) to the constellations of variables found in the various survey contexts, Lenz was able to distinguish three speech levels (regional accent, upper nonstandard and lower nonstandard) within the full variety of the regiolect, and another two speech levels within dialect full variety: base dialect and regional dialect. One of her most important findings is that two distinct types of speaker with completely different levels of competence in the varieties are to be found within the Moselle-Franconian regional language area (cf. Lenz 2003:402): (1) speakers with bivarietal competence, who switch between dialect and regiolect depending on the communicative context (mostly older speakers from the town or rural speakers of all generations) and (2) speakers with monovarietal competence, who use and command just the regiolect (younger town-dwelling speakers). Two subtypes can be detected among the latter. Subtype (2a) are speakers who use the same speech levels independent of the communicative context (“moveless” speakers); subtype (2b) are those who change their regiolectal speech levels depending upon whom they are speaking to (“shifters”). Hence only this latter subtype of speaker can be described as using a varietal continuum (i.e., diaglossia) – to be precise, a continuum lying fully within the full variety of regiolect.

The central finding to be drawn from Lenz’s pioneering study is as follows. Below the surface of what appears from the outside as intermingled sets of variants produced in differing survey contexts by different groups of speakers from a single region in an amorphous dialect-standard continuum, a regional language with a well-differentiated structure and clear divisions can be found when the varietal competence of different types of speakers and their speech behaviour in various communicative contexts is carefully analysed. But this also means, at least for the modern German regional languages, that so long an adequate number of such analyses is not yet available, any attempt to characterize entire linguistic regions as having a specific type of repertoire should be seen as premature (cf. in contrast Auer 2005:24, who sweepingly classifies the Moselle-Franconian area as “type C: diaglossia”).

3. Emergence of the modern regional languages and regiolects
The Standard German spoken language is only a little over one hundred years old. In 1898, a codified “stage pronunciation” norm was developed for the...
theatre (Siebs 1898), an artificially accentuated language (Überlautung) with a North German basis in which speakers had to be especially trained. With the coming of radio at the end of the 1920s, professional announcers initially made use of this stage pronunciation. When spoken by untrained announcers following the Second World War, it developed into the current "moderate cultivated pronunciation".

What was the situation like before this? The German written standard evolved in a process of continual adjustment over centuries, essentially between 1350 and circa 1650. It is assumed that small clusters of elites relatively soon began to make this new written standard the basis of their spoken language use (forming acrolects; cf. Mihm 2003). For the vast majority of speakers, however, the precursors of today’s dialects were the only spoken varieties of German they knew. The first definite evidence for the use of a second oral variety (alongside the dialects and oriented to the written standard) by broad sections of the population comes from Weinrich 1720 (page e 5-6), among educated urban speakers in the central German region around Henneberg. By 1800, a second oral variety had become established in all regions (lastly Switzerland). With the introduction of compulsory schooling after 1800, these “written oriented” oral varieties were taught in all German-speaking regions and were soon universally known. Spoken German had become a two-variety language. The second spoken variety was clearly no standard language: it was neither codified nor standardized and above all it was inconsistent, varying from region to region. Nonetheless, two common terms were used to refer to it. Firstly, because of the common orientation to the written norm, its regional forms were described as Schriftdeutsch ‘written German’ (as it is still known in Switzerland). Secondly, given the Middle and Upper German basis of the written norm it was also known as “High German” (i.e., initially a geographical description). Since High German (Hochdeutsch) remains a label for the German norm, but is now used for the new spoken standard, I propose referring to the old oral prestige varieties of the 18th to early 20th century as regional (or “landscape-based”) High German.

5 See Besch (2003) and Mattheier (2003) on the establishment of the New High German written standard in the various regions. According to Wiesinger (2000:1932-1933), it had become established as a written “compromise” in protestant central and northern Germany by around 1650, in Switzerland by around 1730, in Austria by around 1750 and finally in Bavaria (1760). The earliest indicators of the “oralization” of the emergent new variety among the social and intellectual elite (religious contexts aside) are found in the Middle German area from 1603 on and in the Low German language area from the second half of the 17th century (cf. Wiesinger 2000:1934-1941). In Switzerland as late as 1819 they do not seem to have played any significant role (cf. Stalder 1819:9).
The linguistic structure of regional High German was a product of its origins: in their attempts to pronounce the written language, speakers could only make use of their dialectal phonemic systems. So, for instance, since the Saxon dialects did not discriminate between voiced and unvoiced plosives, the spoken regional High German of the region also failed to distinguish the corresponding graphemes (e.g., <t> and <d>). Where, however, the Palatinate dialects featured phonemic oppositions for which the written code only had one grapheme, e.g., between /o/ vs. /ɔ/ in short vowels, both written <o>, the dialectal opposition was retained in their spoken regional High German. The same applied to the retention of prosodic oppositions such as the Middle-Franconian tone accents for instance. The key point here is that only the broad regional phonological common ground of the historical dialect formations could furnish the basis for the respective pronunciations of the written standard, not the phonologies of the local base dialects. The alignment/calibration of these commonalities (i.e., the synchronization) took place within educational institutions, at first in the institutions responsible for educating clergy and teachers, and then in the schools of the 19th century. This resulted in uncodified conventions for the respective forms of regional High German. In this way, duplex (horizontal and vertical) variety formations arose all over the German-speaking area, the linguistic bases of which were the phonological/prosodic common grounds of the historical dialect formations, which—insofar as they could be applied to the written standard—also shaped the respective regional High German.

The actual origins of the modern German regional languages can be described very simply in light of the preceding. With the distribution via radio (from 1930 on) and television (from 1950) of the supraregional and codified standard pronunciation derived from the stage pronunciation rules, a national pronunciation norm effectively became communicatively accessible for all listeners for the first time. To the degree that the new norm was accepted, this led, in a process which unfolded from north to south, to a re-evaluation, more precisely devaluation, of the old regional High German. Increasingly it was no longer seen as “High German”, i.e., as a prestige variety, but rather as a regionally restricted one. The devaluation process is reflected in labels for it such as *Umgangssprache* ‘vernacular’ (also used by nonlinguists, others of whom speak of “impure or coloured High German”, cf. Lenz 2003:336) or the older linguistic descriptor of “substandard”, which is increasingly giving way to the more neutral term “regiolect”. With the re-evaluation of the old regional High German as a regiolect, the linguistic status of duplex variety formations, which continued to be actively used and to evolve, also changed. Since they each consist of several oral varieties, they retain the status of languages, but since all the vertical varieties of the duplex formations are now perceived as regionally restricted in scope, they are now, in linguistic terms, regional languages. In closing, we can thus define a modern regional language in the light of the his-
torical origins of these variety formations and their current linguistic status; it is an aggregate of varieties and speech levels unified by mesosynchronizations\(^6\) and bounded horizontally by the structural boundaries of the dialect formations or regions and vertically by its differences to the national oralization norms of the standard variety. (Schmidt 2010a: 217)

Figure 2. Devaluation of regional High German

4. From old (localized) base dialects to regional dialects

German offers a unique resource for investigations of the development of the dialect variety. For large parts of the Upper and West Middle German regions, developments in the dialects can be followed in precise detail over more than a century. Around 1880, conscripting elementary school teachers as lay field-workers, Georg Wenker (indirectly) surveyed carefully chosen aspects of dialectal phonology and morphology at each of around 44,000 school locations from across the German Empire of the time. Doubts about the validity of this survey led to repeated replications and extensions throughout the 20th century, using the direct survey methods of the time ('landscape' grammars in 1908, sound recordings after 1937, and modern regional atlases since 1970). At best, comparable distribution data from up to four periods are available. The hand-

\(^6\) By mesosynchronization we mean the calibration of competence in "a series of parallel acts of synchronization, performed by individuals in personal contact situations, which lead to the establishment of common context-dependent linguistic knowledge" (Schmidt 2010:213).
drawn original maps from Georg Wenker's *Sprachatlas des Deutschen Reichs* (1887-1923) together with all of the directly comparable maps and sound recordings from more recent surveys are readily accessible via the internet, where a semitransparent overlay tool aids analysis of the maps (in DiWA [Herrgen and Schmidt 2001-2009, <http://www.diwa.info>]). After almost a decade of DiWA-based comparative analysis, we now know that problems with the validity of the data only affect particular segments of the data. In the majority of cases, the sheer wealth of data, especially comparisons with the roughly contemporaneous (to Wenker) and phonetically precise Neogrammarian dialect monographs, allows a positive validation of the Wenker data and the entire linguistic dynamic process since (cf. Schmidt 2010b).

What have been the developments within the German variety of dialect, as far as we can follow them using solid data? To date, practically all analyses of the dynamics of the German dialects in the 20th century (cf. the overview in Schmidt and Herrgen 2011: chapter 4.2) show that the phonological and morphological boundaries of the historical dialect formations have remained stable since 1880 and, equally importantly, that the old systemic phonological/prosodic and morphological distinctions from the standard language and from the regiolect have also been retained. Well-defined exceptions such as interdialectal phoneme collisions in historical transition zones confirm the rule (cf. Schmidt and Herrgen 2011: chapter 4.2.3). Within the old dialect formations, the level of change is fairly negligible. Attempts to quantify it have shown that comparing the variants found in the Wenker survey of 1880 with those from the modern Bavarian atlases (1980-2000) gives a correlation of 0.9 (cf. Lameli in preparation) or that a reduction in dialectality (measured as phonetic distance) of just six percent is found between two age cohorts a generation apart (*Mittelrheinische Sprachatlas* [MRhSA; Bellmann et al. 1994-2002]: farmers over 70 years old vs. 30-40 year-old commuters). Described qualitatively, the dominant change is the regional levelling: highly localized peculiarities (the defining characteristics of the base dialects) are being abandoned step-by-step in favour of forms with broader regional currency: the old base dialects are being converted into regional dialects. How this is happening can be demonstrated via the “textbook example” shown in Maps 1 and 2. Map 1 shows a detail from the Wenker map for *weh* ‘sore’, which represents the historical /eː/ phoneme (< MHG ê): All that is of interest for us here is that the dominant form in the Moselle-Franconian region in the north (the violet isogloss) was *wie* [viː] while in the Rhine-Franconian region to the south (brownish isogloss) it was *we* [veː] and that at the border to Luxemburg and Lorraine (now part of France) a highly heterogeneous relict zone (marked out with a blue frame) was to be found, with forms which varied from location to location ([viː] = violet symbols; [vɛ͡ɪ] = green symbols; [via] = blue symbols and [veː] = the dominant form, indicated by the absence of a symbol over the
location marker). The relict zone thus features textbook base-dialectal differences. Map 2 shows the development of the dialect through a comparison of three sets of data: Wenker’s 1880 survey, the older generation of informants from the MRhSA (1980), and the younger MRhSA generation (1985). The three smaller maps are redrafted versions of the original maps. They show symbols for forms which differ from the relevant dominant form (the violet or brownish shading) only at locations for which data from both later surveys (with markedly fewer survey locations) are also available, making a direct comparison between the different surveys possible (See Schmidt 2010b on the construction of a dynamic linguistic map). Map 2 ideally demonstrates the development of the old base dialects into a regional dialect: the old structural boundary between the Moselle-Franconian and the Rhine-Franconian regions (shown by the shading) remains unchanged, the relict zone becomes progressively smaller and simultaneously more internally homogeneous until it practically disappears, becoming absorbed into the surrounding Rhine-Franconian broad-regional dialect (for a more detailed analysis, including more minor developments not treated here, see Schmidt and Herrgen 2011: chapter 4.2.4).

Map 1. Detail from the Wenker map for weh ‘sore’
Map 2. Weh ‘sore’ in Wenker’s 1880 survey, the older generation of informants from the MRhSA (1980), and the younger MRhSA generation (1985).

It should be noted that the evolution into a regional dialect is effectively a broad regional levelling within the old dialect formations, in which those forms which dominate in the old dialects (i.e., the most frequent) generally “win out”. In this process, whether or not the most frequent old dialectal form is the same as the standard language or the regiolectal form (as in the Rhine-Franconian dialect in Map 2) plays only a subordinate role. If the most common old-dialectal form differs from the standard language equivalent, this results in a development away from the standard (cf. Herrgen 2010:678-680 and Schmidt 2010a:208-209). The only role the standard language and the regiolect play in this linguistic dynamic process is to affect its speed: where, historically, the standard and the regiolectal forms match with the most frequent old dialectal form, the process is accelerated.

This process is in principle easy to explain. Since the second half of the 19th century, Germany has been marked by a high degree of short-distance internal
The highly localized communicative relations that originally dominated have given way to a regionalization of communication, especially in rural areas, a trend which accelerated in the 20th century. From a linguistic point of view, this has led and continues to lead to a constant recalibration of differences in dialectal competence in regionally shaped speech acts (i.e., mesosynchronization). Whilst the use of locally specific forms in communication with speakers of neighbouring dialects leads to negative feedback and thus to individual modifications of competence, the regionally dominant forms are understood without difficulty (receive positive feedback) and lead to stabilization of the individual’s competence.

A further, final point should be noted. It goes without saying that the development from base to regional dialect sketched here is only valid for the dwindling number of dialect competent speakers, that is, in Germany (where school attendance has been compulsory since 1800) only for those speakers with bivarietal competence. But even within this group of speakers there appear to be major differences. The evolution from base to regional dialect sketched here has been solidly demonstrated for the Upper German and parts of the West Middle German area, for which modern linguistic atlases are available and where regional communication between dialect competent strangers continues to be pitched in dialect. Studies in North and East Hessa and of Low German indicate that regional communicative behaviour vis-à-vis strangers is distinctly different: when talking to outsiders the regiolect is generally used, and the dialect is exclusively reserved for communication partners with whom one grew up in the same village together. The few pertinent studies available to date indicate that in those regions in which the dialect, albeit in a changed manner, continues to be used primarily as a means of local communication, the development described above has not taken place. In them, the dialect has remained virtually unchanged since Wenker’s survey, i.e., the base dialect is largely stable (see Paulus 2005 und Weber 2002 on East and North Hessian; Smits [2007:312-313] on Low German).

5. Investigating the current state of development of the German modern regional languages: The “regionalsprache.de” (REDE) project

Whilst the development of the dialect variety in German can be closely followed, thanks as we have seen to an exceptionally favourable research context, studies of the regiolect variety, indeed the modern regional languages as a whole, face a completely different picture. Although, as with other major languages, plenty of variation linguistic and sociolinguistic studies are available, they do not provide a basis for an empirically secure overview. Werner König’s (1997:252) dictum remains true: “Zu verschieden sind die jeweiligen Versuch-
sanordnungen [...], zu verschieden auch der jeweils beschriebene Punkt in der schiefen Ebene [...] zwischen den höchsten und niedrigeren Sprachformen."

In light of this “empirical deficit” (Schmidt 1998:175), any overview account must be essentially hypothetical in character (cf. for instance, Stickel (ed.) 1997; Mihm [2000: 2113-2122]; and Auer 2005). In the final instance, they can only be based upon extrapolations from individual, virtually incompatible studies. Given that in popular usage the term “dialect” is highly ambiguous in German, sometimes referring to the dialect variety, at other times to the regiolect, the results of public opinion studies in which lay speakers are asked about their command and use of “dialect” are fundamentally dubious. In the context of such survey data from the “new” German states, Niebaum and Macha (2006:171) even go so far as to speak of “confusion”.

Against the background of this dissatisfying research situation, three major complementary projects targeted at a fresh systematic survey of dialect-standard variation in German were launched between 2006 and 2008: The “Deutsch heute” project (IDS Mannheim), following König (1989), aims to survey near-standard variation in the speech of informants of both sexes with the highest level of secondary education from all of the German-speaking countries (160 locations; cf. Brinckmann et al. 2008); the “Sprachvariation in Norddeutschland (SiN)” project (Universities of Bielefeld, Frankfurt/Oder, Hamburg, Kiel, Münster, and Potsdam) sets out to examine the entire variative spectrum of female informants of various ages and differing dialect competence from 36 small North German towns (cf. Schröder and Elmentaler 2009); the goal of the “regionalsprache.de (REDE)” project (Marburg) is to capture the entire variative spectrum of male informants of different ages and social backgrounds from 150 locations across the German Federal Republic.

As the REDE project is the furthest advanced of these in terms of the comparative analysis across space, its initial findings will be presented here so as to offer an insight into the current state of development of the German regional languages as a whole, and the regiolects in particular.

5.1 Groups of speakers and survey contexts
At each location, three groups of speakers are examined in REDE: a representative of the older generation (a so-called “NORM”), two police officers as representatives of the average speaker of the modern regional language (middle generation, middle level of education and social status, communicative occupation), and a representative of the potentially progressive type of speaker (16-20 years old, higher secondary education).

The six survey contexts have been selected so as to capture well-defined segments of the informants’ dialect-standard variation (performance and competence) spectrum. With one exception, these are contexts that have
proven, in variation linguistic studies of German since 1970, to be particularly suited to surveys of competence and usage at the poles of the informants’ individual spectra and to at the same time offer good comparability across space (cf. Schmidt and Herrgen 2011: chapter 4.3.2). The contexts are:

Competence at the standard pole:
- Reading aloud a standard phonetic comparative text (‘The North Wind and the Sun’, in German)
- Rendering historical recordings of Wenker sentences in dialect into “best High German”

Near-standard usage:
- Taking an emergency call
- Guided interview about linguistic biography and language evaluation with a standard-speaking fieldworker

Informal usage:
- Conversation among friends without an investigator/fieldworker present

Competence at the dialectal pole:
- Translation of the 40 Wenker sentences from Standard German into dialect

This deserves a few words of explanation. The closest an individual comes to the standard pronunciation is captured firstly using a written cue (reading the international standard text for phonetic comparisons aloud) and secondly via free formulation (translating older recordings of Wenker sentences). To test the informants’ dialect competence, they are asked in a later survey encounter to render Wenker sentences read to them by standard-speaking fieldworkers into their own deepest dialect. Using the Wenker sentences in both contexts guarantees the fresh survey’s maximum comparability with the historical data available for the complete region, allowing, on the one hand, analysis of the dialect dynamics over 130 years, and a precise ascertainment of the remnant regionalisms in the speaker’s intended standard speech on the other. In collecting samples of regional usage, the interaction partner is varied systematically: the interview with a standard-speaking stranger (fieldworker) contrasts with the informal exchange with a familiar conversation partner who uses a regional language variety. The recordings of the middle generation informants answering emergency calls represent a special case. They serve as a control for the linguistic observer’s paradox. For these police officers, microphones and recording devices form part of their everyday professional praxis, since emergency calls generally have to be recorded for forensic reasons (i.e., this is an “authentic” context). The contextual constraints also lead to the production of a high proportion of directly comparable sentences by the officers, e.g., “What’s your name?”, “What has happened exactly?”, “Please remain where you are!”, “A unit is on its way”, etc.
5.2 Initial findings

5.2.1 State of the regiolectal re-evaluation process: Listeners’ judgements of read-aloud text (areal cross-section)

In a study by Roland Kehrein (2009), recordings of police officers from 16 language areas reading aloud were judged in a test of salience by 590 people from the cities of Kiel, Greifswald, Münster, Dresden, Marburg, Trier, Karlsruhe, Freiburg im Breisgau and Passau. The 20-second speech samples were assessed on a seven-stage ratings scale between the poles of “pure High German” and “deepest dialect”. Table 1 shows the results obtained. It also includes the results of a measurement of phonetic distance (following Herrgen and Schmidt 1989) based on the simple principle of counting the number of regional phonetic features per word which do not match the codified standard pronunciation (the dialectality or $d$ score). The results can be summarized as follows:

1. The objectively measured phonetic differences from the spoken standard and the listener judgements correlate highly significantly (with a Pearson coefficient of 0.9, giving a level of significance of 0.01; cf. Kehrein [2009:43]).

2. The judgements of listeners from the various regions coincide (cf. Kehrein 2009:30-32). No “proximity effect” was found (with longer speech samples) 7, i.e., listeners from the different German regions all judge the degree of regionality of a speech sample according to the same benchmark, in the form of the media-borne standard pronunciation to which they have all been exposed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin of the speech sample</th>
<th>Salience rating (median)</th>
<th>Salience rating (average)</th>
<th>Regionalisms per word (d score)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastphalian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westphalian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Low German (North Saxon)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandenburgish</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ripuarian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mecklenburgish–West Pomeranian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Hessian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moselle Franconian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 For individual phonetic features, (minor) proximity effects can indeed be detected, but as these act in disparate directions, the effect is neutralized in longer speech samples containing more regionalisms. Cf. Kiesewalter 2009.
Table 1. Salience ratings (listener judgements of dialectality) and phonetic distance from the standard spoken language (d score) for police officers reading aloud (cf. Kehrein 2009: Tab. 4 and 5)

Additionally noting that in Kehrein’s salience test a speech sample from a newsreader was rated as 0.15 by listeners and – as is known from other studies – that d scores below 0.2 (just one regional feature in every five words on average) can be classed as standard speech (this is the “perceptual boundary to the spoken standard”; cf. Lameli [2004: 242]), then the current status of the re-evaluation process (from the old regional High German to the contemporary regiolect) can be read from Table 1.

With a median rating of 1, only the read-aloud sample of the speech of police officers from Eastphalian, Westphalian and Northern Low Saxon areas can be classed as standard pronunciation. The judgement could be paraphrased as “standard language with marginal regional features”. In all of the other language areas, the police officers’ read-aloud speech, individually their closest approximation to the standard pole, was perceived as diverging more or less obviously from the accepted standard: a median rating of 2 (Brandenburgish and Ripuarian) could be paraphrased as “near standard, but clearly regionally coloured”, a rating of 4 or 5 as “tending towards dialect” (e.g., Upper Saxon or Middle Bavarian) or even as “near dialect” (North Bavarian, Thuringian). Even with the caution needed in the face of the slender analytic basis, a pronounced trend can already be detected. The regional forms of read-aloud written German, which were accepted as regional High German before the spread of the North-German influenced standard pronunciation via radio and television (from 1930 on), are nowadays assessed as regional deviations from the standard (i.e., as regiolect). Map 3, in which the perceived deviation from the standard (i.e., the level of salience) is symbolized by the relative size of the black circles, shows how far the re-evaluation process has progressed. It is striking that, aside from the expected north-south cline, a no less conspicuous gradient from west to east emerges.
5.2.2 Measuring the variative spectra across space (initial sample)
As of August 2010, the REDE survey had been completed for 70 locations. Full quantitative analyses (d measurements) have been completed for one (middle generation) police officer from each of six locations from different language areas, allowing us a very first comparative insight into the dialect-standard spectra. Figure 3 shows the results for the various survey contexts.

The survey of the Moselle-Franconian town of Wittlich, which can be directly related to the detailed study by Lenz (2003), can serve to calibrate the findings. The varieties and speech levels discovered by Lenz (cf. Figure 1) correspond to the following phonetic distance measurements:
1  Regiolect – regional accent: \( d = 0.3 \); upper nonstandard: \( d = 0.63 \); lower nonstandard: \( d = 0.82 \)
2  Dialect – regional dialect: \( d = 1.41 \); base dialect: \( d = 1.87 \).
Although the Moselle-Franconian REDE informant is still a competent speaker of dialect (the regional dialect), he has not mastered the standard pronunciation (his “reading aloud” sample ranks as regional accent), i.e., he has bi-varietal competence (in regiolect and dialect). In the conversational contexts (emergency call, interview and the conversation with friends) he makes exclusive use of the regiolect, shifting between the upper and lower nonstandard.

This can be compared with the informants from Rendsburg (North Saxon) and Gießen (Central Hessian). Both behave very similarly in conversational contexts: a narrow near-standard continuum within the regiolect, but the North German speaker can also speak in standard (see his “reading aloud” score). Differences emerge with regard to competence in dialect: the Rendsburg police officer can speak dialect, but does not use it in the normal course of events at work or with his family. The informant from Gießen lacks dialect competence and produces many hyperdialectalisms. The least expected type of speaker comes from Dresden: neither competent in dialect, nor able to approximate the spoken standard, with just a very narrow regiolectal continuum. This monovarietal informant effectively commands only a single speech level, which, given its distance from the standard, probably comes close to the old regional High German. In linguistic dynamic terms, here we have the exceptional case in which the old prestige variety is preserved.

In the Upper German area (Middle Bavarian: Garching, High Alemannic: Waldshut-Tiengen, East Franconian: Bamberg) the most conservative-speaking in-
formants of this initial sample are to be found. Once the distance from the standard of the entire variation spectrum is taken into account, the north-south and west-east gradients seen before are evident here too. More importantly, all of the Upper German police officers in this advance sample have mastery of the dialect and even make use of dialectal (!) speech levels in various of the surveyed performance contexts (Garching and Bamberg: all of the performance tests; Waldshut: only in the conversation among friends). In the remaining survey contexts, the police offers switch to regiolect. The large gap between the predominantly very distant from standard speech and the near-standard pronunciation achieved in the reading aloud and translation into standard tasks is striking when compared to the other language areas. We are obviously dealing with what is by now – outside of Switzerland – an archaic (“school”) variety, “spoken written German” (gesprochene Schriftsprache), which is no longer detectable in the remaining language areas (where there has been extensive convergence of competence and performance in the spoken standard).

5.2.3 Drilling down at one location (a pilot study)
To close this section on the investigation of the current state of development of German modern regional languages, a single-location study (Kehrein 2008) is presented, which relates speech data from the REDE informants to data from earlier surveys and from the “Deutsch heute” project, thus opening a window onto the complex structure of the current regional language and the most important trends in its development. The study focuses on the High Alemannic town of Waldshut-Tiengen on the Swiss border, in the far south of the German Federal Republic. Kehrein evaluated the speech data using a qualitative and quantitative analysis of variants and a measurement of phonetic distance. The variety boundary and the coloured frames around the different speech levels in Figure 4 are based on a qualitative analysis of variables detailed in Kehrein 2008. To enhance comparability, only the phonetic distance measurements are examined here in detail. The results in Figure 4 are presented so that they can be compared directly with Figure 3.

Figure 4 shows the measurements of phonetic distance for the following groups of informants:

1. older generation (a panel study): Zwirner survey of 1955 and the REDE survey of 2008 (Zwirner informant, born 1943); older REDE informant (NORM, born 1940);
2. middle generation (REDE survey police officers 1 and 2, born 1960 and 1959, respectively);
3. three speakers from the younger generation (born after 1989).
The findings can be summarized as follows: None of the informants had mastery of the standard pronunciation, although the young (better educated!) informants come quite close (regional accent). The most important difference between the groups of informants is that all of the informants from the older and middle generations possess bivarietal competence (in dialect and regiolect), and are not simply able to speak dialect, but also make use of it at least in conversation with friends. All of the young informants have mastery of and use the regiolect alone (monovarietal competence). But there are also clear differences between the groups of informants within the variety boundaries. These concern speech levels and contextual usage patterns.

These differences are explored in more detail in the following: the repeat survey of the Zwirner informant 53 years later (first 1955, then 2008) proved to be a real stroke of luck. At the time of the first recording, she was 12 years old and was described “as a very lively, sturdy farm child who had to help with all of the work on her parent’s farm”. She is still an agricultural worker today. Her value for the investigation of the origins of the modern regional languages lies in the fact that her dialect has remained demonstrably unchanged between 1955 and 2008 and, more importantly, that the survey of her dialect competence and performance reveals all of the base dialectal features found in the Wenker survey of 1880, the Zwirner study of 1955 with informants born in 1891 and 1912, and the survey for the Südwestdeutschen Sprachatlas (1979) with an informant born in 1901 (cf. Kehrein 2008:15 and 5, fn. 13). This female informant has retained not just the base dialect of the turn of the last
century, but also the old communicative behaviour: perfect diglossia (i.e., with switching between varieties, as was usual all over the rural regions of Germany prior to the emergence of the modern regional languages). The informant reports that she generally only uses dialect and that she very much dislikes using the Standard German that she learned at school and only does so when a conversation partner fails to understand her and requests it. Her linguistic behaviour in the REDE survey is in complete accord with this self-assessment. In all of the survey contexts she uses base dialect, even in the interview with the standard-speaking fieldworker (purple frame). The sole regiolectal speech level in her repertoire is the language for reading aloud she learned at school (red frame). Every indication is that this is an instance of the conservation of “regional High German” which was predominant before the spread of the standard pronunciation via the broadcast media (from 1930 on).

Comparing the “regular” REDE informants from the older and middle age groups reveals the following. These informants also have bivarietal competence and make use of both varieties, but with the choice clearly dependent upon context. Dialect is used in conversation with people who are familiar, regiolect with strangers. But compared to the initial situation, the varieties have changed. New speech levels have developed within the varieties:

1 Due to the decline in base-dialectal features (cf. Kehrein 2008:Tables 7 and 8), a regional dialect has arisen (yellow frame). The competence-performance relation across the generations is very revealing in this regard. While older informants still know the base dialectal forms (as shown in their “translation into dialect” of the Wenker sentences), they no longer make use of them in conversation. Such speakers report using a dialect that can be understood over a larger radius. For the informants of the middle generation on the other hand, the regional dialect is the “deepest” speech level they possess. Their variative competence no longer includes any base-dialectal features. This gives rise to an uncanny linguistic dynamic correlation: the dialect performance of an older generation = the dialect competence of the next generation!

2 For all of the informants from the older and middle generations, the old “regional High German”, re-evaluated as regiolect, represents their individual best language, their closest approximation to the spoken standard (the red frame). This level is only achieved when full concentration is paid to speech production (“reading aloud”, “translation into standard”). In conversation with strangers (“emergency calls”, “interview”; green dots or black triangles), these informants exhibit a second regiolectal speech level that is further from the standard than the traditional “reading aloud” pronunciation (interpreted here as a continuation of “regional High German”. Its emergence can be easily explained in this case since – in contrast to, say,
the Central German regiolects – this High Alemannic regiolect does not display any independent innovations: a portion of the near-standard variants that constitute the traditional “reading aloud” pronunciation can only be controlled by the informants when they are fully concentrated on their use of language and not in everyday speech contexts. Hence (originally) dialectal features are retained here to a large degree (cf. Schmidt and Herrgen 2011: chapter 4.3.3.3 on this interpretation of the results of the analysis of variants in Kehrein 2008).

Those REDE and “Deutsch heute” informants born after 1989, who can also be distinguished from the older and middle generation speakers using the social feature of a higher educational qualification, represent a third speech type. None of these speakers can speak dialect, neither regional dialect nor base dialect (i.e., they have monovarietal competence). Although the youngest REDE informant achieved a purely quantitative d score of 0.94 (not shown) for the translation into dialect task, this was due to hyperdialectalisms, since the speaker had clearly not mastered rules governing the distribution of lexical and phonological dialect variants. These informants make use of a speech level within the regiolect not found among the older informants. It is markedly closer to the standard than the traditional “reading aloud” pronunciation, displaying relatively few remanent regionalisms (cf. Kehrein 2008:21), but does not reach the level of the supraregional standard pronunciation and thus remains beneath the “perceptual boundary to the spoken standard” (cf. section 5.2.1 above). It can be termed a regional accent. For two speakers, the young REDE informant and the male “Deutsch heute” informant, this is the only speech level available to them at all. A context-dependent variation along the dialect-standard axis (the vertical dimension) is not detectable in their speech (cf. Subtype 2a, “moveless” speakers, section 2.2 above). The female informant for the “Deutsch heute” project presents a different picture. Here, two regiolectal speech levels can be found (making her a “shifter”). But the regiolectal speech level, which we have described as the traditional “reading aloud” pronunciation for the older and middle generation of informants, i.e., which represents the closest the older speakers come to the standard pronunciation, is in contrast the individual speech level furthest from the standard for this young speaker.

6. Summary and conclusions
The starting point for this contribution was, on one hand, the terminological proximity of the English terms “regiolect” and “regional dialect” and, on the other, the belief that the gradual decline of the old dialects had given rise to a continuum between regiolect and regional dialect in German. In contrast
to this, it has been argued that there are clear variety boundaries separating dialect from regiolect and regiolect from standard pronunciation in contemporary spoken German, and that these become apparent when the linguistic/cognitive differences in individuals’ core linguistic competence (i.e., at a phonological/prosodic or morphosyntactic level) are taken into account, differences which the individual speaker can only overcome (if at all) in an extended variety acquisition process (this is the “full variety” concept).

Additionally, among speakers who command particular varieties, erroneous crossings of the variety boundaries are clearly flagged in sociocommunicative behaviour (e.g., ridicule of shibboleths). Against the background of the “full variety” concept it has been shown – using various studies and ongoing projects – that, seen as a whole, the modern German regional languages are made up of an internally complex formation of varieties beneath the standard language (i.e., regiolect and dialect) in which various speech levels have become established within the prevailing variety boundaries.

It has also become clear that the complex overall variation-linguistic structure of the German modern regional languages can only be understood when it is kept in mind that this overall structure is based on the cooperation and coexistence of clearly distinct types of speakers. The most important distinction is that between those speakers who were still raised in dialect and always have additional command of the regiolect (bivarietal competence as a precondition for contextual variety switching), and speakers who were socialized in regiolect and cannot speak dialect (monovarietal competence). A distinction should also be drawn between two subtypes of speakers – those who have command of and make use of just one regiolectal speech level (“moveless” speakers) and those who shift between different speech levels within the regiolect in line with contextual factors.

An explanation for the current structure of the modern regional languages can be found in the origins of their varieties. While the dialects represent continuations of the spoken languages out of which German began to develop one-and-a-half thousand years ago, the regiolects represent a continuation of the regionally differentiated forms of spoken High German that first became evident in 1720. These were uncodified and unstandardized regional pronunciation conventions applied to written High German, which was taught in schools right across Germany from 1800 on (traditional “reading aloud” pronunciation). The spread of the standard pronunciation (derived from the stage pronunciation developed in 1898), initially (from 1930) via radio and then (after 1950) television, led to a re-evaluation, indeed a devaluation of the former prestige varieties. Forms that were previously accepted as the only available regional means of speaking High German were now increasingly viewed as regionally restricted deviations from the standard language. They became regiolects. Using a salience study of “reading aloud” pronunciation (Kehrein...
2009), the current degree of progress of the re-evaluation process unfolding from north to south and west to east can be assessed.

Research on changes in the varieties of regiolect and dialect in the 20th century is unevenly distributed. In Upper and West Middle German, where dialect change can be followed in precise detail using a number of directly comparable sets of data, dialect change has taken the form of a shift in speech level: here where, albeit among shrinking groups of speakers, the dialect is also used as a communicative means with strangers from the same region, the old base dialects have become regional dialects. Within the still stable boundaries of the historical dialect formations, the exclusively local or microregional features that characterized the base dialects have been and continue to be replaced by dialect features with broader regional acceptance (= regional dialect). There are, however, also indications that, in the in more recent times poorly documented language areas (Low German, East and North Hessian), where dialect is only used with conversation partners who grew up in the same village and strangers are generally addressed in regiolect, the base dialects have remained largely stable since 1880. As yet we do not have a solid foundation of data about the change in the regiolect variety in Germany.8 Major projects devoted to a fresh survey of the overall structure of the modern regional languages and hence also of the regiolects, in which various language areas are to be investigated using uniform methods, were only launched in 2006-2008. A first single-location comparison of the newly obtained speech data from different groups of speakers with earlier surveys (a combined panel and apparent-time study) indicates that regiolectal change may well have taken place in the differentiation of speech levels in two different directions. Among the bivarietal speakers of the older and middle generations, who also use the regiolect in everyday situations, the traditional “reading aloud” pronunciation (Leseaussprache) learnt at school, originally the sole regiolectal speech level, is complemented by a less-standard regiolectal speech level. This level arises because, with relaxed controls over language use in everyday conversation, some of the near-standard variants which constitute the traditional “reading aloud” pronunciation are being replaced by (erstwhile) dialectal variants. In contrast, among the monovarietal informants of the younger (and better edu-

8 There are only three, difficult to compare, real-time studies: Kreymann (1994) and Lameli (2004) detect a convergence of regiolectal speech levels towards the standard over the course of 20 or 40 years (respectively) in the Riparian town of Erp and the Rhine-Franconian city of Mainz. Lameli ascertained constancy over 40 years for the Northern Low German city of Neumünster. With regard to Spiekermann (2008), who detected a convergence toward the standard over the course of 40 years for individual variables in Baden-Württemberg and a “destandardization” for other variables, also see the alternative interpretation of these data in Schmidt and Herrgen (to appear: chapter 4.3.2.10).
cated) generation, a regiolectal speech level that is clearly nearer the standard than the traditional “reading aloud” pronunciation and features only a few remanent regionalisms (i.e., the regional accent) can be detected. A decisive factor in its emergence may well be the high profile of the mass-mediated standard pronunciation during such speakers’ primary language acquisition.

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