

Studie zur Satzprosodie des Österreichischen Deutsch (nach Grabe, 1998)

Intonation in Austrian German (AG) differs from other varieties of German (Schaeffler & Summers 1999, Ulbrich 2006, Moosmüller, Schmid & Brandstätter 2015, Mennen & Chousi 2018), but phonetic data demonstrating how and why are sparse. Standard German varieties spoken in Germany (SG) are better documented. For example, SG realises pitch accents differently to many English varieties. When the amount of voiced material available for realisation of a pitch accent is very limited (i.e. time pressure), so is the opportunity to fully realise the pitch accent. Under such time constraints, speakers have two options: a) to “speed up” the realisation of the pitch accent and compress the entire contour into the shorter duration of voicing (known as compression), or b) to “clip” the end of contour (known as truncation). While English varieties tend to show compression under increasing time pressure for both falling and rising pitch accents (Grabe, Post, Nolan & Farrar 2000), SG varieties reveal different patterns. Unlike English, SG instead appears to compress rising pitch accents but truncate falling pitch accents when the amount of voiced material is limited (Grabe 1998, Yu & Zahner 2018).

In this study, we aimed to investigate whether pitch accent realisation in an AG variety differs from the above pattern reported for SG varieties. Our overall goal is to better understand which factors contribute to the distinct prosody of AG. We used the same materials as previous studies (Grabe 1998, Yu & Zahner 2018) for comparable results, adapted only minimally to be natural for AG speakers. 20 speakers from the city of Graz were recorded, but the preliminary analysis described here is restricted to just 10 of these. All 10 were functionally monolingual native speakers of Austrian German aged 21 to 31 (mean age 25.5 years), 6 of whom were female. Participants first read an introductory paragraph for context, then read two target sentences designed to elicit phrase-final pitch accents on rises (yes/no questions) and falls (declaratives):

Rises: Ist das nicht der Herr [target]? Unser neuer Nachbar? Isn't that Mr. [target]? Our new neighbour?

Falls: Das ist doch der Herr [target]! Unser neuer Nachbar! That's Mr. [target]! Our new neighbour!

The target was either <Schiefer> for the context with longer voicing duration or <Schiff> for the shorter voicing duration. 10 repetitions of each token were recorded in SpeechRecorder; segmentation and labelling was performed in WebMAUS; and signal processing and statistics were carried out in emuR and R.

Based on the same measures as the previous studies, our results indicate that AG does indeed behave differently to previous studies on SG varieties, in that AG shows compression of both rising and falling pitch accents. On the face of it, this is more similar to the patterns shown for some varieties of English (Grabe et al. 2000) than SG (Grabe 1998, Yu & Zahner 2018), with one distinction: compression of rising pitch accents in AG is largely in the time domain (as for English and SG), whereas compression of falling pitch accents in AG additionally shows compression of the contour in the frequency domain.

Forthcoming publication:

Siddins, J. & Mennen, I. (2019 (forthcoming)). Pitch accent realisation in Austrian German. In Proceedings of the 19th International Congress of Phonetic Sciences. Melbourne, Australia.

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Jän.2019