

## Ist Deutsch EINE Sprache? (Is German One Single Language?)

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Abstract: The difficulty of clearly defining ‘language’ and ‘dialect’ is not a secret to the modern linguist. “German,” as it is commonly known, is a western example of how languages become standardized along the course of the centuries, yet continue to have relatives which compete for the status of “language” as opposed to that of “dialect.” In this article, we weigh in both structural and functional views of language and evaluate the status of present “dialects” classified in SIL’s *Ethnologue* as languages.

The line of demarcation between languages and their living variants (dialects) remains as fluid today as the political borders of Europe throughout the last millennium. An abundance of books, articles, and websites present varying opinions and concepts by both linguists and laymen. The answers offered range from informed classifications to mere speculative opinion. The divergence of definitive opinions on the topic results predominantly from two varying views of language definition. The linguist Einar Haugen describes them as two dimensions: the structural and the functional. Within the structural view, genetic relationship between linguistic forms determines their classification as language or dialect (as a subset of a macrolanguage). The functional dimension encompasses the language’s “social uses in communication.”<sup>1</sup>

The *Ethnologue*, SIL’s publication classifying languages from all parts of the world, lists 19 “languages” under the node of German.<sup>2</sup> Most of them receive the German labels *Dialekt* or *Mundart* by academics, and are also generally perceived as such by the population at large. The *Ethnologue*’s classification, on the other hand, parallels the International Organization for Standardization’s language codes found in document ISO 639-3:2007, which states:

“ISO 639-3:2007 provides a code, published by the Registration Authority of ISO 639-3, consisting of language code elements comprising three-letter language identifiers for the representation of languages. . . . ISO 639-3:2007 attempts to provide as complete an enumeration of languages as possible, including living, extinct, ancient and constructed languages, whether major or minor, written or unwritten.”<sup>3</sup>

In an SIL publication of 1986, Frank Robbins makes this statement about the organization’s understanding of the language-dialect paradigm: “SIL generally considers as dialects of one language any varieties sufficiently similar that one literature can be used for both. Wherever that is not the case the varieties are considered separate languages.”<sup>4</sup> The *Ethnologue* invokes the following clause as a guideline for language distinction:

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<sup>1</sup>Einar Haugen, “Dialect, Language, Nation” in *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 68, (Menasha, WI: American Anthropological Association, 1966), p. 926.

<sup>2</sup>*Ethnologue*, “Germany,” (Dallas: SIL, 2013), <http://www.ethnologue.com/country/DE/languages>, (accessed November 27, 2013).

<sup>3</sup>International Organization for Standardization, ISO 639-3:2007, [http://www.iso.org/iso/home/store/catalogue\\_tc/catalogue\\_detail.htm?csnumber=39534](http://www.iso.org/iso/home/store/catalogue_tc/catalogue_detail.htm?csnumber=39534) (accessed October 17, 2013).

<sup>4</sup>Frank E. Robbins, “How Many Languages?” In *Language in Global Perspective: Papers in Honor of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Summer Institute of Linguistics 1935 – 1985*. (SIL, 1986), p. 22.

“The percentage of lexical similarity between two linguistic varieties is determined by comparing a set of standardized wordlists and counting those forms that show similarity in both form and meaning. Percentages higher than 85% usually indicate a speech variant that is likely a dialect of the language with which it is being compared. Unlike intelligibility, lexical similarity is bidirectional or reciprocal.”<sup>5</sup>

With these principles as the basis of linguistic comparison, SIL has produced multiple catalogs throughout the last decades which attempt to enumerate every language found around the world, whether representative of a small or a large community. The ensuing results have become a compass for linguists working with minority languages in various research, social, and missionary projects. The work undergoes revision on a regular basis, and demonstrates willingness to undergo corrective measures in order to attain the most accurate data. The *Ethnologue* acknowledges that language identification raises controversial issues, including the diverging functional and structural views of language, and relates its choices for categorization according to the ISO code mentioned above.<sup>6</sup> But, should the *Ethnologue*'s treatment of German stand? Or, “ist Deutsch tatsächlich EINE Sprache?” Is German actually *one single* language with many dialects? Should Bavarian, Kölsch, and many other language/dialects be considered distinct languages, as the *Ethnologue* has classified them up to now?



For the purpose of this research, I have given particular consideration to the “dialect” of German regularly spoken by the largest amount of people in our days: Bavarian. As our study will demonstrate, however, not all *Dialekten* maintain the same level of differentiation from the standard High German, and should probably receive different treatment. Thus, the answers to the questions above will prove more complex than a simple yes or no. The academic literature on German dialects or variants, particularly from within the German academic linguistic community is extensive — and rightly so. In this essay, I will make use of this abundance of texts to examine the situation, and to present the struggle of categorizing linguistic variants in consistent ways and determining where German “dialects” fit in the context of the national standard *Hochdeutsch*. I will also attempt to demonstrate the verifiable degree of similarity between a few dialects (German: *Dialekt* or *Mundart*) of German in order to consider the propriety of identifying the varieties as different “languages” from either a historical or a practical point-of-view. Finally, I will broaden the perspective from the German language situation to the topic of the *Ethnologue*'s criteria of language classification as a whole, proposing possible adjustments.

<sup>5</sup>Ethnologue, “Lexical Similarity,” <http://www.ethnologue.com/about/language-info> (accessed July 21, 2013).

<sup>6</sup>Ethnologue, “The Problem of Language Identification,” <http://www.ethnologue.com/about/problem-language-identification> (accessed October 26, 2013).

## High German and Luther

History confirms the multiplicity of identities and linguistic parameters which have co-existed in Europe. Many “languages” have been spoken in what has now become the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany (Bundesrepublik Deutschland – BRD) and its neighbors, and where, today, some form of German has become the official language. The concept of language standardization developed rather late (in the latest centuries) in this area of Europe. The varieties of German which are now commonly identified as a single language co-existed for centuries, receiving popular and political affirmation. What we presently call *Hochdeutsch* or High German has, in many respects, Martin Luther’s translation and publication of the Bible to thank. C. A. M. Noble states that “Luther’s successful attempt to combine his native Thuringian dialect with the *Kanzleisprache* (official language) has come to be regarded as the starting-point of the New High German standard language.”<sup>7</sup>

Admittedly, in order to make a single translation, Martin Luther had to make word form choices from a number of varieties available to him. However, in spite of the plurality of varieties, Luther’s one *single* translation could be generally understood by Germans, without the need for “dialect”- specific versions. To explain this fact, perhaps we should consider a distinction between the original concept of *Sprache* as a spoken means of communication, and that of a written language. Closely-related spoken languages or dialects differ from one another in such a sharp fashion at times, that they often reach the point of unintelligibility. A literate language speaker, however, can usually adequately adapt to a standardized written form of a language, since he or she undertakes an oral interpretation of the written, verbal signs we call “words.”

## “Was ist Sprache, was ist Dialekt?” – Academic Voices

What is a language, and what is a dialect? Dr. Kristin Reinke, an assistant professor of Romanistics at the University of Augsburg, offers the following answer: “This is difficult [to answer], since the root of many standard languages is a dialect.”<sup>8</sup> “In Europe a monolingualistic ideology is prevalent, leading to an interwoven linguistic and political unity, for which reason some dialects, in spite of their linguistic differences, are placed under the roof of the standard language. From a purely linguistic consideration, the romance languages are no more than modern dialects of Latin.”<sup>9</sup> Dr. Reinke’s field of research is the Romance languages, but she presents her view in a broad fashion, and explains in part why the question above does not have a simple, comprehensive, and universal answer.

Franz Xaver Scheurer, in response to the question of whether a *Mundart* should be considered a language, says that “this question should be answered with an unambiguous **yes**. Every *Mundart* displays a complete phonological, morphological, and lexical system. Every

<sup>7</sup>C.A.M. Noble, *Modern German Dialects*, p. 31.

<sup>8</sup>Kristin Reinke, Dr., *Was ist Sprache? Was ist Dialekt?* Augsburg: University of Augsburg. Also in: [http://www.uni-augsburg.de/akademische\\_frage/39\\_Reinke\\_Dialekt.html](http://www.uni-augsburg.de/akademische_frage/39_Reinke_Dialekt.html) (accessed, July 30, 2013), 2011. (translation mine)

<sup>9</sup>Reinke, Dr., *Was ist Sprache? Was ist Dialekt?*, 2011. (translation mine)

member of a dialect-speaking linguistic community possesses a complete and living grammar of his/her *Mundart* as a native speaker. This is proven in modern linguistic science.”<sup>10</sup>

In the BRD, according to polls, 51% of Germans speak the dialect of their region, as well as High German. Bavarian, the dialect of Germany with the greatest vitality, being used on a regular basis in a great number of contexts, displays the largest percentage of regular speakers, calculated at 72% of the Bavarian population<sup>11</sup> The Förderverein Bairische Sprache und Dialekte e.V. (an organization to promote the Bavarian language and dialects) cites the UNESCO *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*, which names Bavarian as one of 13 such languages within German national borders.<sup>12</sup> The organization's site quotes Prof. Dr. Robert Hinderling, who states that the “the distance between Bavarian and High German is greater than that of Danish and Norwegian, or of Czech and Slovakian.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, on the basis of the structural view, they insist that Bavarian should hold the title of autonomous language, even though, as we will see, the differences are primarily aural, not etymological.

Language distinction, as indicated by Dr. Reinke in her statement above, often hinges on political circumstances. G. Tucker Childs gives the same indication: “Language varieties . . . tend to be labeled dialects rather than languages for non-linguistic reasons, usually political or ideological.”<sup>14</sup> Childs explains the dilemma of the varying criteria for determining whether a speech form is a language:

“One of the tests people use to differentiate ‘language’ from ‘dialect’ is mutual intelligibility. Many would say that if people understand each other without too much difficulty, they’re speaking the same language; if not, they’re speaking different languages. That seems like a good rule. So why are Cologne German and Bavarian German, which are *not* mutually intelligible, not considered separate languages? Or why are Swedish and Norwegian considered separate languages, when Swedes and Norwegians have no trouble understanding one another?

Such questions become even more unanswerable when speakers of Dialect A just don't *want* to understand speakers of Dialect B, and sometimes vice versa. One or both groups insist that they speak separate tongues, even though they are speaking – judged by relatively objective linguistic criteria – mutually intelligible dialects of the same language.”<sup>15</sup>

In his article “Western Europe,” Ulrich Ammon reports that around the time of the Second World War, a movement arose in Switzerland, promoting the upgrade of “the dialects to an autonomous language, Alemannic (Alemannisch).” This, he says, “failed probably because it would have cut off the country from its rich literary tradition in German.” In contrast, he

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<sup>10</sup>Franz Xaver Scheuerer, *Sprachen und Sprachgrenzen in der Suedwestlichen Oberpfalz*, [http://www.oberpfaelzerkulturbund.de/cms/media/Festschriften/33.NGT/33.NGT%20Seite%2035\\_38.pdf](http://www.oberpfaelzerkulturbund.de/cms/media/Festschriften/33.NGT/33.NGT%20Seite%2035_38.pdf) (accessed July 21, 2013).

<sup>11</sup>Förderverein Bairische Sprache und Dialekte e.V. , <http://www.fbsd.de/der-verein/satzung/7-beitraege/bairische-sprache-dialekte-mundarten>, (accessed October 25, 2013).

<sup>12</sup>FBSD e.V., *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>FBSD e.V., *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>G. Tucker Childs, “What’s the difference between dialects and languages?” in *The 5-Minute Linguist*, Rickerson, E.M. and Hilton, Barry, editors, (Sheffield, England: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2012), p. 21.

<sup>15</sup>Childs, “What’s the difference between dialects and languages?”, p. 23.

continues, “the endeavor to upgrade its own dialect to an autonomous language did, however, succeed in Luxemburg (Ammon 1995: 398-400).”<sup>16</sup>

The linguist Ofelia Garcia also points out in her article “Conclusion: Linguaging and Ethnifying,”<sup>17</sup> that the pairing of the activity of “creating” language (linguaging) and of identifying ethnicity have produced a force which has shaped societies, led by political powers, and supported by education. She states that “in appealing to the concept of linguaging, I agree with Makoni and Pennycook (2007) who argue that our present conception of ‘language’ was originally constructed by states that wanted to consolidate political power.”<sup>18</sup> She continues: “an important mechanism to manipulate, imagine, and perform linguaging and ethnifying has been the selection of names, as well as the selection of writing systems for the codified language.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, Garcia identifies the fact that certain languages have arisen solely on the basis of its functionality, as a means of defining political authority and allegiance.

James R. Dow illustrates the interplay of language, dialect, politics, and social identification in the following quotes.<sup>20</sup> “In Austria, the 40<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Österreichisches Wörterbuch* (2006) seeks to show the distinctiveness of Austrian Standard German as separate from German Standard German.”<sup>21</sup> “In Switzerland, the address given on National Day is in dialect, an unusual case of informal speech making its way into a formal setting. More than 55% of the Swiss prefer that the president’s message on New Year’s Day be given in dialect.”<sup>22</sup>

The linguist Tucker Childs offers the following observation on Cymbrian of Italy:

“In northern Italy, an entire array of scholars continues to investigate the nature of Cymbrian, a Tyrolean-Bavarian dialect spoken on the high alpine plateaus north of Verona and Vicenza. This German dialect reaches back at least to the eleventh century and represents a distinct identity for these villagers in contrast to the surrounding dominant Italian. There are now journal publications, musical recordings, and folk festivals where the language can be heard. A grammar produced during the 1940s has just appeared (Dow 2008) and should promote further interest in this unusual language and the people who speak it.”<sup>23</sup>

Childs presents an academic summary of the phenomenon of functional dimension in language: “It is easy to conclude from all this that the terms ‘dialect’ and ‘language’ are politically and socially *loaded*.”<sup>24</sup> In a colloquial fashion, linguist Max Weinreich relates it with the popular adage: “a language is a dialect with an army and a navy.”<sup>25</sup>

While some scholars and enthusiasts would seem to have a generous attitude towards the classification of dialects as languages, the majority of linguists would probably disagree on

<sup>16</sup>Ulrich Ammon, “Western Europe,” in: Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity, Joshua Fishman and Ofelia Garcia, editors, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 212.

<sup>17</sup>Ofelia Garcia, “Conclusion: Linguaging and Ethnifying.” In: Joshua Fishman and Ofelia Garcia, Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 524.

<sup>18</sup>Garcia, “Conclusion,” p. 519.

<sup>19</sup>Garcia, “Conclusion,” p. 527.

<sup>20</sup>James R. Dow, “Germany,” In: Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity, Joshua Fishman and Ofelia Garcia, editors, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 221-236.

<sup>21</sup>Dow, *ibid.*, p 234.

<sup>22</sup>Dow, *ibid.*, p 234.

<sup>23</sup>Dow, *ibid.*, p 234.

<sup>24</sup>Childs, “What’s the difference between dialects and languages?”, p. 23.

<sup>25</sup>G. Tucker Childs, “What’s the difference between dialects and languages?”, p. 22.

social, political, or linguistic grounds. We can detect this disagreement through a collection of quotes published by W. Näser of the University of Marburg on its internet site. This University offers a variety of linguistic courses, and has produced important analytical data on the topic of German dialects. I offer here a translated sampling of some of the original quotes from the University of Marburg's site.<sup>26</sup> A citation for each quote is offered in the footnotes as found in Näser's page.

“A dialect (Mundart) is "the special way of speaking, which distinguishes the inhabitants of an area from the inhabitants of other regions, the deviations of individual regions within the language community to which it belongs; to which also pertain, not only the differences in pronunciation, but also those in education, in meaning, and word usage.”<sup>27</sup>

“The general German construct of written, high or common language (Gemeinsprache) is an entity that lives more in the idea than in reality; it is more written than spoken. The [...] dialect is, in general, only spoken, not written.”<sup>28</sup>

“Dialects are variants of a language spoken in a section of its total area of distribution, and which are distinguishable from one another, not only by the preservation of mutual intelligibility in principle through greater or less extensive differences in pronunciation, but which are also differentiated by vocabulary, or even grammatical parts.”<sup>29</sup>

“Dialects are peculiar, regionally or locally restricted variants of a system of a state or national standard language in areas of phonetics, inflection/word formation, vocabulary and stylistics (phraseology, syntax).”<sup>30</sup>

“Dialects are defined by geographically determined areas of coverage and occurrence of idio- and sociolects (idiom+dialect and the language variety spoken by a social group). A language is (usually) a complex structure and area of coverage *including* idiolects, sociolects and dialects. The transition from dialect to what we call language is *fluid* (emphasis mine).”<sup>31</sup>

“The definition states that one can say exactly of something: "It is a dialect," when it has all of the following four characteristics: 1. it is a *Langue* (L); 2. it is a variety (V); 3. it is regionally small (K); and 4. not standardized = it is oral (O).”<sup>32</sup>

<sup>26</sup>University of Marburg, “Definitives: *Dialekt* vs. *Sprache*,” 2010,

<http://staff-www.uni-marburg.de/~naeser/ma-spr.htm> (accessed October 26, 2013).

<sup>27</sup>Johann Christoph Adelung, *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörter-buch der hochdeutschen Mund-art. Mit beständiger Vergleichung der übrigen Mund-arten, besonders aber der oberdeutschen.* 2., vermehrte und verbesserte Aufl. Leipzig 1793-1801, Bd. 3, 311.

<sup>28</sup>Adolf Bach, *Deutsche Mundartforschung. Ihre Wege, Ergebnisse und Aufgaben.* Heidelberg, 1969.

<sup>29</sup>Peter Finke, Internet-Quelle: [Handout Vorlesung 2: Chaos und Ordnung: Die Sprachenvielfalt](#). Uni Bielefeld, Fakultät für Linguistik und Literaturwissenschaft.

<sup>30</sup>W. Näser. In: *Materials for the International Summer School of the Philipps-University (Presentation: The German Dialects)*, 1978.

<sup>31</sup>Werner König, *dtv-Atlas zur deutschen Sprache.* Tables and Texts. München, 1978 (and many other editions), p. 11.

<sup>32</sup>Ulrich Ammon, “Vorbereitung einer Explizit-Definition von ‘Dialekt’ und benachbarten Begriffen mit Mitteln der formalen Logik” (Preparation of an Explicit Definition of ‘Dialect’ and Closely Related Terms by Means of Formal

A couple of other factors have created difficulties for a strict classification of languages and dialects. The first one of these is the phenomenon of “roofless dialects” (*dachlose Dialekte*). The term and concept of *Dachlose Aussermundarten*, attributed to Heinz Kloss, became part of linguistic research in the 1950s.<sup>33</sup> This identification refers to certain dialects considered *dachlos* or roofless, because they exist in areas where the national language does not belong to the same branch. Alsatian, for example, demonstrates this very characteristic.<sup>34</sup> As a territory which has been under the French and German governments at different times, Alsace contains a Germanic population which still speaks some form of German, but, by virtue of its incorporation into France, does not have the roof, or the patronage, of German as a national language.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, in the German language(s) we encounter two terms, *Dialekt* and *Mundart*, which are not conclusively defined either in the academic literature, or in the minds of the German-speaking population at large.<sup>36</sup>



[http://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/document/artikel\\_45730\\_bilder\\_value\\_1\\_bairisch1.jpg](http://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/document/artikel_45730_bilder_value_1_bairisch1.jpg)  
(accessed September 16, 2013).

### Use of Dialect – Historical Evidence

Dialects often receive the stigma of sub-standard, or the label of recent derivation of an ideal perfect standard language. Although we do not deny that such derivation, or even the dismantling of a language, does take place, this pattern does not apply to all dialects. C. A. M. Noble explains: “The dialects of German did not evolve from the standard language as we know it today, or as it ever was. On the contrary: an essential characteristic of dialect is that it existed before the written language and is thus older than the latter. In the Old High German period the

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Logic), in: Klaus J. Mattheier (editor): *Aspekte der Dialekttheorie (Aspects of Dialect Theory)*, (Tübingen, 1983) (Reihe Germanistische Linguistik 46), pp. 27-68, here p. 36).

<sup>33</sup>Harald Haarmann, “Roofless dialects / Dachlose Dialekt,” in Ulrich Ammon, Norbert Dittmann, Klaus J. Mattheier & Peter Trudgill (eds.), *Soziolinguistik: ein internationales Handbuch zur Wissenschaft von Sprache und Gesellschaft*. (Sociolinguistics: an international handbook of the science of language and society), 2nd ed. Handbooks of linguistics and communication science 3.2. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005, pp. 1545-6.

<sup>34</sup><http://cat.inist.fr/?aModele=afficheN&cpsidt=1155629>.

<sup>35</sup>Harald Haarmann, “Roofless dialects / Dachlose Dialekte” – In: Ulrich Ammon, Norbert Dittmann, Klaus J. Mattheier & Peter Trudgill (eds.), *Sociolinguistics: an international handbook of the science of language and society*, Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 2005, pp. 1545-1552.

<sup>36</sup>Haarmann, “Roofless dialects,” 1546.

dialects predominated, and the New High German language from the late Middle Ages onwards grew out of the dialects. This fact disproves the view, widely held today, that the dialects are a form of corrupted standard German.”<sup>37</sup> According to the *Historisches Lexikon Bayerns*, judicial and literary texts in the vulgar tongue (in contrast to the official Latin) became common after about 1300 A.D. The orthography of texts from the regions of Augsburg and Nürnberg to those around Vienna displays signs of unity. With the advancement of the written language, however, the spoken and the written forms began to distance themselves from one another. The *Lexikon* states that “texts . . . which were consciously written in dialect arose in increasing numbers from the seventeenth century on. The everyday colloquial language of the majority of the population remained the dialect also in the twentieth century. It was only in the second half of the twentieth century that the spoken standard language became more and more ingrained.”

The *Glossarium Bavaricum* of Johann Ludwig Prasnch (1637-1690) was published in 1689,<sup>38</sup> the “very first Dialectal Dictionary of the German dialectal region. With the grammar text „The dialects of Bavaria“ (1821), as well as the „Bavarian Dictionary“ (first edition 1827-1837) by Johann Andreas Schmeller<sup>39</sup> (1785-1852) began the scientific (*pre*)occupation with the dialects in Europe (emphasis mine).“<sup>40</sup> “Schmeller’s “Bayerisches Wörterbuch” is still the only comprehensive dictionary for all of Altbayern today.”<sup>41</sup> The evidence of present and past linguistic forms, as well as the multiple opinions relating to their classification, makes an organizational grid of languages that accommodates every view impossible.

### Lexicostatistical Evidence

The data on languages and dialects demonstrate that linguistic variations, particularly within the same language family, produce a continuum of speech varieties which do not easily submit to neatly packed categories. This continuum receives yet another descriptive term, “dialectological language,” among linguists. Dyen, Kruskal, and Black explain the concept in their book *An Indoeuropean Classification: A Lexicostatistical Experiment*: “The definition of dialectological language we would prefer to use is seldom feasible to apply in practice: two dialects (or idiolects) belong to the same language if they are connected by a chain of pairs of mutually intelligible dialects, without geographical constraints.”<sup>42</sup>

Categorization, therefore, should be based on a set of widely-accepted criteria for language and dialect distinction, and applied consistently for all further linguistic analyses. As stated earlier in this essay, the Ethnologue states that 85% minimum percentage of lexical similarity is its rule-of-thumb for two dialects to be classified as one single language. The percentage figures are uncovered by determining the percentage of words that are cognate in the basic vocabulary of the language, as defined by a standardized 207-meaning list, named after its compiler, U.S. linguist Morris Swadesh (Lehmann 2014). The method compares pairs of

<sup>37</sup>C.A.M. Noble, *Modern German Dialects* (New York, Peter Lang Publishing, 1983), p. 21.

<sup>38</sup>Internet library search reveals that a copy of this book is archived in the Staatsbibliothek München.

<sup>39</sup>Zentrales Verzeichnis Antiquarischer Buecher

<http://www.zvab.com/advancedSearch.do?title=Bayerisches+Woerterbuch+in+2&author=Schmeller> (accessed July 22, 2013).

<sup>40</sup>Historisches Lexikon Bayerns, Under “Literatur und Forschung,” also at [http://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/artikel/artikel\\_45730](http://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/artikel/artikel_45730) (accessed July 21, 2013). (translation mine)

<sup>41</sup>Historisches Lexikon Bayerns, *ibid.* (translation mine)

<sup>42</sup>Isidore Dyen, Joseph B. Kruskal, Paul Black, *An Indoeuropean Classification: A Lexicostatistical Experiment*, (Independence Square, Philadelphia: the American Philosophical Society, 1992), p. 9.

languages to obtain a percentage of basic vocabulary that are derived from the same historical root words. McMahon explains the reasoning further: “We use the term ‘meaning list’ rather than the more common ‘word list’ because the latter is potentially ambiguous.”<sup>43</sup>

I present here two tables. The first compiles the information given by April and Robert McMahon’s in *Language Classification by Numbers* throughout the various sections of the book.<sup>44</sup> This table compares multiple modern Western languages. It is, however, incomplete, in that it does not provide lexicostatistical percentages for every possible language pair on the list. The second table parallels only High German and three German “dialects.” The lexicostatistical percentages in this second table result from a calculation made with WordSurv 7.0, a software tool for linguistic comparison created in partnership between the Computer Science and Engineering Department at Taylor University and SIL International.<sup>45</sup>

Table 1

Portuguese (Brazilian)	Spanish	Catalan	Ladin	French	French Creole D.	Italian	Sardinian N.	German	Dutch	Flemish	Frisian	Afrikaans	Penn. Dutch
86.2	70.6	72.2				78.5							
86.2	73.0												
70.6	73.0												
72.2													
				82.5									
				82.5									
78.5						72.8							
								83.8	83.7	75.1	84.4	85.8	
								83.8		82.2			
								83.7					
								75.1	82.2				
								84.4					
								85.8					

<sup>43</sup>April McMahon and Robert McMahon, *Language Classification by Numbers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 34.

<sup>44</sup>McMahon and McMahon, *ibid.*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 36, 45, 58 and 102.

<sup>45</sup>This software can be obtained free of charge at <http://wordsurv.cse.taylor.edu/>.

Table 2

<b>Languages and Dialects</b>	Low-Saxon	Kölsch	High German	Bavarian
Low-Saxon		82	84	83
Kölsch	82		85	86
High German	84	85		99
Bavarian	83	86	99	

The tables make the following observations possible:

- Portuguese and Spanish, at 86.2%, exemplify instances in which languages are at a borderline of distinction. Structurally, they could have passed for one single language, but they have been historically divided on the basis of functional criteria.
- Sardinian, at 72.8% in comparison to Italian, although viewed by people at large as a dialect of Italian, has a “low” enough score to warrant the title of language.
- Catalan, at 73% from Spanish, often thought of as a mere dialect of Spanish, may be classified as a language in its own rights on structural grounds, as the Ethnologue does.
- The German “dialects” hover mostly around the 85% figure when compared to standard High German.
- Bavarian has an exceptionally high percentage (99%) of cognates with High German.
- The German dialects display a low percentage of cognates among themselves, or when not compared to High German.

In contrast to cognate comparisons, the common person usually defines dialects or languages based on their sound, or intelligibility. In many cases of German dialects, if the individual had no knowledge of a common High German, he or she would have great difficulty understanding another dialect. While living in Bavaria, I have personally heard multiple comments made by Germans raised outside of Bavaria, but who had moved to the region, expressing their difficulty of understanding everyday Bavarian. However, as aurally distinct as German dialects may be, the establishment of a standardized form of German since Luther’s time did indeed induce a national unifying conscience, which later became a political unity. While Bavarians love dialect and (rightly) recognize its capability of uniquely crafted expression, most of them would probably not vote for establishing Bavarian as the official language of *Bayern*, since it would distance the *Freie Bundesstaat Bayern (Free State of Bavaria)* from the whole of Germany.

Is the *Ethnologue* true to its own criteria?

The lexicostatistical differences on the tables above exhibit a wide variety of percentages. Clearly, I believe, they also demonstrate that the evaluation of *one* dialect is not sufficient to determine the precision of the *Ethnologue's* choices for all of them. Indeed, to be true to its own criteria, on the basis of both structural and functional views and its 85% rule-of-thumb for distinction between dialect and language, Bavarian should no longer be treated as an autonomous language by the *Ethnologue*. A definitive answer for each of the “dialects” of German, however, would still necessitate precise Swadesh list comparisons for every one of them.

As Tucker Childs’ quote earlier in this essay revealed, the *Ethnologue* accepts language distinctions such as between Swedish and Norwegian, which, according to cognate comparisons, could be considered the same language.<sup>46</sup> In the case of these languages, a solely functional approach prevailed, rather than a structural one.

### Recommendations and Conclusion

The growth of knowledge concerning the world’s languages is greatly indebted to the work performed by dedicated SIL linguists through many decades, who have surveyed, analyzed, and classified languages which the world, 100 years ago, did not even know existed. As a result of this enterprise, the *Ethnologue* now presents a uniquely comprehensive tool for linguistic, missional, and community development projects all around the world. As any scientific process, on the other hand, it is a work in progress, one to which its producers and collaborators are honestly committed.

In this confidence, and in light of the resources I have been able to gather for this essay, I would like to make the following recommendations towards a treatment of language classification which incorporates structural and functional views of language, yet gives voice to the native speakers in a systematic way.

Firstly, on the immediate plane of German “dialects,” we saw that the evidence showed a very high percentage of cognates between Bavarian and High German, practically identifying Bavarian, from a structural point of view, as a dialect, not an autonomous language. A change in the classification of Bavarian, therefore, should be undertaken, in order to maintain the *Ethnologue's* proposed standards. Furthermore, the remaining German “dialects,” for which no complete Swadesh list has yet been constructed, deserve the same research, and it should guide past and future categorizations.

From a philosophical perspective, however, a broader, more consistent set of criteria should be set in place for language classification. The original function of SIL’s language research was the development of minority languages. Thus, the organization, along with other linguists in the twentieth century, did much to pioneer Western-modeled categorization of such languages, attempting to integrate the local understanding of language with that of Western categorization. Along the course of the decades, as linguists attained a progressively better understanding of indigenous languages, the categories oftentimes had to be revised, in order to remain true to the local reality. Likewise, in view of the existence of a highly developed German (native) linguistic Academy, I believe it would be recommendable to allow the official, local set of categories of languages and dialects (the functional view) to supersede the structural classification.

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<sup>46</sup>Childs, “What’s the difference between dialects and languages?” p. 23.

Understandably, difficult political divergences of opinion exist and play an important role in the categorization. I do not believe that the *Ethnologue* should simply relegate its decisions on language categorization to a national government. I also do not pretend to know every possible situation, and how a situation would have to be approached every single time without fail. However, at a minimum, the speakers of a given language or dialect should be the primary decision makers as to whether their “dialect” is viewed as a subset of a macrolanguage, or as a separate language. The *Ethnologue* is not a political tool, and does not necessarily need to slavishly repeat what is currently “politically correct” in any given country’s language classification. It is, however, a tool for the good of individuals and communities. As such, through consultation with a language’s native speakers, it should aim to honor their emic view of their primary communication tool: *their* language.

As to the question of whether German is *one single* language, I believe the precise answer should rely on the composite input of the understanding of linguistic identity collected from the language’s (or the dialect’s) native speakers. Through this model, the *Ethnologue* will establish itself as a tool, not only for the benefit of non-native cross-cultural workers, but one that consistently respects and values a language’s native community.

#### Appendix I: Recommended Literature for Further Research and Comments

Lehmann, Christian

General Linguistic Instruction – in German. Christian Lehmann is a professor at the University of Erfurt, a prominent writer on Linguistic themes, as well as a speaker in various academic circles.

<http://www.christianlehmann.eu/ling/elements/index.html?http://www.christianlehmann.eu/ling/elements/varietaten.php>

Translations into Bavarian

German-Bavarian Dictionary - <http://www.respekt-empire.de/Translator/>

Noble, C.A.M. - Modern German Dialects by C.A.M.

This is a condensed book on the distinctive features of the German *Mundarten*, but quite comprehensive. Concerning the author’s emphasis on phonological features, he says: “This does not mean, of course, that lexicography as such is unimportant in the study of dialects; it was a fascinating topic of investigation as early as 1917 when P. Kretschmer carried out his systematic study of the spread of synonyms using questionnaires on 350 words throughout German-speaking Europe.” “The maps are included in the *Deutscher Sprachatlas*.”<sup>47</sup>

Mattheier, Klaus J. - Dialekt und Standardsprache

The author discusses three different classes of German inside the Federal Republic of Germany. They are the Basis dialect (local), the city dialect (Stadt), and the Standard form. He states that there are also many forms in between these classes, which have not been scientifically studied. His primary research and discussion revolves about the various sociological aspects that determine which language variety is used, going from the familial to the professional use.

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<sup>47</sup>C.A.M. Noble, *Modern German Dialects* (New York, Peter Lang Publishing, 1983), p. 28.

“Hinter dieser Dichotomie im Dialekt/Standardgebrauch steht in erster Linie die Tatsache, dass der Dialekt fuer die originaeren Dialektsprecher, als die, die ihn in der Familie bzw. in ihrer fruehen Jugend erlernt haben, die ungezwungene Alltagsvarietaeet ist, in die man zurueckfallen kann, wenn keine speziellen soziokommunikativen Anforderungen gestellt warden. Historisch spiegelt sich in dieser Konstellation das Ausgreifen der sich modernisierenden oeffentlichn Gesellschaft auf eine vormoderne Kommunikationsstruktur, das zuerst die oeffentlichen Lebensumfelder und dann ansatzweise auch die eher privaten Lebensumfelder erfasst. Doch auch dieser Faktor wird natuerlich ueberlagert durch die anderen. Einmail hat sich seit dem 19. Jahrhundert in der BRD eine Sprechergruppe gebildet, die keinen Dialekt mehr spricht. Wie gross diese Gruppe is, kann nur vermutet warden, sicherlich aber nicht grosser als 25-30 procent (vgl. S. 61). Mit dieser Gruppe suchen Dialektsprecher natuerlich unabhængig von der Lebenssituation soviel Standardsprache zu sprechen, wie ihnen moeglich ist, um die Verstaendigugn sicherzustellen. In Gespraechen mit Sprechern des eigenen Dialekts wird der ‘oeffentlich’ bzw. ‘private’ Status einer Situation entweder durch die soziale Position der Gespraechspartner oder durch das Thema ausgeloeet. Ein ‘Snak’ ueber den Gartenzaun mit dem pastor kann ungeachtet des hohen sozialen Ranges des Gespraechspartners im Dor auf Plattdeutsch ablaufen. Ein innerfamiliaeres Streitgespraech ueber die schulische Zukunft des Kindes zwischen den Eltern kann dagegen durchaus in Hochdeutsch ablaufen (Stellmacher 1987:32-7). Verschiedentlich ist festgestellt worden, dass etwa in dialectfesten Gebieten wie Bayern der Kialekt auch in weiteren Bereichen der Oeffentlichkeit bis hinauf zu den Regionalparlamenten verwendet wird. An den Tueren von vielen Amtsstuben in Bayern, Schwaben und Niederdeutschland findet man Aufkleber wie ‘Bi uns cha me uns alemannisch schwaetze’ oder ‘Ick snack Plat, Du ok?’ (*Der Spiegel* 1976: 46,47).”<sup>48</sup>

Goossens, Jan

“Deutsche Mundarten sind mit der deutschen Hochsprache verwandte . . . Dialekte, die in einem Gebiet gesprochen werden, in dem das Deutsche, und keine enger verwandte Sprache, die Rolle einer Kultursprache erfuellt” (Goossens, p. 49).

Kloss, Heinz – originator of term: “Dachlose Aussenmundarten” in the 1950’s (Haarmann 1955).

Preston, Dennis R.

Preston quotes Terwey, 1885: “The language written and spoken by *civilized* Netherlanders is called the *Dutch language* (*Nederlandsche taal*). The language is also used in part of the Kingdom of Belgium; there it is called *Flemish*. The languages spoken – seldom written – by uncivilized Netherlanders are called *dialects*. The number of dialects can be considered larger or smaller depending on whether one concentrates on similarities or differences among dialects. Three major dialects are however to be distinguished: Frankish, Saxon, and Frisian. From the first, under the influence of many

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<sup>48</sup>Klaus J. Mattheier, “Dialekt und Standarsprache. Über das Varietätensystem des Deutschen in der Bundesrepublik,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 83 (1990): pp. 69-70.

others, over time, the *general spoken and written Dutch language* originated. (Terwey 1884,2).<sup>49</sup>

Preston also writes extensively on the folk understanding of dialect or regional varieties. Much is to be found from page 13 to 25.

This book uses Dutch, French, German, English/Welsh, American English, Turkish and Japanese as the primary case study languages. The study is based on a survey of speakers of dialects, giving them 4 options to choose from as they relate to other dialects of the same language continuum:

- “1. Not different
2. a little different
3. quite different
4. mostly incomprehensible”<sup>50</sup> His chapter 15 deals with German regional speech after re-unification.

Lewis, Paul – quotes:

“Where do you draw the line between a dialect and a language? Where does one language leave off and another begin?”<sup>51</sup>

“At . . . times . . . the linguistic differences are small, and the answer becomes a matter of politics and sociology.”<sup>52</sup>

“. . . among the most dedicated counters are the researchers at *Ethnologue*, a comprehensive directory of the world’s languages . . .”<sup>53</sup>

Robbins, Frank E. Language: Global Perspective – How Many Languages?

“For our purposes, SIL generally considers as dialects of one language any varieties sufficiently similar that one literature can be used for both. Wherever that is not the case the varieties are considered separate languages.”<sup>54</sup> (Robbins, p. 22)

Mention and description of John Crawford’s text testing (1962) – p. 23

“In intelligibility situations:

1. Compare word lists. If comparison yields less than 60% cognates no further testing is needed. Separate material are required unless bilingualism has developed. If there is any indication of that, bilingualism testing is needed.
2. Where more than 60% cognates are found, then intelligibility testing is needed. If that shows inadequate comprehension then separate programs are needed.
3. Where intelligibility tests show adequate comprehension, the attitudes need to be examined to determine whether there are any reasons why the group should not use the same literature.

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<sup>49</sup>Dennis R. Preston, editor, *Handbook of Perceptual Dialectology*, Volume 1 (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999), p. 11.

<sup>50</sup>Preston, *Handbook of Perceptual Dialectology*, p. 40.

<sup>51</sup>M. Paul Lewis, “How many languages are there in the world?” in *The 5-Minute Linguist*, Rickerson, E.M. and Hilton, Barry, editors, (Sheffield, England: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2012), p. 16.

<sup>52</sup>M. Paul Lewis, “How many languages are there in the world?”, p. 16.

<sup>53</sup>Lewis, *ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>54</sup>Frank E. Robbins, “How Many Languages?” In *Language in Global Perspective: Papers in Honor of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Summer Institute of Linguistics 1935 – 1985*. (SIL, 1986), p. 22.

In bilingualism situations:

1. Make a bilingualism evaluation. If comprehension is judged less than adequate, then it can be assumed separate materials are needed.
2. If bilingualism is judged adequate then sociolinguistic and sociological factors such as language attitudes and the rate at which the second language is spreading should be assessed.” (Robbins, p. 26)

#### Appendix 2: Information and Quotes Specific to Particular “Dialects”

Bavarian:

Dictionary [http://spiegl.de/bayerisches\\_wort.pdf](http://spiegl.de/bayerisches_wort.pdf)

Caramurat Dialect of German in Russia:

[http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/history\\_culture/custom\\_traditions/Caramurat.html](http://library.ndsu.edu/grhc/history_culture/custom_traditions/Caramurat.html) (accessed August 17, 2013).

Course on small German dialects:

<http://www.memrise.com/courses/english/small-german-dialects/> (accessed August 17, 2013).

Frisian:

Alastair G. H. Walker, *Nordfriesisch - ein deutscher Dialekt?* In *Zeitschrift für Dialektologie und Linguistik*, 50. Jahrg., H. 2 (1983), pp. 145-160. Franz Steiner Verlag. Also in <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40501825> (accessed August 24, 2013).

Saterfriesische - eine Sprache in Niedersachsen? (Sater Frisian):

SUMMARY - The existence of the (East) Frisian language, spoken in the so-called Saterland, a small area in the north-west of Lower Saxony, is threatened. From the middle ages it had to cope with Low German, and later with High German, which was always a threat to its independence. A sociolinguistic investigation deals with the question of the communicative role of modern Saterland Frisian as well as the number of speakers. It is now almost reduced to the group- language of patriotic Saterlanders. There are no objective pre-conditions or the subjective desire on the part of the Saterlanders for its expansion and possible integration into a kind of “Pan-Frisian”. The rapid decline in the ability to speak Saterland Frisian can be attributed to the economic and communications development of this once very isolated district, as well as the absence of teaching in schools. Saterland Frisian remains an attractive subject for linguists to investigate.<sup>55</sup> Address of the author: Prof. Dr. Dieter Stellmacher, Seminar für deutsche Philologie, Universität Göttingen, Humboldtallee 13 D-37073, Göttingen.

Saxon:

“Denn ab dem Jahre 1500, war das Obersächsische (Meißnische Kanzleisprache) sehr beliebt in weiten Kreisen des deutschen Volkes. Und der meißnische Dialekt, mit dem

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<sup>55</sup>Dieter Stellmacher, *Das Saterfriesische – eine Sprache in Niedersachsen?* In *Zeitschrift für Dialektologie und Linguistik*, 60. Jahrgang, H. 3, (Franz Steiner Verlag, 1993), p. 291.

Luther seine Bibel niederschrieb, hatte nunmal unumstritten Einfluß auf die Entstehung der heutigen deutschen Schriftsprache”.<sup>56</sup>

Saxon of Transylvania (Siebenbürgen Sächsisch):

“Ähnlich wie in Luxemburg, im Elsass und in der Schweiz, hier wird Mundart sogar mit Prestigegewinn verbunden, ist *die Mundart mündliche Ausdrucksform aller Bevölkerungsschichten im Alltag* (Capesius, 1968a, 197; Isbasescu/ Kisch, 1972, 307; Kelp, 1970; 169; Mantsch, 1985, 189).” (emphasis mine)<sup>57</sup>

“Trotz des Nebeneinanders bleiben Mundart und Hochsprache streng getrennt. Anders als in Österreich *und in dialektal geprägten binnendeutschen Gebieten war ein Hinübergleiten von einer Form zur anderen in Siebenbürgen nicht üblich*. Man einigte sich meistens auf eine Kommunikationsform (Thudt, 1970, 156; Capesius, 1965a, 74; Isbasescu/Kisch, 1972, 308; Nägler, 1992, 137). Dies liegt u.a. sicher auch daran, dass die phonetischen, morphologischen und lexikalischen *Unterschiede zwischen Mundart und Hochsprache so groß sind*, dass z. B. die Kinder Deutsch mehr oder weniger als Fremdsprache lernen (Barcan/Millitz, 1977, 82; Thudt, 1970, 156; Custred, 1989, 147), obwohl das Sächsische eine Variante des Deutschen darstellt”. (emphasis mine).<sup>58</sup>

“Mundart in schriftlicher Form findet sich vornehmlich in *folkloristischer Literatur* (Capesius, 1968b, 136) und *Mundartdichtung*, (Wolff, 1977, 171), so dass die durchschnittliche Lese- und Schreibkenntnis nicht sehr hoch ist” (emphasis mine).<sup>59</sup>

Swabian:

<http://www.undinger.de/dictionairle/schwaebisch/woerter/>

Schlesian (Upper):

<http://www.kmosler.de/Sprache/Woerterlisten/OS-Woerter.html>

Wymysorys [wym] - a language of Poland:

Dictionary online - [www.en.glosbe.com/en/wym](http://www.en.glosbe.com/en/wym)

Lower Franconian (Unterfränkisch):

<http://www.udi.germanistik.uni-wuerzburg.de/seiten/wuf.html> and

[http://www.udi.germanistik.uni-wuerzburg.de/material/aufsaeetze/andere\\_sprachen.pdf](http://www.udi.germanistik.uni-wuerzburg.de/material/aufsaeetze/andere_sprachen.pdf)

Other German Dialect sources – from the University of Portsmouth:

German Dialect Dictionaries - <http://www.pauljoycegerman.co.uk/dialects/obwiener.html>

<http://germazope.uni-trier.de/Projekte/DWV> (deutsche Dialektenwoerterbuecher)

<sup>56</sup>Stadt-Fuehrer Dresden, <http://www.barockstadt-dresden.de/dialekt/saechsische-sprache> (accessed July 31, 2013), under Sächsisch verstehen lernen..., 2013.

<sup>57</sup>Waltraut Schuller, Landsmannschaft der Siebenbürger Sachsen in Deutschland e.V., <http://www.siebenbuenger-bw.de/buch/sachsen/12.htm> (accessed July 21, 2013), under Die Mundart der Siebenbürger Sachsen, 1999.

<sup>58</sup>Schuller, Siebenbürger Sachsen.

<sup>59</sup>Schuller, Siebenbürger Sachsen.

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