
The Fictionalization of Oral Varieties in the History of German Drama

Lea Schäfer

Philipps-Universität Marburg
lea.schaefer@staff.uni-marburg.de

Since fictional, literary language usually represents a (written) standard variety, it often plays with the contrast to orality. This often involves certain features of orality that are considered characteristic of certain speaker groups, as we already find in classical Greek drama, which thus shaped modern European literatures evidently.

In German literature we already find passages with fictionalizations of oral varieties in Middle High German texts, as for example in Hugo von Trimberg's *Der Renner* (between 1300-1313). However, as a literary strategy, the opposition between written and oral language(s) becomes popular only from the early modern period. Especially within passages of direct speech, oral varieties are adapted, as in the following excerpt from Theodor Fontane's poem *Herr von Ribbeck auf Ribbeck im Havelland* (1889), in which the author embeds his own Low German orality into the High German matrix language:

- (1) Und kommt ein Jung' übern Kirchhof her,
So flüstert's im Baume: „Wiste ne Beer?“
Und kommt ein Mädle, so flüstert's: „Lütt Dirn,
Kumm man röwer, ick gew' di ne Birn.“

In terms of psychological, but also linguistic creativity, the most interesting cases are those in which not the author's own, but a foreign variety is adapted. For the establishment of this game with variation as a literary strategy, the role of linguistic stereotypes in literary and public-social discourse plays an important role. This interacts with the possibilities and limitations of (fictional) language and perceptual linguistics, which is accompanied by considerations of the linguistic salience (Trudgill 2000). Hence, with this special field of fictional (and partly fictive) orality, one touches on quite different areas, which this paper would like to relate to each other.

The focus of the talk, however, is to present the goals, the technical implementation of corpus annotation, and some initial results of the project “Adaptations of German Varieties in German Drama (16th-19th Centuries),” which attempts to systematically record grammatical structure as well as literary function(s) and the role of intended orality in about 200 plays. A key question will be whether and how grammatical stereotypes develop and become entrenched in literary discourse.

References: • Trudgill, P. (2000 [1974]). *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language & Society*. Penguin Books.