Abstract:

Migration in the Ruhr Metropolis: Practices of Positioning in Talk-in-Interaction

This paper presents findings obtained in a preparatory study for a larger project on “Migration in the Ruhr Metropolis: Language(s) and language attitudes in interaction”. The Ruhr Area is a metropolitan region in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, with approximately 5.3 million inhabitants. It is one of Germany’s major migrant regions. The Ruhr Area has seen several waves of migration which resulted in ‘super diverse’ cities and neighbourhoods (Vertovec 2007) and particular settlement patterns. A key feature of residential segregation in the Ruhr Area is the north-south divide along the A 40 motorway, the so-called ‘social equator’, which divides the cities into ethnically diverse and less diverse, poor and less poor, educated and less educated areas (Kersting et al. 2009, Cindark/Ziegler 2016).

The project design pays attention to these social and spatial characteristics by investigating language use and attitudes from speakers with different ethnic backgrounds living in neighbourhoods north and south of the motorway A 40 in the cities of Essen and Dortmund. A preliminary data set of narrative interviews of speakers with German, Turkish and Arabic roots has been recorded to analyse and compare the relationships between language use and aspects of positioning. Reflecting upon recent developments in interactional (socio)linguistics (Günthner 2008, Imo 2013, König 2014, Ziegler et al. submitted), we have adopted an interactional approach to investigate practices of positioning (Deppermann 2015) more closely. The data, which have been transcribed according to the standards of the conversation analytic transcription system GAT 2 (Couper-Kuhlen/Barth-Weingarten 2011) comprises 24 narrative interviews, carried out in German but also in Turkish and Arabic. The analysis focuses on the following questions: Which categories are used to present the ‘self’ and the ‘other’, how are ‘mixed identities’ talked into being, what stereotypes are common in talking about one’s own group and other groups, what role does emotion play in these activities, how are languages and varieties evaluated and finally: What role does the north-south divide along the A 40 motorway play in sociolinguistic terms?

The results so far reveal that the variable immigrant generation is a crucial factor in using and evaluating ethnic categorizations such as “migrants” or “migration background”. Whereas informants of the first generation of immigrants (people who immigrated to Germany as adults) are indifferent to these ethnic concepts, informants of the second generation of immigrants (people who are descendents from first generation immigrants and born in Germany) perceive these concepts as highly stigmatized. Informants of the third generation of immigrants (people who are descendents of the second generation of immigrants) tend to exhibit a playful approach in defining themselves as migrants, often in the context of constructing a fluid and hybrid identity.

References


