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**Voices of linguistic outrage:  
Standard language constructs and  
the discourse on new urban dialects**

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**Abstract**

This paper investigates the discursive processes at work in public debates on a type of new urban dialect that has been under intense, often heated public discussion in recent years: variants of majority languages that emerged in multiethnic and multilingual neighbourhoods in urban Europe. Against the background of findings from a range of European countries, I present a case study from Germany based on a corpus of emails and online readers' comments posted in the context of a media storm on such a new dialect. I analyse key topoi in the debate, the thematic strands linked to them, and some underlying ideologies supporting them, and argue that a particular construction of Standard German as a "Hochsprache" 'High language' establishes a powerful case of standard language ideology that reinforces a social and ethnic 'us'/'them'-dichotomy to provide a potent conceptual frame for the devaluation of such urban dialects and their speakers.

**Key words:** standard language ideology, public discourse, multiethnolects, Standard German, Othering, racism by proxy

## 1. Introduction

A linguistic phenomenon that has received a lot of public attention over the last decades in a number of European countries is the emergence of new ways of speaking in urban neighbourhoods, in particular among the especially dynamic group of adolescent speakers. In present-day urban Europe, multiethnic and multilingual urban neighbourhoods support new and diverse linguistic repertoires, a wealth of multilingual competences, and new variants of the majority language. Such variants have been characterised, among others, as multiethnolects (Quist 2008), new dialects (Cheshire et al. 2011), or new urban vernaculars (Rampton 2013).

In sociolinguistics, the status of these new ways of speaking as systematic varieties or styles, or as clusters of linguistic resources in communicative practices, has been the subject of some controversy,<sup>1</sup> but there is general agreement that what we find here is a creative use of language that reflects speakers' choices in particular communicative and social contexts,<sup>2</sup> rather than a sign of linguistic poverty or some form of language decay. By contrast, the picture drawn in public debates is mostly negative, and discussions of such linguistic practices are dominated by disapproval and concern.

In what follows, I am going to investigate the discursive patterns in such debates in more detail. I will start with an overview of what we know so far about the public discourse on these new urban dialects from different European countries. Against this background, I

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<sup>1</sup> Cf., e.g., Jaspers (2008), Blommaert and Rampton (2011), Freywald et al. (2011). Cf. Quist (2008), Wiese (2013) for a consolidation of different perspectives.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., e.g., Kotsinas (1992), Nortier (2001), Kallmeyer and Keim (2003), Wiese (2009), Kerswill (2010), Cheshire et al. (2011); contributions in Quist and Svendsen (eds.) (2010), Källström and Lindberg (eds.) (2011), Kern and Selting (eds.) (2011). In some descriptions of (multi-)ethnolectal features, they seem to be regarded as errors (e.g., Androutsopoulos 2001:6 speaks of 'errors in grammatical gender'; Jaspers 2008:94 talks about 'incorrect flektion'). I do not think this indicates a "faulty" view of such linguistic practices, though, but might rather stem from a perspective that looks at individual features, rather than their systematic grammatical status within a particular linguistic variant.

will present a case study from Germany, drawing on evidence from a recent media storm that generated a wealth of data on ideologies and attitudes towards a new vernacular of this kind, ‘Kiezdeutsch’ (lit. ‘(neighbour-)hood German’), its speakers, and the construction of standard vs. non-standard variants. Looking at key topoi in the public debate and the thematic strands linked to them, I will show that a particular construction of standard German as “Hochdeutsch” ‘High German’ plays a central role in the devaluation of Kiezdeutsch.

In Germany, the term “Hochdeutsch” is commonly used for an idealised standard variant which, like standard languages in other countries, is regarded as the basis for “proper usage” and is associated with middle and upper class language use. The “Hoch” in “Hochdeutsch” initially refers to its status as a High rather than Low German variety, where “high” and “low” relate to geographical altitude, namely the more mountainous character of the High German dialect region, which is towards the South, and the flatter, lower landscape in the North, which is home to the Low German dialects (or rather, in a lot of cases, used to be home to them, since Low German variants have mostly been displaced by High German ones, due to the strong influence of standard German). Outside linguistics, the term has, however, undergone a reinterpretation from a geographic characterisation to a qualitative ranking: in general usage, “Hochdeutsch” is usually understood to refer to a “higher” form of language, a culturally elevated “Hochsprache”, ‘High language’, superior to other variants of German. This reinterpretation establishes a particularly powerful case of standard language ideology and, as I will show below, supports a narrative on standard language that provides an important conceptual frame in the discourse on new urban dialects.

## **2. The Public Discourse on New Urban Dialects in Europe**

The phenomenon of new urban vernaculars is comparatively novel, and while it has received considerable attention in sociolinguistic discussion over the last decades, there have only been a few studies focussing on the public debate so far, in addition to those that touch on this topic while primarily targeting other aspects, such as language use or media stylisations (e.g., in comedy). However, coming from a range of European countries where research on new urban vernaculars has been strong, such as Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, The Netherlands, Norway, the UK, France, and Germany, the data we have so far provides an emerging general picture of language ideologies and attitudes apparent in the public debate.

Common findings point to a view of new urban vernaculars as inferior variants of the national language that indicate a lack of linguistic competence, and a fear that they pose a threat to the national language, to the education system, or to majority culture and society. An additional aspect found in a number of studies is an “Othering” of speakers who are associated with aggression and sometimes an opposition to liberal values. Evidence for some of these negative evaluations comes also from studies investigating speakers’ attitudes and perceptions, most notably Bijvoet’s (2003) and Bijvoet and Fraurud’s (2010) pioneering work with Swedish adolescents. Results from their studies point to a devaluation of multiethnic varieties as ‘bad’ or ‘broken’ Swedish both inside and outside the speech communities, and as an indication for a lack of competence in Standard Swedish. In listener experiments, speakers were also rated higher for ‘toughness’, a finding that accords with data showing an association with aggression in public debates (note, though, that speakers were also rated higher for ‘humour’, as a positive trait).

In the public debate in Sweden, Stroud (2004) analyses an ideologisation of ‘Rinkeby-Svenska’ (after a multiethnic suburb of Stockholm) as incorrect and ‘inauthentic’ and even ‘contagious’, and cites a far-right website with the claim that ‘to help immigrants along, language requirements have been lowered’. As Haglund (2005:51) points out, purported linguistic deficiencies of immigrants are also related to “integration failures”. Milani (2010)

reports on a public debate in 2006 where multiethnic ‘slang’ is associated with sexism and violence and seen as a cause for failure in the labour market.

While there is a strong research focus on multiethnolectal speech in Denmark from ethnographic and dialect perspectives, to my knowledge no studies have been conducted so far on the ongoing public debate. Targeting a somewhat related domain, Quist and Jørgensen (2007) report on stereotyped representations of young migrant-background males in a popular internet game. The central character, ‘Mujaffa’, is presented as criminal and aggressive, using a speech style that they describe as ‘mock immigrant Danish’, similar to Hill’s (1995) description of ‘Mock Spanish’ as used by Anglo-Americans. They surmise that ‘A close look at the public debate about the Mujaffa web-page [...] is likely to reveal a [elite racist] discourse parallel to the one Hill analyzes for Mock Spanish.’

For Belgium, Blommaert and Verschuren (1998) provide an in-depth analysis of public debates on the broader topic of cultural diversity that also throws a light on language-related issues. They show an Othering of immigrants and their children as ‘linguistically other’ speakers who are expected to integrate by learning ‘proper Dutch’. As Cornips et al. (*to appear*) report, variants of Dutch spoken by adolescents in multiethnic neighbourhoods in Belgium and the Netherlands, initially labelled ‘smurf lingo’, were associated with a restricted lexicon, grammatical errors, and ‘an eroded sense of “proper”, polite communication’.

For Norway, Svendsen and Røyneland (2008) discuss the following letter by a teacher, published 2006 in *Aftenposten*, a major daily newspaper from Oslo:<sup>3</sup>

1. ‘I actually think many Norwegians would benefit from being instructed in Norwegian as a second language. Especially those who have grown up in areas with 90% migrants. Once, I had an ethnic Norwegian pupil at secondary school who spoke “broken” Norwegian. Frightening.’

This illustrates a similar view, of an incorrect variant that is not a proper part of the national language and might prove contagious to other, monolingual speakers.<sup>4</sup> This is particularly interesting in the case of Norway given its tradition of embracing linguistic diversity, where dialects enjoy a comparatively high prestige and are less confined to the private and informal sphere than in other European countries. Despite this higher acceptance of dialectal variation in general, we find similar negative attitudes towards new urban vernaculars as in other European countries. Relating to this contrast, Svendsen and Røyneland (2008:80), point out

‘The multiethnolectal speech style contributes to a further increase of dialect diversity in Norway. However, this speech style has not, as yet, achieved a status equal to that of the traditional dialects. It is often taken as a manifestation of lack of competence rather than as a new Norwegian dialect’

For the case of the UK, Kerswill (2013) provides a detailed diachronic analysis that indicates a progression of public discourses on “Jafaican” in British print media over the last 4 to 5 years. Initially, “Jafaican” was regarded as exotic and interesting, but soon as a threat to traditional dialects (with pictures such as ‘ethnic cleansing’ in far-right political statements, cf. Kerswill 2013:23). At several stages, “Jafaican” was negatively characterised as being an educational problem, a threat to liberal values, social cohesion, and nationhood, and associated with bad behaviour. However, in the UK the development also involved more positive perceptions, such as that of a ‘normal variety’ and, lately, as ‘cool’, appropriated as fashionable.

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<sup>3</sup> *Aftenposten* from June 8, 2006, quoted after Svendsen and Røyneland (2008:63).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. also Aarsæther (2010) on the association with “bad Norwegian” in the media.

For France, Pooley (2008) finds a strong dominance of negative attitudes towards urban youth vernaculars, which are seen as a ‘linguistic confinement’, associated with violence and sometimes regarded as a threat, or even an ‘attack’ on Standard French or French society. Again, this ‘slang’ is portrayed as an inferior form of language indicating a lack of competence and causing educational failure. He reports that this latter view is also supported by a prominent linguist in the media, who purportedly diagnoses ‘an extreme paucity of (Standard French) lexis that prevents users from being able to function in mainstream society’ (Pooley 2008: 322).

For Germany, Androutsopoulos (2001, 2007, 2011) analyses media stylisations of multiethnolectal speech, “Türkendeutsch” (‘Turks’ German’), that realise negative stereotypes of nonstandard, foreign language use, and ‘broken German’, following a widespread standard language ideology in media.<sup>5</sup> In interviews with young people in Heidelberg, he reports associations of “Türkendeutsch” with youth gangs and connotations of aggressive, anti-social behaviour. As Androutsopoulos (2011) shows, media representations, including those that involve linguist “experts”, construct a heteroethnic relation of speakers to an imagined homogenised majority society and its language. In Wiese (2011), I show how negative attitudes towards language variation, social stratification and the associated linguistic capital, and exotisation contributed to a strong devaluation of what was called “Kanak Sprak” (‘wog speak’) in the public debate at the end of the 1990s and beginning of 2000s, leading to a cross-fertilisation of two linguistic myths: that of vernacular features as ‘broken German’ and that of a ‘double semilingualism’ by multilingual adolescents.

Such phenomena are not restricted to Europe, of course. A well-known example outside Europe is the discourse on English variants spoken by Latinas/os in the US sometimes discussed as ‘Spanglish’. For example, Zentella (2007) notes that, as in the European cases summarised here, this is regarded as incorrect English in the public debate, associated with school failure and often with criminality, and seen as an indication for a ‘lack of discipline’ and an ‘unwillingness to assimilate’. As she points out, linguistic stereotyping and devaluation can play a proxy for racism in this context:

‘In the US, where race has been remapped from biology onto language because public racist remarks are censored, comments about the inferiority and/or unintelligibility of regional, class, and racial dialects of Spanish and English substitute for abusive remarks about color, hair, lips, noses, and body parts, with the same effect. “Incorrect” aspects of grammar or pronunciation label their speakers as inferior’ (Zentella 2007:26)

We can identify four main, overlapping factors as general ideological underpinnings for the converging negative view of new urban vernaculars that emerges here. First, standard language ideology, that is, a belief in a homogeneous, discrete, and superior “standard variety” that leads to the devaluation of other variants as inferior and deficient, and accordingly of their speakers as less competent.<sup>6</sup> Second, a devaluation of linguistic variants that are interpreted as indexing speakers perceived as socially lower.<sup>7</sup> Both of these attitudes support a negative view of new urban vernaculars: as informal, new variants of the respective majority languages, they fall outside the perceived “standard”, and the multilingual speech communities supporting them are dominantly found in underprivileged inner-city or suburban neighbourhoods. A well-known example from a domain not related to recent immigration

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. also Kotthoff (2010) who describes this for the stylisation in comedy shows.

<sup>6</sup> Milroy and Milroy (1999). Cf. Vogl (2012) for an historical overview of standard language ideologies in Europe; Mattheier (1991), Davies (2012) for a detailed discussion of Germany.

<sup>7</sup> Labov (1969:156) states, in a discussion of Bernstein’s views of linguistic codes, ‘a strong bias against all forms of working-class behaviour, so that middle-class behaviour is seen as superior in every respect’.

that reflects a similar interaction of those two factors, is the perception of African American vernacular English as an inferior variety indicating verbal deprivation, as originally discussed in Labov (1969).

A third contributing factor is a widespread monolingual bias<sup>8</sup> that regards monolingualism as the norm, leading to negative attitudes towards speech communities with a large proportion of multilingual speakers – and, as I will show in more detail for the German case below, it is predominantly the multilingual speakers that are visible in the public perception of these speech communities, while the participation of monolingual speakers of the majority language in such linguistic practices is neglected, or dismissed as secondary.

Finally, a fourth factor, related to this, can be xenophobia, given that the diverse linguistic set-up of these speech communities has its roots in immigration, with a lot of speakers coming from families where grandparents, parents, or, to a lesser degree, the adolescent speakers themselves immigrated into the country. Devaluation, and, as we will see below (Sections 3 and 4), sometimes strong resentment, even open hatred, of linguistic practices that are perceived as characteristic of immigrants or their descendants can then serve as a proxy for xenophobic antagonism and racism, as mentioned above for “Spanglish”. As Stroud (2004:197) put it:

‘in modern states, where explicit racist discourse is not officially acceptable, discourses on language, more specifically issues relating to a mother-tongue or standard language ideology, are often used to create immigrant out-groups.’

In public debates of these urban vernaculars, these four different factors come together in a specific pattern of linguistic – or language-proxy – devaluation, making this a particularly interesting object for sociolinguistic studies. In what follows, I am going to investigate such discursive patterns in more detail for a case study on the current debate in Germany. I will first briefly describe the public discourse on multiethnic urban German in general (Section 3). Against this background, I will analyse the current debate on Kiezdeutsch, investigating key topoi and additional ideological underpinnings such as a far-reaching ‘us’/‘them’-dichotomy. Based on this, I will identify a standard language construct of “Hochdeutsch” that organises the different thematic strands in the devaluation of this new urban dialect within a common narrative (Section 4). The final section (Section 5) will summarise our findings.

### 3. The Public Debate on New Urban German

Modern Germany is a multilingual country, and this is particularly true for urban areas. While language use in families is not documented in census surveys for Germany, the Federal Statistical Office includes data on ‘migrant background’: according to the definition employed, someone is of ‘migrant background’ if s/he her/himself or at least one parent immigrated to Germany after 1949 or does not have the German citizenship. Data on migrant background can hence give an indication on potentially multilingual families. According to the German census,<sup>9</sup> about 1/5 of the population as a whole has a migrant background, and approximately 31% of unmarried minors in Germany live in a family with migrant background, with a higher proportion in urban areas: in cities over 500,000 inhabitants, nearly every second child (46%) grows up in a family with migrant background.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Kachru (1994); Gogolin (1994); Cook (1997). Along the same lines, Bommers and Maas (2005:182) point out a ‘counter-factual ideological construction’ of ‘one country, one people, one language’ in many European countries.

<sup>9</sup> Data from 2009 and 2010, released by the German Federal Statistical Office.

This indicates that experiences with multilingualism are widespread in the linguistic reality of young speakers in Germany today, and the new ways of speaking that multilingual urban speech communities support form an important and central, rather than peripheral part of modern German. In contrast to this, the public debate has long been characterised by marginalisation and, initially, exotisation.

At the beginning of the debate, in the late 1990s / early 2000s, a dominant label for the new German vernacular used in multiethnic neighbourhoods was “Kanak Sprak”, which, as briefly mentioned above, can be translated as something like ‘wog speak’: “Kanak” is a pejorative, xenophobic epithet in German, and “Sprak” is a truncation of “Sprache” ‘language’. The term was initially introduced by Feridun Zaimoğlu, who used it in political novels and interview collections as an attempt to reclaim the pejorative expression ‘Kanake’ within political movements of Germans with migrant, mostly Turkish, background.<sup>10</sup> However, the term did not lose its xenophobic associations.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, based on its lexical semantics alone, even independently of its pejorative register, it supports a marginalisation through Othering at two levels: (a) of the speakers themselves as foreign (‘Kanak’) and (b) of their way of speaking as a different language (‘Sprak’). Taken together, this seems to have made it particularly suitable for usage in public discourse, where it was quickly appropriated and broadly used (in some cases also in academic writings), making the expression ‘Kanak’, which outside this compound would be condemned as a xenophobic slur, acceptable here.

Apart from the framing of Otherness, common attitudes expressed in media reports on this phenomenon indicate a stigmatisation as wrong, incorrect German, often associated with aggression. (2.) gives an example from a 1999 article in *Berliner Zeitung*, a major daily newspaper from Berlin [*German originals of all examples quoted in this article are listed in the appendix*]:

2. “Kanak Sprak” ignores the Duden [grammatical reference book for German], and it does not mind raping the grammar.’

(*Berliner Zeitung*, May 28, 1999, ‘Do you need hard? Give you correct.’)

Since then, “Kanak Sprak” has gradually been replaced by “Kiezdeutsch”, a label introduced in Wiese (2006) as an alternative to “Kanak Sprak”. As mentioned above, “Kiezdeutsch” literally means “(neighbour-)hood German”, drawing on “Kiez” [ki : t͡s] as an informal, positively associated Berlin dialect term for a neighbourhood. While labelling linguistic practices can carry risks of homogenising something in a way that might support restriction and even segregation,<sup>12</sup> I believe that the replacement of “Kanak Sprak” by “Kiezdeutsch” can in fact counteract exclusion. This is not only because it is a term adopted from the community that can contribute to empowering speakers.<sup>13</sup> Its semantics also places this way of speaking and their speakers within the majority in-group: it positions it within general everyday communication in an informal neighbourhood setting (“Kiez-”), and it explicitly references it as a part of German (“-deutsch”).

That said, naming linguistic practices will always have at least some essentialising effects. However in this case, naming identified rather than reified an already existing phenomenon, a systematic variant of German (see Wiese 2013 for a detailed discussion), and at the time “Kiezdeutsch” was introduced, the act of labelling – and the essentialising this

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<sup>10</sup> E.g., *Kanak Sprak. 24 Mißtöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft*. Berlin: Rotbuch, 1995.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Androutsopoulos (2007) on language ideology aspects of this.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Jaspers (2008), Androutsopoulos (2011), Cornips et al. (*to appear*). Cf. Wiese (2013) on a more detailed argumentation for using “Kiezdeutsch” to identify a variety.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Wiese (2006; 2013). Cf. also Kallmeyer and Keim (2003), who report that adolescents in Mannheim, Germany, use the name ‘Stadtteilsprache’ “district / ward language”.

might bring with it – had already happened, with “Kanak Sprak” firmly entrenched in the public discussion. “Kiezdeutsch” was introduced to replace this existing label, rather than creating one *ex nihilo*, thus counteracting the strong negative associations of the initial label.

An indication of the destigmatisation and inclusion that the new term “Kiezdeutsch” promotes in contrast to the previous one, is the strong opposition it gets from self-appointed ‘language guardians’ such as the right-wing German ‘Verein für Sprachpflege’, who follows a purist, monoethnically and monolingually oriented agenda. The following quote from its publication *Deutsche Sprachwelt* (2009, issue 36, front page) illustrates this. Under the headline ‘Stammer-German as an Accomplishment? Linguists Admire an Aberration of Our Language’, Thomas Paulwitz, the association’s president, complains about the use of “Kiezdeutsch” instead of “Kanak Sprak”:

3. ‘[H. Wiese] uses the word “Kiez” (neighbourhood), which by now is positively associated, and thus creates a pleasant ambience, which is hardly possible with the word “Kanaksprak”.’

A further illustration of the positive revaluation associated with ‘Kiezdeutsch’ comes from the following quote, taken from a report on public radio that sets the term in contrast to ‘Türkensprache’, ‘Turks’ language’, and links up the ethnic separation implied by the latter with an additional devaluation along social class divisions (‘middle class children’ vs. ‘Kiezdeutsch speakers’) (WDR radio, September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012):

4. ‘[its speakers] call it ‘Kiezdeutsch’ and talk about a dialect. But wouldn’t middle class children call that “Turks’ language”?’

This second quote comes from a public debate that peaked in 2012, which will be the focus of the remainder of this article. The debate initially centred on a linguistic description of Kiezdeutsch as a new German dialect (“Dialekt”), a characterisation that emphasises its status as a systematic and integral part of German and as part of a broader repertoire in its speakers, and its structural and sociolinguistic parallels to traditional German dialects.<sup>14</sup> In accordance with Rampton’s (2013) argument for a ‘reclaim’ of the English term “vernacular”, German “Dialekt” also contributes to

‘normalise the kind of urban speech we are examining, moving it out of the “marked” margins, not just in sociolinguistic study but maybe also in normative public discourse.’ (Rampton 2013:78)

When in February 2012, a monograph (Wiese 2012) was published that summarised research results on Kiezdeutsch as a dialect in an accessible manner comprehensible for non-specialist readers, this was quickly picked up in the public debate in Germany. The discussion was accompanied (and cross-fertilised) by a media firestorm that involved several press agencies, major national newspapers and weekly magazines, public TV and radio news, as well as tabloids and entertainment-oriented sections of popular media, and was also taken up by media in some other European countries, namely Austria (*Wiener Zeitung*, *Der Standard*), the UK (*The Economist*), and Turkey (*Milliyet*, *Radikal*). The ensuing public debate yielded a wealth of data on attitudes towards linguistic variation, multilingual speech communities, and the question of who is a legitimate speaker of a German dialect.

In Germany, the label “Dialekt” ‘dialect’ has traditionally been primarily associated, in both public discourse and academic writings, with the regional varieties that historically formed the background for the emergence of “standard” German.<sup>15</sup> This has led to a popular

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Wiese (2009), Freywald et al. (2011), Wiese (2012;2013).

<sup>15</sup> Cf., e.g., Auer (2011:487), who in a European overview of dialect vs. standard scenarios proposes ‘to reserve the term “(traditional) dialects” for the varieties under the roof [...] of a standard variety which



view of dialects as something associated with German tradition and a long history in German culture. Accordingly, it is, for example, a popular narrative to recall one's surprise when someone perceived as a member of a non-German out-group (e.g., because of physical attributes such as skin colour, or dark hair) speaks a traditional regional dialect of German, which is considered very funny, indicating a strong cognitive dissonance. In the case of Kiezdeutsch, a similar dissonance became evident in some of the rejections of this vernacular as a dialect, and accordingly of its speakers as German dialect speakers.

So the 'Dialekt' framing of the public debate on Kiezdeutsch in 2012 makes this a particularly interesting domain of research. It connects the discussion of linguistic diversity with a concept of nonstandard varieties, 'Dialekt', that is positively connotated as traditionally German and thus potentially collides with "standard language" ideologies. This has led to a sharpening of the discussion of what counts as 'proper' German and who owns it, bringing into focus the way linguistic value systems interact with social inclusion vs. exclusion, shaping power relations, and ultimately helping to support and reassert positive self-images of privileged groups.

Similarly to what Pooley (2008) reported from France (cf. Section 2 above), there were also a few linguists who entered the public debate with negative depictions of this new urban vernacular and its speakers. One of them is illustrated by the following quote, taken from a guest article in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (a large national newspaper) by a professor for linguistics and German as a foreign language:<sup>16</sup>

5. 'Ms Wiese swipes the term "dialect" for an adolescent way of speaking where swaggering plays a large role. Why? She wants to cadge its prestige, since dialects enjoy esteem. [...] "Kiezdeutsch", however, is neither a dialect nor a sociolect, but rather a transitorial specialised language that is based on influences of other languages, and errors in German. [...] It is not a case for dialectology, but instead for language psychology and error analysis.'

What is striking in this statement is the close link between negative structural statements and social devaluation. The description of linguistic characteristics as 'errors' and their association with 'other languages' is not backed by linguistic examples or references to research results. It is, however, introduced by a postulation that 'swaggering plays a large role' in this way of speaking, and a refusal to grant it the 'prestige' or 'esteem' that dialects are seen to enjoy. The fact that the characterisation of Kiezdeutsch as a German dialect prompts such heated rejections, and in this case one from a linguist (although this largely remained an exception), gives a first indication of how strongly such a characterisation conflicted with some widespread and deep-rooted assumptions on 'proper' German and its delineation. This guest article found a wide circulation as an expert rejection of Kiezdeutsch as a dialect, in particular by 'language guardian' associations participating in a 'complaint tradition' in the sense of Milroy and Milroy (1999), where it fitted well into purist and exclusionary attitudes towards German. In contrast to this, a press release by the German Linguistics Association, DGfS, around the same time,<sup>17</sup> which emphasised that linguistic variants such as Kiezdeutsch follow systematic rules, are part of a larger repertoire, and do not represent "wrong" German, was largely ignored in the public debate.

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preceded the standard languages and provided the linguistic material out of which the endoglossic standard varieties developed'.

<sup>16</sup> *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2012. Cf. Wiese (2013) for a discussion of putative interference-based errors in Kiezdeutsch.

<sup>17</sup> URL: <https://dgfs.de/de/aktuelles/2012/erklaerung-der-dgfs-zu-sprachlichen-varianten.html>

## 4. Key Topoi in the Public Debate on Kiezdeutsch: A Corpus Analysis

In this section, I examine the picture that manifests itself in Germany's public debate on Kiezdeutsch in more detail by investigating key topoi revealed in comments on media websites and in emails. I am going to identify a key narrative on what it means to "speak German" that targets concepts of standard language, dialect, and their speakers and sheds light on the complex relationship of language and identity. Relating to the picture that emerged from our cross-national overview, I will identify four central topoi in the discussion of Kiezdeutsch and show how they are backed by this narrative.

### 4.1 The data

The empirical basis for the investigation is provided by a corpus assembling two kinds of reactions to media reports on Kiezdeutsch: (1) emails that were sent to me after such reports, and (2) postings on the respective media websites.<sup>18</sup>

The emails cover data since May 2009 that clustered in two main waves: in May/June 2009, I received a surge of emails which would mostly qualify as "hate mail", with strong aggressive undertones, including insults and some personal threats. A large part of these were, as far as I can see, triggered by a report on a German website coming from the extreme right, "pi-news" ('politically incorrect news'),<sup>19</sup> after a talk on Kiezdeutsch I gave at the "Akademientag", an annual public presentation of the German Academies of Sciences. The second main wave of emails was received in 2012, after the publication of a book on Kiezdeutsch as a German dialect, Wiese (2012) (see above), and subsequent media reports on the topic. These emails cover a broader spectrum, with about a quarter of them (12 out of 51) including positive evaluations, supportive episodic data from the senders' own experiences in working with adolescents in urban neighbourhoods, or questions about dialects and language variation. Taken together, the two waves yielded 76 emails, with 25 in the first and 51 in the second one.

The internet comments were obtained from the article on "pi-news" from May 2009, and from media websites during the period of January to April 2012, when the most recent discussion on Kiezdeutsch peaked in the media (triggering the second waves of emails). Data was collected for this period from websites that could be found by searching for "Kiezdeutsch" and contained reports plus individual comment postings (hence, an internet format similar to traditional "letters to the editor"). Together, this yielded postings to a cross-section of media, covering 14 websites of print media (newspapers and magazines), 4 internet-based news sites (including *pi-news* from 2009 and 2012), and 1 website for a public TV news programme (*Tagesschau*). In addition to those from German websites, the corpus includes postings to an English-language article in *The Economist*. Most of the German media sources target a general audience, among them 5 national news media, 4 daily regional papers, and 4 tabloids. In addition, the corpus also includes comments to some media with a more specific readership: one that targets university students (*UniSPIEGEL*), one that, according to its editorial statement, is targeted at the 'young, German-Turkish 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation' (*Deutsch-türkische Nachrichten*), two news forums from the extreme right (*pi-news*, *Deutschland-Echo*), and a third, with a partly overlapping readership, from the above-

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<sup>18</sup> The corpus is currently anonymised, further edited, implemented into a searchable corpus format, and prepared for general access, as a supplement *KiDKo/E* to the "KiezDeutsch-Korpus" (*KiDKo*) that assembles linguistically annotated, transcribed recordings of spontaneous conversations among adolescents in urban neighbourhoods ([http://www.kiezdeutschkorpus.de/index\\_en.html](http://www.kiezdeutschkorpus.de/index_en.html)).

<sup>19</sup> URL: <http://www.pi-news.net/2009/05/kanak-sprak-eine-spannende-bereicherung/#more-62348> (last accessed May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2013). Some emails reference this website, and the authors of the report included a link with my email address.

mentioned *Deutsche Sprachwelt*. Altogether, the corpus contains 1,362 comments, with a distribution as summarised in Table 1 (with percentages given for each category, and absolute numbers in brackets).

	<b>number of sources</b>	<b>number of comments</b>
general audience (Germany)	65% (13)	34% (469)
<i>national news media</i>	25% (5)	8% (112)
<i>tabloids</i>	20% (4)	18% (250)
<i>regional dailies</i>	20% (4)	8% (107)
general audience (UK)	5% (1)	7% (97)
student-targeted	5% (1)	21% (287)
Turkish-German	5% (1)	3% (41)
right-fringe	15% (3)	23% (309)
“language guardians”	5% (1)	12% (164)

Table 1: Distribution of media sources for comments over the corpus

A comparison of the two columns for sources and comments shows that right-fringe and “language guardian” comments are disproportionately represented in relation to the number of media sources that were included, with a proportion of comments that is about 1 ½ times (right-fringe) or more than twice (“language guardians”) as high as the proportion of sources. In contrast to this, media reports targeting a general audience in Germany generated only about half as high a proportion of comments as would be expected from their share in media sources. This indicates a higher output of right-fringe and “language guardian” posters in this kind of topic that might also have led to an overrepresentation of this population in emails.

By the same token, this might also hold for comments to student-targeted media reports, and even to a higher degree: here, we find four times as many postings as would be expected from their proportion of media sources. However, this might be related to a general higher “verbosity” (in the sense of Labov 1969) of this population, rather than a heightened involvement in discussions of this topic: there are not only more postings, but also considerably longer ones, with an average of 127.97 words per posting compared to 65.14 in all other comment types. The same does not hold for postings from right-fringe and “language guardian” sites, where we find a slight tendency in the opposite direction, with only 62.64 words per posting on average.

In general we have to keep in mind with this kind of data that the advantage we gain by obtaining spontaneous productions also means that the “voices of outrage” we find here come from a self-selected group that might not be representative of the discussion in general. This is something we should in particular keep in mind when looking at data from the emails. In order to reduce skewed effects, I will, when quantifying, distinguish in my analyses between different relevant subsets of postings. While doing so, we have to bear in mind, though, that the primary target group of a website or print medium does not describe all of the users posting comments. So, in the case of *pi-news*, for instance, there were several comments posted by people who were in opposition to the website and criticised its right-wing and often racist agenda. In a different venue, the discussion of the *Economist* article

was not exclusively British, but also involved writers who identified themselves as being from Germany.

In comparison to data from media reports proper, which so far have been in the focus of related studies (and where, of course, we cannot avoid a risk of skewed productions either), the data that the present corpus provides is more informal and less controlled. It offers expressions of opinions that did not undergo external editing except, in the case of comments (in contrast to emails), for that imposed by the site owners: some of the postings were blocked by moderators, presumably because of too drastic xenophobe contents, as some of the postings complaining about such blockings suggest. In addition to a lesser degree of external editing, we can also expect less self-editing by the writers: comments are usually posted anonymously (with writers using only nicknames), and the same was true for most of the emails, so authors do not encounter the kind of social control they would have to expect in open communication, e.g., face-to-face, or in signed letters to the editor, and they need to monitor their communication much less than journalists composing media articles. This comparative lack of (internal and external) editing gives us a special means of access to opinions and sentiments elicited in the discussion of language-related topics.

## 4.2 2x2 Topoi

The attitudes towards Kiezdeutsch and its speakers expressed in the emails and comments that constitute the corpus are predominantly negative, with only a few postings revealing neutral or positive attitudes (altogether, the proportion of positive postings was 8.7%, with lower numbers in emails from the first wave in 2009 (0%) and comments in the right-fringe (0.7%) and tabloid (3.2) domains, and a higher share in comments to student-targeted media (20.2) and emails from the second, 2012, wave (23.5)). The following quotes give examples:<sup>20</sup>

6. ‘Kiezdeutsch is totally unproblematic. Bavarians, South Germans, and Swiss speak a dialect, too, and nevertheless write in correct German.’ *pi-news*, 5/26/2009
7. ‘There is nothing “one has to” do against language development, one cannot do so anyway. One can only demand that in certain contexts (school, job talk, exam, etc.) the high language [“Hochsprache”] is used. What people speak in their free time is their business.’ *UniSPIEGEL*, 3/3/2012
8. ‘During my school years in the 50s, people already talked “silly”. As long as teachers and parents impart a reasonable German, it did not cause any harm.’ *Schleswig-Holsteinische Zeitung*, 27/3/2012

As these quotes illustrate, in such comments speakers often express a contrast between ‘correct’, ‘high’, or ‘sensible’ German and other variants which are downgraded in comparison, a difference in evaluation that they share with negative comments. This provides a first indication of the construction of standard German as a ‘higher’ form of language, which plays a central role in the dominant discourse on Kiezdeutsch.

If we look at the negative postings, which make up the bulk of the data, we can identify a number of themes that recur across emails and different categories of comments and centre around four main topoi:

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<sup>20</sup> In the case of comments, the media sources where the comments were posted are given, in addition to the date (day/month/year) of posting. In the case of emails, I give the date they were sent (note, though, that different emails might share the same date).

- (1) “Broken Language” – Kiezdeutsch is a deficient version of German.
- (2) “Language Decay” – As a result, it threatens the integrity of German.
- (3) “Opting Out” – Speakers refuse to integrate into the larger society.
- (4) “Social Demolition” – As a result, they threaten national cohesion.

These topoi can be organised onto two levels, forming two parallel pairs. The first pair, “Broken Language” and “Language Decay”, targets the linguistic level itself and reflects a negative evaluation of Kiezdeutsch and its impact on German, while the second pair, “Opting Out” and “Social Demolition”, targets a more general social level, relating the negative evaluation of the speakers’ language use to issues of social and societal integration. The following quotes from a comment and an email illustrate the combination of the different topoi:

9. ‘This is not a dialect, but simply the unwillingness to integrate or (even worse) laziness to learn one’s own language properly.’ *Bild*, 17/2/2012
10. ‘To call this chavvy babble a language is an absolute disqualification as a scientist. [...] Through my job, I have a lot to do with (failed) adolescent migrants and also with German-background adolescents, and I see every day how the Germans adjust to this Arab-Turk-Kurd language. In some cases, there are no “normal” dialogues possible anymore because the basic lexicon is already deleted.’ *Email*, 29/2/2012

The contrast constructed in the email between ‘migrants’ and ‘German-background’ adolescents, and the depiction of ‘Germans’ adjusting to an ‘Arab-Turk-Kurd language’ implies a conceptualisation of Kiezdeutsch speakers as non-German, illustrating a powerful social and linguistic dichotomy that I will treat in more detail further below (Section 4.3). In what follows, let us first have a closer look at the data on these four main topoi. This will not only contribute to our picture of the general thematic strands we found in the European overview at the beginning, but, as we will see for some examples further below, it will also reveal some striking similarities to the much older debate on African American vernacular English in the US.

### “Broken Language” and “Language Decay”

The two related topoi of “Broken Language” and “Language Decay” identify a key semiotic domain in the postings, appearing in nearly a quarter (22.5 %) of the data. They are particularly common in the emails, appearing in nearly half of them (44.1 %), and, to a slightly lesser degree, in comments to media reports in tabloids (in 33.2 %). They appear less frequently in comments to student-targeted media (in 16 %), to those targeting the Turkish-German community (in 14.6 %), and to the English/UK website of ‘The Economist’ (6.2 %).

The devaluation implied in the topoi is realised both at the level of the linguistic system and at that of the speakers. At both levels, Kiezdeutsch is put in contrast to ‘High German’, which is constructed as a superior form of language and thus as an indication of higher competence, and as a more desirable part of speakers’ repertoires.

Kiezdeutsch characteristics are commonly judged as ‘errors’, an indication for ‘broken German’ that is perceived as ‘incomprehensible’ and, in 7 cases, characterised as a ‘restricted code’. This “broken” form of language is then considered to hamper the expression of complex thoughts, and accordingly logic, problem-solving and reasoning, reminiscent of earlier attitudes towards AAVE reported in Labov (1969).

As the other side of the coin, speakers are deprecated as ‘stupid’, ‘ignorant’ and ‘uneducated’, and unable to speak ‘High German’, with no larger linguistic repertoire apart from Kiezdeutsch (this last theme appeared in particular in comments to student-targeted media, with 36 of the overall 46 instances for this). Accordingly, a common thread is that of language deficits and the need of special language support, with frequent worries about edu-

cational failure caused by speakers' limitations to Kiezdeutsch (again, similar to something found for AAE in the 1960s/70s; cf., e.g., Baugh 1999). In this context, several posters refer to 'PISA', the OECD student assessment that in Germany has by now become emblematic for national educational underachievement. In a next step, Kiezdeutsch speakers' low proficiency is then regarded as a cause for the lowering of educational standards.

Apart from educational failure itself, Kiezdeutsch is also regarded as an obstacle to social mobility, leading to unemployment for its speakers (since their language use makes them unfit for the labour market), and subsequently to a dependence on welfare and thus to costs for the society. A narrative related to this domain is the accusation that by the promotion of Kiezdeutsch, the middle class wants to keep the competition for their own children low by keeping Kiezdeutsch speakers from learning proper 'High German'. A similar narrative has been reported from the Swedish debate by Milani (2010) as well as for the debate on bilingual education in the US (Hill 2000) and, again, for the earlier debate on AAE, with Labov (1982:178) reporting on accusations about 'a conspiracy to teach imperfect English, and so impose a "relic of Slavery" on black children' (cf. also Labov 2012: Ch.5).

The topos of 'Language Decay' is associated with characterising Kiezdeutsch as 'reduced' and 'primitive' and denying it the status of a proper language. It is rejected as part of German, and characterising it as a German dialect is sometimes considered as an attack on the German language as a whole, or on 'High German' in particular. In order to refute such a 'dialect' characterisation, some posters relate to linguistic terminology for alternative classifications such as 'pidgin', 'sociolect', 'argot', 'slang', 'jargon', 'patois', which are considered more appropriate since they are taken to define more primitive forms of language associated with lower social classes.<sup>21</sup>

Besides lack of competence, the reasons posters allege for speaking Kiezdeutsch is that speakers are 'careless', 'slack', or 'lazy', and do not want to make the time and effort to speak 'proper language'. A frequently made connexion that fits in with this is that between language and culture. In this context, a number of posters devalue Kiezdeutsch as a form of language that belongs to earlier stages of human evolution, with references to 'Stone Age' and 'Neanderthals', in contrast to 'High German', which is characterised as a 'Hochsprache' indicative of high culture. The devaluation of Kiezdeutsch as less cultured leads to concerns that it will negatively affect national culture in Germany, which is, in this context, repeatedly described as the land of 'Dichter und Denker' "poets and thinkers", a popular motif that transports a positive national self-image of Germany as a land of culture, including an appropriately 'High Language'.

### **"Opting Out" and "Social Demolition"**

The two connected topoi of "Opting Out" and "Social Demolition" that centre around integration and social cohesion appear in over 10% of the postings, with a marked increase in emails, in particular in those from the first, 2009, wave, where they appear in 40% of the data, compared to 20% in the second, 2012, wave. This difference might be either due to the different points in time for the two waves, or to a higher proportion of emails from the extreme right in the first wave.

Among the comment postings, the two topoi appear particularly often in those to the English/UK website of *The Economist* (21 %). A frequent term here is 'assimilation', which appears in 8 out of the 97 English postings. Even though the term exists in German, too, it is nearly absent in the German postings, where the somewhat weaker term 'Integration' is

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. also Bourdieu (1982:51) on the use of terms like "jargon" and "petit-nègre" (translated as "slang" and "pidgin" in the 1992 English edition) in linguistic devaluation.

prevalent, and only one comment, which is to a right-fringe website, uses ‘Assimilation’, and here in the combination ‘Integration / Assimilation’. In the postings to *The Economist*, Kiezdeutsch is primarily associated with immigrants, giving rise to the demand that immigrants must assimilate linguistically by speaking German ‘properly’. Early on, the discussion moves from Kiezdeutsch to broader issues of linguistic integration/assimilation, with a focus on bilingual schools, where several posters strongly oppose the idea that heritage languages should be taught at school.

In the German data, a recurrent assumption is that the use of Kiezdeutsch is an indication for either speakers’ inability or their unwillingness to integrate in the majority society. In the second case, Kiezdeutsch appears as a rejection of ‘High German’ and the value placed on it. This lack of integration is regarded as a threat to the larger society, with several posters voicing ‘Armes Deutschland’ “Poor Germany”, a popular motif lamenting putative national declines. A narrative showing up repeatedly in this context is that there might be a plan to teach Kiezdeutsch at schools (again, similar to some media representations of the Ann Arbor case on AAE, cf. Labov 1982:194; Labov 2012: Ch.5), which one should battle in order to defend educational and linguistic standards.

The topos of “Social Demolition” gives, in some cases, rise to the picture of a hostile take-over of the German ‘High Language’, national values, or Germany as a whole. This picture draws on a particular Othering of Kiezdeutsch speakers that is also involved in the other topoi identified here, a social exclusion based on a widespread ‘us’/‘them’-dichotomy.

### 4.3 Social exclusion: a widespread ‘us’/‘them’-dichotomy

Both topoi pairs, clustering around language and integration, respectively, are supported by a dichotomy targeted at Kiezdeutsch speakers that operates at two levels: (1) at a general level of social strata, where speakers are constructed as socially inferior, belonging to a lower social class, and (2) at more specific levels of ‘ethnicity’, where speakers are constructed as belonging to an alloethnic out-group. At both levels, Kiezdeutsch is pushed to a realm of Otherness and indexically associated with speakers that are perceived as inferior. This social exclusion is widespread in the corpus data, with overall 17.5 % of the postings including explicit characterisations falling into this semiotic domain. The following quotes give examples from comments to national news, student-targeted media, tabloids, and emails:

11. ‘What I associate “Kiezdeutsch” with: – uneducated, primitive male adolescents – disposition towards violence; aggression, cursing – dark, fierce mugs – machismo, contempt of women – swanking with outer appearances (gold chains, car ...) – hatred of the educated and those that have achieved a certain prosperity through their own work – hatred of Jews and queers.’ *Fokus Online*, 12/2/2012
12. ‘One should simply take the “Kiez language” as given. I cannot imagine that educated people seriously mind that one recognises uneducated ones from their language. This way, one saves oneself superfluous contacts after all.’ *UniSPIEGEL*, 29/03/2012
13. ‘Oh, if they only knew how they mark themselves, through language, body art, and clothing, as belonging to the lowest caste. A life style at the level of minimal wage, Hartz IV [social benefits] is predetermined this way.’ *Bild* 18/02/2012
14. ‘[...] an “underclass dialect” that is predominantly spoken by migrants of Turkish-Arabic background’ *Email*, 27/02/2012

As these examples from different domains illustrate, the dichotomy that is constructed here is evident across sub-corpora. Such explicit statements are particularly frequent in emails,

where they occur in over a third (36.8 %) of the data, in comments to tabloids (24.8 %), and to right-fringe media (21.4 %). Interestingly, we also find reference to this dichotomy in positive postings. The following quote from an email gives an example where this is ironically broken:

15. 'I find it almost sensational that it should be linguistics, of all disciplines, that changes my view of these young people who always need to spit on the street.'  
*Email, 03/03/2012*

In general, the status deprecation of speakers is realised through themes such as “under-class” (e.g., ‘mob’, ‘riffraff’, ‘low caste’, ‘ghetto’, ‘gutter language’), “poverty” (e.g., ‘poor’, ‘Hartz IV’), “low education” (e.g., ‘uneducated’, ‘education-adverse milieu’), “aggression and law-breaking” (e.g., ‘aggressive’, ‘criminal’, ‘delinquent’), and “low culture” (e.g., ‘uncivilised’, ‘primitive’, ‘uncultivated’), the latter two often associated with an opposition to liberal values, similarly as reported for the debates in the UK and Sweden. In a number of cases, the social ousting of Kiezdeutsch speakers is reinforced by posters expressing strong emotional and physical responses of social aversion, describing Kiezdeutsch as ‘repugnant’, ‘ghastly’, ‘creepy’, ‘disgusting’, and ‘vomit’-inducing.

The construction of Kiezdeutsch speakers as aggressive is frequently supported by putative “language examples” made up by the posters, which are dominated by curse words and threats. In particular in the emails, such “Kiezdeutsch” usage allows the posters to break linguistic taboos and use violent threats, insults, and slurs (e.g., ‘bitch’, ‘pussy’, ‘old shit’, ‘I fuck you, slut’, ‘Piss off, or I put you into hospital’) in direct communication.

At ‘ethnic’ levels, speech communities supporting Kiezdeutsch undergo an alloethnic reinterpretation, with speakers constructed as ‘foreigners’, ‘migrants’, or as belonging to specific non-German ethnicities. The xenophobic undertones that are prevalent in this domain are particularly visible in the labels promoted by posters in rejection of “Kiezdeutsch”. The following comments, to a regional newspaper, a right-fringe website, and to *UniSPIEGEL* (targeting university students), respectively, give an illustration:

16. ‘Kiezdeutsch? Turk-prole dialect would be more correct’ *rp-online, 22/04/2012*
17. ‘What she calls “Kiezdeutsch”, is nothing but Kanak [wog] blathering’ *Deutschland-Echo, 29/01/2012*
18. ‘Kiezdeutsch – the term alone is a euphemism for erstwhile “Kanack” and most definitely no dialect’ *UniSPIEGEL 29/03/2012*

The ethnic conceptualisation centres around Turkish, Arabic, and Kurdish backgrounds – sometimes contrasted to Asians as ‘model minorities’ – and is often associated religiously, with a negative view of Islam up to islamophobia. This relates to a more general prejudice against Islam in Germany: according to the most recent Religion Monitor survey of Bertelsmann Foundation, ‘many Germans regard Islam [...] as something foreign, alien, and threatening’ (Pollack and Müller 2013: 60), with around half of the respondents perceiving it as a threat, rather than an enrichment.

Further ideological underpinnings for the dichotomy observed here is the linguistic exclusion of multilingual speakers from a “German” in-group, in particular of those with heritage languages that are assigned a low market value. For one, a “migrant background” is seen as a basic obstacle to German competence, with assumptions of “double semilingualism” pervasive in the public debate and even in logopedics,<sup>22</sup> and a strong ideological asso-

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<sup>22</sup> E.g., a German hospital run by the Catholic Caritas association offers logopedic support for multilingual patients, listing as indicators for a logopedic examination, besides symptoms such as stuttering or



ciation of “migrant background” and “in need of special language support”.<sup>23</sup> This can go so far that, e.g., the Berlin city administration counts the proportion of children and adolescents with a migrant background as a negative factor for the developmental index of a neighbourhood, arguing (in response to a question I sent them on this) that it is an indication for ‘problem agglomerations’ that require interventions in education and quartier management.

Second, naming practices tend to deny genuine “Germanness” for some immigrants and their descendants. While immigrants from Russia who can claim a pre-war German ancestry are known as “Russia Germans” (‘Russlanddeutsche’), residents of Turkish descent are commonly called “German Turks” (‘Deuschtürken’) even if they belong to the second or third generation living in Germany, a compound that marks them as a kind of Turks, rather than a kind of Germans, given that nominal compounds in German are right-headed.<sup>24</sup> This seems to be restricted to immigrants to Germany, and in particular to those of Turkish background, while, e.g., the term “German Americans” (‘Deutschamerikaner’) is used to identify German immigrants to the US. This apparent inability to name someone of Turkish descent as German can lead to startling phrases, e.g., when an article in *Tagesspiegel*, a major Berlin newspaper, described two alleged terrorists who had been arrested in Vienna and Berlin, as ‘an Afghan-background Austrian and a German Turk’ (April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2013), making a palpable effort to avoid the more natural parallelism ‘... and a Turkish-background German’.

Taken together, this kind of exclusion provides an ideological reinforcement for the topoi on language and integration observed in the corpus, feeding into a narrative that we can now identify as a central theme evident in the devaluation of Kiezdeutsch: what counts as German, who is a legitimate speaker of German and, crucially, of ‘High German’, and what is, accordingly, a German dialect and who owns it?

#### 4.4 ‘Hochdeutsch’: a narrative on standard language

The construction of standard German as ‘Hochdeutsch’ “High German”, and an elevated ‘Hochsprache’ “high/exalted language”, links up social and linguistic dichotomies and provides a key narrative feeding into the debate on Kiezdeutsch. In the corpus, we find frequent references to ‘Hochdeutsch’ where it is contrasted with Kiezdeutsch and serves as a characterisation of what Kiezdeutsch is not, both at the level of language variants and of speakers’ repertoires. Together with a view of traditional dialects as a historical basis for this ‘high language’, this perspective ousts Kiezdeutsch – and its speakers – from the realm of ‘German’.

A key to this view is the notion of ‘Hochdeutsch’ as a higher, exalted language that is closely associated with a positive notion of ‘culture’ in two senses. First, ‘Hochdeutsch’ is constructed as a buttress for a *shared culture* and for national unity, a vehicle to overcome fragmentation that supports communication and understanding across German regions.<sup>25</sup>

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language loss after laryngeal operations and stroke, also ‘mixing of two languages’ in children, suggesting a pathological view of phenomena like code switching.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Scarvaglieri and Zech (2013) for a functional-semantic analysis of ‘Migrationshintergrund’ (“migrant background”) in German, and for corpus data on co-occurrences with, among others, ‘support’ and ‘language support’.

<sup>24</sup> This is reminiscent of the *ius sanguinis* that was to some degree reflected in German citizenship laws before their reformation in 1999. Note, however, that even then, citizenship was not exclusively based on descent, and it was, of course, possible for, e.g., Turkish immigrants to obtain German citizenship. Yet, this legal possibility, which has since been significantly expanded, does not seem to influence the general perception of who is ‘German’.

<sup>25</sup> This is in line with a view of standard variants as ‘modes of optimal denotation’, as analysed by Silverstein (1996: 287). Note that the image of “Hochdeutsch” we find here, disregards not only differ-

This association of ‘Hochdeutsch’ with ‘culture’ links up with the topoi set of ‘Opting Out’ and ‘Social Demolition’: against this background, speaking Kiezdeutsch is seen as a refusal to partake in such a shared culture and thus as a threat to social cohesion, an unwillingness to integrate that suggests conflict and aggression. This accounts for themes such as ‘aggression’ and ‘violence’, and relates to the motif of ‘Poor Germany’.

Second, ‘Hochdeutsch’ is constructed as a sign for a *high culture*, for cultural elevation, refinement, and complexity, with posters talking about ‘cultivated high language’, and ‘polished’ or ‘immaculate High German’. This notion of standard German relates to the motif of ‘Poets and Thinkers’. It presents ‘Hochdeutsch’ as something that does not come naturally, but requires effort and care, and provides a valuable cultural capital for those who master it.<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, linguistic change is regarded as a threat to those who own this capital, as is grouping ‘Hochdeutsch’ with other variants of German, which would challenge its superior status.

The contrast of this elevated language form to nonstandard variants links up with the topoi set of ‘Broken German’ and ‘Language Decay’, and subsequent themes of educational failure, unemployment, and welfare costs, and with characterisations of Kiezdeutsch as reduced and primitive. The cultural refinement associated with ‘Hochdeutsch’ expands to the cognitive domain, where this more complex and refined form of language is regarded as supporting correspondingly refined thoughts and complex reasoning. Again, this is then by way of contrast negated for Kiezdeutsch, leading to the view of Kiezdeutsch as a cognitive obstacle.

A potential difficulty for the devaluation of Kiezdeutsch based on its contrast to ‘Hochdeutsch’ is its characterisation as a dialect, which brings in a notion of linguistic variants that are regarded as distinct from ‘Hochdeutsch’, but nevertheless positively associated: a ‘Dialekt’ is commonly associated with positive regional traditions, rather than decay or demolition.<sup>27</sup> In the data provided by our corpus, this is solved by posters restricting the label ‘Dialekt’ to those variants that formed the historical basis for ‘standard’ German. A ‘Dialekt’ in this view is something that has a long history in German, is part of German folk culture, serves as a foundation for ‘Hochdeutsch’, and is used alongside ‘Hochdeutsch’ by its speakers. In contrast to this, Kiezdeutsch is then constructed as outside of such a culture: it is not part of German since it does not look back at a long history, has not contributed to the rise of ‘Hochdeutsch’, is old only in the sense of reflecting a more primitive stage of language (the ‘Stone Age’ theme), and will thus not be part of a repertoire that encompasses ‘Hochdeutsch’, but instead causes ‘semilingualism’.

The following quotes, taken from a comment to a regional newspaper article and from an email, illustrate this line of reasoning and demonstrate the ethnicisation and ousting of Kiezdeutsch that is associated with this:

19. ‘Hochdeutsch “lords” over all dialects as a unifying, common language. [...] In the case of “Kanak-Sprak” there is no superordinate Hochdeutsch, but “migrantics”. While a Saxonian or Bavarian or ... can talk to you in Hochdeutsch with a respective accent, the “Kanak-Sprak” artists cannot.’ *Schleswig-Holsteinische Zeitung*, 27/03/2012

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ent variants considered part of standard German within Germany, but also those in German-speaking countries other than Germany.

<sup>26</sup> This is in accordance with a general phenomenon mentioned in Bourdieu (1982: 51), who points out that the ranking of languages seems to be guided by the amount of “control” involved in speaking.

<sup>27</sup> This positive association holds for a widespread view of ‘Dialekt’ in an *abstract* sense. In actual practice, dialect use will nevertheless often be regarded as indexical for low social class (in accordance with general findings on dialect perceptions including both associations of positive local identity and of low social class).

20. ‘Your claim that “Bavarian is not seen as a failed attempt to speak Hochdeutsch either”, is a brazen attempt to mix up a piece of German culture with your oh so beloved “Kiezdeutsch”. The Bavarian, Hessian, or Swabian dialect evolved on German ground and was fostered by people of one culture. The so-called “Kiezdeutsch” is brought into Germany, and spread here, by foreigners such as Turks and other people from the Arabic/Near Eastern cultural area. We Germans do not want to support your cosying up to Turks and other muslims in Berlin, and I ask you to stop promoting as a German linguistic commodity this cultural good with the name “Kiezdeutsch” that you value so highly.’ *Email, 19/02/2012*

Taken together, this construction of German dialects and of standard German as ‘Hochdeutsch’ that associates it with two perspectives on ‘culture’ links up the four central topoi and the ‘us’/‘them’-dichotomy we identified for the public debate on Kiezdeutsch, bringing together different thematic strands in an overarching narrative, summarised in Figure 1.

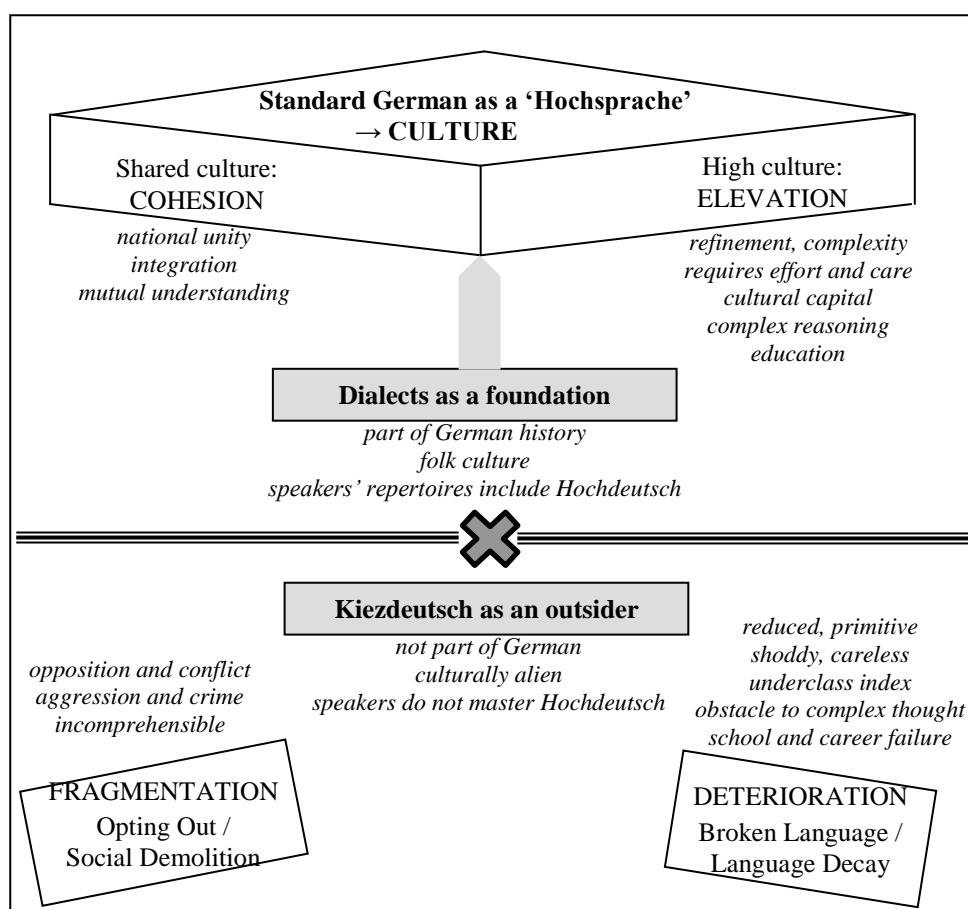


Figure 1: A standard language narrative on ‘Hochdeutsch’ vs. Kiezdeutsch

## 5. Conclusions

The study presented here suggests that attitudes and ideologies on such new urban dialects as Kiezdeutsch provide us with something like a mirror image to those on standard language: Kiezdeutsch is constructed as everything that ‘Hochdeutsch’ and its dialects are not. Based on a social dichotomy that can be further boosted by xenophobic insecurities, we find a marginalisation of Kiezdeutsch as a negative counterpart to a standard variant that is perceived as a superior form of language, closely associated with positive values of cultural

elevation and cultural unity and linked to traditional dialects as its historical and ‘folk cultural’ foundation.

Kiezdeutsch and ‘Hochdeutsch’ thus present themselves as two sides of a coin. They are linked in an argumentative structure that crucially builds on a contrast of linguistic and social identity, a contrast that helps speakers who conceive of themselves as German majority speakers to reaffirm a prestige that they perceive as threatened by multiethnic urban communities. To reject Kiezdeutsch as part of German can thus reflect a proxy racism we have also seen for other cases: a projection of ethnic and xenophobic demarcations and exclusions onto the linguistic plane.

Taken together, our results suggest that debates on new urban dialects can cast a particularly interesting spotlight on ideological constructions of ‘standard’ language and its speakers, on demarcations of what it means to speak ‘proper language’ and who owns it, making this domain a special source for investigations into language and identity.

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## Appendix: German originals of the examples quoted in the article

2. ‚Kanak Sprak‘ ignoriert den Duden, und auf eine Notzucht mehr oder weniger an der Grammatik kommt es ihr ebenfalls nicht an (*Berliner Zeitung*, May 28, 1999 “Brauchst du hart? Geb ich dir korrekt”)
3. [...] bedient sie sich des mittlerweile positiv besetzten Wortes „Kiez“ (Stadtteil) und schafft damit eine angenehme Grundstimmung, die mit dem Wort „Kanaksprak“ kaum möglich ist. (*Deutsche Sprachwelt* 2009, issue 36, front page, “Stammeldeutsch als Errungenschaft? Sprachwissenschaftler bewundern eine Fehlentwicklung unserer Sprache”)
4. Sie nennen es „Kiezdeutsch“ und sprechen von einem Dialekt. Aber würden Mittelschichtskinder das nicht als „Türkensprache“ bezeichnen? (*WDR radio*, September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012)
5. Frau Wiese kapert den Terminus “Dialekt” für eine jugendliche Sprechweise, in der Angeberei eine große Rolle spielt. Warum? Sie möchte an seinem Prestige schnorren, denn Dialekte genießen Ansehen. [...] “Kiezdeutsch” aber ist weder ein Dialekt noch ein Soziolekt, sondern eine transitorische Sondersprache, die auf Einflüssen anderer Sprachen und auf Fehlern im Deutschen beruht. [...] Es ist kein Fall für die Dialektologie, sondern für die Sprachpsychologie und die Fehleranalyse. (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2012, “Sachtemang mit dit Kiezdeutsche. Heike Wiese Thesen über Jugendsprache gründen sich auf Sozialarbeit, aber haben keinen Halt in der Linguistik” [‘Keep yer horses with dat Kiezdeutsch. Heike Wiese’s theses about youth language are grounded on social work, but do not have a basis in linguistics’])
6. Kiezdeutsch ist völlig unproblematisch. Bayern, Süddeutsche, und Schweizer reden auch Dialekt und schreiben dennoch richtiges Deutsch. (*pi-news*, May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2009)
7. Gegen die Entwicklung von Sprache "muss man" nichts tun, man kann es auch gar nicht. Man kann nur verlangen, dass in gewissen Kontexten (Schule, Vorstellungsgespräch, Prüfung etc.) die Hochsprache verwendet wird. Was die Leute in der Freizeit reden, ist ihre Sache. (*UniSPIEGEL*, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012)
8. auch zu meiner Schulzeit in den 50ern wurde auf dem Schulhof schon "appeldwatsch" geschnackt. Solange die Lehrer und das Elternhaus ein vernünftiges Deutsch vermitteln, hat es nicht geschadet. (*Schleswig-Holsteinische Zeitung*, March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012)
9. Das ist kein Dialekt, sondern lediglich die Unlust sich zu integrieren oder (noch schlimmer) die Faulheit die eigene Sprache richtig zu lernen. (*Bild*, February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2012)
10. Dieses Assigestammel als Sprache zu bezeichnen ist eine absolute Disqualifikation als Wissenschaftler [...]. Ich habe beruflich sehr viel mit (gestrauchelten) jugendlichen Migranten und auch deutschstämmigen Jugendlichen zu tun und sehe jeden Tag, wie sich die Deutschen an die Arab-Türk-Kurdensprache anpassen. Teilweise sind gar keine “normalen” Dialoge mehr möglich, weil der grundlegende Sprachschatz schon gelöscht ist. (*Email*, February 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012)
11. Womit ich „Kiezdeutsch“ assoziiere: – Ungebildete, primitive männliche Jugendliche – Gewaltbereitschaft, Aggressivität, Pöbelei – düstere, grimmige Visagen – Machotum, Frauenverachtung – Protzerei mit Äußerlichkeiten (Goldkettchen, Auto...) – Hass auf die Gebildeten und auf diejenigen, die sich durch eigene Arbeit einen gewissen Wohlstand geschaffen haben – Hass auf Juden und Homos. (*Fokus Online*, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2012)



12. Man sollte die "Kiezsprache" einfach als gegeben hinnehmen. Ich kann mir nicht vorstellen, dass Gebildete es ernsthaft ablehnen, dass man Ungebildete an der Sprache erkennt. So erspart man sich doch überflüssige Kontakte. (*UniSpiegel*, March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012)
13. Ach, wenn sie doch nur wüssten, wie sie sich durch Sprache, Körperkunst und Kleidung zur untersten Kaste gehörend kennzeichnen. Eine Lebensführung auf Niveau Mindestlohn, HartzIV wird so vorprogrammiert (*Bild*, February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2012)
14. Dass ausgerechnet Sprachwissenschaft meine Sicht auf die jungen Leute, die immer ausspucken müssen, verändert, finde ich beinahe sensationell. (*Email*, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012)
15. "Unterschichtendialekt" [...], der überwiegend von Migranten mit türkisch-arabischem Hintergrund gesprochen [...] wird (*Email*, February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012)
16. Kietzdeutsch? Türkenproll-Dialekt wäre wohl richtiger (*rp-online*, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012)
17. Was die als "Kiezdeutsch" bezeichnet, ist nichts anderes als kanakengequassel. (*Deutschland-Echo*, January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012)
18. Kiezdeutsch Schon dieser Terminus ist ein Euphemismus für ehemals "Kanack" und ohne wenn und aber kein Dialekt (*UniSPIEGEL*, March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012)
19. Über allen Dialekten "thront" hochdeutsch als verbindende, gemeinsame Sprache. In den Schulen wird hochdeutsch gelehrt, evtl. mit einem örtlich unterschiedlichen Akzent. Bei "Kanak-Sprak" gibt es kein übergeordnetes hochdeutsch sondern "migrantisch". Während ein Sachse oder Bayer oder... sich mit Ihnen auf hochdeutsch mit dem entsprechenden Akzent unterhalten kann, können dies die "Kanak-Sprak"-Artisten nicht (*Schleswig-Holsteinische Zeitung*, March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012)
20. Ihre Feststellung "Bayerisch wird auch nicht als der gescheiterte Versuch angesehen, Hochdeutsch zu sprechen", ist ein dreister Versuch, ein Stück deutscher Kultur mit Ihrem so heiß geliebten "Kiezdeutsch" zu vermischen. Der Bayrische, Hessische oder Schwäbische Dialekt entwickelte sich auf deutschem Boden und wurde von Menschen eines Kulturkreises gepflegt. Das so genannte "Kiezdeutsch" wird von Ausländern wie Türken und anderen Menschen aus dem arabischen-vorderasiatischen Kulturraum nach Deutschland hereingetragen und hier verbreitet. Ihre Anbiederei bei Türken und sonstigen Moslems in Berlin wollen wir Deutsche nicht mittragen und ich bitte Sie, dieses von Ihnen so hoch geschätzte Kulturgut mit dem Namen "Kiezdeutsch" nicht weiterhin als deutsches Sprachgut zu verbreiten. (*Email*, February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2012)