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USING DIALECT DICTIONARIES AS A DATABASE

Stereotypes of people in the ‘Franconian Dictionary’

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The ‘Franconian Dictionary’ (Fränkisches Wörterbuch = WBF) pursues the expected objective for a dialect dictionary, namely to research, preserve and pass on the cultural heritage of dialect (cf. <https://wbf.badw.de/zielsetzung.html>). However, the function of this dictionary does not have to be limited to preserving an “intangible cultural heritage”. For usage-based research questions, this dictionary of the Franconian administrative districts is a valuable database: a substantial part of the archival material consists of questionnaires that the informants have filled out themselves.

Since the WBF is not published as a multi-volume book publication, but as an online database, the data of the indirect questionnaire surveys have been successively made accessible online since 2017. So far, only parts of the so-called “post-war questionnaires” have been recorded. These comprise 123 different questionnaires from the period 1960 to 2001 with a total of 6,678 questions, which were sent to respondents (mostly primary school teachers at rural schools) and filled out by them personally. The return rate of these indirect questionnaire surveys amounts to a total of approx. 48,000 questionnaires. Currently (03-2022), the database already contains the records of 1,358 questions.

Thus, the lemmatised word material offers direct access to authentic utterances and linguistic constructions of competent dialect speakers, in which individual experiences and ideas are manifested as well as collective, generalizing attributions.

In the presentation, it will be shown on the basis of the WBF how dictionary data can be methodically used as an empirical database. The limits and possibilities of the dictionary as a research corpus will also be problematised (cf. Kürschner/Habermann/Müller (eds.) 2019).

As an exemplary object of investigation, stereotypes of people are evaluated:

Das Stereotyp umfasst, wenn es auf Menschen bezogen ist, einen Sachverhalt, in dem in ungerechtfertigter Weise Personengruppen verallgemeinernd, bewertend (meist pejorativ) und vereinfachend Eigenschaften zugeordnet werden (Pümpel-Mader 2010, p. 10).¹

Research on stereotypes is now widespread across disciplines, so that a precise definition of the term depends on the particular perspective.² However, in stereotyping, qualities or actions that are assumed to be characteristic are associated with particular groups of people (Hinton 2000, p. 64), not least in order to contrastingly delimit one’s own social group. Therefore, stereotypes can reflect positive or negative assumptions about social groups (Brandt/Reyna 2011, p. 49) and are often based on binary (opposing) thought patterns.

¹ “The stereotype, when related to people, is based on a process in which characteristics are unjustifiably assigned to groups of people in a generalizing, evaluative (usually pejorative) and simplifying manner.”

² A first approach to different aspects of the concept of stereotypes can be found, for example, in Hahn (2007), and from a linguistic point of view in Quasthoff (1973) or Hentschel (1995).

Stereotypes can be assigned to different social contexts such as nation, ethnicity, occupation, age, gender, etc. and refer to different aspects such as physical characteristics, traits, behaviours, attitudes or life outcomes of the stereotyped group (Merk-Carinci 2020, p. 53; Brandt/Reyna 2011, p. 49).

The aim of this study is to elicit such person-related schematizations, to analyse them formally and functionally, and to reconstruct culture-specific stereotypes that have been handed down in the dialect dictionary.

Stereotypes can be realised implicitly or explicitly in language use (cf. summarising and problematising Quasthoff/Hallsteinsdóttir 2016, pp. 350–351). Explicit stereotypes manifest themselves through certain linguistic forms of expression at all linguistic levels, from phonetics, word-formation patterns, the use of certain types of words and syntactic structures to sentence and verbal patterns (Pümpel-Mader 2010). With reference to the dictionary data of the WBF, which consists of lemmatised lexemes, this means that the respondents have noted down lexemes or sometimes phrases in response to questions that could be used at any time as a linguistic utterance in a concrete linguistic context. Or in other words, the question in the questionnaire replaces the concrete linguistic context, which supports the detection and interpretation of possible stereotypes.

When searching the WBF database, one can set various filters so that, among other things, the tokens for certain questions can be displayed. This provides initial access to relevant dictionary data for the study of stereotypes. Certain questions about persons or social groups contain typical linguistic markers for stereotypes, such as negatively evaluative adjectives (What do you *derogatorily* call a “resident of the Arab countries”?, cf. questionnaire 69, question 39; dialect *mocking* name for city dwellers?, cf. questionnaire 35, question 39) or pick up on negative characteristics: Dialectal for *careless*, female person who works *untidily*? (cf. questionnaire 97, question 5). Other questions are contrastively related to each other: Catholic and Protestant children like to call each other mocking names. Which ones are common among them? for Catholic children? for Protestant children? (cf. questionnaire 36, question 16), and enable a comparison between different social groups. Sometimes autostereotypes are asked in contrast to heterostereotypes or metaheterostereotypes (cf. Thiele 2015 for differentiation): What are the inhabitants of your home landscape called? Are other names used for immigrants and refugees? Which ones? What do migrants and refugees call the long-established inhabitants of the landscape? (cf. questionnaire 18, questions 55–57).

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