LINGUISTIC IDENTITY, LANGUAGE ATTITUDES AND LANGUAGE PERCEPTION IN THE GERMAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY OF BELGIUM.

A comparative study across the German-Belgian border.
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GERMAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY OF BELGIUM
(German: Deutschsprachige Gemeinschaft Belgien, DG):
One of the three federal communities of Belgium (since 1973)
Official language: German; dialects spoken: Ripuarian and Moselle Franconian varieties
More than 75,000 inhabitants → linguistic minority
Eventful history: 3 changes in nationality within 25 years (between 1920 and 1945)

COMPARISON TO THE BORDERING GERMAN AREAS:
Great similarities between the linguistic situation in the German-speaking Community and in the bordering German areas on the level of traditional dialects, on the level of regional linguistic features and in the vertical structure of variety use
Differences on the level of the cultural and political situations
→ Comparison can enlighten the role of nationality as well as the role of the linguistic minority situation

RESEARCH QUESTION:
Do language attitudes, language perception and linguistic identity of the German-speaking Belgians differ from those of the locals in the bordering German areas?

RESEARCH METHODS:
Collection and analysis of data concerning East Belgian German in public discourse
Investigations in three places in the GC (Eupen, Kelmis, St. Vith) and in two comparable places in bordering Germany (Aachen, Poing), 10 informants per place
Questionnaire based in-depth interviews
Listening task
Map-drawing task

PUBLIC DISCOURSE (NEWSPAPER, RADIO, PUBLICATIONS, WEBSITES):
- German language in general: German-speaking Belgians have the impression that they always have to fight for their right to speak German in all circumstances, that it is not self-evident, even if they are living in a region that is officially German-speaking
- use of East Belgian German: East Belgian linguistic characteristics are regularly treated in the media: radio competition of the Belgischer Rundfunk (BRF): „Ostbelgien lernt Deutsch – der germanistische Adventskalender“, Gebärder Blumenkohl, publication of a popular scientific dictionary of East-Belgian everyday German (Heinen/Kramer 2011)
→ prevalent subject in the minds of the speakers, but dichotomy: appreciation for East Belgian German, signal of group identity vs. sense of inferiority towards Germans

FIRST RESULTS (AFTER 11 INTERVIEWS IN EUPEN, KELMIS AND ST. VITH)

LANGUAGE:
Perception of German:
- Differing from German in Germany (different sound, Belgian vocabulary)
- Not seen as homogeneous: division into northern speech and southern speech (particularly differences of prosody)
- Not Standard German, seen as a more simple, less formal variety, “wie einem der Schnabel gewachsen ist” (“the way the beak has grown”)
- Names: Kelmiser Küchendeutsch, Eupener Slang, Kelmiser „die Bulle, das Raclette, enfin, deR camion, deR Bic, deR makei, afonieRen, deR mazout, das Plattes WasseR, deR PaRking, die okkasion, die kRollen, P

IDENTITY:
Negative identification: being neither Walloon nor German
Tendency to devaluate the out-groups:
- Walloons: not very organised, not very accurate
- Germans: too accurate, too strict, self-admiring, not popular anymore

At the same time: Defining their identity as a mixture of the best characteristics of these two groups: “German-speaking Belgians are as disciplined and organised as Germans, but have the ‘savoir-vivre’ of the Walloons”

Take pride in their status: being a minority (a curiosity), being bilingual or multilingual
Proud to be Belgians, proud to live in a multicultural, multilingual country → curiosity
Want to be perceived as Belgians and as German-speaking Belgians

Proper speech elements can be seen as horrible, ridiculous, awkward, uneducated → you have to speak non-regional-ly-marked Standard German (good German, isn’t German), but low instead of their own Standard German proficiency
Idea of a more or less homogeneous German in Germany:
- wall articulated, very formal, sophisticated Standard German → reveals a sense of inferiority in GC towards Germans.
On the other hand: awareness that there are regional varie-
ties of German in Germany can → contradictory statements

Ambiguous feelings about regionally-marked German in the GC:
- Identity marker, source of sympathy, gives a homely feeling vs. incorrect, bad German
- Attitudes depend on speech situation: Only appropriate in relaxed, private situations. In more formal situations, use of