

PhD Project:

Variation and Perception of Intonation in West Central Bavarian

Abstract

Over the past century, research on intonation has developed substantially. Early impressionistic observations suggested that a characteristic “melody” distinguishes languages and dialects. Since then, the field has advanced through precise phonetic tools such as Praat, enabling detailed acoustic analysis and controlled experiments.

In his grammar of Western Middle Bavarian, Slobinski (2009) notes that a comprehensive contemporary description of the dialect’s intonation is still lacking. The most recent thorough account remains Kufner (1961), which follows an impressionistic approach influenced by Pike (1945). More recent studies address variation in northern vs. southern Standard German (cf. Auer et al. 2000) and other dialects (cf. Kügler 2007). However, a systematic analysis of Western Middle Bavarian using modern frameworks—such as AM theory (Pierrehumbert 1980), GToBI (Grice et al. 2005), and Optimality Theory—remains absent.

This doctoral project addresses this gap. It will be based on spontaneous interviews with older speakers, combined with native-speaker intuition, to formulate and test hypotheses through perception experiments. The aim is to gain insights into the perception and acquisition of dialectal intonation and its divergence from Standard German and other intonation languages.

Keywords: bavairain, dialect, intonation, phonology, autosegmental-metrical theory, GtoBI, optimality theory

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