Language attitudes in the Berlin speech community after the fall of the wall in 1989

1. Research design

In the winter term 1994/95, together with students of linguistics at the German department of the Free University Berlin, I started to prepare an investigation in which data of linguistic behaviour and language attitudes of the Berlin speech community after the fall of the wall in 1989 was to be collected. Proceeding from a questionnaire which formed the basis of Norbert Dittmar's, Peter Schlobinski's and Inge Wachs's 1983 survey in the western part of the city, namely the districts Wedding and Zehlendorf, we thought about how this questionnaire would have to be modified to reflect the changes that have occurred in the last twelve years. The most significant changes followed from the fact that it is now possible to carry out investigations in the whole of Berlin and to see what differences in the speech behaviour and language attitudes of speakers in east and west Berlin exist. Furthermore, we were interested in the way in which changes of behaviour and attitude were and still are initiated by the political events in 1989.

We adopted mostly those questions - in part considerably modified and extended - that were dealing with the self-assessment of dialect usage, the socio-regional distribution of the Berlin urban vernacular as seen by the interviewees, the preference and the emotional value, the concept of norm concerning the use of the Berlin urban vernacular compared to that of the standard variety, and the level of knowledge of the Berlin urban vernacular. The taking over of these thematic domains was necessary to make a comparative interpretation of at least a part of the answers possible.

Something we newly introduced were questions on how the informants place themselves in social networks, how close they are to the linguistic market, and especially how differences between East and West are perceived and/or reflected upon.

A first run of the questionnaire campaign took place in February 1995, after which the questionnaire was slightly revised and a provisional final version was agreed upon, which was the basis for our investigations carried out from November 1995 to April 1996.

All in all, 515 Berliners aged between 25 and 45 were interviewed in the districts Zehlendorf, Wedding, Pankow, and Prenzlauer Berg.

In the western part of the city we chose the districts Wedding and Zehlendorf to be able to compare at least part of our findings with the results presented in Dittmar/Schlobinski/Wachs 1986. In the eastern part of Berlin we chose Prenzlauer Berg and Pankow so that social layers could be compared: Pankow is a bourgeois residential district, as far as this can be said about districts in the eastern part, which can be compared to Zehlendorf in the west; Prenzlauer Berg - like Wedding - is a traditional working class district, although one has to admit that a process of social change is under way here and this not only since 1989, though from then on with new characteristics; still, the general character of the district has not changed yet.

We chose the age-group of the 25-to 45-year-olds, because this group has relatively consolidated attitude structures on the one hand, but on the other hand is highly flexible and willing to adopt to new circumstances, abilities that have to be trained as they are vital for survival on the job market, which is increasingly regulated by the linguistic market. This group is open to linguistic innovation so we can assume that changes in attitude, if already perceptible at all, might most probably be found in this age group, which we have divided into two, the 25-to 35-year-olds and the 35-to 45-year-olds.
2. Prior studies

The evaluation of the 1983 survey by Dittmar/Schlobinski/Wachs showed that the Berlin speech community is non-homogeneous and is divided into two significantly different communication communities for whose description the 'prestige model', for the western part, and the 'solidarity model', for the eastern part, were developed (Schlobinski 1987; Dittmar/Schlobinski 1988). In the western part of the city the usage of the Berlin urban vernacular is clearly negatively marked; it highlights social stratification and is not avoided only by success-oriented and socially aspiring speakers. So the restricted usage as well as the low depth of the Berlin urban vernacular correspond with the rather negative attitude of the western speech community towards the urban vernacular. Conversely the usage of the standard variety secures social prestige and functions as a means of social definition.

Yet in the eastern part of the city the usage of the Berlin urban vernacular is positively connoted, a fact the GDR-linguists Helmut Schönfeld and Margit Peine pointed out in 1981 ("endowed with metropolitan prestige"). The usage of the Berlin urban vernacular was not layer specifically limited, let alone socially defining, but on the contrary functioned as an essentially identification giving factor for the inhabitants of Berlin to dissociate themselves from the 'rest' of the republic and especially from the newcomers from Saxony. So, following from that, the communication value of the variety was also higher than in the western part of the city, because the spectrum of acceptance was much broader.

A large part of the factors which created the positive image of the Berlin urban vernacular in the eastern part of the city have ceased to exist. The lives of the people in the eastern part of Berlin have dramatically changed with the reunification, but then the lives of the people in the western part have also changed, but to far lesser degree. Things are different from that they were in 1983. It is obvious that the eastern communication community is under immense pressure to adapt to the western prestige model which clearly dominates the linguistic market in the whole of Berlin. But are there balancing-out or adaption processes taking place in reversed direction also? And anyhow, what is that unifies and separates people in east and west Berlin in their linguistic consciousness, their language attitudes, and their linguistic behaviour?

As far as I know, the latter questions have not been answered on a sufficiently broad empirical basis for speakers in the eastern part.

The findings, as I interpret them, still show a linguistically divided city. Statements about beginning processes of change are difficult to make as there are - for east Berlin at least - no preceding investigations. There is no doubt that important changes in the linguistic self-presentation are under way, which becomes obvious in individual sociolinguistic interviews, but in this large-scale survey it can be proven only in part.

3. Data analysis and interpretation

Here I will present a first work report from the early stages of the evaluation of a part of the survey, an empirical description with first attempts at an interpretation.

I refer to almost one half of all the available questionnaires, 126 from the eastern and 111 from the western part of the city, all in all 237, of which 118 are men and 119 are women.

For this report I have concentrated on some of the questions which, from the outset, aim at differences or which through their answers reveal differences between people in east and west Berlin, differences concerning the linguistic behaviour and evaluation of varieties. (You find extracts from the questionnaire in the appendix.)
3.1 Selfassessment of linguistic behaviour

The answers to our opening question: Do you usually use the Berlin urban vernacular or standard German? (see table 1) provide us with the background against which all the following answers will have to be read and interpreted. According to the self-assessment of the interviewees there exists a big gulf between people from east and west Berlin. 51.6% of the people in east Berlin say they usually speak in the urban vernacular, compared to only 23.4% in the west. 43.7% of the people in east Berlin describe themselves as speakers of standard German, whereas 70.3% say that in the west. 3.2% of the informants in east Berlin and 5.1% in west Berlin use both varieties in equal parts. Only an insignificant 1.6% of the people in east Berlin and 0.9% in west Berlin were not able to classify themselves. This shows that clearly defined ideas about the characteristics of the two varieties exist. If you look at the districts individually three fairly puzzling findings stand out. Only the people in Zehlendorf gave the answers we had expected: according to their statements, 82% are speakers of standard German, 16.4% are speakers of the Berlin urban vernacular. In Wedding the quota of speakers admitting the use of the Berlin urban vernacular is a mere 32.6%, whereas 55.1% state that they usually speak standard German. This is a result, I have not yet an explanation for (yet), the less so since the evaluation of the linguistic behaviour in the residential area shows diametrically contrasting results: 55.1% of the interviewees are of the opinion that the Berlin urban vernacular is spoken in Wedding, 34.7% think that the standard variety is the prevailing means of communication.
Table 1: Question 1: Do you normally use the Berlin urban vernacular or standard German?

### East

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<td>39</td>
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### East and West Berlin

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### Analysis of the districts (East)

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<td>6</td>
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### Analysis of the districts (West)

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</table>
The results of the survey in the eastern part of the city are surprising in like manner. An equal number of people interviewed in Prenzlauer Berg classify themselves as speakers of the Berlin urban vernacular on one side and speakers of standard German on the other side. This could be interpreted as a sign of the process of change mentioned above, especially since 48.6% of the interviewees have taken the Abitur (higher leaving certificate/baccalaureat). In direct contrast with that, 56.7% of the people in Pankow describe themselves as speakers of the Berlin urban vernacular, whereas only 39.2% say they are using the standard variety. It is possible that the traditional north-south difference plays a role here, i.e., from a purely geographical point of view, there is a decrease of use of the urban vernacular from north to south. So the overall result, if both parts of the city are looked individually, corroborates the thesis of a now as before divided speech community.

3.2 Language attitudes towards the Berlin urban vernacular

3.2.1 This does not only concern the linguistic behaviour but also the language attitudes towards the varieties - to begin with. Nearly one fifth (18%) of the people interviewed in west Berlin answer in the negative to question three (see appendix), compared to only 3.4% of the interviewees in east Berlin. A clearly positive rating of the Berlin urban vernacular by speakers in east Berlin, 17.5% always enjoy listening to the urban vernacular, is slightly less apparent in the western part, where 10.8% always enjoy listening to it. East and west are of the same opinion where the acceptance of the situation-related use of the Berlin urban vernacular is concerned (East: 70.6%; West: 69.4%).

3.2.2 An east-west division shows in people's attitudes towards their own use of dialect (see table 2).

Table 2: Question 6: Do you try not to speak the Berlin vernacular (in too pronounced a manner)?

(Details given in %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Prenzlauer Berg</th>
<th></th>
<th>Pankow</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>8.6</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>--</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
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<td>--</td>
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<tr>
<td>always</td>
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<td>never</td>
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<td>22.2</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15.1% of the east Berlin speakers, compared to 28.8% of the west Berlin speakers try to avoid speaking the Berlin urban vernacular if possible in all situations and with all conversation partners; 11.1% of the east Berlin speakers and at the first sight astonishing 22.5% of the west Berlin speakers never do this; 70.6% of the east Berlin speakers and 36.9% of the west Berlin speakers decide according to the situation, that is act consciously. Adding up all those that -
whether according to the situation or not - try to avoid the Berlin vernacular, one gets a percentage of 85.7% for the eastern and 67.7% for the western part. Does this indicate a laxer way how to deal with language in the western part? On the contrary. It is striking that those people from west Berlin (namely the people from Zehlendorf) who answer the question in the negative or not at all (West total: 10.8%; Zehlendorf: 16.4%), often, by their answers, turn out to be radical "not-at-all" speakers of the urban vernacular. (Example: In what situations/with whom do you speak in the dialect? - closed question with an opportunity to supplement; supplement: Never!). Should there exist a similar radical rejection of the urban vernacular in the eastern part of the city, then in any case it does not show in the questionnaire. Because of the generally positive attitude towards the Berlin urban vernacular I think that rejection is unlikely to occur, as 87.2% of the east Berlin standard German speakers answer question three in the affirmative also.

3.2.3 We have formulated question ten in such an exaggerated manner on purpose (a tolerance question would have been feasible), because a teaching position should presuppose a high acceptance of the object to be taught and the identification with the object. Almost one third of the people in Berlin (East: 26.2%; West: 27%) have a decidedly positive attitude towards the Berlin urban vernacular and (would) teach it to their children. It is interesting that 'confessing' speakers of the Berlin urban vernacular in all districts of Berlin are irresolute when it comes to the passing-on of the variety, only 50% vote in favour of it. One can try to find out reasons against it by looking at the answers to question twelve and twenty, but especially by evaluating the semantic differentials in question seven (which I haven't had time to do yet). 59.5% of the east Berlin speakers and 54.9% of the west Berlin speakers object to a deliberate imparting of the Berlin urban vernacular, the east Berlin standard German speakers being the ones opposing the most, the west Berlin standard German speakers rejecting is not quite as violently. The vote of the east Berlin standard German speakers can easily be explained by the experiences they have had, namely on the job market, since 1989, which, in a manner never experienced before, showed them the importance of linguistic self-presentation. To be able to actually corroborate this thesis, comparable results of surveys carried out before 1989 would be necessary, especially for questions 1-13, but at least for questions 1 and 10-13.

3.2.4 For an interpretation of the results from question 13, such earlier surveys really are vital as well. 31.7% of the people in east Berlin and 29.7% in the west do not think it is important to use standard German at the workplace. 47.8% of the speakers in west Berlin think it is important, 19.8% of these think it is vital to use standard German at the workplace. The results in east Berlin seem to contradict the presumption mentioned above: only 31.8% judge that the use of standard German is important, 3.2% of these think it is vital to use it. At this point, limits of a survey of this kind clearly show. Based on these figures one can hardly pass a judgement if and what kind of immense changes have taken place in the consciousness of the people in east Berlin; what remains is the fact that there is a big discrepancy between results in east and west Berlin. The next aim of my work will be to answer question 18 in a more differentiated manner and in combination with question 12, because after all 18.3% of the people in east Berlin have (drastically) reduced their use of the dialect after 1989 - this is the biggest group of all who have changed their language use since then. Changes of attitude are usually initiated by negative experiences, which after all 11.1% of the people interviewed in east Berlin have had.

3.2.5 Once again I come back to the answers to question 6, which in my opinion can be interpreted in still another way; the interpretation is based on the acceptance of the following two theses:
1. All standard German speakers whose use of the Berlin urban vernacular does not depend on the situation, object to it.
2. This negative attitude is also assumed by all those speakers of the Berlin urban vernacular who try to always suppress the Berlin urban vernacular.
It follows from here, that an incredibly big discrepancy between the language attitudes of the people in east and west Berlin exists, attitudes which in the western part of the city are also clearly socially stratified. Only 36.1% of the people in Zehlendorf have a positive attitude towards the Berlin urban vernacular, in Wedding the percentage is 55.1%. The results in east Berlin are completely different from that, they do not show a clear difference between the city districts. 74.3% of the people in Prenzlauer Berg and 80.4% in Pankow identify, at least partly, with the urban vernacular.

4. East - west: differences and mutual aspects

4.1 So the 'solidarity model' still seems suitable to describe the attitudes in the eastern part of the city, or put differently: It still exists in a modified, either reduced or extended form. When east Berlin was the 'capital of the GDR' the social identity of its people was to a high degree formed by the use of the urban vernacular, which set them apart from others and gave them an identity. Now people realize that the distinctive character of the Berlin urban vernacular has changed: It is not any longer the 'variety of the capital', but that variety which is used more often by people from east than from west Berlin, the variety that linguistically divides the city. At the same time it becomes clear that it is necessary to adapt to the linguistic behaviour of the speakers in the western part of the city, firstly, in order not to be identified immediately as an 'Ossi' by western speakers, because this identification is based on the use of the Berlin urban vernacular which has, as a rule a negative connotation; and secondly, closely connected to the afore said, in order not to impair ones chances on the job market (keep in mind: 85.7% of the people from east Berlin try - situation related or always - to avoid speaking in the Berlin urban vernacular). These behaviour patterns are probably different from those before 1989, but they do not correlate with corresponding changes of attitude (remember question 3). In the same way, the answers in the interviews again and again corroborate the social distinction value, which is ascribed to the varieties in the western part, that is the use of a variety is mainly interpreted as an indicator of the social affiliation and the level of education of a person, which leads to a stigmatization of the Berlin urban vernacular. Seen from this point of view, the necessity of linguistic adjustment for the people of east Berlin becomes obvious, if they want to avoid being socially declassified immediately.

4.2 Such differences between east and west surface in the answers to question twenty. But first, something both sides have in common: The undecisiveness of the people in Berlin is very prominent; almost one half of the people (East: 46.8%; West: 50.4%) do not have an opinion. 42.5% of the people in east Berlin have noticed that the Berlin urban vernacular is less and less accepted (West: 16.2%), whereas 32.4% of the people in west Berlin say they have noticed the opposite, that is a higher acceptance of the Berlin urban vernacular (East: 9.5%). In my opinion, the results in east Berlin clearly show the loss of social identity as described above. The results in west Berlin rather indicate a positive development, there is a potential spectrum of acceptance of variety usage and there is possibly even a rediscovery of the emotional values linked to the use of a non-standard variety under way. Apparently not not only the former speech community of east Berlin is in a state of diffusion, but at least in part there is a tendency of diffusion in the opposite direction as well. Looking at the 'I-don't-know' answers one will notice that a high percentage of these answers come from speakers of the Berlin urban vernacular from east Berlin and from standard German speakers from the west. In my opinion, this can be interpreted as a strengthening of tendencies in the respective parts of the city: Both groups are obviously not as sure of their linguistic identities as they formerly were, because they see a developement, which does not put into question their self-identification but which, at the same time, is not easily compatible with their identities either, as it is heading into the opposite direction. This is why people settle for the 'I-don't-know' answer.
4.3 The assumption of a 'divided city' is also confirmed by the estimation and assessment of the language use of the speakers of the 'other' part - people in east Berlin about people in west Berlin and reversed. It correlates for instance with the answers given to the question about the estimation of the use of dialect in the 'other' part of the city: 54% of the people in east Berlin are of the opinion that the Berlin urban vernacular is used less in west Berlin; 83.8% of the people in west Berlin say that the people in east Berlin use the Berlin urban dialect more often. It gets really interesting if, against this background, one asks about the rating of dialect use (question 17). The people in east Berlin are irresolute. The overwhelming majority (63.5%) is indifferent, and the others answer the question in the affirmative or in the negative in more or less equal numbers. Only just under a third of the people in west Berlin are sympathetic towards the linguistic behaviour of the people in east Berlin, 36% do not like it, and another 36% do not mind either way. The judgement of the people in west Berlin is supported by speakers of the Berlin urban vernacular as well as speakers of standard German. In contrast, these two groups of speakers vote significantly different in east Berlin. It is the speakers of the Berlin urban vernacular who rate the language use of the people in west Berlin more positively and who, at the same time, have a less indifferent attitude. This might possibly indicate that for this group of speakers the use of varieties has been noticed to be potentially problematic only after 1989, at which time they would have been confronted by 'model' language of the people in west Berlin. The very obvious tendency of the city as a whole to remain neutral, a tendency which is especially strong in the eastern part of the city, leads to the presumption that the inhabitants of the city are well aware of their precarious situation and they want to avoid rash judgements. This is why I think that part of the 'I-don't-know' answers are answers signalling a hidden rejection, because affirmation is always easy to articulate and usually will be articulated.

5. Resume

So do people from east and west Berlin have a problem with each other? People do not seem to be too curious to find out about each other, almost one half of the people say (East: 44.5%; West: 47.7%) that they only 'occasionally' visit the other part of Berlin; 15.1% of the people in east Berlin and 28.8% of those in the west (very) rarely or never go. Network structures obviously haven't changed much in that respect: Only just under a third of the interviewees (East: 27%; West: 30.6%) have friends in all of Berlin, nor can contacts with colleagues be seen as a regulative: 21.2% of the people in east Berlin and only 3.6% of those in the west work in the, for them, 'other' part of the city. Now as before, there is a big demand to get know each other to be able to ground the competence of judging less on ignorance, prejudices, and cliches but rather on an empirical basis.

I am not trying to say that I think a mutual getting-to-know each other would solve the emotional problem of the 'divided city' But as people in east and west Berlin blame each other for their current feelings of alienation - a general feature of the 'Ossi-Wessi' relationship in Germany -, I think that the gradual elimination of existing barriers is our only chance to control this fatal trend, this negative attitude now and in future. And I think that especially the people in Berlin have a realistic chance to achieve this.

References

Appendix

Questionnaire: Linguistic behaviour in the Berlin speech community (extracts)

1. Do you usually use the Berlin urban vernacular or standard German?
   Berlin urban vernacular ( )
   standard German ( )
   don't know ( )

2. Do people in your residential area speak in the Berlin urban vernacular mostly?
   yes ( )
   no ( )
   don't know ( )

3. Do you like listening to the Berlin urban vernacular?
   yes, always ( )
   depends on the situation ( )
   no ( )
   don't know ( )

4. In which situations do you speak the Berlin urban vernacular/ would you speak in the Berlin urban vernacular? (More than one answer possible)
   in the family ( )
   at the workplace ( )
   when I am nervous ( )
   in a radio interview ( )
   at the authorities ( )
   in a pub ( )
   specify others________________________

5. With whom do you speak in the Berlin urban vernacular/ would you speak in the Berlin urban vernacular? (More than one answer possible)
   with friends ( )
   with colleagues ( )
   with the teacher of my children ( )
   only with people I know ( )
   if I like somebody ( )
   with people from other regions of Germany ( )
   specify others________________________

6. If you speak in the Berlin urban vernacular (even if only very rarely): Do you try not to speak it (in too pronounced manner)?
   yes, always ( )
   depends on the situation ( )
   no ( )

7. What do you feel when you hear the Berlin urban vernacular? Please indicate in a scale from 1 to 5, for instance: 1 = extraordinarily cheeky, 2 = very cheeky, 3 = cheeky, 4 = not really cheeky, 5 = not cheeky.
   I perceive the Berlin urban vernacular as
   cheeky ( )
   humorous ( )
   vulgar ( )
   original ( )
   honest ( )
   simple ( )
   brash ( )
   kind-hearted ( )
   aggressive ( )
   provincial ( )
   friendly ( )
   chummy ( )
   uncouth ( )
   engaging ( )
   tolerant ( )
   quick-witted ( )
   intelligent ( )

10. Would you teach the Berlin urban vernacular to your children?
   yes ( )
   no ( )
   don't know ( )
11. Do you think it is important to be able to speak standard German?
   yes ( )
   no ( )
   in certain situations ( )
   don't know ( )

12. Have you had experiences where the use of the Berlin urban vernacular had an effect on the standard German speaker's opinion about you?
   yes, in a positive way ( )
   yes, in a negative way ( )
   not in an important way ( )
   no ( )

13. Is the use of standard German for your current occupation rather unimportant ( )
    of advantage ( )
    necessary ( )
    important ( )
    essential ( )

16. Do you find that the people in the, for you, 'other part' of the city use the Berlin urban vernacular more or less often than people in 'your' part?
    more often ( )
    the same ( )
    less often ( )
    don't know ( )

17. Do you like the way people speak in the other part of the city?
    yes ( )
    no ( )
    don't know ( )

18. After the fall of the wall - Do you use the Berlin urban vernacular much more often ( )
    more often ( )
    in the same way ( )
    more seldom ( )
    much more seldom ( )

20. Do you think that the acceptance of the Berlin urban vernacular in the whole of Berlin has increased or decreased after the fall of the wall in 1989?
    rather increased ( )
    rather decreased ( )
    don't know ( )