

REVIEWS

Kiezdeutsch. Ein Neuer Dialekt Entsteht. By Heike Wiese. München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2012. Pp. 280. Paperback. €12.95.

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This study consists of two parts (see below) preceded by an introduction titled *Kiezdeutsch—keine “Kanak Sprach”* ‘Kiezdeutsch (KD)—not a kanaka language’.¹ In addition, there is a glossary of specialized terms used in the book, as well as a *Kiezdeutsch-Test* followed by the answers. The test is for any reader who would like to find out how much Kiezdeutsch she or he already might know and for making primarily two points: i) Kiezdeutsch is not as strange as one might think, and ii) it is not hard to learn; native speakers already know quite a bit of it from a dialect they speak. A second appendix contains a position paper written jointly by linguists on the myth of *doppelte Halbsprachigkeit* ‘double semi-lingualism’ (see discussion below).

In the first part, *Was ist Kiezdeutsch? Eine sprachwissenschaftliche Betrachtung* ‘What is KD? A linguistic examination’, Wiese undertakes a detailed description of the linguistic properties of this *Multietnolekt*; this choice of term is explained below. As background, she explores the multilinguistic context of its development and the fact that throughout the evolution of Standard German, there has been the incorporation of dialectal usage and grammar: Systematic changes, contemporaneously often viewed as mistakes, become the new rules of the future, as seen in the use of *brauchen* ‘need’ without the infinitive marker *zu*, an indication of its modal-like properties, which has now become acceptable in the standard language.

A distinguishing feature of Kiezdeutsch, Wiese points out, is that changes are happening much more quickly, making this variety particularly dynamic. Contributing to this quality is the multilingual context:

¹ The word *Kiez* goes back several centuries. Originally it referred to neighborhoods of towns or cities on the eastern frontier of the German empire that in the Middle Ages had a high percentage of working-class people of primarily Slavic origin. Today the term is generally understood, especially in Berlin, as referring to any city district, regardless of ethnic makeup.

Virtually every speaker of Kiezdeutsch also speaks another variety of German, and in many cases another language. Yet, despite the multilingual influences, Wiese argues that Kiezdeutsch is not a *Mischsprache* 'mixed language'. Words from other languages that are used in Kiezdeutsch undergo some sort of shift so that they fit into the German system.

In her discussion of the grammatical innovations in Kiezdeutsch, Wiese argues first and foremost that this dialect is *typisch Deutsch* 'typically German': The innovations can be found either in a similar form in other current dialects or in earlier periods of German. For instance, the omission of the article and preposition in *Wir gehen Görlitzer Park* (instead of *Wir gehen in den Görlitzer Park* 'We're going to GP') is parallel to the omission of the article and preposition found in colloquial German in expressions such as *Wir sind gleich Alexanderplatz* 'We'll be at AP shortly', where AP is a transit stop in Berlin. The only difference is that in Kiezdeutsch, this omission may occur with all types of locative adverbials, not just with those that refer to transit stops. Likewise, the coronalization that occurs in the Kiezdeutsch pronunciation of *ich* 'I' as *isch* can be found throughout the Rhineland; Kiezdeutsch takes advantage of this pronunciation and elides *isch* with *schwöre* 'swear', sometimes dropping the *-e*, thereby creating *ischwör*, an exclamation for affirming the truth of a statement, as in *Ihre Schwester is voll ekelhaft, Alter. Ischwöre* 'Her sister is really obnoxious, old man. I swear', which does not differ substantially from English youth talk.

Another interesting example of Kiezdeutsch taking a usage from the standard language and applying it more broadly is found in the use of semantically bleached verbs such as *machen* 'to make' with a complement, as in *Streit machen* 'create strife'. In Kiezdeutsch, new combinations have been coined: One can also say *Machst du rote Ampel!* 'You're running a red light!' or *Die müssen doch erst Kündigung machen* 'They first have to give notice'. The same is done with *haben* 'to have' in *Hast du U-Bahn? Nee, ich hab Fahrrad* 'Are you taking the subway? No, I've got my bike'.

An example of a syntactic property of Kiezdeutsch that Wiese discusses is the use of verb-third (V3) constructions, as in *Danach ich ruf dich an* 'After that I'll call you'. As is the case with other properties, this one can be found in earlier stages of German, as Wiese points out (pp. 90–91). Her explanation for the use of V3 is based on her analysis of in-

formation structure in a German sentence: Whereas in Standard German only one element may precede the finite verb in a main clause, in Kiezdeutsch there is greater flexibility: There may be no element at all—hence the occurrence of V1-structures as declaratives; there may be one, as in Standard German, creating the V2-structure, but there may also be two, resulting in the V3-structure. Wiese does not point it out, but V3-structures occur only with temporal adverbials such as *danach* ‘after that’, followed by the subject. This phenomenon is an obvious candidate for an account in a theoretical framework.

Wiese concludes her discussion of grammatical properties of Kiezdeutsch with a discussion of the word *so* ‘so’ as in *Die guckt so zu dir so* ‘She looks “so” at you’. In her analysis, the double occurrence of *so* creates a frame around the focus-marked element *zu dir*. She argues that the use of *so* is not a borrowing from English expressions such as *She is SO smart, it’s scary*—for one, the double occurrence has no correlate in English—but bears greater resemblance to the use of *like* in *She is like really smart!* This would be an interesting topic for further research.

In the second part of her study titled *Kiezdeutsch als neuer Dialekt* ‘Kiezdeutsch as a new dialect’, Wiese addresses sociolinguistic issues that this dialect has raised, both in the popular press and in linguistic circles. Central to these issues is the question of the status of Kiezdeutsch as a dialect and what effect it is having on Standard German. In the context of her discussion of the emotionally heated reaction to Kiezdeutsch among the general public, and how important it is to consider arguments of experts, she states, “Dies war nicht zuletzt auch eine wesentliche Motivation für mich, dieses Buch zu schreiben.”²

In addressing the public opinions about Kiezdeutsch, Wiese begins by asking, “Was bedeutet es, ein Dialekt zu sein?”³ She points out that a dialect is usually defined by the region in which it is spoken or by the class of people who speak it. Kiezdeutsch, she argues, combines both regional and social characteristics of dialects and in addition is spoken by individuals who often have proficiency in other languages besides German; therefore, it is a *Multiethnolekt*. She goes on to trace the history of Standard German as a variety that evolved in the German middle class as a language distinct from the German spoken by nobility (those who did

² ‘This, too, was an important motivation for me to write this book.’

³ ‘What does it mean to be a dialect?’

not speak French) and distinct from the dialects that were too regionally limiting and often negatively associated with the lower, uneducated working class and peasants. The German middle class consciously molded Standard German as a linguistic form of identification, their calling card, and as an important means for maintaining and improving their status. In this social context, anyone who spoke a dialect sent out signals that she or he belonged to a lower class that had not reached or aspired to a level of achievement, prestige, or sophistication associated with speakers of Standard German. A dialect was something that was not to be spoken in these middle class circles, and any dialect was associated with grammatical mistakes and a general lack of linguistic capability. In this scenario, Standard German is no longer viewed as one of many linguistic varieties but rather as a grammatically superior linguistic form. By comparison, the dialects are viewed as linguistically inferior and riddled with mistakes, and by extension their speakers as incompetent and generally not as intelligent. Wiese argues that these attitudes and opinions are deeply rooted in today's German society and play a role in social interaction, as indicated by tests in which the German spoken by a person from a well-established middle class Berlin neighborhood such as Zehlendorf was consistently rated better than the German spoken by a person from, for example, Kreuzberg, where many people with migrant background and unemployed live, even when both speakers made the same or similar "mistakes."

In this linguistic milieu, Kiezdeutsch has an even tougher time of it than other dialects such as *Schwäbisch* 'Swabian' or *Bairisch* 'Bavarian', which have been rehabilitated to a certain degree due to the economic success of the regions in which they are spoken. As Wiese argues convincingly in the first part of the book, Kiezdeutsch is not inferior to Schwäbisch or any other German dialect; it simply has the misfortune of evolving in socially and economically depressed neighborhoods of Berlin. Today's speakers of colloquial German utilize many of the same types of abbreviations, ellipses, and short cuts found in Kiezdeutsch without being aware of it. A double standard has developed: When a Caucasian German does it, it is acceptable, but when a teenager from a Turkish or Arabic family does it, even though she or he was born in Germany and thus speaks without a foreign accent, then it is considered grammatically incorrect.

With today's revitalization and rehabilitation of traditional dialects in Germany, the attitudes toward Kiezdeutsch are no longer linguistically based but rather derived by association with a locale or region in which the speaker lives. As Wiese states, "Menschen neigen dazu, den Sprachgebrauch gesellschaftlich Privilegierter als 'gut' zu bewerten und den sozial schwächer Gestellter als 'schlecht' und 'fehlerhaft'—ohne Rücksicht auf die sprachlichen Fakten."⁴

Other issues that Wiese addresses are i) the myth of *doppelte Halbsprachigkeit* 'double semilingualism' (Cummins 1994, MacSwan 2000, among others) in which purportedly neither of the two languages spoken are up to the level of good proficiency (see also Appendix 2), ii) the existence of prestigious second languages, such as English or French, in contrast to nonprestigious second languages, such as Turkish, and iii) the belief that Kiezdeutsch points to insufficient integration into German society. Wiese presents convincing arguments against all of these mistaken notions.

My comments above should have already pointed to my evaluation of this study: Wiese has done an outstanding job with both the description of the linguistic facts of Kiezdeutsch and the discussion of its problematic reception by German speakers. Furthermore, her language is very lucid and precise, making the book a joy to read. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in dialect study, youth language in Germany, and the history of the German language in general. In addition, Wiese's study points to many areas in which theoretical linguists could shed further light on the linguistic phenomena of Kiezdeutsch.

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⁴ 'People tend to rate the language usage of the socially privileged as "good" and that of the socially weaker positioned as "bad" or "error-ridden"—without regard for the linguistic facts.'

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