

Aspects of communicative uncertainty in the language of young East Germans during the Wende

HEINZ J. KREUTZ
MONASH UNIVERSITY

In this paper I shall address the issue of communication with respect to potential barriers and miscommunication, by illustrating how communicative uncertainty, as realised through a range of hedging strategies, may mark the speech of young East Germans. Special attention will be paid to the use of certain hedging constructions which may be explained not so much in terms of politeness, but more as an attempt to hide communicative uncertainty. cursory reference will also be made to face saving strategies.

1. Introduction

In section I, I will present a brief overview of some past and current research questions. This will be followed in section II by an outline of the contribution of the present study, its empirical base and its emphasis on spoken interaction.

Section III will explore the term 'communicative uncertainty', and its functional manifestation, hedging.

Reference will be made to the relationship between hedging strategies and communication difficulties, and the importance of differing socio-cultural backgrounds and worlds of experience. These considerations will be exemplified and illustrated in section IV by presenting corresponding video data dating from the Wende (1989/90). The main analytical categories consist of lexicosemantic (linguistic), and interactional (pragmatic) evidence, including non-verbal (pauses and hesitations) communicative behaviour.

The paper will conclude with a brief summary (V) and the contentions that:

- a. there existed communication difficulties between East and West Germans, and that some may well have outlived the unification process, and
- b. the issue of east-west communication deserves to be

considered in an intercultural paradigm (especially in regard to 'Fremdheit' (foreignness) and 'unterschiedliche Erfahrungswelten' (different worlds of experience)). The paper will conclude with some suggestions for further research.

It is surprising that the issue of confrontation and understanding in relation to communication in eastern¹ Germany (and, perhaps more strikingly, between the east and the west), is still relevant today, almost seven years after the fall of the Berlin wall. Obviously, the whole process of unification is still incomplete, and the German people in east and west are still trying to come to terms with this momentous event, undoubtedly the most important in Germany's post-WWII history. Research into particular aspects of linguistic and communicative differences between the Germans in the GDR and FRG has a tradition that dates back more than forty years. It derived much of its impetus from the ideological and sociopolitical differences that existed between the two states. This was reflected in the continuing disagreement as to whether East and West Germany constituted different speech communities with distinct varieties of German². It would be useful to differentiate between pre- and post-1989 research, however,

since the present article offers only limited scope for detailed treatment of this work, the interested reader is referred to the relevant publications summarising the findings of those studies¹. However, it should be noted that most aspects of communicative differences between East and West Germany have often been dichotomised into:

- Intuition vs. evidence: work on lexicosemantic differences prior to 1989 was very much empirically based and resulted from a comparison of East and West German newspapers (Hellmann, 1984). However, claims that there virtually existed a 'Sprachspaltung' (linguistic division) at linguistic levels other than the lexicon were primarily grounded in the observers' ideological stance, and backed up by little more than intuition and polemics. In the time immediately after the Wende, impressionistic accounts continued, especially in the form of short contributions in the more public media domain. Since then, however, the need for empirically based studies has been recognised and the volume of serious research continues to grow⁴. Observations made in recent years have presented evidence that it is more rewarding to concentrate on the link between language and society, different sociocultural background and experiences, and more generally the connection between societal changes and changed social behaviour, and its effect on linguistic/communicative behaviour⁵.
- Linguistic vs. communicative: until the early 1990s the main focus was on 'Sprachunterschiede', that is, linguistic differences, between East and West Germany, and the more pragmatic aspects of communication were largely ignored⁶. Part of the reason for the lack of proper research prior to 1989 was the problem of access to naturalistic data from the former GDR, but also the dilemma which presented itself during the Wende: existing (GDR-) forms of communication and structures were rapidly disappearing in the climate of political, social and communicative change, and linguistic 'catch-up-work' became the order of the day. Probably the most important linguistic rescue operation originating during that period was the 'Wendekorpus' which was compiled at the Institut für Deutsche Sprache. In order to capture evidence of changing communicative patterns, a shift in

research orientations had to occur, away from the more traditional and limiting frequency analyses based on written language to research into spoken, actually occurring communication in a variety of settings, which focussed on communicative processes and larger discourse phenomena.

- Pre- and post 1989: while in the more serious scientific treatment of East-West differences the focus was almost entirely on the written language (and therefore inadvertently the public-official domain), there has been a considerable shift towards analysing spoken German. This shift coincided with the traditional exclusively linguistic approach of pre-1989 to a stronger emphasis communicative/discourse aspects of language use, and the role of different 'Lebens- und Erfahrungswelten'⁷ ('Language-Communication — Understanding against the Background of Varying Worlds'.)
- The question of linguistic data under examination: the above mentioned traditional focus on written German coincided by and large with a preoccupation with the public domain. Only very few accounts of actual 'real-life' data from the more private sphere existed, and then only in the form of impressionistic and anecdotal accounts (so-called 'Hörbelege'). It is in this area that, perhaps, the most dramatic change in terms of research orientation has taken place: there now exists considerable research on written and spoken language, but also public, semi-public and private, as well institutional and non-institutional discourse.⁸

2. The present study

The material used for the present study consists of eight extracts (total duration approx. 5 minutes of recording time) from a much larger corpus comprising approximately four hours of video-taped TV discussions, round-table-talks and talkshows. It was chosen for a number of reasons which have been discussed in more detail elsewhere (Kreutz, 1993). The decision was made to opt for video recordings of TV discussions which were held during the six months between October 1989 and March 1990, the historical period which has since been referred to as 'Wende'. The discussions presented here involve large numbers of (predominantly

young) East German speakers debating a range of topics pertinent to the social and political changes that were taking place at the time. There was a definite advantage in terms of quantity: by gaining access to the video recordings at the IDS in Mannheim a much more comprehensive corpus could be obtained than would have been possible if the material had been collected by means of personal interviews. One main drawback of the use of TV-language material is the difficulty to classify the language as naturally occurring speech. However, if one applies the criteria 'spontaneous' and 'emotional', certain claims at representativeness are possible. Hartung, prominent East German linguist, claims that⁹

'solange davon ausgegangen werden darf, daß eine Äußerung in der vorliegenden Form auch in anderen Kontexten und Situationen möglich ist, darf vorausgesetzt werden, daß sie allgemeine Gültigkeit hat' (Hartung, 1990:448 so long as it may be assumed that a given utterance is also conceivable in that same form in different contexts and situations, its general validity may be taken for granted).

Similar approaches (i.e. 'interpretative Analyse' interpretive analysis) in conjunction with 'Mediensprache' (language in the media) have been used successfully elsewhere (e.g. Linke, 1985; Mühlen, 1985; Hoffmann, 1982; Holly, Kühn & Püschel, 1986 on talkshows, and 'politische Fernsehinterviews' (television interviews with the participation of politicians).

As regards the calibration and categorisation of the data, it should be mentioned that observations regarding modifying expressions such as hedgings are not random, but viewed in a wider thematic context and according to individual speaker profiles.

3. Communicative uncertainty

The process of linguistic liberation may be well advanced, however, remnants of old habits and terminological, lexical, and semantic gaps are likely to persist for some time, and the necessary linguistic inventory at the disposal of east German speakers at the time of the Wende and thereafter has essentially been a West German one, and in the context of the current 'discourse of discontent' and 'Ostalgie'

('eastalgia', an obvious play on 'Nostalgie' nostalgia) a general reluctance to accept lexemes and expressions that have prior connotations may be presupposed. After all, it is a feature of many discourse forms and genres to resort to more careful means of expression and argumentation if there is doubt or uncertainty involved. The linguistic means resorted to are often what has become known as hedging (Markkanen and Schröder 1996).¹⁰

There is an intrinsic link between society and language, and so social change will always entail linguistic changes as well. The result is alienation and uncertainty on a large scale, as in the former GDR. Manifestations of alienation and uncertainty as a result of this process of change are becoming the object of investigation to an ever-increasing extent.¹¹

However, 'Unsicherheit' (uncertainty, lack of confidence) and 'Wertewandel' (change of values) are essentially part of the social dimension of communication, and therefore more difficult to capture in a linguistic analysis. An additional problem is the fact that a term like 'Unsicherheit' — uncertainty — automatically conjures up associations of 'Sicherheit' (sureness and confidence). It needs to be emphasised that, in the present context, the term is not intended to be evaluative, but as a working term for practical purposes only — although it may be assumed that west German speakers are more confident since their communication patterns have hardly changed.

The compromise between the linguistic and the social dimension lies in the linguistic realisation of 'uncertainty', i.e. linguistic activity as an intrinsic part of social activity. It is in this pragmatic framework that hedging and hedging strategies provide a functional approach that may shed some light on occurrences of communicative uncertainty among east Germans.

3.1 Hedging

The perception of hedging as a functional category of communicative intent allows consideration of many linguistic forms. As such, hedging strategies may be seen as manifestations of the communicative uncertainty referred to above.

In general, in the situation of 1989 and thereafter a high degree of communicative uncertainty may be expected from speakers from east Germany trying to cope with the new. People who share the same mothertongue feel that they cannot communicate properly. Lexical differences clearly existed, however, the paradigm developed mainly by Hellmann (Hellmann, 1973; Hellmann, 1976; Hellmann, 1984), and Schlosser (1990a)¹¹, as useful as it has been, could perhaps not be fully sustained, since, as became quickly evident, lexical differences were not the main impediment to effective communication.

Fraas (1993:260) justifiably asks 'Woher kommen die zahlreichen Kommunikationsprobleme?' (where do all the communicative difficulties arise from?). It seems reasonable to assume that, in view of the vast amount of research undertaken in the area of East-West German language divergence, and the limited insight the studies afford, that the problems east and west German speakers are facing when trying to communicate are not entirely at the linguistic surface level. Different experiences, ways of life, patterns of behaviour ('Erfahrungswelten, Lebensweisen, Verhaltensmuster') have developed during four decades of separation. There is the well known and well documented phenomenon that east Germans perceive the meanings (denotation and connotation) of certain words, their implications and presuppositions differently from their west German counterparts, and vice versa (e.g. v Polenz 1993). Speakers often are not aware of these differences, they communicate, but that which is being communicated ('Kommunikat') is not necessarily the same, misunderstanding may be based on semantic and pragmatic differences, there is potential for conflict.

The different experiences of social and political developments for over four decades would have facilitated the formation of different standards and expectations, which are reflected in disparate communicative behaviour of East and West Germans.

There exists psycholinguistic evidence that difficulties in communication may be caused by unfamiliar text segments (and I would argue that text here is to be understood in the broadest possible sense), such as lexemes or complicated

syntagms. Subsequent gaps have to be bridged by drawing on existing knowledge. (This phenomenon of sometimes only vaguely understanding the gist of a text or discussion is a well known phenomenon to all language users, in areas that require specialised language or jargon). Fraas (1993:261) quotes Strohner: 'bei der Aktivierung eines Wissensbereichs werden neue Wissensbereiche hinzuaktiviert, wenn es bei der Herstellung von Sinn notwendig ist' (when activating one area of knowledge, if necessary, new areas become activated in the construction of meaning) and she continues emphasising the 'Selbstorganisation des Textverarbeitungssystems zur Erschließung neuer Wissensbereiche' (self-organisation of the text-processing system in order to access new areas of knowledge). In the case of east-west German communication problems the effect of disparagingly used lexemes and their connotations ('lexematische Bedeutungserweiterungen/-divergenzen') are, naturally, of much greater importance than comprehension difficulties as a result of syntagmatic complicatedness (which are, it seems, predominantly intralingual 'innersprachlich') across the two Germanies. Still, an analysis beyond the word level is surely required.

The one crucial factor that needs to be taken into account in the context of linguistic unification is the lack of information and incompatible knowledge bases ('Wissensbestände') which are often not recognised, simply because a mutual basis for understanding each other is simply assumed, irrespective of whether it really exists or not. The resulting conflicts are often noticed retrospectively.

Here one may want to look for the key to conflicts in communication between speakers of the same native language, conflict that is not uncommon in cross linguistic settings between native speakers of different languages. In those non-native settings, however, speakers expect to encounter difficulties and are prepared to compensate for them and accommodate accordingly (incidentally, accommodation theory esp. Giles and Smith 1979 may also provide some interesting insights). Speakers adjust a priori to differences in mentality, cultural and social background.

Against this background hedging strategies provide a suitable communicative tool to tone down and reduce one's

responsibility for what one says, or to mitigate what might otherwise seem too forceful. There are also aspects of politeness and face saving which need to be considered, especially in situations of direct contact between east and west.

As for the data under consideration, as a first tentative hypothesis the existence of uncertainty in the communicative activity among the participants in the discussions has been presupposed. Such an approach naturally raises the question of how a category like communicative uncertainty may be determined linguistically. Uncertainty, vagueness, mitigation, downtoning, etc. are all terms which have been used extensively in research on hedging and modality. In the relevant literature hedging is often defined as 'qualification and toning down of utterances and statements in order to reduce the riskiness of what one says', 'mitigation of what might otherwise seem too forceful', or 'politeness and respect to strangers and superiors' (Schröder and Markkanen 1996:2). Hedging thus is primarily a functional category and allows the consideration of many different linguistic forms, which allows a broader perspective than, for example, the term modality. Hedging has also been used in connection with 'concepts (which) trigger prototypical images in people's minds, which make it necessary to somehow mark their less prototypical representatives' (Schröder and Markkanen 1996:2). Bußmann (1990) emphasises the importance of a cultural context, and Gippert (1993) stresses the point that hedges are 'Bezeichnung(en) für Ausdrücke, die andeuten, in welchem Sinne bestimmte Exemplare einer bestimmten Kategorie zugeordnet werden. Aus der Tatsache, daß (jeweils relativ zu einem spezifischen kulturellen Hintergrund) manche Exemplare als bessere/typischere Beispiele einer Kategorie angesehen werden . . . ergibt sich ein Bedürfnis für solche Hecken.' (in Schröder and Markkanen 1996:1); labels for expressions which indicate in what sense items are allocated to a particular category. The fact that (relative to a specific cultural background) some items are better/more typical representatives of a category triggers the need for hedging).

In addition Chafe (1986:270) draws attention to the relationship (and the potential discrepancy causing the use

of hedges) between knowledge and a category ('a match between a piece of knowledge and a category is less perfect'). The problematic nature of 'knowledge' is recognised, for example in the distinction between prototypical and social knowledge. In the case of the GDR, changes in the knowledge base and the *Weltbild* have forced speakers to meet the challenge of having to rename large areas of their reality, which in turn has had an impact on their communicative behaviour in general. The complexity of this has been addressed on occasions, especially by Fraas (1993) in her discussion regarding changed communicative conditions in the GDR during and after the Wende.

4. Discussion

Instead of presenting a full list of possible hedging structures for the German language¹¹, I will now turn to some examples from the data. I will limit my discussion and interpretation to more salient examples. The following is an exemplary analysis and will concentrate on some major aspects of communicative uncertainty. The interpretation relies on native speaker intuition, which is a reliable tool at the researcher's disposal when trying to determine the function of a particular linguistic device, especially if this intuition, or interpretation, can be backed up by related findings in the discipline. In the present case, this is certainly the case. If we take lexico-semantic occurrences (in the sense of Hellmann's 'Spezifika') as a point of departure and examine the linguistic/discourse environment of such items, it is possible to ascertain whether the items are marked or not.

Lexico-semantic phenomena in the sense of 'DDR-Spezifika' (Lexem-, Wortfeld-, Bedeutungs-, etc., see Hellmann 1973, 1984) have been dealt with extensively in the past in the context of written communication. By relating them to occurrences of hedging, in oral communication, it becomes possible to analyse an utterance like

118 A2:<male> ich wollte eigentlich auch noch dazu sagen (0.5) zum Beispiel (.) bei mir war der Grund daß ich abgehauen bin (.) aufgrund dessen (>1.5) weil (>1.5) also man ist kein Reisekader gewesen <looks around> verstehen sie (1.0) als (actually, if I can comment on this (.) for example (.) my reason for escaping was (.) because (.) well I was no 'Reisekader' you know (.) when)

by combining lexico-semantic phenomena (here 'Lexemspezifikum' Reisekader) with communicative strategies (here: combination of hedged performative and downtoning at the lexical level by using *eigentlich* and also) and processes of utterance planning (here: silent pauses). (for a full turn sequence re. extract 6 in the appendix). Example 118 is of purely lexical nature. Since there is no equivalent west German concept for 'Reisekader', a simple substitution of form becomes impossible. The speaker seems to realise this after beginning the verbalisation process, which results in two unusually long silent pauses and ultimately in communication breakdown. The compere interferes and appropriates the next turn.

Examples

Extract 1: Discussion between RZ (Renee Zucker, compere of the show) and BT (Barbara Thalheim, studio guest and member of the inner circle of discussants).

- 32 BT:würde ick sagen ja (0.5) ick glaube schon daß man sehr geformt ist (0.5 eh) von einer Situation in die man hineingeboren wurde (.) und ick bin in dieses andere Deutschland hineingeboren worden und das hat mich schon ganz entscheidend geformt (..) außerdem bin ich die Tochter einer (>0.5) sehr (>0.5) muß ich schon sagen (.) kommunistischen Familie mein Vater war in Dachau (>0.5) hat da ne Zeit seines Lebens verbracht war der erste politische Flüchtling in Algier (0.5) und war seit seinem sechzehnten Lebensjahr Mitglied (0.5) der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands.

(I would say so yes (.) I do believe that we are influenced (.) by a situation you are born into (.) and I was born into this other Germany and this did indeed shape me immensely (.) also I am the daughter of a (.) very (.) I have to admit (.) communist family (my father was in Dachau (.) spent a part of his life there he was the first political refugee in Algier (.) and became a member of the German Communist Party at the age of sixteen).

Prompted by the compere of the show, BT proceeds to underline her identity as a communist and an East German citizen ('dieses Land', this country). From the point of view of using hedging strategies, two items are of importance:

firstly, the hedged performative 'muß ich schon sagen' which immediately precedes the reference to communism, which is thematised twice ('kommunistische Familie', 'Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands'; secondly, there is a pause before 'Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands' which is lexically motivated and which may thus be seen as evidence for lexical processing ('Formulierungsarbeit').¹⁴ The overall effect is one of apology and justification.

- 34 BT:kann es denn nicht sein daß ihr in diesem Teil (.) der Welt dieses Wort erlöst oder Erlösung in anderer Weise benutzt als wir! (.) könnte das nicht so sein?

(I mean is it not possible that you people in this part (.) of the world use this word 'erlöst' (redeem) or 'Erlösung' (redemption) differently from us (.) couldn't that be).

BT's next turn is significant in that she a) distances herself from her West German interlocutor ('diesem Teil der Welt'), and b) she raises the issue of linguistic diversity between East and West Germany (re. 'Erlösung'). This indicates a well developed communicative awareness which gives support to the antagonistic position BT takes up. However, this antagonism is mitigated by modality markers (modal verb 'kann', even more by means of subjunctive II in 'könnte') at the beginning and end of the turn. Therefore, despite the speaker's seemingly strong position, the hedging strategy provides a frame for face saving and will ultimately allow her to at least partially withdraw from her position, if need be.

Extract 2: between MS (Michael Steinbrecher, compere of the show) and U, AND, A1 and A2 (=Uwe, ANDreas, both members of the inner circle; A - comments from the 'outer circle', the Audience)

- 14 U:da muß ich vielleicht noch etwas dazu sagen (.) bei mir war das so also (0.5) entstehen Eindrücke in der BRD daß viele aus der DDR kommen weil (0.5) materielle Gründe der Anlaß sind (.) ich denke aber die materiellen Gründe stehen stehen hinter den ideellen Gründen weit zurück (>0.5) es ist so (.) nach meinen Erfahrungen zumindest und das kann vielleicht ne Ausnahme sein (.) daß (.) die Leute der DDR (>0.5) nach meinen Erfahrungen wie gesagt relativ sicher sozial leben (perhaps I should add

here () in my case the situation was like () you get the impression in West Germany that a lot of people come from the GDR because () there are material reasons () however I believe that material reasons are far less important than ideological reason () it's like () at least as far as my experience goes and I may be an exception () that () the people of the GDR () according to my experience as I've said live relatively secure lives socially speaking)

U begins his turn with a hedged performative ('muß ... sagen') which receives additional downtoning through the use of 'vielleicht'. The hesitant articulation of his ideas and opinion, and the fact that they are only his, hence the lack of claim to generalisability is underlined twice ('bei mir', 'meinen Erfahrungen') is noteworthy in itself and becomes even more noticeable by the presence of pauses in the immediate environment of lexical items ('ideell' and 'materiell') which were of particular significance in the economic system of the GDR. Schlosser (1990a:68) illustrates how there existed an economic climate in which 'streng nach marxistischer Weltordnung — die materiellen Bedürfnisse vor den kulturellen rangieren.' (Italics in the original). In view of this, U's claim that for GDR citizens material motives are of limited significance takes on a different meaning: we are presented with an attempt to justify the desire of East German to move to West Germany. This potentially face threatening contention is therefore hedged at several levels.

... aber viel mehr und viel wichtiger finde ich die Tatsache daß ideelle Dinge (.) ideelle Werte eine Rolle spielen (.) daß man also gezwungen ist (>1.0) in der DDR (>1.0) staatskonform zu leben (>0.5) ohne (0.5) mit dem Gesetz anecken zu müssen (.) und mal so auf alles das reagieren muß (.) beziehungsweise sich anpassen muß was vom Staat gefordert ist (.) hat so den persönlichen Spielraum den man hat für seine eigene Entwicklung relativ gering halten muß ich sagen betont muß und nicht kann (0.5) weil es gibt ja in der letzten Zeit auch versuche da auszubrechen (0.8) bloß wohin die führen (0.5) ist den meisten die hier sind ja bekannt.

(... but what's more and what I find much more important is the fact that ideological aspects () ideological values play a role () that you are in fact forced () in the GDR () to live in conformity with the government () without () interfering with the law () that is having to fit in with what was required by the government () you had to limit your own personal freedom which you normally have for your own development and I emphasise had to and not was allowed to () because in recent times there have been attempts to break free () but where that leads us () most of us are well aware of that).

The two lengthy pauses before 'staatskonform' signifies the speaker's dilemma: maintaining 'ideelle Werte' and a politically conformist existence were irreconcilable in the GDR. An interpretation as to whether this is an instance of hedging will remain ambiguous as long as it is unclear whether the speaker uses the pauses deliberately or subconsciously.

Extract 3: between MS and AND.

19 AND: die Sachen die ich jetzt konkret dazu erzählen könnte (.) das wären vor allen Dingen (.) na die schon gesagten materiellen Sachen (>1.0) was jetzt weniger konkret nennbar ist das wären (.) andere Sachen die eben in den ideologischen Bereich reingehen (0.5) wo man sich (>1.5) auf Jahre hinweg (0.5) echt verarscht fühlt (.) muß mal das Wort so sagen wie es ist wenn man also die Zeitung aufschlägt (0.5) und dort (.) eine Erfolgsmeldung nach der anderen liest (.) und man geht in die Geschäfte (.) und dort zeigt sich dann genau das Gegenteil

(the things I could talk about in more concrete terms () would be above all () well the already mentioned material aspects () and what could be mentioned in more general terms () other things which really have to do with ideological matters () where for years you really feel like someone's taking the piss out of you () I have to say it like it is like when you read the newspaper () and there is one success story after another () and then you go down to the shops () and you realise the opposite's the case)

Again, as in the previous example, there is some conflict over the link between materialism and ideology. The apparently formulaic turn-opening 'die Sachen die ich jetzt konkret dazu erzählen könnte' constitutes a hedge (modalised, subjunctive II, hedged performative) *per se*. In this examples, however, the strategy seems to serve a different function: it is not so much a question of mitigation and downtoning of the utterance to allow the speaker a possible retreat from his position, but more a case softening the force of his anger (re. the casual-vulgar 'verarscht').

Extract 4: between MS and U.

48 U: ja gedanklich schon (.) und auch in Handlung aber (.) natürlich muß man abwägen (.) ganz klar abwägen zwischen dem (.) was einem da nützen könnte (.) und dem (.) was einem unheimlich schaden könnte (.) und ich habs gerade gesagt wenn man ausbricht dann ist man weg dann ist der Zug abgefahren dann ist es unheimlich schwer wieder aufzuspringen (.) wenn man einmal den Kontakt verloren hat und einmal in diesen Kreis (0.5) derjenigen gezählt wird die etwa nicht mehr systemkonform sein könnten (.) beziehungsweise mit denen politisch (0.5) schwierig zu diskutieren ist (.) oder die eben ganz neue Ideen bringen (0.5) auch progressive Ideen (.) konformistische Ideen (>0.5) dann ist es schon sehr schwierig da etwas zu machen

(well yes mentally speaking (.) and also in terms of action but (.) of course it's a toss up between what (.) can be useful (.) and (.) what can be extremely damaging (.) and I've just said if you break out than you're finished you miss the train and it is extremely difficult to catch up (.) once you have lost contact and become a member of (.) well those who would be unable to be conformist any longer (.) or who are difficult when it comes to political dialogue (.) or who have got new ideas altogether (.) including progressive ideas (.) conformist ideas (.) well then it's pretty hard to do anything at all).

In addition to a number of hedging 'clusters' which are present throughout the interaction (i.e. combinations of modality, particles and hedged performatives, re. appendix, extract 4, turns 44–52), the above example serves to highlight the very different sociopolitical background East

Germans were exposed to. There was atypical hesitation after 'konformistisch' (turn 14, not shown here), which seems to point to some sort of terminological confusion: whilst above the negative connotation of 'staatskonform' is evident, the speaker (U) later attempts to label 'konformistisch' (48) as 'progressiv' (in the sense of 'ganz neue Ideen', also note the enthusiastic undertone). The speaker anticipates a brighter, non-socialist future for East Germany, but is somewhat inconsistent in his attempt to verbalise this. Here it is useful to recall the narrowly defined, predetermined meaning of 'progressive' and 'progressiver Fortschritt' in Marxist philosophy. Historical Materialism understands 'progressiv' and related derivations as part of a predetermined societal process. The speaker's predicament is apparent from his intention to convey meaning by a form that is coloured by prior (marxist) usage, and which thus may only be partly suited to express the intended message adequately. He is also at risk to trigger unwanted associations and old (socialist) concepts among his peers, instead of new, emerging ones. Later in the discussion he solves this problem: 'reformistische, progressive Gedanken' become 'westliche Gedanken' (reformist, progressive ideas — western ideas).

Also in turn 48, U presents his information in a dialectic manner that is reminiscent of GDR communication at the official level ('nützen' vs 'schaden'). Also, there is a thematic chain extending from 'systemkonform' via 'politisch schwierig diskutieren' and 'progressive Ideen' to 'konformistische Ideen'. The speaker is confronted with opposing concepts which are both positively and negatively connoted: 'neu' and 'progressiv' constitute the 'positive' category, whereas 'konformistisch' is the opposite. This is the reverse of the situation as it existed before 1989, where 'progressiv' in the sense of advancement ('Fortschritt'), as already mentioned above, was part and parcel of the philosophy of historical materialism.⁴⁵ The use of 'progressive Ideen' in conjunction with 'konformistische Ideen' is therefore a contradiction in terms — they are not synonymous, any more. Speaker A1 in extract 5 below is experiencing a similar dilemma when trying to formulate his ideas. Of additional significance is the marked pause-hesitation pattern: 'progressiv' is surrounded by four relatively long lexical pauses — perhaps a good indication

that the speaker is making a lengthy attempt to retrieve an alternative lexical item which would not be contradictory or ambiguous. Hedging in this instance cannot be classified as a deliberate communicative strategy anymore, rather, the utterance sounds 'hedged', carefully produced with an air of uncertainty.

Extract 5: between A1 (comment from the studio audience) and MS (compere)

106 A1: ja (eh) ich hab ihnen insofern ich hab ihnen nicht in die Reihe gepaßt (0.5) habe (>1.0) progressiv (0.5) ja (1.0) hab ich im Prinzip diskutiert ich wollte (.) mehr (0.5) als (0.5) vorangehen sollte beziehungsweise (.) als sich dieser Mittelstand der sich da gebildet hat (.) ja und der von seinen Plätzen nicht wegweichen möchte ja (.) da kann man nichts machen da kann man reden wie man will da kann man (.) dagegen angehen das wird einfach nichts ja und man sollte es wenigstens versuchen und wenn mans versucht hat dann könnte man den Weg über Ungarn (.) als letztes (eh) nehmen und den haben wir als letztes genommen und der war schon lange vorbereitet.

(well (.) I didn't fit into their scheme of things in that (.) discussed in a (.) progressive sense (.) right (.) that's what I basically did I wanted (.) more (.) things to get a move on that is (.) when this middle class developed (.) right and they didn't want to let go of their positions right (.) well there's nothing you can do you can talk all you like you won't (.) achieve anything and you should at least try and when you've tried then you could at least try the route via Hungary (.) as a last resort (.) and that's the route we took as a last resort and that was prepared a long time before).

Many more examples could be presented with instances of hesitation and pausing, lexical indeterminacy (e.g. 'Umbruch') and several GDR-specific items whose use is the source of some confusion (e.g. 'Kollektiv'), and, at the interactional level, the use of downtoning particles (e.g. 'eigentlich') which do not affect the truth value of the proposition put forward, but are active — in a hedging sense — at the subjective level.

Before concluding this section, however, one final example shall be mentioned, since it captures the essence of much research into linguistic debate on east-west German:

114 GT: meine Erfahrungen sind einfach die daß wenn wir über bestimmte Dinge reden (.) wir immer erklären müssen (.) wie wir das meinen also wir sagen:: (0.5) einen Satz und der wird (>0.5) rein inhaltlich verstanden aber (.) was damit gemeint ist ist immer sehr kompliziert

(my experience is simply that when we talk about certain things (.) we always have to explain (.) what we actually mean like we say (.) a sentence which (.) in terms of content will be understood but (.) what is actually meant is is always very complicated)

115 AF: woran liegt das daß ihr euch mit dergleichen Sprache nicht so ausdrücken könnt daß wir euch verstehen?

(what's the reason for that, using the same language you can't express yourself in way that we can't understand you)

116 GT: (>2.0) <long turn initial pause> tja (0.5) woran liegt das das wäre sicher ein abendfüllendes Gespräch das weiß ich sicher (.) auch nicht ganz genau <facial expression, handmovements suggesting that he is at a loss> (0.5) im einzelnen

(well what's the reason this sure would be an evening-filling conversation I don't know exactly know for sure myself)

117 AF: weiß es sonst jemand? warum gibt es Sprachschwierigkeiten zwischen euch und uns? <segment concludes with the next speaker avoiding the subject of 'Verständigungsschwierigkeiten' and returning to a discussion of the DSU-party>
(anyone else have any idea? why are there communication problems between you and us)

In 114 and 116 the speaker explicates what language users and researchers, in recent years, have suspected all along: there are communication barriers ('Verständigungsschwierigkeiten'),

and there exists a need to elaborate if the message is to be got across without ambiguity. This, however, involves additional communicative effort ('sprachlicher Mehraufwand'¹⁶) which is to be performed mainly by east Germans, since they have been subjected to massive change. The compere's inquiry (117 AF) into the nature of these differences remains unanswered. This inability to articulate the problem, let alone provide an answer, sums up the dilemma of the East German speakers in a most convincing fashion.

5. Concluding remarks

Examples like 114–116 in the previous section give the researcher a clear direction: they reinforce the view that simple lexico-semantic analyses will not capture the differences in communicative habits between east and west. Future investigation will need to be data driven and focus on communicative strategies in a variety of situations and contexts, with a diversity of participants. There needs to be a renewed focus on wider communication channels and patterns, general attitudes towards language and speakers, and different methodological approaches, e.g. text – discourse – conversation analysis, to written and spoken language from different perspectives. For this purpose, an inter-cultural approach to communication may be helpful (Clyne 1994, Hinnekamp 1994). If the notion of culture is detached from language it becomes possible to subsume notions of 'different worlds' and 'varying backgrounds' under a pragmatic approach which utilises the link between culture, society, change and linguistic form and function, especially in a situation where heterogeneous groups speak one and the same native language, as is the case for east and west Germans.

It is a well established truism in intercultural communication research that, by and large, communication can and will function even under the most difficult condition, as long as both parties are willing.

As for the critics who have claimed that the communicative differences between east and west Germany are negligible and a construct of the researchers' imagination (e.g. Oschlies (1989)), and that the kind of examples presented above are simply 'German', and neither typically east nor west, I would like to refer them to Weinrich's (1986:19) notion of

'linguistische Nuancenkompetenz': socially triggered discrepancies at different levels of communication.

Appendix: Transcriptional convention

N.B. overlaps have been excluded from the examples below as they are not an analytical feature in the current context.

(0.5), (1.0), etc. — pause (respective lengths)

(>0.5), (>1.0), etc. — pauses (> signifying longer than)

(.) — short pause (shorter than 0.2 of a second)

(0.5 eh), (0.5 hm), etc. — filled pauses (respective lengths)

a:, a: — lengthening of preceding sound

ich glaub schon — decreased volume

+ich glaub schon+ — fast speech

<looks into the audience> — comments (nonverbal behaviour)

{**} — incomprehensible utterance

RZ, BT, etc. — initials of interlocutors.

Bibliography

- Antos, G. 1996, *Fremdheit in der Muttersprache. Wissenstransfer und Wertewandel als Kommunikationsproblem*. Referat zum 22. New Hampshire Symposium, 19–26 Juni 1996. *Between Confrontation and Understanding: Bridges and Barriers to Communication in Eastern Germany*: 1–5.
- Ahrends, M. (ed.) 1989. *Allseitig Gefestigt*. München:dtv.
- Baudusch, R. 1995, 'Fremdheit und Vertrautheit'. *Muttersprache* 105: 302–323.
- Bauer, D. 1990. *Zwei deutsche Staaten — zwei deutsche Sprachen? Deutsche Sprache*. 18: 218–240.
- Blei, D. 1991. 'Neue Offenheit — neue Herzlichkeit. Beobachtungen zum Sprachgebrauch der Ostdeutschen'. *DaF* 29: 49–51.
- Bußmann, H. 1990. *Lexikon der Sprachwissenschaft*. Stuttgart: Kröner.

- Chafe, W. 1986. 'Evidentiality in English conversation and academic writing'. in Chafe, W. und Nicholls, J. (Hg.). *Evidentiality: The Linguistic Coding of Epistemology*. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex.
- Clyne, M. G. 1994. *Cross-cultural Communication at Work*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Clyne, M. G. 1995. *The German Language in a changing Europe*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Clyne, M. G. 1991. 'The sociocultural dimension: The dilemma of the German speaking scholar'. in Schröder, H. (ed.): *Subject-oriented Texts*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Coates, J. 1986. *Women, Men and Language*. London: Longman.
- Debus, F., Hellmann, M. & Schlosser, H-D (eds.). 1986. *Sprachliche Normen und Normierungsfolgen in der DDR*. Hildesheim: Olms.
- Fix, U. 1994. 'Sprache vor und nach der 'Wende': 'gewendete' Texte ± 'gewendete' Textsorten'. in Heringer, H. et al. *Tendenzen der deutschen Gegenwartssprache*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Fix, U. 1993a. 'Noch breiter entfalten und noch wirksamer untermauern: Die Beschreibung von Wörtern aus dem offiziellen Sprachverkehr der DDR nach den Bedingungen des Gebrauchs'. in Grosse, R., Lerchner, G. and Schröder, M. (eds.): *Beiträge zur Phraseologie, Wortbildung, Lexikologie*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Fix, U. 1993b. 'Rituelle Kommunikation im öffentlichen Sprachgebrauch der DDR und ihre Begleitumstände'. in Lerchner, G. (ed.). *Sprachgebrauch im Wandel*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Fleischer, W. 1987. *Wortschatz der Deutschen Sprache in der DDR*. Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut.
- Fraas, C. & Steyer, K. 1992. 'Sprache der Wende — Wende der Sprache? Beharrungsvermögen und Dynamik von Strukturen im öffentlichen Sprachgebrauch'. *DS 20*: 172–84.
- Fraas, C. 1993. 'Verständnisschwierigkeiten der Deutschen'. *Muttersprache 103*:3. 260–263.
- Giles, H. & Smith, P. 1979. 'Accommodation theory: optimal levels of convergence'. in Giles, H. & St. Clair, R. (eds). *Language and Social Psychology*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Gippert, J. 1993. 'Heckenausdruck'. in Glück, H. (Hg). *Metzler-Lexikon Sprache*. Stuttgart: Metzler.
- Hartung, W-D. 1990. 'Einheitlichkeit und Differenziertheit der deutschen Sprache'. *ZfG 4*: 447–465.
- Hellmann, M. W. 1973. *Zum öffentlichen Sprachgebrauch in der BRD und der DDR*. Düsseldorf: Schwann.
- Hellmann, M. W. 1976. *Bibliografie zum Öffentlichen Sprachgebrauch in der BRD und DDR*. Düsseldorf: Schwann.
- Hellmann, M. W. 1984. *Ost-West Wortschatzvergleiche*. Tübingen: Narr.
- Hellmann, M. W. 1987. 'Die doppelte Wende — Zur Verbindung von Sprache, Sprachwissenschaft und eingebundener politischer Bewertung am Beispiel deutsch-deutscher Sprachdifferenzierung. in Klien, J. (ed.). *Politische Semantik*. Düsseldorf: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag.
- Hellmann, M. W. 1989. 'Berichte zur Alltagskommunikation in der DDR — ein Thema für Linguisten. *Muttersprache 89*. 79–82.
- Hellmann, M. W. 1990. 'DDR-SPRachgebrauch nach der Wende — eine erste Bestandsaufnahme'. *Muttersprache 100*. 266–86.
- Hellmann, M. W. 1991. 'Ich suche eine Wohnung. Zur vergleichenden Untersuchung alltagssprachlichen Handelns in beiden deutschen Staaten'. in Schlosser, H.D. (ed.). *Kommunikationsbedingungen und Alltagsprache in der ehemaligen DDR: Ergebnisse einer inter-disziplinären Tagung*. Hamburg: Buske.
- Hellmann, M. W. 1992. 'Babylon oder: Die Leipziger Volkszeitung in der Wende'. *Sprachreport 2–3*. 12–13.
- Hellmann, M. W. 1993. 'Die Leipziger Volkszeitung vom 27.10.1989 — eine Zeitung im Umbruch'. *Muttersprache 103*: 3. 186–218.
- Hinnekamp, V. 1994. *Interkulturelle Kommunikation*. Heidelberg: Julius Groos.
- Hoffmann, R. R. 1982. *Politische Fernsehinterviews: Eine empirische Analyse sprachlichen Handelns*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Holmes, J. 1984. 'Hedging your bets and sitting on the fence'. *Te Reo 27*. 47–62.
- Holly, W., Kühn, P. & U. Püschel. 1986. *Politische Fernsehdiskussionen*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Kreutz, H. J. 1993. 'Pragmatic and linguistic implications of the convergence between east and west Germany'. in Hajek, J. (ed.). *Working Papers in Linguistics 13*, 63–78. Melbourne: University of Melbourne.
- Lakoff, R. 1975. *Language and Woman's Place*. New York: Harper Colophon.

- Lerchner, G. 1992. 'Broiler, Plast(e) und Datsche machen noch nicht den Unterschied. Fremdheit und Toleranz in einer plurizentrischen deutschen Kommunikationskultur'. in Lerchner, G. (Hg). *Sprachgebrauch im Wandel. Anmerkungen zur Kommunikationskultur in der DDR vor und nach der Wende*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Levelt, W. 1989. *Speaking: From Intention to Articulation*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.
- Linke, A. 1985. *Fernsehgespräche im Fernsehen*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Markkanen, R. & Hartmut S. 1996. *Hedging and Discourse*. (Manuskript, in Vorbereitung für 1996 bei de Gruyter: Berlin.)
- Mühlen, U. 1985. *Talk als Show*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Oschlies, W. 1989. *Würgende und wirkende Wörter — Deutschsprechen in der DDR*. Berlin: Holzapfel.
- von Polenz, P. 1988. 'Binnendeutsch oder plurizentrische Sprachkultur?', *ZGL* 16: 198–218.
- von Polenz, P. 1993. 'Die Sprachrevolte in der DDR im Herbst 1990', *ZGL* 21.2: 127–149.
- Rochester, S. 1973. 'The significance of pauses in spontaneous speech', *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*. 2.1: 51–81.
- Schlosser, H-D. 1990a. *Die deutsche Sprache in der DDR: Zwischen Stalinismus und Demokratie*. Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik.
- Schlosser, H-D. 1990b. 'Das Ende der Zweisprachigkeit'. in Schlosser, H-D. (ed.). *Wiederbegegnung, Herausforderung an die politische Bildung*. Frankfurt: Pädagogische Arbeitsstelle Deutscher Volkshochschulverband.
- Simpson, P. 1993. *Language, Ideology and Point of View*. London: Routledge.
- Stevenson, P. 1995. 'Gegenwartsbewältigung: coming to terms with the present in Germany'. *Multilingua* 14-1: 39–60.
- Thierse, W. 1992. 'Sprich, damit ich dich sehe. Ein anderes Deutsch, doch keine andere Sprache in der Vergangenheit der DDR'. *F.A.Z.* 7.4.92, 36.
- Weinrich, H. 198. *Lügt man im Deutschen, wenn man höflich ist?*. Mannheim: Bibliographisches Institut.
- Welke, K., Sauer, W. & Glück, H. (eds.). 1992. *Die deutsche Sprache nach der Wende*. Hildesheim: Olms.
- Ylönen, S. 1992. 'Probleme deutsch-deutscher Kommunikation: Unterschiede im kommunikativen Verhalten zwischen Alt- und Neubürgern', in *Sprachreport* 2/3: 17–20.
- Endnotes**
1. In the following I will use the labels East and West Germany, respectively, when referring to the now defunct historical entities of the former GDR and FRG; east, eastern, west and western (alone and in various combinations with Germany) will be used to denote the present geographic entities, which are a subset of the new, unified Germany.
 2. Hartung (1990); Fleischer (1987), and v. Polenz (1988) employ the term 'Kommunikationsgemeinschaft' (communication community) as opposed to 'Sprachgemeinschaft' (speech community). They argue that whilst the overall German 'Sprachgemeinschaft' remained intact, two heterogeneous 'Kommunikationsgemeinschaften' did develop. More recently, this difference was emphasised by the east German politician W. Thierse (1992:36), who states that east Germans did not have a different German language, but a different relationship to that language.
 3. esp. Hellmann (1976), (1987), and (1990), Bauer (1990), v. Polenz (1993), and Clyne (1995).
 4. for example Ylönen (1992); Blei (1991); Fix (1994); Welke, Sauer, and Glück (1992).
 5. e.g. von Polenz' (1993) summary and, more recently, Baudusch (1995).
 6. but see Debus, Hellmann & Schlosser (1986) for alternative attempts at analysing spoken everyday language on the basis of GDR films.
 7. Fraas and Steyer (1992); Fraas (1993); Fix (1993a,b); Hellmann (1991).
 8. The notion of 'innere Zweisprachigkeit' (internal bilingualism) may well have been correct, but has, in my view, never been put to the test; For cursory reference see esp. Hellmann (1991) Schlosser (1990); Clyne (1995). Stevenson (1995) is more critical of the notion of code-switching and gives a more detailed account. See Fix (1993b) for communication domains (private — semi-private — public).
 9. This claim of being able to draw general conclusions from linguistic data as long as one may assume that an utterance is likely to occur in the same form in any other context may be somewhat sweeping. The point he is making, however, seems clear: It allows us to analyse a much wider range of spoken language material (esp.

- institutionalised discourse) within existing discourse analytical frameworks.
10. This recent volume by Schröder and Markkanen is to-date the most comprehensive account of hedging and hedging strategies. As it summarises virtually all earlier important work in the area (e.g. (Coates, 1986; Holmes, 1984; Lakoff, 1975; Simpson, 1993; Clyne, 1991), I will limit my overview accordingly.
 11. The most recent example is perhaps Antos' paper 'Fremdheit in der Muttersprache: Wissenstransfer und Wertewandel als Kommunikationsproblem' (1996) at this conference.
 12. It has to be stressed, of course, that especially Hellmann's categories were never intended to be applied in a pragmatic analysis.
 13. Hedging structures in the sense of actual linguistic items: hedging in German can take many different forms, ranging from the non-verbal (careful, hesitant gestures), paraverbal (instances of subvocalisation, hesitation and pauses), lexical (e.g. adverbs or particles like 'vielleicht' maybe, 'eigentlich' actually), phrasal or sentential ('kann sein' possibly), morpho-syntactically (subjunctive mood 'ich würde...' I would), indirect speech acts (esp. modalised, as in hedged performatives 'ich möchte hinzufügen' I would like to add) or even non-propositional/interactional (esp. through use of downtoning particles 'eigentlich ist es schon so, daß...' well, it's actually the case that . . .).
 14. see Rochester (1973) Levelt (1989) for comprehensive treatment of pauses and hesitation. Only lexical pauses will be considered in the present context, as juncture pauses (syntactically motivated) are generally not relevant in lexical retrieval processes.
 15. Ahrends (1989:58) explains: 'Im historischen Materialismus wird Fortschritt als ein objektiver, gesetzmäßiger Prozeß dargestellt, dessen Hauptkriterium die Entfaltung der Produktivkräfte ist. Im Blick auf das kapitalistische Ausland wird in den DDR-Medien nur dann von fortschrittlichen Kreisen, Strömungen oder Kräften gesprochen, wenn diese antikapitalistisch wirksam oder zur Zusammenarbeit mit Kommunisten sind.'
 16. Grit Liebscher, personal communication.

Heinz Kreutz is currently employed as an Associate Lecturer in the Department of German and Slavic Studies at Monash University. Heinz submitted his PhD in March 1997. During his doctorate he worked as a research assistant and sessional tutor in the Department of Linguistics and the Department of German Studies at Monash University.



Applied Linguistics
MA and PGradDip
by flexible delivery

The Department of Linguistics offers the MA and PGradDip in Applied Linguistics on the Clayton campus or by Distance Education. The MA consists of 8 subjects to be studied over two years full-time or four years part-time. The PGrad Dip consists of the first four core subjects of the MA. We offer subjects such as:

- Language in society
- Bilingualism
- Second language acquisition
- Language and gender

On campus students can do up to 2 research projects in lieu of core and elective subjects.

For further details, contact MA Co-ordinator, Linguistics Department, Monash University, Clayton Vic. 3168 tel: 9905-2296; fax: 9905 2294; email: mark.newbrook@arts.monash.edu.au