[WLG]

WIENER LINGUISTISCHE GAZETTE

"*Eh* ist eh anders" – *eh* and *sowieso* in Federal German and Austrian German

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University of Tübingen

1.   Introduction

In the literature on German discourse particles, the particle *eh* is usually said to be either synonymous or functionally equivalent to the particle *sowieso* (see Weydt 1983, Thurmair 1989, Eggs 2003, Fisseni 2009, Bruijnen & Sudhoff 2013). Hence, the effect of uttering (1) with either *eh* or *sowieso* is claimed to be the same, and *eh* and *sowieso* are claimed to be fully interchangeable.

(1)   Partikel sind **eh / sowieso** interessant.
         particles are EH / SOWIESO interesting
         'Particles are interesting' + particle contribution

The aim of this paper is to provide evidence that the picture that is painted in the literature on *eh* and *sowieso* is biased towards the varieties of German that are spoken in the Federal Republic of Germany ("Federal German"). In the varieties of German that are spoken in Austria ("Austrian German"), the particles *eh* and *sowieso* have distinct contributions, which is noticeable especially in polar interrogatives.[1] I discuss intuitive judgements on Austrian German *eh* and present the results of a corpus study that supports the claim that Federal German *eh* and Austrian German *eh* have distinct contributions.

   Hence, the dialectal variation found for *eh* differs from the more common case where a particle is only available in certain varieties (e.g., *leicht*, which is only found in Austrian German; Csipak & Zobel 2014). The main consequence that needs to be drawn from this is that in particle research, dialectal variation with respect to the contribution of a given particle should always be controlled for systematically.

   [1]Weydt (1983) already notices this difference but does not say any more on the subject.

2.   Two versions of *eh*

Weydt (1983) and Thurmair (1989), among others, observe that in German, *eh* and *sowieso* are fully interchangeable, a claim that, as a native speaker of Austrian German, I always found surprising. For me, *eh* and *sowieso* clearly have distinct discourse functions. I aim to show that the reported interchangeability only applies in varieties of Federal German. I use *eh*$_D$ for Federal German *eh/sowieso* and *eh*$_A$ for Austrian German *eh*; *sowieso* in Austrian German is the same as *eh*$_D$. Also note that *eh*$_D$ and *eh*$_A$ are always stressed.

2.1   Federal German *eh*$_D$

Following Weydt (1983) a.o., I propose that *eh*$_D$, applied to a proposition p, contributes:

(2) $\exists r'[r'(t_0)(w_0) = 1 \,\&\, \forall t'[r'(t')(w_0) \rightsquigarrow p(t')(w_0)] \,\&\, r' \neq r \,\&\, \forall t'[r(t')(w_0) \rightsquigarrow p(t')(w_0)]]$
IN PROSE: There is a preexisting state of affairs r' which usually brings about p ($\rightsquigarrow$) that differs from a salient (potentially future) state of affairs r that also usually brings about p.

In declarative sentences, where *eh*$_D$ occurs most frequently, it contributes the content in (2) at the not-at-issue level (see e.g., Potts 2011). In (3), for instance, B asserts that Maria will bring Peter along (= p). In addition, the use of *eh*$_D$ conveys that p is brought about by an actual state of affairs r' and not by a potential future reminder to do so by A and B (= r).

(3)   A: Should we remind Maria to bring Peter along?   (provides the salient r)

       B: Nein, sie bringt den **eh**   mit.
           no   she brings him EH$_D$ with
           'No, she will EH$_D$ bring him.'

The use of *eh*$_D$ in interrogative sentences is constrained to polar interrogatives.[2] While the frequency of use of *eh*$_D$ in declarative sentences depends on the regional variant,[3] the rarity of *eh*$_D$ in polar interrogatives could result from the following—to my knowledge novel—observation: in polar interrogatives, the contribution of *eh*$_D$ is what is at-issue, all other content is treated as backgrounded. To see this, consider (4) with the assumption that the coffee dispenser is the only option to get coffee.

(4)   A: Do you want coffee?   (= indirect offer to get coffee)

       B: Kommst du **eh**   am   Kaffeeautomaten vorbei?
           pass   you EH$_D$ at-the coffee-dispenser by
           'Will you EH$_D$ pass by the coffee dispenser?' (Bruijnen & Sudhoff 2013, 84)

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[2]Thurmair (1989, 136) argues that *eh*$_D$ only occurs in polar interrogatives following negation (*nicht*). Fisseni (2009) and Bruijnen & Sudhoff (2013), however, show that *eh*$_D$ can also precede and occur independently of negation.

[3]The varieties of Federal German differ with respect to whether *eh* or *sowieso* is preferred. My informants in Tübingen (South-West Germany) state a clear preference for *eh*, while those in Göttingen (Central Germany) prefer *sowieso*.

With her question, B treats A's passing by the coffee dispenser (=*p*) as established (given A's offer). What B asks is whether *p* will be brought about by a preexisting state of affairs *r′* or by her positive answer to A's question/offer (=*r*). This is what A reacts to in (5a).

(5)   a.   A: No, only if you want coffee.
        b.   A: #No, I'm not passing by the coffee machine.

A's answer in (5b) is infelicitous since it is in conflict with *p* being established. It becomes felicitous if we omit *eh_D* from B's question in (4) and assume that the coffee dispenser is not the only option. In that case, B asks whether *p* (i.e., *p* is not established). A's subsequent answer (5b) then implicates that he will get the coffee from somewhere else.

2.2   Austrian German *eh_A*

Austrian German *eh_A*, applied to a proposition *p*, contributes the content in (6). The holder of the attitudes that are part of the speaker's belief (Bel_cS) vary depending on sentence type.

(6) $\text{Bel}_{cS}(p \cap \text{Bel}_{cA/cS} \neq \varnothing \ \& \ \neg p \cap \text{Bel}_{cA/cS} \neq \varnothing \ \& \ \text{Bul}_{cA/cS} \subset p)$
        IN PROSE: The speaker (*cS*) believes that the addressee's (*cA*)/her belief worlds are compatible with both *p* and ¬*p* and that the addressee/she wants *p* to hold.

The particle *eh_A* occurs freely in declaratives and polar interrogatives. Unlike *eh_D*, though, *eh_A* contributes (6) at the not-at-issue level in declaratives as well as in polar interrogatives. This, I argue, makes *eh_A* in polar interrogatives less constrained than *eh_D*: all of the examples given for *eh_D* are also potential examples illustrating *eh_A*; not all examples of *eh_A* are potential examples illustrating *eh_D*, though.

Uttering the declarative in (7), B asserts that Maria will bring Peter along (=*p*). By using *eh_A*, B conveys that she believes that A (= *cA*) is not in a position to exclude ¬*p* (why else would A ask?) but wants to exclude it—i.e., in a declarative, the attitude holder of the inner, variable attitudes in (6) is *cA* (see Csipak & Zobel 2014 for a similar proposal).

(7)   A: Should we remind Maria to bring Peter along?

        B: Nein, sie bringt den **eh** mit.
               'No, she will EH_A bring him.'

Turning to polar interrogatives, let us assume that B only drinks coffee from the coffee dispenser and would decline A's offer if A were to get coffee from a different place. Now, B's question in (8) asks whether A will pass by the coffee machine (=*p*). The use of *eh_A* conveys that B (= *cS*) is not in a position to exclude ¬*p* (why else would B ask?) but wants *p* to hold—i.e., in a polar interrogative, the inner attitudes in (6) are speaker-relative.

(8)   A: Do you want coffee?

B: Kommst du **eh** beim Kaffeeautomaten vorbei?
     'Will you EH_A pass by the coffee machine?'

Note that since eh_A contributes not-at-issue content, A could felicitously use (5b) to answer B in (8). Moreover, since eh_A and *sowieso* make different contributions, they can be combined straightforwardly in Austrian German, as in (9) (using the context for (4)):

(9)   B: Kommst du **eh sowieso** beim Kaffeeautomaten vorbei?
             'Will you EH_A SOWIESO pass by the coffee dispenser?'

In (9), B takes A's passing by the coffee dispenser ($=p$) as established (given A's offer). Using *sowieso*, which contributes at-issue content like eh_D, B asks whether <u>p will be brought about by a preexisting state of affairs r' and not by B's positive answer ($=r$)</u>. The use of eh_A takes the underlined sentence radical p' of the question as its argument and conveys—at the not-at-issue level—that B is not in a position to exclude $\neg p'$ but wants p' to hold.

3.   Supporting evidence: a corpus study

3.1   The motivating idea

The corpus study presented in this section compares the number of occurrences of *eh* for three German speaking areas that represent three different varieties of German: Lower Saxony, the Nuremberg area (Franconia and Bavaria), and Eastern Austria (Lower Austria and Burgenland). The first two areas belong to the Federal Republic of Germany. The occurrences of Lower Saxony and Eastern Austria clearly exemplify eh_D and eh_A, respectively. For the variety spoken in the Nuremberg area, it is *a priori* plausible to assume that *eh* could be either eh_D or eh_A since this variety is similar to the varieties spoken in Austria.

Given the discussion on eh_D and eh_A in the previous section, I had the following expectations for the outcome of the study.

- The number of occurrences of *eh* in polar questions should be comparatively lower for the Federal German areas than for the Austrian area.
- Hence, the number of overall occurrences of *eh* for the two Federal German areas should be lower than the number of occurrences for the Austrian area.

The data that was analyzed for the three German speaking areas was taken from three sub-corpora of the TAGGED-T2 archive of the German Reference Corpus (DeReKo) that can be accessed via COSMAS II.[4] These are collections of journalistic texts from regional newspapers that were published between 2010 and 2014. I assume that the majority of the occurrences of *eh* in these papers were produced by speakers from these three regions.[5]

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[4] `https://cosmas2.ids-mannheim.de/cosmas2-web/`

[5] I am aware that this is a problematic assumption. Hence, the results of this study should definitely be taken with caution.

- **Lower Saxony:** Braunschweiger Zeitung (BZ), Hannoversche Allgemeine (HA)
- **Nuremberg area:** Nürnberger Nachrichten (NN), Nürnberger Zeitung (NZ)
- **Eastern Austria:** Niederösterreichische Nachrichten (NoeN), Burgenländische Volks-zeitung (BVZ)

3.2   The general results

I queried the three sub-corpora independently for all occurrences of *eh* with the exception of *eh* in the fixed phrase *eh und je*.[6] The results are presented in (10) and (11).

(10)   *Absolute number of hits in general and per newspaper*

	Lower Saxony	**Nuremberg area**	**Eastern Austria**
Number of hits	636 hits	1030 hits	1786 hits
Results per newspaper	BZ, 598 hits (6.94 tokens/mio) HA, 38 hits (4.07 tokens/mio)	NN, 628 hits (12.25 tokens/mio) NZ, 402 hits (8.99 tokens/mio)	NoeN, 1449 hits (12.65 tokens/mio) BVZ, 337 hits (16.47 tokens/mio)

(11)   *Comparison of the number of tokens of 'eh' for the three areas (tokens per million)*
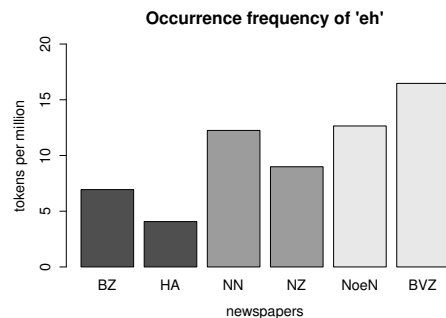
If we compare the number of tokens per million for Lower Saxony (dark gray, BZ and HA) and for Eastern Austria (light gray, NoeN and BVZ), we see a clear difference in the frequencies of use for *eh*. The results for the Nuremberg area (medium gray, NN and NZ) are right in between the results for Lower Saxony and Eastern Austria. Hence, *eh* is more frequently used the more to the South-East an area is.

While these results are in accordance with eh_D and eh_A being distinct and with the expectations discussed in the previous subsection, they do not give conclusive evidence for a difference between eh_D and eh_A. The particle *eh* originated in the south-eastern German speaking regions and only later spread to other German speaking areas (see, e.g., Weydt 1983, 178f). Hence, the data can also be explained by assuming that in Lower Saxony, the newer expression *eh* does not occur as often since it is dispreferred with respect to the older expression *sowieso*. The more you go to the South-East, the more preferred and frequent

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[6]The COSMAS II query: eh NICHT (eh ``und'' je).

eh becomes. That is, in the Nuremberg area, *eh* is less dispreferred/more preferred than in Lower Saxony, and in Eastern Austria, *eh* is even more preferred than in the Nuremberg area. This explanation does not depend on a difference between eh_D and eh_A.

To see whether the corpus data supports the claim that there is a difference between eh_D and eh_A, we, therefore, need a more fine grained analysis that takes a look at how readily *eh* occurs in declaratives and polar interrogatives for the three areas. Especially the behavior of *eh* in polar interrogatives should differ for areas with eh_D and areas with eh_A.

3.3   Investigating the sentence types

To investigate the distribution of *eh* in declaratives and polar interrogatives, I took random samples of 250 items for each of the three areas and annotated them for SENTENCE TYPE (declarative vs. polar interrogative). I did not distinguish matrix and embedded sentences.

(12)   *Absolute/relative frequencies for the occurrence of 'eh' relative to sentence type*

	declarative	polar interrogative
Lower Saxony	249 (0.996)	1 (0.004)
Nuremberg area	249 (0.996)	1 (0.004)
Eastern Austria	234 (0.936)	16 (0.064)

The samples from Lower Saxony and the Nuremberg area both contained only one example for *eh* in a polar interrogative. This contrasts with the 16 examples found for Eastern Austria. If we look at the two examples of *eh* from Lower Saxony and the Nuremberg area, we find that the first, (13), exemplifies a use of *eh* under negation, as described by Thurmair (1989), and that the second, (14), is in fact a direct quote of an Austrian author.

(13)   Wird er es nicht **eh** "versaufen"?
        will he it not   EH drink.away
        'Won't he EH waste it on drink?'   (Lower Saxony)

(14)   [**Context:** "Before the 'Theo-Book', the extended version of my book from 1997, was published, I asked Theo (who is now 16 years old)..."]   (Nuremberg area)

        ob   ihm das **eh** recht ist oder ob   er irgendein Problem damit hat.
        whether him that EH okay is or   whether he any   problem with-it has
        'whether he is EH okay with that or whether he has a problem with it.'

The occurrence of *eh* in (13) is replaceable by *sowieso*. This is not the case for *eh* in (14), which the native speakers of Federal German variants who I consulted also judge as odd.

The 16 interrogative clauses containing *eh* that were found for Eastern Austria attest that *eh* can be used in positive and negative polar interrogatives, as in (15) and (16).

(15)   Bin ich hier **eh** in Waidhofen an der Ybbs?
        am I   here EH in Waidhofen an der Ybbs

'Am I ᴇʜ Waidhofen an der Ybbs?'   (NoeN)

(16)   Bist jetzt **eh** ned deppat worden?
         are   now ᴇʜ not crazy   become
         'Did you ᴇʜ not go crazy now?'   (NoeN)

As with (14), the occurrences of *eh* in (15)/(16) cannot be replaced by *sowieso* and my consultants for Federal German variants also judge these uses of *eh* as odd.

These results fit with the first expectation given in the previous subsection. In connection with the reported native speaker intuitions, they suggest that there is indeed a difference between eh_D and eh_A, and that *eh* from the Nuremberg area and *eh* from Lower Saxony are both eh_D regardless of the relative geographical distance/closeness to Austria.

4.   Conclusion

To substantiate my claim in the introduction that Federal German eh_D and Austrian German eh_A differ in their contribution, I first presented an analysis of the two particles in declaratives and polar interrogatives based on native speaker intuitions. This analysis identified a difference in content for eh_D and eh_A, as well as a difference in the behavior and, hence, frequency of eh_D vs. eh_A in polar interrogatives. As a second step, this difference in frequency was checked by means of a corpus study. I determined the overall occurrence frequency and the occurrence frequency of *eh* in polar interrogatives for two areas in Germany and one area in Austria. As expected, *eh* occurred more frequently overall and more frequently specifically in polar questions in texts from Austria.

In sum, this case study showed that dialectal variation at the level of semantic content must not be discounted in particle research and, hence, needs to be controlled for.

References

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Sarah Zobel
sarah.zobel@ds.uni-tuebingen.de