



On the difference between the Federal German and the Austrian German discourse particle *eh*

An experimental investigation

Sarah Zobel
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The discourse particle *eh*

Discourse particle *eh* is found across all German speaking areas

- (1) Die meisten Besucher bleiben *eh* nur einige Stunden.

'Most visitors stay EH only a few hours.'

(BRZ13/JAN.06279, 01/2013, Braunschweig, Germany)

- (2) Einige Zuschauer waren *eh* ein wenig verärgert.

'Some viewers were EH a bit annoyed.'

(NON13/JUL.15266, 07/2013, Lower Austria, Austria)

- (3) Laster sind in Bischofszell *eh* tabu.

'Trucks are EH prohibited in Bischofszell.'

(A09/JUN.06993, 06/2009, St. Gallen, Switzerland)

Default assumption:

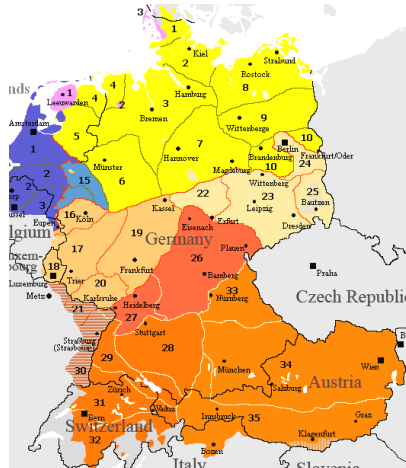
eh contributes the same meaning in the different varieties of German



Aim of this talk

Main aim:

challenge the default assumption
that *eh* means the same in the
different variants of German



(Source: wikipedia.de)

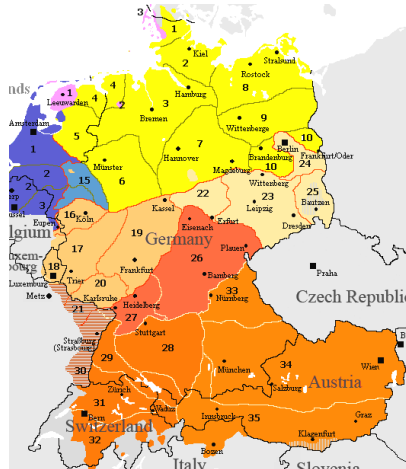


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⇒ compare *eh* as used in **Federal German (FG)** and as used in **Austrian German (AG)**



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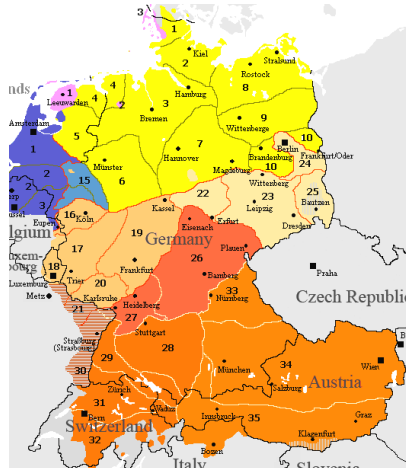


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challenge the default assumption that *eh* means the same in the different variants of German

- ⇒ compare *eh* as used in **Federal German (FG)** and as used in **Austrian German (AG)**
- ⇒ report the results of a comparative study on the **acceptability of *eh* in polar questions**



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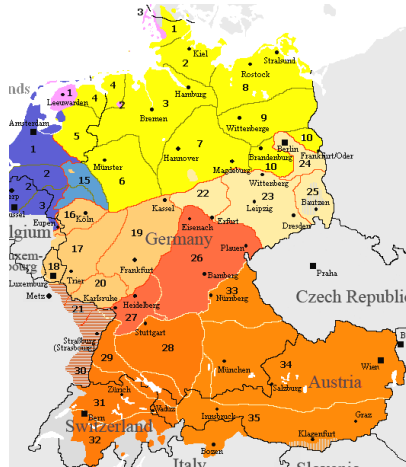


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challenge the default assumption that *eh* means the same in the different variants of German

- ⇒ compare *eh* as used in **Federal German (FG)** and as used in **Austrian German (AG)**
- ⇒ report the results of a comparative study on the **acceptability of *eh* in polar questions**
- ⇒ discuss the implications for studying the **differences between FG *eh* and AG *eh***



(Source: wikipedia.de)



Roadmap

Introduction

FG and AG 'eh'

Background on discourse particles

Analyses of 'eh'

Experiment

Discussion

Comparison of FG and AG speakers

Implications for the analysis of FG 'eh' and AG 'eh'

Conclusion



Background: German discourse particles – I

German is particle-rich: *ja, doch, wohl, denn, etwa, ... eh*

Properties of particles:

(a.o. Eckardt 2013, Egg & Zimmermann 2012, Matthewson 2016, Repp 2013, Rojas-Esponda 2014, Zimmermann 2011)



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- ▶ are sensitive to the preceding discourse
- ▶ fit the containing utterance to the preceding context
 - ⇒ “discourse navigating devices”
 - ⇒ means to perform “discourse management”

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- ▶ fit the containing utterance to the preceding context
 - ⇒ “discourse navigating devices”
 - ⇒ means to perform “discourse management”
- ▶ typically do not contribute to the truth-conditions of the containing utterance (“not-at-issue meaning”)

(a.o. Eckardt 2013, Egg & Zimmermann 2012, Matthewson 2016, Repp 2013, Rojas-Esponda 2014, Zimmermann 2011)



Background: German discourse particles – II

“discourse navigating devices”:

particles make reference to the **speaker's attitudes** regarding the utterance content **in reference to the current state of the discourse**.



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Example: *doch*

(see e.g. Grosz 2014, Zimmermann 2011)

- (4) A: When will you be coming by tomorrow?
 B: I can't come by tomorrow, sorry... I thought we wanted to meet Sunday...
 A: Morgen ist doch Sonntag. (*Tomorrow is DOCH Sunday.*)



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***doch* signals:**

- ⇒ content in the preceding context is in **conflict** with the content of the containing utterance
- ⇒ the speaker judges the containing utterance as **uncontroversially true**



Background: German discourse particles – III

Different particles can:

- ▶ have different restrictions regarding sentence types
- ▶ be sensitive to different aspects of the context
- ▶ express different speaker attitudes
- ▶ potentially differ in their (not-)at-issueness

Use these aspects to figure out:

- ▶ whether two particles differ in their semantics
- ▶ the exact discourse effects of single particles



'Consensus' in the previous literature

The discourse particle *eh*:

- ▶ can freely occur in **declaratives** and is restricted but possible in **polar interrogatives**
- ▶ signals that **the content of its containing utterance is the case independently of a contextually given potential cause**

(5) Peter geht heute **eh** zur Post.
'Peter will EH go to the post office today.'

⇒ synonymous with / performs the **same function as *sowieso***

(Eggs 2003, Bruijnen & Sudhoff 2013, Fisseni 2009, Thurmair 1989, Weydt 1983)



Observation: *eh/sowieso* in AG

- ▶ **Assumption:** *eh* and *sowieso* perform the same function
- ▶ **Expectation:** we do not find *eh* and *sowieso* in the same utterance
 - ⇒ no corpus hits for “*eh sowieso*” in the available corpora for FG



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- (6) Ich finde der was angeln will, der beschäftigt sich **eh sowieso** damit.
‘I believe that someone who wants to go fishing will EH SOWIESO engage with this.’
(from: <http://anglerforum.at>)
- (7) Ja klar, machen wir **eh sowieso**.
‘Of course, we do that EH SOWIESO.’
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- ▶ **But:** no solid evidence for a difference between FG and AG



Observations: *eh* in polar questions – I

FG *eh* can occur in polar questions, but is subject to restrictions
(= requires specific contextual configurations)

- (8) A: Do you want coffee? (= offer to get coffee from dispenser)
 B: Gehst du #(eh) zum Kaffeeautomaten?
 ‘Are you EH going to the coffee dispenser?’
 (cf. Bruijnen & Sudhoff 2013:84)

B asks: “Are you going to the coffee dispenser independently of your offer to get coffee for me?” (⇒ for B, it’s established that A will go to the coffee dispenser)

⇒ contribution of FG *eh* in B’s question is at-issue and the positive answer to the question without *eh* is treated as established



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Polar questions without *eh* are odd/incoherent in contexts that allow for the questions with *eh*.



Observations: *eh* in polar questions – II

- ▶ **My native AG intuition:** contribution of *eh* in polar questions is not-at-issue

(9) A: Do you want coffee? (= offer to get coffee from dispenser)
 B: #Gehst du (*eh*) zum Kaffeeautomaten?
'Are you EH going to the coffee dispenser?'

⇒ **AG speaker:** the dialogue is incoherent with and without *eh*

- ▶ **Proposal for contribution of AG *eh* in polar questions:** the speaker signals that she wants the answer to the question to be yes
 - ⇒ **B asks:** “Are you going to the coffee dispenser?”
 & signals “I want your answer to be ‘yes’”.

(Csipak & Zobel 2014, Zobel 2017)



Observations: *eh* in polar questions – III

- ▶ **FG *eh* in polar questions:**
 - ▶ '?*eh-p*' asks whether there is a potential cause for *p* that differs from a contextually given potential cause & treats *p* as established
 - ▶ *eh* contributes at-issue meaning
- ▶ **AG *eh* in polar questions:**
 - ▶ '?*eh-p*' asks '?*p*' and signals that the speaker prefers the positive answer
 - ▶ *eh* contributes not-at-issue meaning



Observations: *eh* in polar questions – III

▶ FG *eh* in polar questions:

- ▶ '?*eh-p*' asks whether there is a potential cause for *p* that differs from a contextually given potential cause & treats *p* as established
- ▶ *eh* contributes at-issue meaning

▶ AG *eh* in polar questions:

- ▶ '?*eh-p*' asks '?*p*' and signals that the speaker prefers the positive answer
- ▶ *eh* contributes not-at-issue meaning

Prediction: different distribution of *eh* in FG and AG

- ▶ FG *eh* can occur in a polar question '?*eh-p*' if the question expressed by '?*eh-p*' is contextually licensed
- ▶ AG *eh* can occur in a polar question '?*eh-p*' if '?*p*' is contextually licensed and if the speaker plausibly wants *p* to be the case

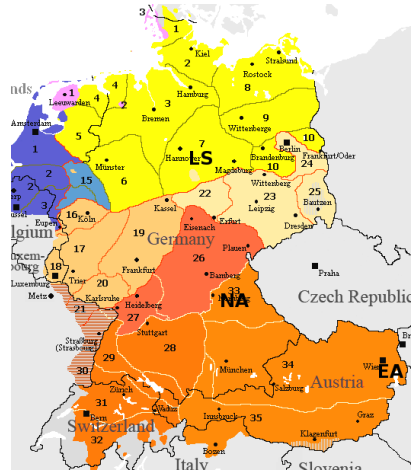


Zobel 2017: corpus study

Absolute and relative frequencies:

| | decl. | polar int. |
|-----------|-------------|------------|
| LS | 249 (0.996) | 1 (0.004) |
| NA | 249 (0.996) | 1 (0.004) |
| EA | 234 (0.936) | 16 (0.064) |

- ▶ random samples of 250 corpus items containing *eh* from 3 regions in Germany and Austria
- ▶ annotated for sentence types
- ▶ different distribution of *eh* in FG and AG with respect to sentence type



(Source: wikipedia.de)



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Goal of the study

Find evidence that **FG *eh*** and **AG *eh*** are distinct particles.

Construct contrasting item material based on the contributions proposed for FG *eh* and AG *eh* in polar questions:

- ▶ '*?eh-p*' asks whether there is a potential cause for *p* that differs from a contextually given potential cause & treats *p* as established
- ▶ '*?eh-p*' asks '*?p*' and signals that the speaker prefers the positive answer



Structure of the study

Central idea: acceptability judgment task relative to a given context

- ▶ test polar questions with and without *eh* (PRESENCE OF EH) in contexts that only license the FG use or that only license the AG use (CONTEXT)
- ▶ test the same item material in a FG speaking region and in an AG speaking region (SPEAKER COMMUNITY)
- ▶ comparison of the results should reveal an interaction between SPEAKER COMMUNITY and CONTEXT for polar questions with *eh*

⇒ 2 × 2 design: PRESENCE OF EH (me,ke) × CONTEXT (de,oe)

⇒ SPEAKER COMMUNITY: FG and AG



Item construction: context only licensing the FG use

- ▶ **FG:** '?eh-p' asks whether there is a potential cause for p that differs from a contextually given potential cause & treats p as established
- ▶ **AG:** '?eh-p' asks '?p' and signals that the speaker prefers the positive answer

General make-up of the (de)-contexts for '?eh-p':

- ▶ p is established via a commitment entered into by the addressee (offer or acceptance of a request)
 - ⇒ realizing p imposes on the time and resources of the addressee
 - ⇒ potentially disrupts the addressee's plans
- ▶ p is something that the speaker benefits from

⇒ FG '?eh-p' should be a natural question in this context

⇒ '?p' and AG '?eh-p' are incoherent in these contexts (s. Sudo 2013)



Sample item: context only licensing the FG use (de)

(de)-context: Paul and Maria are office mates. Paul is currently working on a larger project with Maria's help. Paul knows how much Maria loves the Cappuccino from the cafeteria. During one of their breaks, **he tells Maria that he will get her favourite coffee from the cafeteria for her.**

- (me) Maria freut sich und fragt: "Gehst du **eh** in die Kantine?"
'Maria is happy and asks, "Are you EH going to the cafeteria?"'
- (ke) Maria freut sich und fragt: "Gehst du in die Kantine?"
'Maria is happy and asks, "Are you going to the cafeteria?"'



Item construction: context only licensing the AG use

- ▶ **FG:** '?eh-p' asks whether there is a potential cause for p that differs from a contextually given potential cause & treats p as established
- ▶ **AG:** '?eh-p' asks '?p' and signals that the speaker prefers the positive answer

General make-up of the (oe)-contexts for '?eh-p':

- ▶ p is not established from the point of view of the speaker
 - ⇒ previous (loose) commitment of the addressee wrt. p + unreliability of the addressee
 - ⇒ the actual plans of the addressee are unknown to the speaker
- ▶ p is something that the speaker wants/benefits from

- ⇒ AG '?eh-p' and '?p' should be natural questions in this context
- ⇒ FG '?eh-p' is not licensed because p is not established



Sample item: context only licensing the AG use (oe)

(oe)-context: Paul and Maria are colleagues in a larger department. Each day, another person is responsible for organizing the coffee break. Today, Paul comes into Maria's office and asks whether she would like coffee. **Since Paul often gets bad coffee from the dispenser in the hallway, Maria hesitates.**

- (me) Sie fragt: "Gehst du eh in die Kantine?"
'She asks, "Are you EH going to the cafeteria?"'
- (ke) Sie fragt: "Gehst du in die Kantine?"
'She asks, "Are you going to the cafeteria?"'



Hypotheses

For each speaker community:

- ▶ **FG speakers:** $de-ke \approx oe-me < de-me \approx oe-ke$
⇒ interaction between CONTEXT and PRESENCE OF EH
- ▶ **AG speakers:** $de-ke = de-me < oe-me \approx oe-ke$
⇒ main effect for CONTEXT
⇒ no interaction between CONTEXT and PRESENCE OF EH

Comparison between speaker communities:

- ▶ interaction between SPEAKER COMMUNITY and CONTEXT for those conditions containing *eh* (me)
- ▶ no interaction between SPEAKER COMMUNITY and CONTEXT for those without *eh* (ke)



Methods – I

Participants:

- ▶ 24 native speakers of FG (students of the University of Tuebingen)
- ▶ 24 native speakers of AG (participants from the Vienna area)

Materials:

- ▶ 24 experimental items: context-utterance-pairs
- ▶ 48 filler items: 24 items from an experiment on *auch* ('also'), 24 general filler items containing other particles
- ▶ 4 questionnaires containing 24 experimental items and 24 items for *auch*, both in latin square design, and 24 fillers; randomized in two versions (regular and reversed)
- ▶ each participant saw 6 items of each of the 4 factor combinations



Methods – II

Procedure:

- ▶ participants were asked to rate the acceptability/felicity of the target utterance in the given context (7-point Likert scale)

(10) “Speziell heißt das, dass sie gebeten werden, für die Frage auf einer **Skala von 1 (sehr schlecht) bis 7 (sehr gut)** anzugeben, wie **passend und akzeptabel** Sie diese Frage in dem gegebenen Kontext finden. Denken Sie sich dafür in die Rolle der Adressatin/des Adressaten hinein und überlegen Sie, ob Sie die Frage aus dieser Perspektive für **gelingen** halten.”

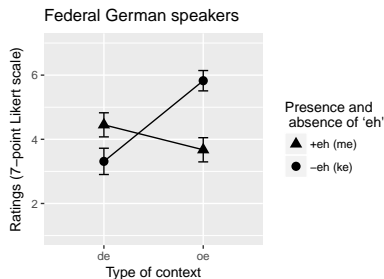
- ▶ FG speakers: pen-and-paper questionnaire
- ▶ AG speakers: questionnaires presented via OnExp (UGoettingen)



Results: FG speakers – eh

Means and SDs:

| | me | ke |
|----|-------------|-------------|
| de | 4.45 (2.23) | 3.31 (2.33) |
| oe | 3.67 (2.14) | 5.83 (1.69) |



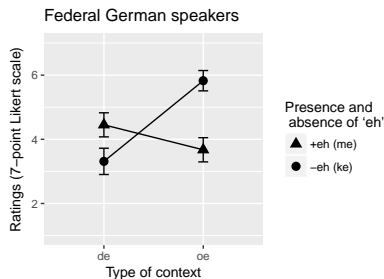
Predicted: interaction between CONTEXT and PRESENCE OF EH ✓



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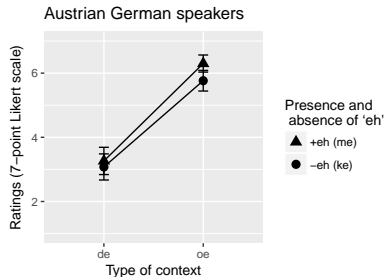
- ⇒ statistically significant interaction between CONTEXT and PRESENCE OF EH
($F_1(1, 23) = 41.56, p < .05$; $F_2(1, 23) = 86.11, p < .05$; $minF'(1, 41) = 28.03, p < .001$)
- ⇒ main effect of CONTEXT
($F_1(1, 23) = 14, p < .05$; $F_2(1, 23) = 9.45, p < .05$; $minF'(1, 44) = 5.64, p < .05$)
- ⇒ no main effect of PRES. OF EH
($F_1(1, 23) = 5.33, p < .05$; $F_2(1, 23) = 2.86, p = .1$; $minF'(1, 42) = 1.86, p = .18$)



Results: AG speakers – eh

Means and SDs:

| | me | ke |
|----|-------------|-------------|
| de | 3.26 (2.42) | 3.08 (2.25) |
| oe | 6.30 (1.39) | 5.76 (1.73) |



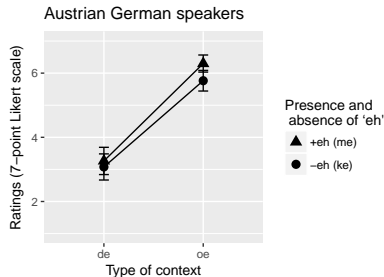
Predicted: main effect of CONTEXT, no interaction ✓



Results: AG speakers – eh

Means and SDs:

| | me | ke |
|----|-------------|-------------|
| de | 3.26 (2.42) | 3.08 (2.25) |
| oe | 6.30 (1.39) | 5.76 (1.73) |



Predicted: main effect of CONTEXT, no interaction ✓

⇒ main effect of CONTEXT

($F_1(1, 23) = 181.59, p < .05$; $F_2(1, 23) = 117.8, p < .05$; $minF'(1, 44) = 71.47, p < .001$)

⇒ no main effect of PRES. OF EH

($F_1(1, 23) = 5.13, p < .05$; $F_2(1, 23) = 5.96, p < .05$; $minF'(1, 46) = 2.76, p = .1$)

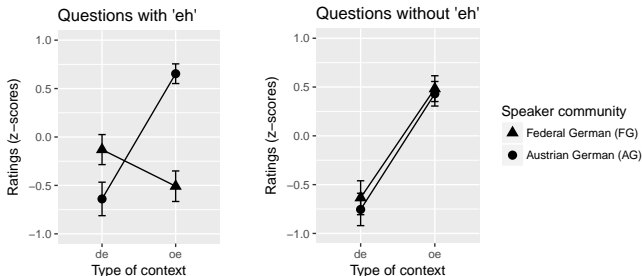
⇒ no statistically significant interaction between CONTEXT and PRESENCE OF EH

($F_1(1, 23) = 1.15, p = .3$; $F_2 < 1$; $minF'(1, 43) = 0.44, p = .51$)



Results: comparison – I

Combined data set, z-transformed:



| | de-me | oe-me | de-ke | oe-ke |
|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| FG speakers | -0.13 (0.94) | -0.51 (0.96) | -0.63 (1.06) | 0.48 (0.80) |
| AG speakers | -0.64 (1.05) | 0.65 (0.62) | -0.75 (1.01) | 0.43 (0.76) |



Results: comparison – II

Questions with *eh* – predicted:

interaction between SPEAKER COMMUNITY and CONTEXT ✓

⇒ statistically significant interaction between CONTEXT
and PRESENCE OF *eh*

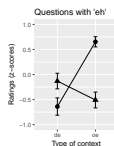
$(F_1(1, 46) = 70.38, p < .05; F_2(1, 23) = 70.23, p < .05)$

⇒ main effect of CONTEXT

$(F_1(1, 46) = 21.09, p < .05; F_2(1, 23) = 16.63, p < .05)$

⇒ main effect of SPKR COMM

$(F_1(1, 46) = 13.11, p < .05; F_2(1, 23) = 10.31, p < .05)$



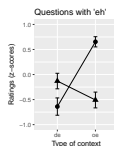


Results: comparison – II

Questions with *eh* – predicted:

interaction between SPEAKER COMMUNITY and CONTEXT ✓

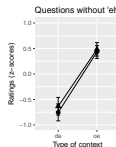
- ⇒ statistically significant interaction between CONTEXT and PRESENCE OF *eh* ($F_1(1, 46) = 70.38, p < .05; F_2(1, 23) = 70.23, p < .05$)
- ⇒ main effect of CONTEXT ($F_1(1, 46) = 21.09, p < .05; F_2(1, 23) = 16.63, p < .05$)
- ⇒ main effect of SPKR COMM ($F_1(1, 46) = 13.11, p < .05; F_2(1, 23) = 10.31, p < .05$)



Questions without *eh* – predicted:

no interaction between SPKR COMMUNITY and CONTEXT ✓

- ⇒ no statistically significant interaction between CONTEXT and PRESENCE OF *eh* ($F_2(1, 46) < 1; F_1(1, 23) < 1$)
- ⇒ main effect of CONTEXT ($F_1(1, 46) = 178.08, p < .05; F_2(1, 23) = 88.54, p < .05$)
- ⇒ no main effect of SPKR COMM ($F_1(1, 46) = 1.29, p = .26; F_2(1, 23) = 1.37, p = .26$)





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FG *eh* vs. AG *eh*?

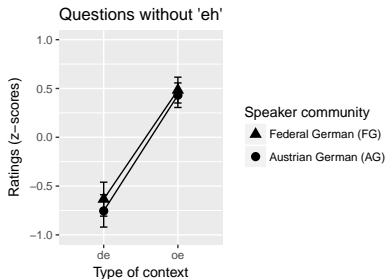
Comparison between FG speakers and AG speakers:
in the same contexts, FG speakers judge polar questions with *eh*
significantly differently than AG speakers

Does this tell us something about FG *eh* vs. AG *eh* or something about
the two samples?

⇒ take a look at the questions without *eh* and the fillers



FG vs. AG: polar questions without *eh*

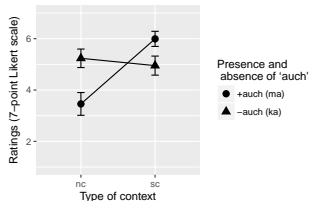


- ▶ no significant interaction between SPEAKER COMMUNITY and CONTEXT
- ▶ FG speakers and AG speakers produced the same reaction pattern when judging the contextual fit of polar questions without *eh*

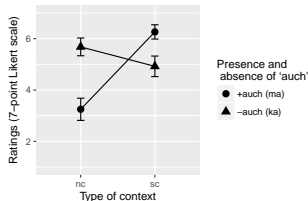


FG vs. AG: results for *auch* ('also')

Federal German speakers



Austrian German speakers



Means and SDs:

| | ma | ka |
|----|-------------|-------------|
| nc | 3.46 (2.69) | 5.24 (2.19) |
| sc | 5.99 (1.79) | 4.95 (2.25) |

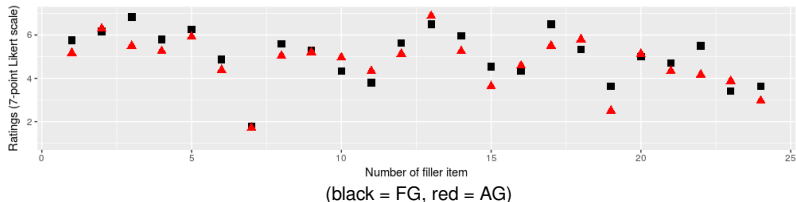
Means and SDs:

| | ma | ka |
|----|-------------|-------------|
| nc | 3.25 (2.63) | 5.68 (2.10) |
| sc | 6.26 (1.69) | 4.92 (2.43) |

- ▶ FG and AG speakers produced the same patterns when judging the contextual fit of the additive particle *auch* ('also')



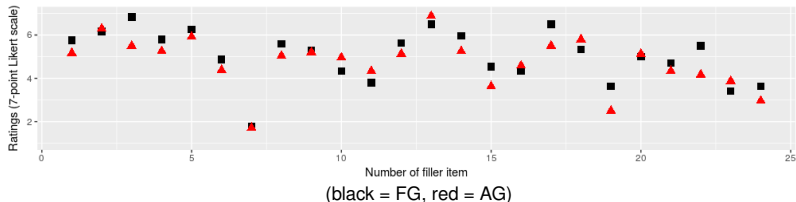
FG vs. AG: results for the general fillers



- ▶ FG and AG speakers produced the same pattern when judging the contextual fit of the filler items (= context-utterance-pairs containing the particles *denn* and *eigentlich*)



FG vs. AG: results for the general fillers



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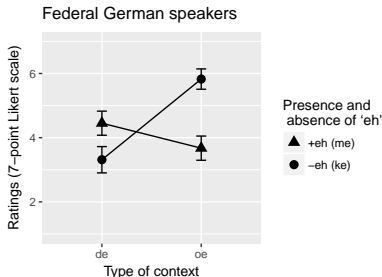
IN SUM: the different patterns found for polar questions with *eh* cannot be attributed to a general/overall difference between FG and AG

⇒ FG *eh* and AG *eh* differ in their semantic contribution



Implications for the analysis of FG and AG *eh*

- ▶ **AG *eh***: pattern was descriptively just as expected
- ▶ **FG *eh***: the responses to (de-me) were not as good as expected



Take a closer look at:

- ⇒ the context-question-pairs for FG *eh*
- ⇒ the reaction patterns of the FG subjects



FG *eh*: why is the overall rating of de-me so low?

Behavior of subjects:

~ 62% of the subjects (15/24) rated *eh* in the de-contexts (de-me) as bad as the sentences without *eh* (de-ke) / *eh* in the oe-contexts (oe-me)

- ▶ The context-utterance-pairs allowed for a lot of **leeway in how the subjects imagined/fleshed out the contexts** (⇒ high SDs).
- ▶ **Potentially also:** competition with *sowieso*?



FG *eh*: implications?

- (11) FG '*?eh-p*' asks whether there is a potential cause for p that differs from a contextually given potential cause & presupposes p

What do we learn about this analysis? Is it (partly) wrong? Which parts are wrong? And how can we improve the analysis if we need to?



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- ▶ The items did not test fine-grained contextual differences.
⇒ restrictions on the possible items because of the aim to test both varieties in parallel



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Next step: smaller manipulations of those contextual aspects that FG *eh* is sensitive to (which?)



FG *eh*: comparison – items vs. felicitous examples

A₁: Ich hol dir einen Kaffee.
'I'm going to get you coffee.'

A₂: Hättest du gerne einen Kaffee?
'Would you like some coffee?'

B: Kommst du **eh** am Kaffeeautomaten vorbei?
'Are you EH passing by the coffee machine?'



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- ⇒ **potential effect**: the way in which *p* is previously introduced (assertion vs. question)
- ⇒ **potential effect**: the type of discourse move performed with the question (e.g., initiating vs. reacting move, Farkas & Bruce 2010)



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- ⇒ **potential effect**: the way in which *p* is previously introduced (assertion vs. question)
- ⇒ **potential effect**: the type of discourse move performed with the question (e.g., initiating vs. reacting move, Farkas & Bruce 2010)
- ⇒ follow-up experiment(s) on FG *eh* with detailed manipulations along these lines



Summary

- ▶ FG *eh* and AG *eh* if fact differ in their contribution.
- ▶ The results for FG *eh* show that (as always) additional work on the contribution of FG *eh* is needed.
- ▶ While the results for AG *eh* were just as expected, this (of course) does not mean that no further work is not needed there, either.
- ▶ **Most pressing open issues:**
 - FG *eh* and AG *eh* in assertions (vs. polar questions)?
 - distribution of FG *eh* vs. *sowieso*?



Thank you!

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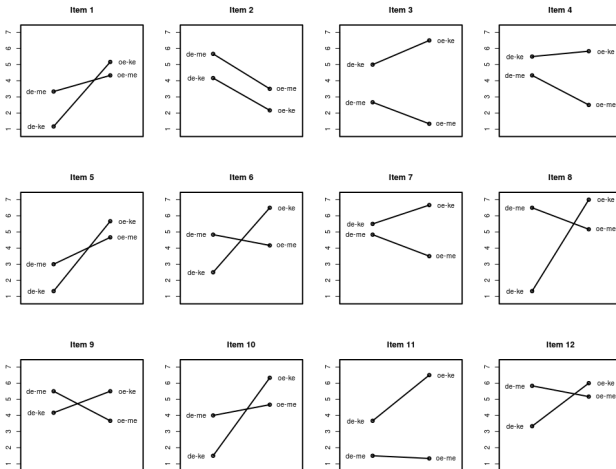
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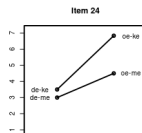
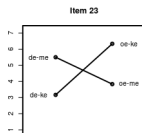
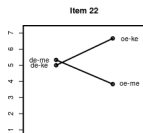
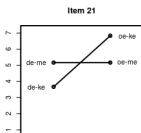
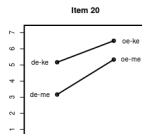
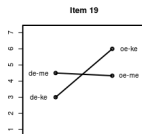
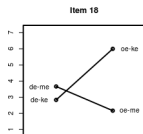
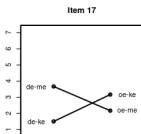
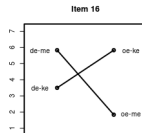
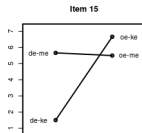
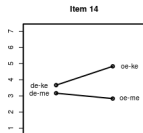
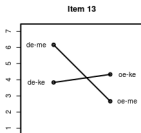


FG *eh*, items – I



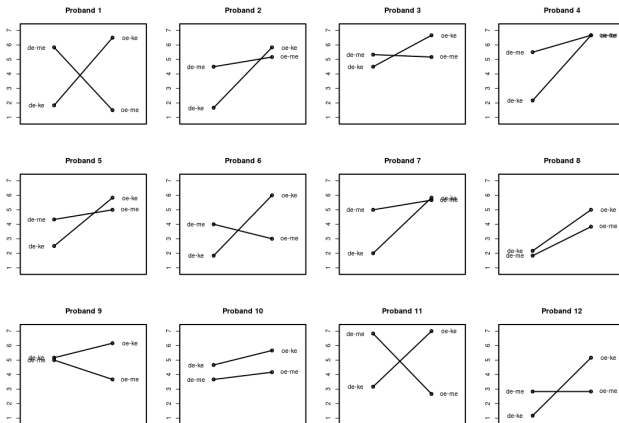


FG *eh*, items – II





FG *eh*, subjects – I





FG *eh*, subjects – II

