



#yallaCSU

By Ingrid Piller | December 9, 2014 | Language, migration & social justice

No Comments

3

637 views



This tweet says: "CSU issues correction: its proposal was translated into German incorrectly"

Germany is currently witnessing a delightful language ideological farce. It all started when the conservative Christian Social Union (CSU) party [proposed last Friday that migrants needed to speak German not only in public but also at home](#). By way of background: the conservative CSU only operates in the southern state of Bavaria, where it has been the sole party in government for most of the time since 1945. On the federal level, the CSU is in a permanent coalition with its sister party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). The CSU thus currently forms the Bavarian state government and is a member of the coalition that forms the current federal government. Generally, the national perception is that of these two conservative parties, the CSU is the one that is more conservative, more provincial, more parochial and less modern.

One immediate reaction to the CSU proposal that migrants should speak German at home was that the language of the home is clearly none of the business of the state. The Secretary General of the CDU, for instance, tweeted: whether people speak Latin, Klingon or Hessian at home is no one's business but their own.



Peter Tauber
@petertauber

Ich finde ja, es geht die Politik nichts an, ob ich zu Hause lateinisch, klingonisch oder hessisch rede.

4:38 AM - Dec 6, 2014

406 419 people are talking about this

By choosing a dead language, an invented language, and a dialect as examples, Peter Tauber draws attention to a far more complex linguistic situation than the CSU must have had in mind. One of these complexities that immediately hit the comments and responses on social media is related to the fact that Bavarian identity is strongly connected to the Bavarian dialect, which is well-maintained and not always easy to understand by

other Germans. Being a dialect speaker has typically been a prerequisite for a successful political career in Bavaria (i.e. in the CSU). Consequently, many social media commentators have been drawing attention to the fact that CSU politicians and the citizens they represent are unlikely to speak German at home. In a typical example, a tweeter asks whether Bavarian can even be considered German:



Dirk Matten
@dirkmatten

The party of the only part of Germany where people don't speak German wants to force Immigrants to do so at home!

spon.de/aen6y

6:08 AM - Dec 8, 2014

1 See Dirk Matten's other Tweets

The social media debate has also been used as an opportunity to tweet in Bavarian. In the following example a tweeter writes in Bavarian and asks in a pretend-stupid manner (a characteristic of Bavarian humour) whether he still has permission to speak Bavarian:



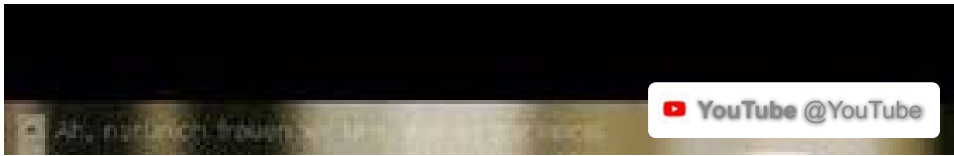
The Jöcker
@chrisjoecker

Derf i jetz dahoam noh bairisch redn oda wos? #csu #weltfremd

6:37 PM - Dec 8, 2014

See The Jöcker's other Tweets

Irrespective of whether politicians speak dialect or the standard, they frequently can be caught saying things that make no sense whatsoever and links to videos of CSU politicians stumbling through speeches that seem to lack all grammar, coherence or sense have also been making the rounds:

**Deniz Yücel**

@Besser_Deniz

Jetzt mit Hashtag: Man hatte es schon fast vergessen, das exzellente Deutsch der CSU. #YallaCSU. [youtube.com/watch?v=uF6u0S...](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uF6u0S...)

11:10 PM - Dec 7, 2014

31 41 people are talking about this

Another layer of absurdity is added by the fact that the CSU sees itself as being representative not only of Bavaria but also of ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe, who have settled in Bavaria since 1945 and are sometimes referred to by CSU politicians as “the fourth Bavarian tribe.” The claim of these ethnic Germans to German citizenship rests on the fact that they have maintained the German language and culture outside the German-speaking countries, often in the face of adversity, over centuries. So, obviously, when it comes to ethnic Germans, speaking a language other than the national language at home has been considered a good thing.

The modern complexities of a diverse globalized society are even more striking. Commentators have been pointing to these in all kinds of ways; for instance, by drawing attention to [hipster Berlin families](#) who speak English at home in order to raise their children bilingually:

**(PM)**

@Philip_Meinhold

Prenzlauer-Berg-Eltern in Aufregung: Dürfen sie mit ihren Kindern zuhause kein Englisch mehr sprechen? #YallaCSU

10:32 PM - Dec 6, 2014

41 23 people are talking about this

Others have raised the practice of watching foreign-language movies on TV as one that would be inconsistent with the proposal:

**Laura**

@awwwkid

Kommt schon mal vor dass ich fremdsprachige filme gucke usw, hoffentlich bekommt die csu davon nichts mit! #YallaCSU

10:43 AM - Dec 9, 2014

See Laura's other Tweets



The complexity of what it means to “be German” and to “speak German” today is best expressed by the Twitter hashtag #yallaCSU. The hybrid based on *Arabic yalla* (“let’s go!”) has been trending on German Twitter:

"Trending Germany:05:26 AM CET"

1. [#halligalli](#)
2. [#DagiVSTimo](#)
3. [#askBrudis](#)
4. [#Bibibeitaff](#)
5. [#YallaCSU](#)
6. *Weihnachten*

— TrendieDE – Trends (@TrendieDE) *December 9, 2014*

#yallaCSU brings together tweets that are critical of the CSU proposal and most express their views in an ironic fashion. The overall point is that Germany is a modern multicultural society where it is not linguistic diversity that is out of place but old-fashioned ideas about linguistic and ethnic uniformity such as those expressed by the CSU:



Karimatun
@KarimaELO

Danke CSU! Wir haben wirklich ein Integrationsproblem: aber wie integrieren wir Euch nur in unser modernes, buntes Deutschland?!?
[#YallaCSU](#)

11:09 AM - Dec 9, 2014

1 See Karimatun's other Tweets

By now the CSU proposal has hit the international media – it has been covered by the *New York Times*, the *BBC*, the Lebanese *An Nahar* and others. What has drawn this attention is not so much the retrograde proposal of a relatively obscure and – in the global scheme of things – minor political party but the response of a mature multilingual and multicultural society. I found following the #yallaCSU tweets not only immensely entertaining and informative about language ideologies in contemporary Germany but, above all, heartening: in Germany, at least, monolingualism and monoculturalism are fighting a rear-guard battle.



BAVARIA

BAVARIAN

BILINGUAL EDUCATION

DIALECT

GERMAN

GERMANY



LANGUAGE AND POLITICS

LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES

MIGRATION

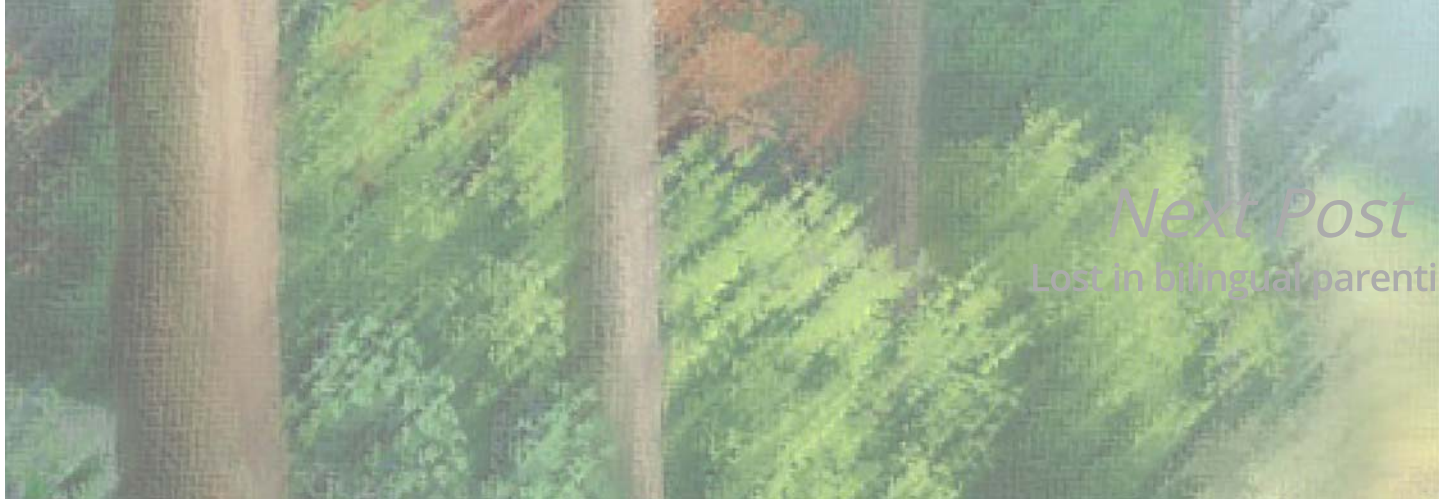
MULTICULTURALISM

MULTILINGUALISM

SOCIAL INCLUSION

SOCIAL MEDIA

SOCIAL NETWORKING



Author

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