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Areal Variation and Change in the Phraseology of Contemporary German

Abstract: Areal variation and change in phraseology is still a remarkably underdeveloped area of research. Past studies of areal phraseology have either been restricted to small localities and regions, or have required considerable effort in data collection. There is a complete lack of studies on phraseological change in contemporary German. Recent research projects on German areal linguistics have used internet surveys, as in the case of the *Atlas zur deutschen Alltagssprache* (AdA) ‘Atlas of colloquial German’ (with data from mostly spoken regional vernaculars), or large corpora, in the case of the *Variantenwörterbuch des Deutschen* (VWB) ‘Dictionary of lexical variation in German’ and the *Variantengrammatik des Standarddeutschen* (VG) ‘Regional variation in the grammar of Standard German’ (with data from written Standard German). These new methods can be used to obtain reliable data on the areal distribution of phrasemes in contemporary German usage with relatively little effort. Moreover, a comparison of recent AdA data with data from the *Wortatlas der deutschen Umgangssprachen* (WDU) ‘Word Atlas of colloquial German’, collected in the 1970s and 1980s, can reveal developments in the areal distribution of phrasemes on the level of colloquial speech. This article aims to demonstrate the potential of such research approaches for the study of variation and change in phraseology and will use selected examples from the AdA and the VG for illustration.

1 Introduction

Diatopic variation and change are central research issues in modern variationist linguistics and historical linguistics. Phraseology, however, is comparatively marginal in this area of research. As for German, there is relatively little research on diatopic variation in phraseology. After some studies on the phraseology of dialects and regiolectal varieties in the second half of the twentieth century,

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1 Cf. Piirainen (2006) and Sava (2014) for overviews of the field of areal variation in the phraseology of German.
mostly restricted to small localities or regions (cf. Hain 1951; Hünert-Hofmann 1991; Piirainen 2000), it was Elisabeth Piirainen who carried out the first major survey on diatopic variation in the phraseology of contemporary colloquial German at the beginning of the new millennium. Unfortunately, the results of her study, based on about 3,000 written questionnaires from Germany, are only available through individual publications (see e.g. Piirainen 2003, 2006, 2009a, 2009b) rather than as a linguistic atlas of phraseology. Apart from and contrary to her own study, “[l]inguistic geographical studies on phraseology are usually restricted to aspects of the [!] German pluricentricity” (Piirainen 2006: 195). Piirainen demonstrates that the distribution of phrasemes is not limited to languages or so-called ‘national varieties’ of a language; they are sometimes distributed only in certain areas (of different sizes) within these countries, and phrasemes – idioms in particular – can be widespread across different languages (cf. Piirainen 2012). Piirainen (2009a) coined the term “areal phraseology” to encompass a linguistic concept which does not limit the consideration of diatopic phraseme distribution to individual languages or countries. The investigation of regiolectal phraseology in particular thus constitutes a research desideratum.\(^2\)

Though the historical phraseology of German appears to be intensively researched today (see Friedrich 2007; Filatkina 2018 and the contributions to Filatkina et al. 2012), there is relatively little research on recent changes in the phraseology of German, particularly changes in areal phraseology.

The present article will therefore look at areal variation and change in the phraseology of contemporary German. Section 2 discusses some conceptual problems and issues of variation and change in phraseology. Case studies of areal variation in German phraseology are presented in section 3. Section 4 presents two examples of change in the areal variation of routine formulae in recent decades, and section 5 concludes with a brief summary.

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\(^2\) Grober-Gluck’s (1974) study is an exception here, as it covers most of the German-speaking area. However, its primary interest is not linguistic; Grober-Gluck’s study on “motives and motivations in sayings and folk wisdom” is a by-product of the Atlas zur deutschen Volkskunde (‘Atlas of German Folklore’), a large ethnographic project conducted in Germany and Austria from 1930 to 1935. Typically, phraseological comparisons (e.g. dumm wie ein Schaf/eine Gans/Haferstroh etc. ‘thick as mince/a brick (etc.)’) and sayings which are prompted by extralinguistic facts (e.g. ‘What do people say when someone’s nose itches?’) are mapped.

\(^3\) In his 2018 plenary talk “Neue Wege der Regiolektforschung” (‘New paths of research into regiolects’) at the 6th congress of the Internationales Gesellschaft für Dialektologie des Deutschen (IGDD) in Marburg, Michael Elmentaler identified phraseology as one of three prominent and particularly rewarding research fields in the future study of German regiolects.
2 Areal Variation and Change in Phraseology

For the purposes of this chapter, language variation and language change may be defined as follows (based on Pickl 2013: 39).

- Language variation occurs when more than one linguistic form is used to represent a linguistic function.
- Language change occurs when the association between linguistic function and linguistic form alters over time.

Areal variation in phraseology can thus be defined as the coexistence of different phraseological forms (or variants) representing the same linguistic function in a given area (e.g. in the German-speaking countries).

Phraseological change manifests itself in different ways, which may be subsumed into three basic types:

- Type I: Phraseme A is replaced by phraseme B over time (cf. example 1).
- Type II: The internal structure of a phraseme variant is altered over time, either on a paradigmatic level (e.g. one constituent is replaced by another lexical form, cf. example 2, or by a different morphological form, e.g. a plural form of a noun by a singular form, cf. example 3), or on a syntagmatic level (e.g. a phraseme is shortened, cf. example 4, the word order is fixed, particularly in binomials, cf. example 5, or the constituents of a polylexical phraseme have moved together to form a monolexical expression, cf. example 6).
- Type III: The semantic or pragmatic function of a phraseme changes over time (cf. example 7).

(1) Middle High German dā gienc ez (jmdm.) ûz deme spil > present-day German da wurde es (für jmdm.) ernst ‘things become serious (for sb.)’
   (Friedrich 2007: 1095)

(2) Early New High German (Luther) Aus den aügen, aus dem hertzen. > present-day German Aus den Augen, aus dem Sinn. ‘Out of sight, out of mind.’
   (Friedrich 2007: 1101)

(3) Middle New High German (Knigge) in Reihe und Gliedern > present-day German in Reihe und Glied ‘in formation’
   (Burger 2015: 147)

In practice, the identification of phraseological variants faces several well-known problems. I will mention only five:

1. The definition of ‘phraseme’ as inherently involving polylexicality: Some compound verbs in German have two orthographic variants, such as (jmdm. etw.) übel nehmen/übelnehmen ‘to hold sth. against sb.’. Is the discontinuous variant übel nehmen a phraseological unit?

2. The distinction between phraseological variant, phraseological modification, and phraseological error, e.g.: Is etw. unter den Tisch kehren (lit. ‘to sweep sth. under the table’) a modified phraseme (cf. Wotjak 1992: 171), an error (cf. Elspaß 2002), or by now a “canonical modified phraseological unit” (cf. Rodríguez Martín 2014), i.e. a variant, if it accounts for about a third of all occurrences in present-day German print?5

3. The distinction between structurally similar phraseological synonyms (e.g. in letzter Minute/in zwölfter Stunde ‘at the last minute’) and phraseological variants (e.g. the lexical variants die Achseln/Schultern zucken and the grammatical variants die Achsel/Achseln zucken, mit der Achsel/den Achseln zucken ‘to shrug one’s shoulders’).

4. The low frequency of many phraseological types such as rarely used idioms: Even competent speakers can have trouble identifying such phrasemes or

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5 According to a quick search in the Google Books Ngram Viewer, conducted in November 2018 (cf. Pfeiffer 2017: 18–22). Stumpf (2016) points to another problem, i.e. the differentiation between modified phrasemes and phraseme schemata (or phraseological constructions) such as X oder Y, das ist hier die Frage (‘X or Y, that is the question’, built on Sein oder Nichtsein, das ist hier die Frage ‘To be or not to be: That is the question!’), e.g. Kaufen oder nicht kaufen (‘To buy or not to buy’) / Hart oder weich (‘Hard or soft’) / etc., das ist hier die Frage.
judging what their ‘normal’ form is, and sometimes frequencies are too low even in large corpora to establish a ‘normal’ form.

5. The fairly limited usefulness of dictionaries in the investigation of variation and change of phraseological units due to either missing or unclear information on the underlying corpora and the lexicographic methodology.

3 Areal Variation in the Phraseology of Present-Day German

In section 2, I defined areal variation as the coexistence of different forms representing the same linguistic function in a given area. As for areal phraseological variation, Piirainen (2009a: 147–152) identifies six categories of distributional range. For the purpose of this paper, I will present a modified version of her classification, trimming the six categories down to four6 and illustrating them with examples from Piirainen and from VWB (2016).

1. A phraseme is distributed in only a small region (sometimes within the range of just a few villages), e.g. the (West Low German) idiom Klumpe nao Wessum dräägen ‘to carry coals to Newcastle’ (lit. ‘to carry clogs to Wessum’), which is (or was) only known and used in the dialects of a small region around Wessum, a Westphalian village that was known for its clog craft.

2. A phraseme is distributed within a larger area, e.g. the idiomatic saying sie kommt nicht aus den Sträuchern (‘she isn’t making (any) headway’), which is only known and used in the colloquial vernacular in Westphalia, as it is derived and translated from an idiom in the Westphalian dialects (Se kümp nich uut de Strüüke).

3. A phraseme is distributed within a standard variety of a larger region, e.g. das ist gehopst wie gesprungen (Northern German standard)/das ist gehupft wie gesprungen (Southern German standard) ‘it’s six of one and half a dozen

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6 I omitted Piirainen’s category „Verbreitung im Raum eines nicht mehr existierenden Staatsgebiets“ (‘distribution in the area of a defunct state territory’), because it only comprises phrasemes from the former GDR, which may be more appropriately subsumed under the (new) category 3 (phrasemes of areal standard German varieties), and the category „Verbreitung innerhalb des gesamten deutschen Sprachgebiets“ (‘dissemination within the entire German-speaking area’), because phrasemes falling into this category do not constitute areal variants.
of the other’, or es ist noch nicht im Topf, wo’s kocht ‘it’s still early days’ (Eastern German standard, i.e. in the area of the former German Democratic Republic).

4. A phraseme is distributed within a standard variety of a country, e.g. etwas gebacken bekommen ‘to get sth. done’ (German Standard German, cf. section 3.1.1 below), die Finken klopfen ‘to take to one’s heels’ (Swiss Standard German), or es/etw. ist zum Krenreiben ‘it’s a hoot’ (Austrian Standard German).

This classification situates areal variation as encompassing variation in colloquial German, understood as usage in (mainly spoken) dialects and regiolectal varieties (categories 1 and 2), as well as variation in the (mainly written) standard language (categories 3 and 4). I will first concentrate on variation in colloquial German (3.1) and then on Standard German (3.2).

Based on Piirainen’s concept of areal phraseology, and focusing on areal variation in the phraseology of German, this investigation is guided by the following research questions:

1. What does the areal distribution of phraseological variants look like in colloquial German vernaculars and in Standard German?
2. Is it possible to establish differences between awareness and actual usage?
3. How do dictionaries deal with areal variation?
4. Is it possible to establish changes in the areal phraseology of German?

RQ 3 can be subdivided into various sub-questions: Do dictionaries account for certain phrasemes at all? Do they account for the areal distribution of phrasemes or their variants? If yes, are these accounts reliable? Do dictionaries distinguish between awareness and usage? Duden 11, the main phraseological dictionary of Standard German, and VWB, the dictionary of areal variation in Standard German, will be used to address RQ 3 and its sub-questions.

### 3.1 Areal Phraseological Variation in Colloquial German Vernaculars

#### 3.1.1 Patterns of Distributional Range

The present chapter takes the definition of ‘colloquial German vernacular’ to be:

7 The VWB marks idiomatic expressions with an asterisk.
This definition accounts for the different manifestations of everyday colloquial vernaculars in the German-speaking countries, which may include both dialectal and regiolectal varieties. In German-speaking Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and many regions in central and southern Germany, Austria, and South Tyrol, the vernacular language of everyday life is still dominated by local or regional dialects. In many other areas, however, everyday language is characterized by supra-regional varieties, such as regiolects.

Such colloquial vernaculars are the subject of the long-term Atlas zur deutschen Alltagssprache (AdA) (‘Atlas of colloquial German’) project (Elspaß and Möller 2003ff.). In 2003, an initial online questionnaire was distributed, aimed at eliciting everyday language, particularly as used by the younger generation in urban areas. The AdA is geared toward lexical variation, but also includes questions on morphosyntax, phonetics, and phrasemes (including routine formulae). This first survey was completed by 1,763 participants, and was followed by ten more surveys conducted at fairly regular intervals. Over the years, the number of participants snowballed; in the tenth survey, over 20,000 people provided data. As the data were collected in a crowd-sourcing approach, it was not possible to control the number of responses per location (though, in spite of this and rather surprisingly, the overall number of responses is almost balanced for gender). Responses were assigned to 500 cities and towns and then aggregated by location. The individual maps presented below show either one or two color-coded dots per location. In the latter case, the bigger dot represents the most frequently reported, i.e. the dominant, variant at the location. A smaller dot next to the big dot indicates that there is variation at the location and symbolizes the second most common variant there.

In the AdA surveys 1 to 11, data on 35 phrasemes were elicited and presented on 39 maps. A full list can be found in the appendix. I will present and discuss various examples here with regard to RQ 1.

Figures 1 and 2 show examples of phrasemes with a small-scale distribution. The routine formula *jmd. ist gut zufrieden* ‘sb. is quite content’ (figure 1) is used
only in a small area in the northwest of Germany which borders the Netherlands. The similarity to (Standard) Dutch *iemand is goed tevreden* is obvious. Figures 2a/b present variants of the German equivalents for ‘don’t take offence’ and ‘you have to take things as they come’: The Standard German variants are *nimmt’s mir nicht übel* and *man muss es nehmen, wie es kommt*. Only in a small area in the far west of Germany (Saarland and the western part of Rhineland-Palatinate), Luxembourg, and the southern part of East Belgium (around St. Vith) are the variants *hol’s mir nicht übel* (figure 2a) and *man muss es holen, wie es kommt* (figure 2b) common. These variants can be traced back to a general replacement of the German verb *nehmen* ‘to take’ by *holen* in the Moselle Franconian dialects (see RhWb 3: 759–760); as the two examples demonstrate, this also affects phrasemes.

**Fig. 1:** Distribution of *gut zufrieden* ‘quite content’ (AdA VIII-6h)
Fig. 2a: Distribution of *nimm's/hol's mir nicht übel* ‘don’t take offence’ (AdA IX-6d)

Fig. 2b: Distribution of *man muss es nehmen/holen, wie es kommt* ‘you have to take things as they come’ (AdA IX-6e)
None of the three variants with a small-scale distribution (*gut zufrieden; hol’s mir nicht übel; man muss es holen, wie es kommt*) are considered Standard German, as they are listed in neither Duden 11 nor VWB.

The next group of maps presents phraseological variants with a large-scale distribution. Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of the routine formula *das geht sich [zeitlich] noch aus* ‘this will work out (timewise)’. It is used throughout Austria, but also in Liechtenstein, South Tyrol, and the Bavarian dialect areas of southeastern Germany. Again, the distribution points to a certain dialect area. But it is also employed in Standard German: The VWB (2016: 65) marks *etw. geht sich aus* as a variant of Standard German in Austria and in the southeast of Germany. Duden 11, however, has no entry.

![Fig. 3: Distribution of das geht sich [zeitlich] noch aus 'this will work out (timewise)' (AdA XI-3a)](image)

The meaning of the variants in figure 4a is ‘(to do sth.) free of charge’. There are three main variants: *für umsonst* is the most widely distributed and is used as the standard form, *für umme* (a phonetically non-standard variant of *für umsonst*) is restricted to a small area in the Palatinate area in the southwest of Germany, and *für lau* – also considered ‘non-standard’ – is the dominant form in the north of Germany as well as the only non-standard variant mentioned in Duden 11.
Fig. 4a: Distribution of variants for ‘(to do sth.) free of charge’ (AdA VIII-4n)

Fig. 4b: Variants for ‘(to do sth.) free of charge’ from Piirainen (2006: 217)
Figure 4a can be compared with a map from Piirainen (2006: 217). Piirainen’s map (figure 4b), however, is limited to Germany, and it is not extensional, but focuses on the distribution areas of three non-standard variants: für lau in the west, für umme in the southwest, and für nasse in the (central) east of Germany. There are three remarkable differences between the two maps. Firstly, the area on the AdA map for für umme is smaller and situated further north in comparison to Piirainen’s map. Secondly, the area of für lau extends much further to the north and to the east on the AdA map. Thirdly, and most surprisingly, the für nasse area on Piirainen’s map does not materialize on the AdA map at all, despite für nasse being at the top of the list of four optional variants (plus one optional box for ‘other’ variants) in the AdA online questionnaire. As it is improbable that such a drastic change has occurred within one decade, these discrepancies are more likely to be due to the different numbers of informants (ca. 3,000 in Piirainen’s study vs. 9,758 in the AdA study) and the different methods of data collection. While Piirainen targeted professional linguists and students at German departments throughout the country (Piirainen 2006: 210), the AdA questionnaire was directed at laypeople (see Möller and Elspaß 2015: 521–526 on the methodology of the AdA). Moreover, in contrast to the point-symbol maps of the AdA, Piirainen’s area map does not show the distribution of responses.

Figures 5a and 5b map the distribution of two variants for the German phraseme for ‘to get sth. done’, one of which is considered non-standard (etw. gebacken kriegen) and the other standard (etw. gebacken bekommen). Clearly, the non-standard variant has a much wider distribution area (most of Germany, except the southeast) than the standard variant (the colour code on the two maps is as follows: Pink dots signify that the phraseme is ‘very common in use’, orange dots mean ‘fairly common’ and blue dots stand for ‘utterly uncommon’).

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8 Piirainen collected her questionnaire data in 2000–2001, and the AdA data for ‘(to do sth.) free of charge’ were collected in 2010–2011. There is also no evidence of significant age differences between Piirainen’s informants and the AdA informants: About two thirds of Piirainen’s respondents (Piirainen 2006: 210) and about half of the AdA informants were under 30 years of age.
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Fig. 5a: Distribution of *gebacken kriegen* 'to get sth. done [non-standard]' (AdA IV-21a)

Fig. 5b: Distribution of *gebacken bekommen* ‘to get sth. done [standard]’ (AdA IV-21b)
3.1.2 Awareness and Actual Usage of Phrasemes

RQ 2, regarding differences between the awareness and actual usage of phrasemes, is addressed by this next group of variants. Figures 6a/6b, 7a/7b, and 8a/8b show pairs of maps for three phrasemes: _das geht dich einen Schmarren an_ (‘that’s none of your business’, figure 6a/b), _dicke Backen machen_ (‘to brag about sth.’, figure 7a/b), and _mit etw./jmdm. ist kein Blumentopf zu gewinnen_ (‘you’re not getting anywhere with this/them’, figure 8a/b). In each case, the phraseme is widely known, but its actual usage is restricted to a much smaller area (pink dots in figures 6a, 7a and 8a stand for ‘the phraseme is known’ in the respective locality; in Figures 6b, 7b and 8b, pink dots mean ‘the phraseme is used’ in that locality. Blue dots signify ‘unknown’ or ‘uncommon’ respectively).

Dictionaries like VWB and Duden 11 do not distinguish between awareness and usage. Usually, they only mark the areas in which the phrasemes are used (cf. RQ 3). In view of figures 6b, 7b, and 8b, dictionaries’ labels of areal distribution appear to be somewhat misleading. In Duden 11, _das geht Dich einen Schmarren an_ is considered a ‘southern German and Austrian’ variant, and VWB marks it as being used in ‘southeastern Germany and Austria’.9 _Dicke Backen machen_ is labeled as ‘particularly northern German’ by Duden 11, though it is apparently equally employed in the southwest. And _mit etwas/jmdm. ist kein Blumentopf zu gewinnen_ is labeled as ‘particularly used in the Berlin vernacular’ by Duden 11, whereas VWB marks it as being used in ‘Germany and Austria’. Neither matches the distribution as displayed on the map (Germany, particularly north and central Germany). These examples illustrate yet again the fundamental problems of lexicographic labels on the areal distribution of idioms, which Piirainen has pointed out repeatedly (e.g. Piirainen 2002).

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9 To be completely correct, South Tyrol should also be added. Both dictionaries consider this phraseme standard, although the online Duden dictionary marks _Schmarr(e)n_ (‘rubbish, tripe’) as ‘colloquial’ (https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Schmarren, accessed December 31, 2018).
Fig. 6a: Distribution of awareness of *das geht dich einen Schmarren an* (‘that’s none of your business’) (AdA IV-20a)

Fig. 6b: Distribution of usage of *das geht dich einen Schmarren an* (‘that’s none of your business’) (AdA IV-20b)
Fig. 7a: Distribution of awareness of *dicke Backen machen* (‘to brag about sth.’) (AdA IV-19a)

Fig. 7b: Distribution of usage of *dicke Backen machen* (‘to brag about sth.’) (AdA IV-19b)
Fig. 8a: Distribution of awareness of *mit etw./jmdm. ist kein Blumentopf zu gewinnen* (`you’re not getting anywhere with this/them`) (AdA IV-18a)

Fig. 8b: Distribution of usage of *mit etw./jmdm. ist kein Blumentopf zu gewinnen* (`you're not getting anywhere with this/them`) (AdA IV-18b)
3.2 Areal Phraseological Variation in Standard German

In the present contribution, I use a definition of ‘standard language’ – or rather, ‘standard varieties’ – that is based on the concept of a standard of usage. Thus, a standard variety can be defined as a variety which is commonly used in contexts that are perceived as standard language.10 This may include the usage of conceptually written language which is widely accepted as appropriate and used in formal and public situations in any region of a language area, in this case the German-speaking area. As the classification at the beginning of section 3 has already indicated, this standard variety can cover a country or a larger region within a country. In this respect, I follow a model of ‘pluriareal standard languages’ rather than ‘pluricentric standard languages’ in the sense of ‘plurinational standard languages’ (see Elspaß and Dürscheid 2017: 87–89; Elspaß et al. 2017: 70–74, for a discussion of the different concepts).

In this section, I first present three examples from the AdA and then three examples from a Master’s thesis by Lisa Höller (2016), who based her study on two large electronic corpora of present-day Standard German.

Although the first three examples are taken from the ‘Atlas of colloquial German’ (AdA), the variants display variation that is also valid for the standard.

Figure 9 shows the results for the phraseological variants eins gemerkt/eins im Sinn/etc., ‘to carry a digit over’, as when a number greater than 9 (in this case 10) is transferred to the next position (in this case by adding “1” in the tens position).

10 “Standard ist das, was in Kontexten, die als standardsprachlich aufgefasst werden, regelhaft in Gebrauch ist” (Elspaß et al. 2017: 71).
The map reveals a clear areal distribution of the two main variants *eins im Sinn*, which is the dominant variant in the north and the west of Germany, and *eins gemerkt*, which is used in the rest of the German-speaking countries. Some noticeable regional variants are *behalte eins* in the southwest, *merke eins* in the (north)east of Germany, and *bleibt eins* or *eins weiter* in some parts of Austria. These variants are not mentioned in Duden 11.

Figure 10 illustrates the distribution of the variants of New Year wishes in Standard as well as colloquial German. The distributional areas of four variants can basically be distinguished: *frohes* ‘happy’/*gesundes* ‘healthy’/*gutes* ‘good’ *neues (Jahr)* ‘new (year)’ and *Prosit Neujahr* (with the loan from Latin *prosit* ‘may it benefit’). Duden 11 only lists *pros[i]t Neujahr*, with no indication as to its limited areal distribution.
Figure 11 is the only map which seems to identify a national variant, *jmdn. auf die Schaufel nehmen* (‘to pull sb.’s leg’), which in colloquial language is only used in Austria (though not so much in the western parts of Austria\textsuperscript{11}). The almost exclusive variant in the other German-speaking countries is *jmdn. auf die Schippe nehmen* (with *jmdn. auf die Schüppe nehmen* constituting merely a phonetic variant).

\textsuperscript{11} The grey dots on the map indicate that the idiom is not used at all – neither in this or the other variant – in many parts of Austria (and elsewhere).
The map appears to confirm the information given in VWB and Duden 11, which labels *jmdn. auf die Schaufel nehmen* as an Austriacism. A search in the Austrian newspaper corpus of the German reference corpus (DeReKo), however, paints a different picture. \(^{12}\) Out of 1,125 cases in which the idiom was used, 191 (= 17.1\%) have the variant *jmdn. auf die Schippe nehmen*. \(^{13}\) In other words, in almost every sixth instance, an idiomatic variant is used in Standard German in Austria which has no basis in the Austrian spoken vernaculars – the lexemic variant *Schippe* is alien to colloquial varieties of German in Austria, as another map from the AdA confirms. \(^{14}\)

The following three selected results, taken from Höller (2016), focus on areal standard variation in prepositions in phrasemes. Höller’s study is partly based on

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12 Search strings: “(auf die Schippe) /s0 &nehmen”, “(auf die Schüppe) /s0 &nehmen” and “(auf die Schaufel) /s0 &nehmen”.
13 There are no hits for *jmdn. auf die Schüppe nehmen*.
the corpus of the *Variantengrammatik des Standarddeutschen* (VG) ‘Regional variation in the grammar of Standard German’ and partly on the *Deutsches Referenzkorpus* (DeReKo) ‘German Reference Corpus’.

**Tab. 1a:** Distribution of *auf/zu Besuch fahren/kommen/sein/haben* (lit.: ‘to go/come/be/have on (a) visit’) in the VG corpus

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<th>zu Besuch</th>
<th>total</th>
<th>auf Besuch (%)</th>
<th>zu Besuch (%)</th>
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</table>

**Tab. 1b:** Distribution of *auf/zu Besuch fahren/kommen/sein/haben* (lit.: ‘to go/come/be/have on (a) visit’) in the DeReKo

<table>
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<th>auf Besuch</th>
<th>zu Besuch</th>
<th>total</th>
<th>auf Besuch (%)</th>
<th>zu Besuch (%)</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

Tables 1a and 1b present results for variation in the prepositions *auf/zu* in the idiom *auf/zu Besuch fahren/kommen/sein/haben* (lit.: ‘to go/come/be/have on (a) visit’). In order to provide a better overview, the results are summarized for Germany (D), Austria (A), and Switzerland (CH). With regard to the lexicographic representation of such standard variation, I will follow both the VWB’s (2016: VIII) distinction between specific vs. unspecific variants and also Farø’s (2005: 387) distinction between absolute vs. relative variants. A specific variant is used exclusively in a certain country and is a shibboleth of that country, whereas an unspecific variant is also used in other countries (but not in all countries and regions). Absolute variants are variants which are the (almost) only variants that occur in a speech community, whereas relative variants are those that occur frequently in a speech community, but are not the exclusive variants in the community.
Although the VG corpus is much smaller than the DeReKo (600 million word forms vs. 28 billion word forms\textsuperscript{15}), the two corpus searches show similar results. The dominant form is clearly \textit{zu Besuch} ..., while the variant \textit{auf Besuch} ... is rarely used in Germany, more common in Switzerland, and accounts for about a quarter of all instances in Austria.

\textbf{Tab. 2a:} Distribution of \textit{nach dem/zum Rechten sehen/schauen} (‘to see that everything is OK’) in the VG corpus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>nach dem Rechten</th>
<th>zum Rechten</th>
<th>total</th>
<th>nach dem Rechten (%)</th>
<th>zum Rechten (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>975</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>975</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>98.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CH</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>52.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textbf{Tab. 2b:} Distribution of \textit{nach dem/zum Rechten sehen/schauen} (‘to see that everything is OK’) in the DeReKo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>nach dem Rechten</th>
<th>zum Rechten</th>
<th>total</th>
<th>nach dem Rechten (%)</th>
<th>zum Rechten (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>13,569</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13,584</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,101</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CH</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>578</td>
<td>1,090</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>53.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In tables 2a and 2b, Höller’s results for the distribution of \textit{nach dem/zum Rechten sehen/schauen} (‘to see that everything is OK’) are summarized for Germany (D), Austria (A) and Switzerland (CH). Again, both corpora render strikingly similar results. On the whole, \textit{nach dem Rechten sehen/schauen} is the clearly dominant variant. In Switzerland, however, both variants are equally frequent in use; \textit{zum Rechten sehen/schauen} can be considered a relative Helvetism. (The VWB simply marks it as a Helvetism.)

\textsuperscript{15} The numbers refer to the time of Höller’s investigation. The size of the DeReKo has almost doubled since.
The last set of tables focuses on the variation of *auf dem* and *am*, which is not restricted to phrasemes (e.g. *Das Buch liegt auf dem/am Tisch* ‘The book is on the table.’), but it is very noticeable in idioms such as

- *auf dem/am Laufenden sein/bleiben* ‘to be/keep (oneself) up-to-date’,
- *etwas auf dem/am Kerbholz haben* ‘to have something (bad) on the tally’,
- *auf dem/am Zahnfleisch gehen* (‘to be on one’s last leg’).

The variants with *am* are usually presented as typical of Austrian usage, and *am* is often interpreted as a contraction of *an + dem* (e.g. Burger 2010: 208–209). Both assumptions require a revision. Firstly, *am* in these contexts most certainly originates in a contraction of *auf + dem* rather than a contraction of *an + dem* (cf. Höller 2016: 30), and secondly, as Höller’s corpus studies show, the proportion of *am*-forms varies from phraseme to phraseme, cf. table 3.

**Tab. 3: Proportion of *am/auf dem* in seven idioms in VG and DeReKo subcorpora ‘Austria’ (from Höller 2016: 53)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>phraseme</th>
<th>% in VG corpus</th>
<th>% in DeReKo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>am richtigen Weg sein</em></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>am Laufenden sein/bleiben/sich halten</em></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>am Prüfstand stehen</em></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>etw. am Kerbholz haben</em></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>jmdn. am falschen Fuß erwischen</em></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>am Boden der Tatsachen bleiben</em></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>am Zahnfleisch gehen</em></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here, some differences between the results of the corpus search in the VG and the DeReKo subcorpora are noticeable. All in all, because of the sheer size of the DeReKo its results are certainly more reliable. (For instance, the idiom *am Zahnfleisch gehen* appears only 5 times in the subcorpus ‘Austria’ of the VG corpus.)

To conclude, in none of the cases presented in this section could a variant be identified as a specific national variant (Germanism, Austrianism, or Helvetism) and at the same time an absolute variant. *Zum Rechten sehen/schauen* appears to be a specific idiom variant of Switzerland, but even this Helvetism is only a relative variant in the standard language corpora for Switzerland. Likewise, idioms
with *am* are almost specific Austrianisms, but none is an absolute variant in the corpora for Austria. *Eins im Sinn* is a ‘Germanism’ in the sense that it is only used in Germany, but here it is also a relative variant, and, more precisely, it shows a clear areal distribution in the northwest of Germany only. None of the other variants is nation-specific in Standard German. If they are absolute variants in one country, they are relative variants in another country. This appears to be a typical distributional pattern in the standard language varieties of German. From an empirical point of view, this kind of standard variation in the German-speaking countries may be more appropriately conceptualized as pluriareality rather than pluricentricity (in the sense of ‘plurinationality’, see Schmidlin 2006).

### 4 Changes in the Areal Variation of Colloquial and Standard German

In section 2, language change was defined as change in the associations between linguistic functions and linguistic forms over time. The present section investigates whether it is possible to establish changes in the areal phraseology of German (RQ 4). I will present two case studies of routine formulae in German. As in section 3, the examples are taken from atlases of colloquial German, but they also display variation in spoken registers of Standard German. Both case studies use a change in real-time framework (Chambers 2003: 212–215). More precisely, the findings come from a real-time panel study that uses the same questions and basically the same methodology. In both cases, areal distribution maps of routine formulae are compared. The older maps are based on data collected for the *Wortatlas der deutschen Umgangssprachen* (WDU) (‘Word Atlas of colloquial German’) in the 1970s, with data on the ‘typical’ expression at a given location provided by 1 or 2 informants per location. The AdA data were collected and presented in the manner explained in section 3.1 above, representing language use approximately one generation later than the WDU data.

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16 Some of them are also used in South Tyrol.
17 The hypothesis that the regional distribution of variants from colloquial language has changed in recent decades was first tested in Elspaß (2005). In this study, I compared the regional distribution of eleven WDU maps (nine lexical variables, two syntactic variables) from the first two volumes of the WDU (WDU I–II) to eleven equivalent maps from an online pilot study for the subsequent AdA conducted in 2002 – thus studying language change across a time span of c. 25–30 years.
Figures 12a and 12b illustrate the distribution of variants for ‘a greeting formula which people would normally use when they enter a local shop in the afternoon’. The map in figure 12a is taken from the first volume of the WDU. Figure 12b shows the distribution of the same pragmatic variable about 25 years later, based on an online survey for the AdA. A comparison of the two maps reveals both similarities and differences, pointing partly to stability and partly to change. As for similarities, both maps display a north-south divide along the river Main, which has been identified as the main isogloss in the language geography of colloquial German (Durrell 1989; Möller 2003; Pickl and Pröll 2019). The dominant form south of the river Main is Grüß Gott (lit. ‘(may) God greet you-SG’), with its variant Grüß Euch (‘(may God) greet you-PL’, in South Tyrol and some parts of Austria) and the exclusively Swiss German form Grüezi (a phonetic variant of Grüß Euch). The dominant form north of the Main and along the river Rhine in the southwest of Germany was and is Guten Tag. The most obvious change is that in many places, particularly in the north of Germany, these polylexical routines have been joined or even replaced by the more informal monolexical Hallo. Although it exists natively in German (as an old imperative singular form of holen ‘fetch’, cf. Pfeifer 2003: 500), its rapid dissemination within one generation is certainly due to its status as an internationalism (cf. French âllo, English hello, Spanish hola, Dutch hello, etc.). Another striking change is the spread of moin, which is most probably the abbreviated form of the Low German and Frisian phraseme mo(o)ji(e)n dag (‘(I wish you/have a) nice day’).

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18 Today, moin is considered a salient marker of northern German regional identity. Anecdotal evidence has it that moin partly owes its rapid dissemination to the adoption of the expression as the title of a popular morning show of a private radio channel in the 1990s (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moin, accessed December 31, 2018).
Fig. 12a: Distribution of variants of 'greeting when entering a local shop in the afternoon' (WDU I–47)

Fig. 12b: Distribution of variants of 'greeting when entering a local shop in the afternoon' (AdA II–1)
Fig. 13a: Distribution of variants of ‘saying goodbye after meeting friends’ (WDU I–48)

Fig. 13b: Distribution of variants of ‘saying goodbye after meeting friends’ (AdA X–17a)
Similar developments can be observed in the case of routine formulae for ‘saying goodbye after meeting friends’, a fairly informal situation (figures 13a and 13b).

I will confine my discussion to the only two phrasemes on these two maps. Whereas the distribution of *mach’s gut* (lit. ‘make-SG it good’, mainly in Central East Germany) has remained relatively stable, the formal routine *Auf Wiedersehen* (lit. ‘on seeing (you) again’) has almost entirely been replaced by the more informal monolexical variants *Tschüss/Tschüüs/Tschö* in the north of Germany, again north of the river Main, which are shortened forms of *a tschüs(s)/a tschö* and all ultimately – via French *À dieu* or Spanish *adiós* – go back to Latin *ad deum* (‘God be with you’, cf. also *Ade* in Southwestern Germany), or by *Tschau* (cf. Italian *ciao*, from Venetian *ščiaoo* ‘(your) servant’). In present-day German, *Auf Wiedersehen*, including its southeastern variant *Auf Wiederschau(e)n* (and the Swiss German dialect form *Uf Widerluege*), are restricted to more formal contexts, as shown in figure 13c, the distribution of routines for ‘saying goodbye to customers when they leave a local shop’.

![Distribution of variants of ‘saying goodbye to customers when they leave a local shop’](image)

**Fig. 13c:** Distribution of variants of ‘saying goodbye to customers when they leave a local shop’ (AdA X–17b)

While both case studies include instances of long-term changes of form on a syntagmatic level (Type II change, e.g. *a tschüss > tschüss, mo(o)i(e)n dag > moin*),
the most striking changes are Type I changes, i.e. polylexical routine formulae which are apparently perceived as rather formal have been or are gradually being replaced by monolexical informal expressions (e.g. *Guten Tag* > *Hallo*; *Auf Wiedersehen* > *Tschüss*).

## 5 Conclusion

This paper has identified areal variation and change as a still barely-researched subject in the phraseology of German. Case studies on variation and change in colloquial German have been presented, based on data from online surveys that aim to elicit spoken regional vernaculars and variation in Standard German (AdA), as well as from a regionally-balanced corpus of Standard German (VG).

With regard to RQ 1, the AdA has proven excellent for studying and presenting the areal distribution of phraseological variants in German as well as changes in their areal patterns. As in the lexis of colloquial German in general (cf. Pickl and Pröll 2019), neither traditional dialect boundaries nor contemporary political borders can fully account for the areal structure of phraseme variation in German. One of the most striking contrasts exists between the north and the south of the German-speaking countries, with the river Main as a prominent dividing line (see e.g. the salutations *Guten Tag* vs. *Grüß Gott*).

RQ 2 asked whether it is possible to establish differences between awareness and actual usage. Informants were asked (i) whether a certain phraseme is commonly known in their local town and (ii) whether it is commonly used. As expected, the three case studies showed that the phrasemes under investigation are widely known, but that their usage is restricted to a smaller area (see e.g. *das geht dich einen Schmarrn an* ‘that’s none of your business’, which is known in all German-speaking countries, but is actively used only in Bavaria, Austria and South Tyrol.)

As for the representation of areal variation in dictionaries (RQ3), Piirainen already demonstrated in a number of essays that areal tags, even in phraseological dictionaries, are often sketchy and sometimes plainly incorrect. In many instances, dictionaries label areal variants of Standard German as simply ‘colloquial’ or ‘regionally used’, implying that they are non-standard. In the present paper, it has emerged that the tags given by VWB, a dictionary of areal variants in Standard German, are often more precise than those of Duden 11, the most prominent phraseological dictionary of German. The VWB, however, often does not differentiate between absolute and relative variants (see e.g. the figures for
zum Rechten sehen/schauen ‘to see that everything is OK’ or jmdn. auf die Schaufel nehmen ‘to pull sb.’s leg’ in section 3.2).

Finally, a comparison of maps from two linguistic atlases of colloquial German, WDU and AdA, has revealed changes in the areal phraseology of German which have occurred in recent decades (RQ 4). In the case of the routine formulae examined here, the major finding was that polylexical formal routines have gradually been replaced by monolexical informal expressions (see e.g. Guten Tag > Hallo).

In methodological terms, the case studies have demonstrated the potential of both online surveys and corpus studies for gaining new insights into the areal variation of phrasemes and their change in German. Such new methods can help to advance this relatively young field of research, which Elisabeth Piirainen aptly coined ‘areal phraseology’ and to which she contributed some of her pioneering work.

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Appendix: Phrasemes in AdA

Survey # Variable

1. *eins gemerkt/eins im Sinn/*... (Question 19)
2. Gruß beim Betreten eines Geschäfts am Nachmittag (Question 1)
   Antwort auf „Danke“ (Question 2)
3. *etw. ist nicht nötig/*etw. braucht’s nicht* (Question 4b)
   Ach komm!/Ach geh! (Question 5d)
4. *mit jmdm. ist kein Blumentopf zu gewinnen* (Awareness) (Question 18a)
   *mit jmdm. ist kein Blumentopf zu gewinnen* (Usage) (Question 18b)
   *(eine) dicke Backe(n) machen* (Awareness) (Question 19a)
   *(eine) dicke Backe(n) machen* (Usage) (Question 19b)
   *Das geht Dich einen Schmarren an* (Awareness) (Question 20a)
   *Das geht Dich einen Schmarren an* (Usage) (Question 20b)
   *Das krieg ich nicht gebacken!* (Awareness) (Question 21a)
   *Das krieg ich nicht gebacken!* (Usage) (Question 21b)
7. Neujahrswünsche – in der Silvesternacht um 0:00 Uhr, wenn man auf das neue Jahr anstößt (Question 1a)
   Neujahrswünsche am 1. Januar (Question 1b)
   Wunsch in den Tagen vor dem 1. Januar (Question 1c)
Areal Variation and Change in the Phraseology of Contemporary German  

*Heute* (Question 4d)  
‘unentgeltlich’ (Question 4n)  
gut zufrieden (Question 6h)  

9 *jmdn. auf die Schippe/Schüppe/Schaufel nehmen* (Question 3c)  
Verbreitung von *sich ausgehen*: Das geht sich noch aus. i.S.v. ‘Es ist noch genug Geld/Zeit da’ (Question 7g)  
einen Purzelbaum machen/schlagen/schießen (Question 8c)  

10 ‘Donnerstag vor dem Rosenmontag’ (Question 1)  
Verabschiedung unter Freunden (Question 17a)  
Verabschiedung gegenüber KundInnen (Question 17b)  

11 *Kalter Hund/Schwarzer Hund/…* (Question 1i)  
hin ... zurück/hinzu ... rückzu/... (Question 2g)  
Erwiderung auf *Schönes Wochenende!* (Question 2h)  
Verbreitung von *sich ausgehen*: Das geht sich (noch) aus. [Wdh.] (Question 3a)  
Verbreitung von *Du kannst doch nicht einfach hingehen und x tun!* (Question 3b)  
Verbreitung von *Das war doch sowas von albern/dumm ...!* (Question 3e)  
Verbreitung von *Das gehört geändert!* (Question 3f)  
Verbreitung von „*Der kann das ab.*“ (Question 3i)  

20 geradeaus/genau/... (beim Zahlen) (Question 6a)  
Haben Sie noch einen Weg?/(etwas) in der Nähe zu tun/erledigen? (Question 6b)  
*Das ist mir egal/gleich/wurscht!/Das kommt nicht drauf an.* (Question 6c)  
Wunsch beim Essen im Restaurant: *Guten Appetit!/Einen guten!/Mahlzeit/...* (Question 6d)  
Wunsch beim Essen in der Kantine: *Guten Appetit!/Einen guten!/Mahlzeit/...* (Question 6e)  
aufpassen wie ein Haftelmacher/Heftelmacher/Heftlimacher/Schießhund/Luchs/... (Question 6f)