

# METHODS IN AUDIOVISUAL DIALECTOLOGY IN A BILINGUAL CONTEXT

Herta Maurer-Lausegger  
University of Klagenfurt, Austria

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Today's rapid technological developments have encouraged a much wider range of approaches to observing, portraying and interpreting objects of research in many different disciplines. Thanks to dramatic advances in digital and film technology, dialectology has also seen the number of interdisciplinary approaches increase since the second half of the 1980s. Communication and data capture technology enable researchers to exploit multimedia to present language maps, spoken dialects and individual linguistic phenomena on video, film and in the internet. Portraying the general context of linguistic and social interaction in film means that dynamic/visual elements are included in multidimensional space and time alongside the spoken text, making it possible to observe and research the objects being investigated from a more profound perspective (Maurer-Lausegger 2006:283). As Hess-Lüttich points out (1987:220f.), studies on the complementarity of language and image, sound and music, and verbal and non-verbal codes in films and on TV have revealed that these intermedial relationships between symbols are usually too complex to be quantifiable in static and statistical terms but have to be evaluated in a dynamic and functional manner. The additional visual-contextual information provided by audiovisual media in contrast to sound alone can be very informative and sometimes even essential when working on an interpretation.

Reflecting current academic trends and depending on the availability of technical equipment, dialectology, too, can pursue a wide range of linguistic and cultural interests. One of the many innovative approaches to emerge recently is audiovisual dialectology, which has been developed by the author and professional film crews in an interdisciplinary research project entitled *Documentary records of past folk culture in dialect* ([www.kwfilm.com](http://www.kwfilm.com)) which was launched at the Institute of Slavic Studies at Klagenfurt University in 1994. It involves filming the dialect and sociocultural context of bilingual speakers and then producing documentary videos with an accompanying pamphlet. In 2005, the term *Audiovisual Dialectology* was added to the project title. I first attempted to define audiovisual dialectology as an area of research in 2000 (Maurer-Lausegger 2000:191f., 2004:27). It is an innovative interdisciplinary approach to research placed firmly in the context of cultural

studies and its main goal is to document language and culture in the situational context (Maurer-Lausegger 2006:285).

## **2. BILINGUAL SOUTHERN CARINTHIA — THE AREA UNDER INVESTIGATION**

The area where I carry out my research on audiovisual dialectology is in the bilingual region of Southern Carinthia, where German and Slovene are spoken. Our interdisciplinary research project focuses primarily on documentary, linguistic and sociocultural goals. I myself am very interested in recording the autochthonous dialect spoken by the older generation of Slovene speakers in bilingual areas of Carinthia. To a limited extent we also document Carinthian German, the second language in the region, so as to preserve the rarely heard typical interference patterns from Slovene and standard German in the speech of the oldest dialect speakers. A detailed description and presentation of the multifarious Slovene and German dialects is essential as both of them are gradually dying out (Maurer-Lausegger 2004a:26, 2006:283f.).

## **3. AUDIOVISUAL DIALECTOLOGY — FILMS AND PAMPHLETS**

The recordings are turned into high-quality documentaries produced by our project partner, Artis Filmproduktions-GmbH in Klagenfurt. Topics covered so far include water mills and sawmills, sheep breeding, agricultural implements for arable farming, sledges and other means of transporting wood, baking bread in traditional ovens and reminiscences of rural life, resulting in seven documentaries in Slovene, six German ones and two in English. The Slovene versions are produced in the original dialect while the German ones are either originally in German or in a dubbed version where Slovene can still be heard in the background. The English versions on baking bread and the different types of sledges have the original Slovene soundtrack and English subtitles (Maurer-Lausegger 2006:284, in press; [www.kwfilm.com](http://www.kwfilm.com)). I would like to point out that the dubbed German versions are not intended for research purposes but for viewing by the general public.

The films are published with an accompanying pamphlet in the series “Dialekt-dokumentationen/Narečne dokumentacije/Documentaries in dialect” by Hermagoras Verlag/Mohorjeva založba in Klagenfurt. The pamphlets, which are illustrated with old photographs, have a phonological transcription of the text of the film and a German/English translation or a standard Slovene version. They also include detailed information on how the individual films were made (Maurer-Lausegger 2004a:28). Numerous publications have described various aspects of audiovisual dialectological research; several papers are in print or in preparation. Since September 2000, the film projects have also been presented on [www.kwfilm.com](http://www.kwfilm.com), which includes information on the project, my bibliography and short extracts from the films.

#### 4. METHODS IN AUDIOVISUAL DIALECTOLOGY

Despite the fact that modern media could be used in many different ways in dialectology, many researchers have been reluctant to use interdisciplinary approaches so far (Maurer-Lausegger 2006:293). Our practical experience has shown that academics in related fields in cultural studies (for example, ethnologists, cultural anthropologists, sociologists, etc.) who have been successfully using videos in their own research work for quite a long time, are very interested in our interdisciplinary dialectological working methods, particularly when they can identify their own research interests and goals in our films on dialect (Maurer-Lausegger 2004a:31).

One reason why we concentrate on filming the language of older dialect speakers is that their dialect is more firmly rooted, exhibiting an extraordinary variety in lexical, phonological, morphological and semantic terms, while younger speakers often show distinctive interference patterns with other varieties of German or Slovene. As old farming tools and traditions gradually disappear, valuable cultural assets are lost and along with them the down-to-earth language that describes them. Audiovisual documentation of the dialect and everyday life in a region with numerous dialects and variations is thus vital due to the unique sociolinguistic situation (Maurer-Lausegger 2006:283f., 2007:165).

Depending on research interests, coupled with technical and financial capabilities, one can present dialect on film in a wide variety of ways. So far, our films have concentrated on ethnographical topics from “bygone days”. Such topics are particularly suitable for recording dialect spoken in its most traditional form. This does not mean to say that our audiovisual dialectology exclusively covers the language spoken by the older generation and ignores younger speakers. Our film archives include recordings of dialect speakers of every age but they are not intended for a general audience (Maurer-Lausegger 2007:171).

When using a professional camera team (consisting of a cameraman, sound assistant and interviewer/researcher in our case) in dialectological field research, the interviewer/dialectologist must have a wide range of practical experience and theoretical knowledge. Likewise, the cameraman must be very sensitive to the situation being filmed and be prepared to consider the needs of the interviewer/dialectologist. Successful use of film technology in dialectological research requires a wide range of practical and theoretical experience with dialectological and sociolinguistic field research, solid sociolinguistic knowledge of the terrain in which the recordings should be made, good knowledge of the language/dialect and awareness of and experience with the technicalities of film production (Maurer-Lausegger 2007:171).

As a dialectologist and ethnologist, I have more than 25 years of experience with dialect research in the field in bilingual areas of Carinthia. My practical experience in dialectological and sociolinguistic field research coupled with recording experience has been gained as follows: working with the Slovene department at the Austrian Broadcasting Company’s Carinthian studio (producing radio programmes in dialect; archiving sound recordings); dialectological and sociolinguistic field re-

search with a tape recorder and several camera teams (with individuals or groups as well as concentrating on terminological research); involvement with several professional feature films and documentaries. Thanks to this practical experience and close consultation of related literature, I have been able to try out many different methods of audiovisual dialectology with several different camera teams and to continue to refine them (Maurer-Lausegger 2004a:27f., 2007:165).

We document spontaneously spoken dialect, paying particular attention to a “simulated yet natural” situation in its sociocultural context (Wodak 1982) in front of the camera. Every situation requires its own specific methodological approach, which means the team must build up a fundamental feeling of trust from the start and also be very flexible. In contrast to other documentaries, it is not possible to create a screenplay in the classic sense of the word as the “plot” or order of events is determined by the dialect speaker(s). In other words, the cameraman is an “observer” who follows the dynamic contextual events with the camera (Maurer-Lausegger 2000:200f., 2007:170).

The recordings consist of monologues and group conversations (dialogues with two to three speakers) or serve to document terminology in the context of the equipment and objects under investigation (audiovisual documentation of terminology; Maurer-Lausegger 2004a:28, 2004b). The spontaneous conversations in front of the camera mostly cover topics relating to a rural farming community still characterized by the use of traditional farming skills and implements. As a dialectologist and film producer interested in cultural matters, I find that my presence is essential at all stages of producing the film, from the initial contact with the dialect speakers in the field to the finished documentary. It has also proved to be very useful that the camera team was familiar with the language/dialect being documented, particularly for audiovisual documentation of terminology filmed in context.

My research goals require the filmed dialect to be as authentic as possible, which can result in very expensive productions. Multimedia recordings of spontaneously spoken dialect which do not only cover text but also the relevant situational context can be used in a number of ways. They do not only present the results of dialectological research but can also be useful in other areas of linguistics and cultural studies, although audiovisual dialectology pays particular attention to articulation and excellent sound quality. The dialect texts recorded in “simulated yet natural” situations can provide the basis for compiling dialect grammars of individual villages or regions. The film texts allow the study of different linguistic levels (for example, phonetics, morphology, lexicology, semantics, syntax, phraseology, etc.), but can also be interesting for other research fields, such as discourse analysis, cultural geography, sociolinguistics, ethnography, cultural anthropology and other disciplines in cultural studies, depending on the way in which the film is made. Due to the dynamic movements of the camera in our dialect films (involving wide, medium and zoom shots), certain restrictions are inevitable. For example, when concentrating on terminology, phonetics or spontaneous dialogue with distinctive non-verbal communication, the cameraman concentrated on close-ups and details,

which meant that what is going on in the context of filming can only be recorded to a limited extent. Naturally, every restriction on what is included also limits the film's usefulness for other disciplines (Maurer-Lausegger 2006:293f).<sup>1</sup>

## 5. CONCLUSION

At the heart of our audiovisual approach dialectology is the documentary. It is what enables us to use such a wide range of methods, opening up a broad spectrum of academic applications as well as sociocultural approaches (seminars, excursions and educational events as well as cultural programmes). The films are appealing to experts in various disciplines — dialectology, ethnology, cultural anthropology and other areas of cultural studies — but are also attractive for anybody interested in folklore and local culture, as demonstrated by their positive reception during ethnographic exhibitions and cultural events. Such activities help contribute to the breaking down of language barriers in the general public (Maurer-Lausegger 2004a:31f.).

## REFERENCES

- Hess-Lüttich, E.W.B. 1987. *Angewandte Sprachsoziologie. Eine Einführung in linguistische, soziologische und pädagogische Ansätze*. Stuttgart: Metzler.
- Maurer-Lausegger, H. 2000. Die audiovisuelle Dialektforschung — eine Kulturwissenschaft. In *Junge Slavistik in Österreich. Beiträge zum 1. Arbeitstreffen, Innsbruck, 24–26.02.1999*, ed. W. Stadler, E. Binder, and H. Kalb, 187–207. Innsbruck: Verlag des Instituts für Sprachwissenschaft.
- . 2004a. Audiovisual dialectology: The film research project “Documentary records of past folk culture in dialect” and its role in the linguistic culture of Carinthia. *Tidsskrift for Sprogforsk-ning* 2 (2004):25–40. [Also available online: [www.statsbiblioteket.dk/tfs/arkiv\\_tfs1-2004.htm](http://www.statsbiblioteket.dk/tfs/arkiv_tfs1-2004.htm).]
- . 2004b. Audiovisuelle Dialekt- und Terminologieforschung: Fragen zur Übersetzung und Synchronisation dialektologischer Filme. In *Dialektübersetzung und Dialekte in Multimedia*, ed. I. Helin, 21–44. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- . 2006. Aspekte der audiovisuellen Dialektologie im Gesamtzusammenhang dialektologischer und kulturwissenschaftlicher Forschung. In *Slavistische Beiträge* 453:283–299. Thematic issue: *Slavistische Linguistik* 2004/05. *Referate des XXX. Konstanzer Slavistischen Arbeitstreffens, Klagenfurt, 13–17 September 2004 und Referate des XXXI. Konstanzer Slavistischen Arbeitstreffens, Freudenstadt, 19–23 September 2005*, T. Berger, J. Räcke, and T. Reuther (eds.).

---

<sup>1</sup>Non-verbal communication can be reproduced in video transcripts with the help of computer technology (syncWriter, QuickTime-MoviePlayer). It plays a particularly important role in intercultural communication. For more information see Rehbein et al. (2001).

- . 2007. Audiovisual dialectology: Methodology and theoretical considerations. *Beiträge zur Dialogforschung* 33:163–176. Thematic issue: *Theoretical Approaches to Dialogue Analysis. Selected Papers from the IADA Chicago 2004 Conference*, L.N. Berlin (ed.).
- . In press. Audiovisual documentation of dialect in bilingual situations (Slovene/German) [www.kwfilm.com](http://www.kwfilm.com).
- Rehbein, J., J. Fienemann, S. Ohlhus, and C. Oldörp. 2001. Nonverbale Kommunikation im Videotranskript. Zu nonverbalen Aspekten höflichen Handelns in interkulturellen Konstellationen und ihre Darstellung in computergestützten Videotranskriptionen. In *Mediensprache und Medienlinguistik. Festschrift für Jörg Hennig*, ed. D. Möhn, D. Roß, and M. Tjarks-Sobhani, 167–198. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Wodak, R. 1982. Erhebung von Sprachdaten in natürlicher oder simuliert-natürlicher Sprechsituation. In *Dialektologie. Ein Handbuch zur deutschen und allgemeinen Dialektforschung* (Erster Halbband), ed. W. Besch, U. Knoop, W. Putschke, and H. Wiegand, 539–544, Berlin: de Gruyter.