

Southern American English and Saxon German (Sächsisch) are both used in constructing negative social stereotypes in their respective national cultures: For Northerners in the United States, a Southern accent often conjures up images of hillbillies, shotguns, pick-up trucks and cotton fields. Similarly, a Saxon accent is generally detested and for many Germans, implies not only 'eastern', but also 'GDR' with all the negative images of a failed political and social system. However, despite negative associations and the radical reshaping of their societies, these varieties are holding their own and continue to thrive. Why? Using data from several studies measuring language attitudes, this paper explores the parallels between the status of Saxon German and Southern American English within their home regions. Research by Preston (1989), Hundt (1996, 2004), Daily-O'Cain (1999), and Tamasi (2003), among others, suggest that these two varieties have much in common from a folk linguistic perspective: they are a source of both internal and external ridicule, yet they are also an effective means by which a regional culture can both resist a hegemonic national culture and maintain local identity and solidarity. Moreover, although speakers of such varieties tend to exhibit linguistic insecurity, meaning that these accents are deemed friendlier and more pleasant by their speakers, and they enjoy a resilient covert prestige. A recent study, however, (Anders, 2004) conducted in Saxony in the cities Dresden and Leipzig revealed interesting new findings; not only did the majority of the Saxon informants judge their own local accents negatively, but they also refused to identify themselves with the local accent, believing that "typical" Saxon is spoken in other cities but not in their own. This evidence together with other studies may suggest general patterns of cognitive mechanisms of stereotypes. This paper attempts to build a more complete and accurate understanding of how speakers and listeners regard language use and variety within the regions of their country and the role language plays in the maintenance of regional identities.