’Data – what data?’ Language activism and the availability of language-related (governmental) data and support in Scotland and Bavaria

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This paper will focus on and evaluate activities by language activism groups in Scotland and Bavaria. Their struggle to obtain governmental data relating to speaker numbers, support measures and initiatives in relation to Scots and Bavarian has been a protracted one. While in autumn 2013 the number of Scots speakers will be available for the first time via the 2011 census figures, Bavaria has long announced to supply similar data but has – to date (September 2013) – failed to do so. Researchers (e.g. Rowley 2011) have thus had to rely on estimations and results from opinion polls.

Grassroots activism is often at the heart of minority/contested language support and has, for example, managed to make its voice heard more loudly in the media than academia (Zabaleta et al. 2010). While it is not always easy to answer who the actors in language activism are, one aspect is clear: experts and non-experts in a variety of fields are involved, sometimes pulling in different directions.

A number of projects supporting the study of and research into the language have been backed by respective Bavarian ministries; however, this aid often does not stretch beyond an initial project phase when it is then taken on by activist groups. On the other hand, Scots has received comparatively little actual governmental support (Millar 2006) while other organisations have lobbied extensively and successfully for an inclusion of Scots-related questions in the census. On the surface, the support in Bavaria appears to be better than in Scotland; however, language awareness of Scots far surpasses that of Bavarians. The paper will therefore also highlight the potential underlying political reasons for the discrepancies in the supply of data and the resulting (non-)support of language activism by the population.

Keywords: minority languages, politics, language activism.