

German as a minority language: The “Swabians” in the Danubian States and their language(s)

Michaela Bentz
Int. Ph.D. programme LIPP, Munich
Steinickeweg 7, D-80798 München, Germany
michaela_bentz@yahoo.de

During the 18th century, people came from today’s South-western and Western Germany and settled in parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. How did their language(s) develop? Which developments did they have in common, which of them were unique? How great was the influence of Croatian, Hungarian, Serbian and Romanian in the different communities?

I recorded the “Swabian” inhabitants of 82 villages and towns in Croatia, Hungary, Romania and Serbia and wrote down my interviews between 2003 and 2007 (2,600 pages). After the Second World War, many “Swabians” left South-eastern Europe, a development that still continues; there are only some people advanced in years (mostly older than 70) who stayed in their native countries. They spoke different dialects from the beginning of the settlement, which developed differently because they had different neighbors and language contacts.

Common grammaticalized phenomena are arguably intensified by language contact: Adverbs and adverbial qualifications are often moved outside the verbal frame: *sechs Klassen hast du ja gemacht in der Volksschule* “six years you attended the “Volksschule” though”, also the accusative object: *so habe ich nicht gekannt die Kinder!* “so I didn’t know the children!”. The position of the auxiliary and the full verb is often exchanged: *Vielleicht ist unsere Gote gegangen schauen* “Perhaps our god-mother went and had a look”. Perfect participles can form sentences: *um fünfze Nachmittag heimgekommen* “come home at five p.m.”. German *zu* (“to” – as an infinitive conjunction and as a preposition) is replaced: the extended infinitive is formed by *für* “for”: *dass wir Wasser haben für trinken* “that we have water for drink”, connected with the verb *sagen* “(to) say”, *über* “about” is used: *sagt der Direktor über mich* “says the director about me” – etc.

Unique phenomena are due to different origin: exceptions at Saderlach/Zădăreni, Romania (the only village in South-eastern Europe with High Alemannic dialect): Often, a periphrastic verbal form with an inflected form of *tun* “(to) do” + infinitive is used: *weil Ihr alles zusammenraffen tut!* “because you do gather up everything!” – except at Saderlach/Zădăreni. The verb *geben* “(to) give” is also used as an auxiliary and replaces *werden* “(to) get”: *wir waren enteignet gegeben* “we had got dispossessed” – except at Saderlach/Zădăreni. Only at Saderlach/Zădăreni, the preposition *wegen* “because of” is sometimes used as a conjunction and replaces *weil* “because”: *aber wegen so viele Fehler drin sind, habe ich gesagt* “but because of there are so many mistakes within, I said”.

Phenomena caused by language contact: In regions with particularly strong Hungarian influence, people tend to iron out the difference of gender: *schönes, großes Christbaum* “beautiful, large Christmas tree” and to let out the article: *Er war auch [ein] armer Mann* “He has also been [a] poor man”. They also often integrate Hungarian nouns in their language and form their plural as if they were “Swabian” words: *Narancsă* (Hung. *narancs*, pl. *narancsok*: orange), *Pogácslä* (Hung. *pogácsa*, pl. *pogácsák*: cookie), *Kogaschä* (Hung. *kakas*, pl. *kakasok*: cock), *Nénis* (Hung. *néni*, pl. *nénik*: aunt).

References

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