

# German as a Minority Language: The “Swabians” in the Danubian States and their Language(s)

---

MICHAELA BENTZ  
LMU Munich  
michaela\_bentz@yahoo.de

**ABSTRACT.** During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, people came from today’s western, southwestern and southern 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, Romanian and Serbian in the different communities?

## 1 Historical key features

I recorded the “Swabian” inhabitants of 80 villages and towns in Croatia, Hungary, Romania and Serbia and “Swabians” who emigrated to France after the Second World War with the “Action France”, an action managed by the Banatian attorney Jean Lamesfeld. These speakers came from the Romanian villages Șag/Schag and Voiteni/Wojteg and from Šupljaja/Stefansfeld, Serbia and today live in Dachstein, Mulhouse and Reiningue. In December 2007, I also conducted interviews with “Swabians” who emigrated to Brazil after the Second World War. 500 “Swabian” families emigrated to Entre Rios, Paraná, Brazil under the direction of the Helvetian Europe’s Aid. Between 2003 and 2007, I transcribed my interviews (about 3,000 pages). This paper will show some first results of my analysis.

The “Swabian” settlers came from today’s western, southwestern and southern Germany during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, most of them between 1722 and 1788; Gehl classifies the different communities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire according to the origin of the settlers (Gehl 1997; 2000; 2003; 2005). I recorded about 250 speakers in the following villages and towns in southeastern Europe:

Croatia: Osijek/Essegg (Bavarian-Austrian); Vukovar (West Palatinate); Kozarac (Baranja)/Geisdorf.

Hungary: Budaörs/Wudersch, Soroksár/Schorokschar (Middle Bavarian); Nemesnádudvar/Nadwar (Rhine-Franconian, Swabian); Dunaharaszti/Harast (Swabian); Nagyárpád/Großarbersdorf (Alemannic); Izmi (Hessian); Olasz, Véménd/Wemend (Fuldish).

Romania: Zădăreni/Saderlach (High Alemannic); Brebu Nou/Weidenthal, Gărâna/Wolfsberg, Sadova Veche/Altsadowa (North Bavarian);

Caransebeş/Karansebesch, Lugoj/Lugosch, Reşiţa/Reschitza, Steierdorf, Timişoara-Elisabetin/Temeswar-Elisabethstadt, Timişoara-Iosefin/Temeswar-Josephstadt (Bavarian-Austrian); Peregu Mare/Deutschpereg (Bavarian, Palatinate); Bacova/Bakowa, Darova/Darowa, Deta/Detta, Fântânele/Engelsbrunn, Fratelia, Iosifălău/Josephsdorf (Palatinate, Bavarian); Ciacova/Tschakowa, Sendlac/Sendlak (Rhine-Franconian); Grabaţ/Grabatz, Lipova/Lippa (Rhine-Franconian, Bavarian); Charlottenburg/Charlottenburg, Lovrin/Lowrin, Sânmihaiu German/Deutschsanktmichael, Tomnatic/Triebswetter (Palatinate); Becicherecu Mic/Kleinbetschkerek, Bulgăruş/Bogarosch, Jimbolia/Hatzfeld, Lenauheim, Satchinez/Knees (West Palatinate, Moselle-Franconian); Giarmata/Jahrmarkt (North Palatinate, Moselle-Franconian); Biled/Billed (Moselle-Franconian, Palatinate); Cărpiniş/Gertianosch, Iacea Mare/Großjetscha, Pişchia/Bruckenau, Sânnicolau Mare/Großsanktnikolaus, Sânpetru Mare/Großsanktpeter (Rhine-Franconian, Moselle-Franconian); Sântana/Sanktanna (South Franconian, Swabian); Neudorf (Hessian); Bărăteaz/Baratzhausen, Giulvăz/Djulweß, Nădrag/Nadrag, Percosova/Perkos, Tirol/Königsgnad, Ştiuca/Ebendorf.

Serbia: Apatin (Alemannic, Palatinate); Ođaci/Hodschag (Alemannic, Rhine-Franconian); Kljajčevo/Kernei (Alemannic, Rhine-Franconian, Bavarian); Bački Jarak/Jarek, Čonoplja/Tschonopl, Glogonje/Glogon, Mramorak (Rhine-Franconian); Pančevo/Pantschowa (Rhine-Franconian, Bavarian); Franzfeld/Kačarevo (Swabian, Rhine Franconian); Knićanin/Rudolfsgnad (Palatinate); Karavukovo/Karawukowa, Krušćić/Weprowatz, Ratkovo/Parabutsch, Ravno Selo/Schowe, Vrbas/Werbaß (West Palatinate); Stanišić/Stanischitz (East Palatinate); Bela Crkva/Weißkirchen, Jabuka, Vršac/Werschetz (Bavarian-Austrian); Bačka Palanka, Bezdan, Kikinda, Sombor, Subotica.

## **2 Common grammaticalized phenomena**

Adverbs and adverbial qualifications are often moved outside the verbal frame: *und am nächsten Sonntag sind sie dann gegangen wieder in die Kirche alle* “and on the next Sunday, then they all went to church again”, *Die Mädeln waren angezogen schwäbisch* “The girls were dressed in Swabian style”. The position of adverbs and adverbial qualifications seems all in all to be more flexible than in standard German: They can stand at the end of the sentence, but they can even be placed in front of a declarative sentence: *Bei uns zu Weihnachten sind die Christkindlein gekommen* “With us, the little Christ Children came at Christmas”. This may occur in German common speech as well, but in “Swabian”, it is the rule and not the exception. Objects are also often moved outside the verbal frame: *so habe ich nicht gekannt die Kinder!* “so I didn’t know the children!”, *Wir haben*

*The “Swabians” in the Danubian States and their Language(s)*

*auch gehabt mehrere Blaskapellen* “We also had several brass bands”, which doesn’t happen in German common speech. This means that the verbal frame is sometimes deleted – a phenomenon which can also be explained by language contact, because verbal frames only exist in German and Dutch. The loss of the verbal frame is also favoured by the fact that preterite forms are found very rarely in “Swabian” dialects; this is because the “Swabians” ancestors came from today’s western, southwestern and southern Germany, and people from the south tend to use rather present perfect than preterite forms (Schirmunski 1962).

The position of the auxiliary and the full verb is often exchanged: *Drei Häuser waren, wo Rumänen haben gewohnt* “Three houses existed which Romanians were living in”, *Dort waren so kleine Häuschen mit so kleinen Fenstern, wo der Milchtopf ist hineingegangen* “There were such little houses with such small windows, where the milk pan fitted in”. The modals are often placed in front of the related infinitive, the adverbial qualification and the accusative object: *im Sommer haben wir auch mal dürfen draußen im Hof spielen* “in summer, we were also allowed to play outside in the yard sometimes”.

German *zu* “to” (both 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” – which means: “says the director to me”. The last-mentioned phenomenon cannot be explained by the German basis dialects; maybe it also arises in the local varieties of one or more of the contact languages, but not in the relevant literary languages. However, in the towns and in the villages not far away from the towns, *sagen über* is not as much in use as it is in the rural villages. It is used very often in Rhine-Franconian villages like Semlac, in Palatinate villages like Charlottenburg and in West Palatinate villages like Ravno Selo, for example, whereas it is not used, for example, in Zădăreni, Romania, the only village in southeastern Europe with High Alemannic dialect.

In almost every village and town, a periphrastic verbal form with an inflected form of *tun* “(to) do” + infinitive is often used: *die Temeswarer tun ja schon nicht mehr Schwäbisch reden* “the Timișoareans already don’t speak Swabian any more”, *Die Temeswarer tun mehr städtisch reden, ja!* “the Timișoareans do speak more urban, yes”, *Der tut in der Nacht humbitangieren und am Tag schlafen* “He does fool around at night and sleep during the day” – except in Zădăreni.

There are common grammaticalized phenomena like the deletion of the verbal frame or *sagen über* meaning *sagen zu* which are – or arguably are – provoked or intensified by language contact; the verbal frame, for example, is a typically German construction which is lost under the impact of Croatian, Hungarian, Romanian and Serbian. With some phenomena – like the deletion of the verbal frame – the impulse is already given in the basis dialects.

### 3 Unique phenomena due to different origins

Only in Zădăreni is the preposition *wegen* “because of” 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”. There are no other “Swabian” locations in which this phenomenon is adopted.

In the dialects of some villages in Hungary of Fuldish origin, ancient verbal forms which sound like perfect participles without suffixes replace the infinitive in conjunction with some modal verbs: *Das kann ich jetzt nicht so richtig ausgedrückt!* “I can’t express it that correctly now”, *wo man hat könnt Salonzucker gemacht* “where you could make candies”. There is also one village situated near Fuldish villages, Nagyárpád, which has an Alemannic origin but also shows this Fuldish phenomenon: *und die Weiber haben nachher das Blut gerührt, so gerührt, dass es nicht – zsamngstockt* “and the women were stirring the blood later, they were stirring like this, in order that it didn’t coagulate”.

Sometimes, conjunctions can be inflected: *wennst* “when you, if you”, *obst* “if you”, *weilst* “because you”. This is a Bavarian or East Franconian phenomenon (Harnisch 1989; Rowley 1988; 1997) which can also be found in Kničanin, a village with Palatinate origin, and in Mramorak, a village with Rhine-Franconian origin, for example: *Wennst was brauchst, kommst!* “If you need anything, come!”

In Low Franconian dialects, the plural is sometimes formed by *-s* (Schirmunski 1962): *Families* “families”, *Gemeindes* “villages”, *Doktors* “doctors”. This phenomenon also exists in Bulgăruș, a village with West Palatinate and Moselle-Franconian origin, in Elisabetin, a quarter of Timișoara with Bavarian-Austrian origin, in Kačarevo, a village with Swabian and Rhine Franconian origin, and in Mramorak: *Und waren sie zu fünft, jeder war woanders versteckelt, bei die deutsche Families* “And they were in a fivesome, each one was hidden somewhere else, with German families”, *Weil der Pfarrer hat nicht – nicht können kommen jeden Sonntag, weil der hat acht, äh – Gemeindes gehabt* “Because the clergyman couldn’t – couldn’t come on every Sunday, because he had eight, er – villages”, *Ihr habt auch Doktors gehabt, hier?* “You also had doctors here?” – etc.

The verb *geben* “(to) give” is also used as an auxiliary and replaces *werden* “(to) get”: *wir waren enteignet gegeben* “we had got dispossessed”, *die Enten, die sind schon drei, vier Wochen vorher gestopft gegeben* “the ducks, they have already been crammed three, four weeks before”. This phenomenon is nowadays typically Luxemburgish, southwest Moselle-Franconian and Rhine-Franconian (Nübling 2006). One could imagine that the phenomenon appears in locations with the relevant origin, but this supposition doesn’t hold up against the evidence – far from it! For the Rhine-Franconian village Semlac, I found 46 incidences of

*werden* as auxiliary but only one single one for *geben* in this function. The phenomenon of *geben* as an auxiliary verb cannot be found in Serbian villages – even in Rhine-Franconian villages like Bački Jarak, people do not use this form. In Rhine-Franconian/Moselle-Franconian villages, things are different: For the small town Sânnicolau Mare, I have 32 examples for *werden* as auxiliary but only two for *geben*, whereas there are eleven examples for *werden* and eight for *geben* in Sânpetru Mare und even 86 for *geben* but only eight for *werden* in Iecea Mare. This can only be explained by the impact of standard German in the towns. Interestingly, I found 23 incidences of *geben* as an auxiliary and only five of *werden* in this function in Iosifălău which has Palatinate/Bavarian origins so that one would not expect this result. It is not possible to explain this phenomenon by the basis dialects; it can only be explained by the contact between different varieties of German dialects in southeastern Europe. However, neither the towns using Bavarian-Austrian common speech like Lugoj or Reșița nor the village Gărîna which is of North Bavarian origin and is isolated in the Semenic Mountains nor Zădăreni which has a High Alemannic dialect adopt *geben* as an auxiliary verb – but they resist for different reasons: In the towns because of the impact of standard German, in Gărîna because of the remoteness of the village and in Zădăreni because this dialect is so different from the other “Swabian” dialects.

Some unique phenomena due to different origins of the ancestors of the villages and towns are adopted by the inhabitants of some other villages; however, people from the towns do not tend to adopt dialectal phenomena from the villages because the impact of standard Austrian German is much stronger here, and there are also geographically isolated villages like Gărîna which do not adopt phenomena from other “Swabian” dialects. The High Alemannic dialect of Zădăreni is different from all “Swabian” dialects; it does not have any impact on the other dialects, and at the same time, the other dialects do not seem to have an influence on it.

#### **4 Variation due to different language contacts**

In Hungary, in Serbian and in few Romanian regions with particularly strong Hungarian influence, people tend to iron out the difference of gender: *schönes, großes Christbaum* “beautiful, large Christmas tree”, *das Prozession* “the cortege”, *der Bürgermeisteramt* “the mayoralty”, *die Verkehr* “the traffic”; scilicet, there is no difference of gender in Hungarian. Sometimes, they also leave out the article: *Er war auch [ein] armer Mann* “He has also been [a] poor man”.

The influence of Hungarian also leads to graver lexical alterations in the aforementioned regions: The “Swabians” living there often integrate Hungarian nouns in their language but 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), for example. Furthermore, they integrate Hungarian conjunctions like *hanem* “but”.

In Vršac, Serbia, the “Swabians” also inflect some German nouns like Serbian ones: *Klinacen, Klinci* – German “klein”/“klin” “little” + Serbian *-ac*, pl. *-ci* = “boy”, “boys”: *Wir vier Klinacen!* “The four boys of us”, *Da sitzen wir jetzt beim Tisch beisammen, und unser vier – vier Klinci* “There we are sitting together around the table, and our four – four boys”.

In Osijek, Croatia, the “Swabians” integrate Croatian words, e.g. adverbs like *baš* “just”: *Sautanz haben wir nicht baš gehabt!* “we just didn’t have a “slaughter dance”” or the Croatian (or Serbian) word *nego* instead of the German conjunction *sondern* “but” or the comparative conjunction or particle *als* “than”: *Ja, ich mache doch das nicht wegen Euch – nego wegen mir!* “Well, I don’t do this because of you – but because of me!”, *Jetzt haben sie mehr Rechte nego [...] die Kroaten* “Now they have more rights than [...] the Croatians”. *Nego* is also used in Apatin, Kačarevo, Mramorak, Sivac and Vršac, for example. The inhabitants of Apatin and the few German inhabitants of Sivac use both the Hungarian word *hanem* and the Serbian word *nego*. A very interesting aspect is that in the interviews I conducted in Hungary, there is no single instance of *hanem*; the speakers in Hungary always use *sondern*. The corresponding Romanian words *ci* or *dar* “but” and *ca* or *decât* “than” are not used in the villages and towns located in Romania, and of course they aren’t in the three other states.

The use of substantives taken from the contact languages depends on the relevant region, but in Osijek, Apatin und some smaller Serbian villages, the “Swabians” also use many Croatian (or Serbian) conjunctions. In Apatin, they also use the Hungarian *hanem*, which isn’t used in Hungary. The Romanian language doesn’t have any impact as regards conjunctions, particles and adverbs.

## **5 Conclusion**

The “Swabian” dialects in southeastern Europe are not a dialectal continuum but a complicated combination of different varieties of German and the relevant contact languages; the varieties of German influence each other, but proximity to town, remoteness or radical differentness (Zădăreni) minimize the capacity to adopt phenomena from other dialects or to have an impact on them. However, there are common grammaticalized phenomena which are provoked or at least intensified by language contact. There is a huge impact of the relevant contact languages on “Swabian” dialects, and the influence of Hungarian, but also

Croatian and Serbian, is very strong, whereas the influence of Romanian is minimal and does not have any effects on conjunctions, particles and adverbs.

## References

- Bentz, M. (2008). Spracherhalt und Sprachwandel. Eine exemplarische Untersuchung am Donauschwäbischen. In *Berichte und Forschungen. Jahrbuch des Bundesinstituts für Kultur und Geschichte der Deutschen im östlichen Europa 15 (2007)*. Munich: Oldenbourg. [in print]
- Gehl, H., (2000). *Wörterbuch der donauschwäbischen Baugewerbe*. Stuttgart: Thorbecke.
- Gehl, H., (1997). *Wörterbuch der donauschwäbischen Bekleidungsgerbe*. Sigmaringen: Thorbecke.
- Gehl, H., (2003). *Wörterbuch der donauschwäbischen Landwirtschaft*. Stuttgart: Steiner.
- Gehl, H., (2005). *Wörterbuch der donauschwäbischen Lebensformen*. Stuttgart: Steiner.
- Harnisch, R. (1989). Die sogenannte „sogenannte Flexion der Konjunktionen“. Ein Paradigma aus der Bavaria thuringica. In E. Koller, W. Wegstein and N.R. Wolf (Eds.), *Bayerisch-österreichische Dialektforschung*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann.
- Nübling, D. (2006). Auf Umwegen zum Passivauxiliar – Die Grammatikalisierungspfade von GEBEN, WERDEN, KOMMEN und BLEIBEN im Luxemburgischen, Deutschen und Schwedischen. In C. Moulin and D. Nübling (Eds.), *Perspektiven einer linguistischen Luxemburgistik. Studien zu Diachronie und Synchronie*. Heidelberg: Winter.
- Rowley, A.R. (1988). Morphologie aus Syntax – natürlich. Zur Flexion der Nebensatzeinleiter in nordostbayerischen Dialekten. In W. Viereck (Ed.), *Verhandlungen des Internationalen Dialektologenkongresses Bamberg 1990*, Vol. III. Stuttgart: Steiner.
- Rowley, A.R. (1997). *Morphologische Systeme der nordbayerischen Mundarten in ihrer sprachgeographischen Verflechtung*. Stuttgart: Steiner.
- Schirmunski, V.M. (1962). *Deutsche Mundartkunde. Vergleichende Laut- und Formenlehre der deutschen Mundarten*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.