Language Maintenance and Language Death
Culture and Language Use
Studies in Anthropological Linguistics

CLU-SAL publishes monographs and edited collections, culturally oriented grammars and dictionaries in the cross- and interdisciplinary domain of anthropological linguistics or linguistic anthropology. The series offers a forum for anthropological research based on knowledge of the native languages of the people being studied and that linguistic research and grammatical studies must be based on a deep understanding of the function of speech forms in the speech community under study.

For an overview of all books published in this series, please see http://benjamins.com/catalog/clu

Editor

Gunter Senft
Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen

Volume 6

Language Maintenance and Language Death. The decline of Texas Alsatian by Karen A. Roesch
Language Maintenance and Language Death

The decline of Texas Alsatian

Karen A. Roesch

John Benjamins Publishing Company
Amsterdam / Philadelphia
Für Heinz
# Table of contents

List of tables xi  
List of figures xiii  
List of illustrations xv  

## CHAPTER ONE  
### Introduction  
1.1 Overview 1  
1.2 Methodology and data collection 5  
1.3 What is Texas Alsatian? 7  
  1.3.1 The land of origin 10  
  1.3.2 The Upper Rhenish donor dialect 11  
1.4 The decline of Texas German dialects 13  
  1.4.1 Linguistic homogeneity versus heterogeneity 16  
  1.4.2 Standard French and German Überdachung 17  
  1.4.3 Elsasser and Dietsche: Two cultural communities 18  
1.5 Adopted home of Texas Alsatian: Medina County 2000 20  
1.6 Participant profile 22  
  1.6.1 Speaker fluency 24  
  1.6.2 Language acquisition and fluency 26  
1.7 Contact with the European homeland and language use today 27  
1.8 Book overview 32  

## CHAPTER TWO  
### The sociohistorical context  
2.1 The ecology of language 35  
2.2 Beginnings: The historical context 38  
  2.2.1 German immigration to Texas 38  
  2.2.2 Immigration to Medina County 40  
  2.2.3 Henri Castro, Empresario 41  
  2.2.4 The founding of Castroville 43  
2.3 Socio-cultural contexts: Religion and education 45  
2.4 Political and economic contexts 50  
  2.4.1 Insulation 50
2.4.2 “Reawakening” 52
2.4.3 Verticalization vs. horizontalization 53
2.5 Sociolinguistic contexts 54
   2.5.1 Language use in early Castroville 54
   2.5.2 Diglossia and language shift in early Castroville 57
   2.5.3 Real and apparent-time analysis of 2009 participants 60
2.6 “Group vitality” and language maintenance and shift 64
2.7 Summary 66

CHAPTER THREE
The lexicon of Texas Alsatian 69
3.1 Introduction 69
3.2 Distinguishing Texas Alsatian lexically 70
3.3 Lexical borrowing 77
3.4 Lexical innovation and convergence 82
3.5 Code-switching 85
3.6 Summary 90

CHAPTER FOUR
The phonology of Texas Alsatian 93
4.1 Introduction 93
4.2 Phonological features of European Alsatian 94
   4.2.1 Regional German dialects in contact with Alsatian 95
   4.2.2 Distinguishing consonantal features of Alsatian 95
   4.2.3 Distinguishing vocalic features of Alsatian 97
   4.2.4 Alsatian regional varieties: Upper and lower Rhenish 97
4.3 Texas Alsatian 103
   4.3.1 Preservation of Alsatian vocalic features 103
   4.4.2 Preservation of consonantal features 111
   4.3.3 Phonological transference 119
4.4 Summary 120

CHAPTER FIVE
The morphosyntax of Texas Alsatian 123
5.1 Introduction 123
5.2 The standard German noun: Gender, case, and number 125
5.3 The Upper Rhenish noun: Gender, case, and number 128
5.4 The Texas Alsatian noun: Gender, case, and number 130
   5.4.1 Gender 130
   5.4.2 Case marking 133
5.4.3 Number and plural formation 140
5.4.4 The diminutive 144
5.4.5 Pronouns 145
5.5 The Upper Rhenish verb 151
5.6 The Texas Alsatian verb 156
  5.6.1 The present perfect tense 156
  5.6.2 Temporal auxiliaries 160
  5.6.3 Modal auxiliaries 161
  5.6.4 Word order in verb complements 163
5.7 Summary and analysis 166

CHAPTER SIX
Language attitudes 169
6.1 Introduction 169
6.2 Attitudes, feelings, beliefs 170
6.3 The Castroville Alsatians 174
6.4 Language use and attitudes toward “the other” 178
  6.4.1 The “other” 178
  6.4.2 The Texas German community: not “the other”? 181
6.5 The decline of Texas Alsatian 182
6.6 Preservation 185
6.7 Summary 188

CHAPTER SEVEN
Language maintenance and death 189
7.1 Introduction 189
7.2 Structural maintenance of the Upper Rhenish donor dialect(s) 190
7.3 Structural change and loss in Texas Alsatian 192
7.4 Texas Alsatian versus other Texas German varieties 193
7.5 Group identity markers for the Castroville Alsatian community 194
7.6 Attitudes, dispositions, and ideologies 195
7.7 The decline of Texas Alsatian 196
7.8 Implications for various research areas 198
  7.8.1 Implications for structural research on language maintenance 199
  7.8.2 Implications for sociolinguistic research on language maintenance 200
  7.8.3 Implications for research on linguistic change related to language death 201
  7.8.4 Implications for sociolinguistic research on language death 202
7.9 Concluding remarks 202
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Participant Profiles  
Appendix B: Alsatian Questionnaire  
Appendix C: TGDP Questionnaire  
Appendix D: Gilbert (1972) Sentences, Sample  
Appendix E: Eikel (1954) Sentences, Sample  
Appendix F: Interview Transcriptions, Sample

References  
Index
List of tables

Table 1.1  Sample demographics of Medina County communities 21
Table 1.2  Ancestry Groups 22
Table 1.3  Age distribution of participants 24
Table 1.4  Participant fluency 25
Table 2.1  Alsatian passengers on the Heinrich 43
Table 2.2  Marriages in D’Hanis 1910–1940 47
Table 2.3  Elected officials of July 12, 1848 (CCHA: 1983) 55
Table 2.4  Texas German language shift in Gillespie County 58
Table 3.1  Gilbert TxG data for SG -fällt (‘falls’) 73
Table 3.2  Roesch (2009) data for SG sieh (‘look’) and -fällt (‘falls’) 73
Table 3.3  Lexical examples from the Ellsasser Wordbuch 74
Table 3.4  Lexical distinctiveness for “horse” 76
Table 3.5  Lexical distinctiveness for “girl” 76
Table 3.6  Borrowing scale (Thomason 2001) 79
Table 3.7  Texas German for “lightning bug” 83
Table 3.8  Convergence of lexical items in Texas Alsatian 84
Table 4.1  Vowel lengthening in Upper Rhenish 101
Table 4.2  Backing and lowering of MHG ê 104
Table 4.3  Upper Rhenish [a, a, ë, ə] for Standard German [ɛ] 105
Table 4.4  The retention of MHG ê > a 107
Table 4.5  Retention of MHG long vowels i and û 108
Table 4.6  Upper Rhenish [i] for Standard German [ai] 108
Table 4.7  Upper Rhenish [y:] for Standard German [au] 109
Table 4.8  Rising and closing diphthongs in Upper Rhenish 110
Table 4.9  Upper Rhenish [y] for Standard German [y] 111
Table 4.10  Spirantization of intervocalic [b] 113
Table 4.11  Upper Rhenish [x] for Standard German [ç] 114
Table 4.12  The realization of /t/ in Texas Alsatian 118
Table 5.1  Masculine definite article declinations, der Mann 124
Table 5.2  SG Masculine noun inflection for case and number 126
Table 5.3  Upper Rhenish (Mulhouse) case and gender markings 128
Table 5.4  Plural formation in SG and URMul  129
Table 5.5  Texas Alsatian noun gender  131
Table 5.6  Resampling of gender assignment in Medina County  131
Table 5.7  Resampling of Texas Alsatian gender assignment  133
Table 5.8  URMul demonstrative forms  134
Table 5.9  Comparative resampling of demonstrative adjective “this”  135
Table 5.10  Comparative resampling of demonstrative adjective “that”  136
Table 5.11  Resampling of dative forms after two-way preposition auf  138
Table 5.12  Resampling of accusative after two-way preposition auf  139
Table 5.13  2009 Texas Alsatian plural formation  141
Table 5.14  Resampling of plural formation for Kopf (’head’)  142
Table 5.15  Resampling of plural formation for Topf (’pot’)  143
Table 5.16  Resampling of plural formation/Techteřa (’daughters’)  143
Table 5.17  Upper Rhenish personal pronouns  145
Table 5.18  Resampling of nominative personal pronoun wir (’we’)  146
Table 5.19  Resampling of first person pronouns mich, mir (’me’)  147
Table 5.20  Nominative personal pronoun ihr (’you’)  147
Table 5.21  Accusative personal pronoun sie (’her’)  148
Table 5.22  Dative personal pronoun ihr (’her’)  149
Table 5.23  Standard German personal relative pronouns  150
Table 5.24  Relative pronoun wu (’whom, that’)  150
Table 5.25  Upper Rhenish monosyllabic verbs  152
Table 5.26  Upper Rhenish verb endings  153
Table 5.27  Infinitive and past participle verb forms  153
Table 5.28  Temporal auxiliaries  154
Table 5.29  Present perfect vs. preterite for SG ankommen (’to arrive’)  157
Table 5.30  Present perfect versus preterite for SG gehen (’to go’)  158
Table 5.31  Present perfect versus preterite for SG sein (’to be’)  159
Table 5.32  Time adverbial placement in Texas Alsatian  165
List of figures

Figure 1.1 “Can you understand Texas German?” 9
Figure 1.2 “Can Texas Germans understand you?” 10
Figure 1.3 Speakers’ Year of Birth 23
Figure 1.4 Participant fluency/Acquisition age 27
Figure 1.5 “With whom do you speak Alsatian now?” 29
Figure 1.6 “How often do you speak Alsatian?” 30
Figure 1.7 “Where do you speak Alsatian?” 31
Figure 2.1 Diglossia in Early New Braunfels (Boas 2009a: 46) 58
Figure 2.2 Diglossia in Early Castroville 59
Figure 2.3 Language shift 60
Figure 2.4 “When did you learn Alsatian?” 61
Figure 2.5 Use of Alsatian as a child 63
Figure 2.6 Use of Alsatian as a young adult 63
Figure 6.1 “Alsatian is...” 173
Figure 6.2 “Alsatian is ... of my identity” 176
Figure 6.3 “What defines your Alsatian heritage?” 177
Figure 6.4 “New residents are welcomed in our community” 180
Figure 6.5 “Do you consider yourself part of the TxG community?” 181
Figure 6.6 “How is the Texas German community different?” 182
Figure 6.7 “Why do you think Alsatian is spoken less these days?” 183
Figure 6.8 “Texas Alsatian should be preserved” 184
Figure 6.9 “Texas Alsatian will be preserved” 184
Figure 6.10 “I can play an important part in preserving Alsatian” 186
Figure 6.11 “How to preserve the Alsatian heritage” 187
Figure 6.12 Institutional support 187
## List of illustrations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illustration 1.1</th>
<th>Upper Rhine ancestral villages</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illustration 2.1</td>
<td>The Western German Settlements (Boas 2009a: 37)</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustration 2.2</td>
<td>Castro's Colonies (Weaver 1985: 118)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustration 4.1</td>
<td>Major Alsatian Isoglosses</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustration 4.2</td>
<td>Upper Rhenish [a] for Standard German [e]</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustration 5.1</td>
<td>Present perfect forms of haben (Philipp &amp; Weider 2002)</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

... with the exception of Alsatian and East Friesland Low German in Medina County ... it is indeed a rare event to find someone who can consciously speak a type of language markedly different from that which prevails among his neighbors ...

– Glenn Gilbert (1972: 1)

1.1 Overview

This study constitutes the first in-depth description and analysis of Texas Alsatian as spoken in Medina County, Texas, in the twenty-first century. The Alsatian dialect was transported to Texas in 1842, when the entrepreneur Henri Castro recruited colonists from the Alsace to fulfill the Texas Republic’s stipulations for populating his land grant located to the west of San Antonio. Texas Alsatian is a dialect distinct from other varieties of Texas German (Gilbert 1972: 1, Salmons 1983: 191) and is mainly spoken in Eastern Medina County in and around the city of Castroville.1 With a small and aging speaker population, Texas Alsatian has not been transmitted to the next generation and will likely survive for only another two to three decades. Despite this endangered status, Texas Alsatian appears to be a language undergoing death with minimal change.2 This study provides both a descriptive account of Texas Alsatian and discussions of sociolinguistic processes linked to ethnic identity and loyalty which have enabled the maintenance of this distinct German dialect for 150 years. Language maintenance shall refer to the preservation of a speech community’s ancestral language from generation to generation (Winford 2003: 11).

Texas Alsatian speakers have maintained several distinctive lexical, grammatical, and phonological features of their Alsatian ancestral language for six

---

1. Boas (2009a: 2) refers to Texas German as a language in functional and distributional contexts because it functions as one when juxtaposed with English in Texas, but as a dialect when comparing its linguistic properties with other German varieties. The distinction is maintained for Texas Alsatian in this study.

2. That is, without considerable structural and semantic loss. Many accounts of languages in contact situations and typologies focus upon the structural and semantic loss (e.g., simplification, regularization) in dying languages (e.g. Dorian 1978, 1981, 1982a, 1982b, Dressler 1988, Campbell & Muntzel 1989, Wolfram 2002, Brenzinger 1992a, Tsunoda 2005, etc.).
generations despite intense contact with English. To investigate the extent of preservation, this study first identifies the main European donor dialect of the Texas Alsatian community and establishes main linguistic features which distinguish it from the surrounding standard-near Texas German dialects. The extent of the preservation of these features by current Texas Alsatian speakers is then examined based on data collected from 2007 through 2009 and substantiated by Gilbert’s (1972) data collected in Medina County in the 1960s.

When examining languages in contact situations, Weinreich proposes that the components of an explanatory framework must include (1) “purely structural considerations, (2) psychological reasons and (3) socio-cultural factors” (1953: 44). Previous studies of Texas German (e.g., Eikel 1954, 1966a–b, Gilbert 1972, Guion 1996, Fuller & Gilbert 2003, Boas 2003, 2005, 2009a, etc.) have mainly focused upon a linguistic description or structural analysis, but this study also inquires into attitudes and ideologies instrumental to the maintenance of Texas Alsatian revolving around language and cultural identity, as well as those attitudes now contributing to its rapid decline.³

This study informs research on several levels (specific implications for these different research areas are addressed in the conclusion). In general, it contributes to the body of research on linguistic developments (maintenance, change, loss) and sociolinguistic processes which motivate these developments. Languages in contact often act as a “natural laboratory,” in which processes and linguistic changes not so evident in monolingual situations can be studied (Matras 1998: 282). In addition, this study provides comparative data for contact phenomena observed in other language contact situations, such as structural attrition, lexical borrowing, and code-switching. Texas Alsatian also conforms to the paradigm of an endangered dialect undergoing minimal change and offers data for comparative studies with other German-American dialects (cf. Huffines 1989, Born 1994, Keel 1994, Nützel 1998, Louden 2003, Nicolini 2004, Boas 2009a), as well as for studies of German Sprachinseln in other countries (Damke 1997, Berend 2003, Clyne 2003).

More specifically, it provides a unique diachronic measuring stick for the study of language change in Texas German dialects, as it is possible to trace the donor dialects of current Texas Alsatian speakers to specific villages in the Alsace, which is often impossible to ascertain for other varieties of Texas German. This provides data for evaluating developments in the Texas Alsatian dialect more accurately in terms of linguistic processes involved in language change, such as attrition and

³ Salmons (1983) and Boas (2005, 2009a) include an analysis of socio-cultural and historical factors influencing the decline of Texas German in their research. Guion (1996) also makes an argument for psychological motivation as the cause for certain morphological innovations in the speech of younger Texas Germans in Gillespie County.
related questions of cause, i.e., internally or externally-motivated (contact-driven) change. Most importantly, however, this investigation offers a case study of a dialect which resisted absorption into any developing Texas German koiné, which Gilbert proposes in his 1972 study (1972: 1–2). Siegel (1985: 363) defines koiné as the stabilized result of mixing of linguistic subsystems such as regional or literary dialects. It usually serves as a lingua franca ... and is characterized by a mixture of features of these varieties and most often by reduction or simplification.

Boas (2009a: 2) argues against the formation of a koiné or what Trudgill (2004) terms a “New World dialect” and concludes that Texas German only completed the beginning stages of this proposed model.

Only minimal research exists to date on the linguistic structure of Texas Alsatian and there is no known study addressing sociolinguistic aspects of the speech community. This study overcomes this lack of data by addressing the following questions:

1. What are some linguistic features of the European donor dialect(s) that have been maintained in Texas Alsatian?
2. How does Texas Alsatian differ from its European donor dialect(s)?
3. How does Texas Alsatian differ from other varieties of Texas German?
4. Which linguistic features and extra-linguistic factors serve as identity markers for the community of Texas Alsatian speakers?
5. Which ideologies and speaker attitudes have contributed to the linguistic preservation of Texas Alsatian?
6. Which extra-linguistic factors are triggering the rapid decline of Texas Alsatian in progress?

The breath of the topic undertaken in this study and its largely descriptive nature necessarily involve exploring various theoretical frameworks from a variety of perspectives relevant to language contact situations. These are introduced and discussed within a brief literature review in each chapter according to their relevance to the chapter topic. For example, the linguistic preservation of Texas Alsatian is investigated within sociolinguistic frameworks in Chapter Six. Here, Texas Alsatian is examined within the concept of language as a “badge of identity” (Epps 2006). Breton et al. (2000) create a taxonomy of ethnic behavior in their study of ethnic identity in Canada which is insightful and facilitates the discussion on linguistic maintenance. Breton et al. (2000: 35–37) distinguish between internal and external aspects of ethnic behavior. External aspects are observable behavior, such as speaking in an ethnic language, practicing ethnic traditions, participation in personal ethnic networks, institutional and voluntary organizations, and events sponsored by ethnic organizations, while internal aspects are subjective and include attitudes, ideas, images, and feelings. The Alsatian Questionnaire developed in
2007 for this study investigates these internal and external aspects of ethnic identity and provides data which supports the importance of speaker attitudes in the maintenance and death of the ancestral language.

Several seminal studies on Texas German serve as a common thread for the analysis of Texas Alsatian throughout the study. Gilbert’s (1972) linguistic survey of Texas German of thirty-one counties in the 1960s included Medina County and provides the only diachronic data on Texas Alsatian. Gilbert (1972: 1, 18) makes reference to the Alsatians and Low Alemannic dialect features of eastern Medina County in his introduction, but presents no specific analysis of the dialect. Several distinctive Alsatian phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical features are evident in Gilbert’s maps, however, which often show Medina County participants utilizing forms that are only rarely found in the remaining thirty counties. Gilbert (1972: 17–18) also notes Alsatian lineage for thirteen of the twenty-seven Medina County participants in his field notes on the participants (see §3.2 for specific information on the languages spoken by his participants). Judging by the birthdates provided, many of his informants represent the parent generation of participants in this study and therefore provide important generational data for identifying linguistic change.4

As early as the 1940s, Fred Eikel interviewed inhabitants of New Braunfels in Comal County, Texas. He published his findings on the phonology, morphology, and syntax of New Braunfels German in a series of publications (Eikel 1949, 1966a, 1966b, 1967). Boas (2009a) builds upon earlier data from Eikel (1954) and Gilbert (1972) together with current data from the Texas German Dialect Archive to present a more complete picture of the Texas German language and its decline.5

Whereas Boas (2009a) focuses on the predominant Texas German variety found in New Braunfels whose donor dialects are those of north-central Germany and mutually intelligible with Standard German (Boas 2009a: 2), this study investigates an enclave of immigrants from a different German dialect area located today in eastern France, which differentiates itself from the Texas German spoken in the western settlements in many respects and is only mutually intelligible with other Texas German dialects after prolonged contact. Boas (2009a) also investigates attitudes pertinent to the decline of Texas German, whose conclusions serve as an important base for comparison with Texas Alsatian. He concludes that the

---

4. Eight participants were identified as #s 9, 19–21, 23–25, 27, born 1879, 1884, 1893, 1901, 1907, 1914, 1919, and 1920, respectively. Gilbert (1972: 17–18) identified five additional participants (#s 4, 7, 8, 12, 18, born 1894, 1916, 1886, 1892 and 1894, respectively) who had Alsatian-speaking parents or grandparents.

5. Recent research on Texas German directed by Boas (2003, 2006; Boas et al. 2010) has resulted in the creation of the Texas German Dialect Archive, a database established for research and preservation purposes and now published online at www.tgdp.org.
continued stigmatization due to earlier sociolinguistic developments and the current low practical value of Texas German will lead to its disappearance in the next three to four decades (Boas 2009a: 291).

1.2 Methodology and data collection

Thirty-six Texas Alsatian speakers of varying linguistic competence were interviewed in Castroville and environs from January 2007 through May 2009 to record and analyze the extant Texas Alsatian dialect spoken in Medina County, Texas. Nine of these either declined to speak Alsatian during the interview or preferred to speak English (“formerly fluent” speakers, Dorian 1982b). As a result, only twenty-seven complete narrative samples in Alsatian were procured. For comparative purposes, ten Texas German speakers from the adjacent communities of Hondo and Quihi, and ten European Alsatian speakers from the Upper and Lower Rhine Departments in France were interviewed. Community historians, priests, former mayors, and other residents involved in historical preservation efforts were also included in the data collection process. Additional interviews were conducted in two other smaller centers of Alsatian heritage, D’Hanis, another Castro colony established twenty miles west of Castroville in 1847, and LaCoste, five miles southeast of Castroville, founded when the railroad pushed through the county in the 1880s. Further references to Castroville and Texas Alsatians include the speakers in these communities.

The initial search criterion for participants was self-identification by the participant as a native speaker of Texas Alsatian, and included all levels of competence. Community contact was established through the local Chamber of Commerce, which recommended the current leader of an Alsatian language class featured in their Visitors Guide. The snowball technique (Johnstone 2000: 92; Milroy & Gordon 2003: 32), involving the use of informant social networks to identify potential participants, was employed to make subsequent contacts, as it was often difficult to convince Texas Alsatian speakers of the importance of participating in the documentation of their language. Recruitment of participants was made even more difficult due to issues of health or the absence of a telephone in the household. At an early point in the interview process, spouses who spoke Texas German were included in order to collect comparative data.

Similar methods of data collection to those used by the Texas German Dialect Project (TGDP) (Boas et al., 2010) were utilized to facilitate future comparisons with Texas German. Interviews were conducted in the spirit of documenting for preservation purposes, but with an additional goal of establishing effective preservation strategies for Texas Alsatian in the Castroville community. Phonological,
morphological, syntactic, and lexical data were obtained from participants using open-ended interview techniques and elicitation tasks. In order to elicit a controlled data set (especially useful for phonology), participants were asked to produce Texas Alsatian translations for a list of English lexical and grammatical items compiled by Gilbert in the 1960s (Appendix D) to provide a diachronic basis for comparison. In some cases, the Eikel (1954) list (Appendix E) was incorporated when time and health of the informants permitted. The interview spanned approximately 2–2½ hours and covered a variety of topics, such as language use, family history, and childhood experiences.

All interviews were digitally recorded, coded, and stored for transcription and analysis (see Appendix F for sample transcriptions). These Texas Alsatian interviews are archived for academic and instructional use in the Texas German Dialect Archive (Boas 2006). Transcriptions of narratives were recorded in a modified German orthography to facilitate rapid comprehension. These also include the additional graphemes à [ɔ] and ř [r] (the latter used by Gilbert 1972 for the apical trill) for contrastive comparison with Standard German, which, for example, does not have a velarized [a] phoneme. IPA phonetic transcriptions were used occasionally to facilitate comparison with Standard German or Texas German.6

Each participant also completed a written biographical survey eliciting personal data such as religious affiliation and educational level, as well as opinions, feelings, and beliefs towards aspects of their language. Initially, a written survey developed by the TGDP (Appendix C) was used for this purpose in the absence of a more Alsatian-specific one, and provides the only data available on four of the participants in this study. However, to address Texas Alsatians as a community distinct from other western Texas German communities, I developed a survey (Appendix B) which treats Texas Alsatian as a separate dialect and specifically addresses attitudes unique to the Alsatian-speaking community, such as views on the use, prestige, and grammaticality of their own dialect versus other varieties of Texas German. Thirty-six Alsatian questionnaires (including four from non-speakers) and four TGDP questionnaires which provided overlapping information were completed and provide the basis for the analysis on attitudes and language choice in Chapter Six. In an attempt to expand the database, the questionnaires were distributed to the memberships of the Castro Colonies Heritage Association, Chamber of Commerce, and the representative Catholic churches in the area, with almost no response.

6. Gilbert (1972) does not consistently use phonetic transcriptions, preferring instead to utilize certain “lead forms” or phonemic transcriptions for vowels. On the other hand, he does transcribe certain items phonetically, such as those for /r/, when the analysis focuses upon the allophonic realization of a particular phoneme.
Questions have been raised as to the reliability of self-reported data and to the limitations of categorical responses typical of written questionnaires (Milroy & Gordon 2003: 52). To compensate somewhat for the limitations of this data collection method, many of these same questions were posed in the interview sessions. Additional comment sections were periodically spaced throughout the questionnaire. The questionnaire responses are displayed by number instead of percentage in data tables under each chart in consideration of the relatively small sample number, but percentages are calculated and used when comparing data with other studies in order to facilitate comparison with varying sample sizes.

The Observer’s Paradox (Labov 1972) should also be taken into consideration when viewing data collected during the open-ended interviews and translation tasks. Even though I was acknowledged fairly quickly as a semi-insider (see §6.4), the participants were aware of the specific goal to document their ancestral language, and exercised great care to produce Alsatian lexical items versus perhaps more frequently-used English loanwords, especially in the translation tasks. To offset this “observer’s paradox,” I conducted open-ended interviews which included “getting to know” the participant and his interests, in order to elicit as “natural” (Wolfson 1997) a sample as possible. I also attended many formal and informal Alsatian community events in Castroville and the French Alsace as a participant observer, such as lunches, celebrations, and the local men’s Kaffeklatsch, which literally translates as “coffee gossip.” In Castroville, these are groups of men within the Texas Alsatian community who gather around a cup of coffee in the morning or afternoon to discuss various public or personal events. They often switch back and forth between Texas Alsatian and English in their discussions depending upon the fluency of the members attending. Similar groups meet in other Texas German communities such as Fredericksburg.

1.3 What is Texas Alsatian?

Historically, Alsatian was spoken by the Alamans, a major tribe of the Herminones who occupied Southern Germany and parts of Austria in the third century, then spread into Switzerland and the Alsace region (Waterman 1991: 43, Vassberg 1989: 21).7 Upper Rhenish varieties of the Alsatian dialect were brought to Texas by immigrants in the 1840s from border areas of the triangle created by France, Switzerland, and Germany. The Alsatian dialect is still extant in present-day France and differs measurably from the north and central German dialects in its lexicon,

7. The Franks occupied most of Gaul in the 5th and 6th centuries and adopted the Romance languages in areas where they constituted a minority. This, in turn, eventually created a Franco-Germanic linguistic border which does not represent today’s political borders (Vassberg 1989: 20).
phonology, and morphosyntax, although all German dialects share a common structure and lexical stock. It is important to note that Alsatian was predominantly a spoken language with rare examples of written texts at the time of immigration to Texas and is not supported by a standardized variety. Keller (1961) notes very little dialect literature before 1870. Today, Alsatian’s main communicative medium is still the spoken word and it remains a non-standardized language with multiple spoken varieties in the Alsace.

Due to extended contact with English and Texas German in Medina County, a spoken form has emerged over the past century in the speech communities clustered in and around Castroville which will be referred to as Texas Alsatian. This variety is characterized by occasional lexical and phonological borrowings from English and Texas German.

There is no standard form spoken by all of the participants. Variations which were either present in the speech of the original immigrants or which developed within various communities are well-represented. Several of the participants pointed to this variation, but could not pinpoint the exact features. They noted that “they just speak different over in [town].” The following segment from one participant’s (#234) narrative provides an introductory look at the Texas Alsatian dialect of Castroville:

I hän ñäs gschaft in Santön mit a [bunch] a wieber... sie sin iweřàll ovagànga un g’wohnt un mol a Tàg hän eini g’sait zü mir, wie kumms ñs dü nix saisch? Wu bisch dü g’sei? I hän gesait, “Ninzihn [mile] vü Santön fer ñchzin Johř un se:bř [mile] süd vüm wu ich gwo:nt bin. Dann hän i kiːʃota un ich bin dert scho sitř ich ñchzin Johř âlt g’sei bin.” Die hän nur d’Kopf g’schüttelt. Dàs isch àweř a dummi Fřoi, die hän g’dàcht. (laughs) [No], si hän nitt gloibt, ñs ich nia àhna gànga (bin)...

‘I worked in San Antonio with a bunch of women...they went everywhere and had lived everywhere and one time, one day one of them said to me, “Why don’t you say anything? Where have you been? I said, “(I’ve been) nineteen miles from San Antonio for eighteen years and seven miles south from where I lived. Then I married and I’ve been there since I was eighteen years old.” They only shook their heads. That is really a stupid woman, they thought. (laughs) No, they didn’t believe that I’d never been anywhere.’

Some Texas Alsatian (TxAls) lexical, phonological, and morphosyntactic differences from Standard German (SG), such as the SG past participle for sein (‘to be’) gewesen versus the TxAls g’sei, or SG aber versus TxAls àweř are immediately evident to the reader familiar with German. These differences will be discussed in further detail in Chapters Three, Four, and Five.

8. Transcriptions are in a modified German orthography, unless specific phonetic comparisons are being drawn. The grapheme r generally represents an apical trill and the grapheme à represents a highly-velarized a, as in saw, or IPA [ɾ].
Although many native German speakers generally seem to be able to understand the Alsatian dialect, Texas German speakers appear to experience difficulty in comprehending their Texas Alsatian neighbors. My own field experience alerted me to this difficulty. Initially, I spoke Standard German during my interviews, but soon discovered it was difficult for them to understand me and vice versa. I began learning Alsatian, but even slight phonological and lexical variations in my pronunciation seemed to adversely affect comprehension. To investigate this intelligibility between Texas German dialects, Question #17 on the Alsatian Questionnaire asked Texas Alsatian speakers whether they could understand Texas Germans. Figure 1.1 displays the responses of the thirty-two Texas Alsatian speakers:

The speakers who responded with “always” or “often” were determined to have had contact with Texas German in the home (spouse) or Standard German in foreign language education (#s 202, 241, 242, 248, E.B.). As I had thought to observe several situations where the Texas German speaker could not understand Texas Alsatian, a further question “Can Texas Germans understand you when you speak Alsatian?” was asked in the following survey question. The responses differ only slightly and are shown in Figure 1.2.

Both charts indicate that Texas German and Texas Alsatian are only somewhat mutually intelligible except in cases where there has been long and intense contact, such as with a spouse or parent who speaks the other dialect. It is highly likely that

---

9. I conducted a small spontaneous experiment and introduced a Texas Alsatian informant to a Texas German speaker. The Texas German could not understand the Texas Alsatian, but the Texas Alsatian, who has several Texas German friends with whom he speaks, was able to understand her.
this unintelligibility plays some role in the separation which exists between the two dialect communities.

The next section introduces certain socio-historical facts on the land of origin, the Alsace, which aid in understanding the socio-cultural context particular to Texas Alsatian.

1.3.1 The land of origin

Political boundaries are constantly in a state of flux, but within the last two hundred years, the Alsace and neighboring Lorraine on the west side of the upper Rhine across from Germany have been “disputed, coveted, [and] shuffled back and forth” by Germany and France (Hessini 1981: 11), as it sits at one of Europe’s major crossroads, i.e., at the juncture of the north-south route along the Rhine and the east-west route Paris-Munich-Vienna.

After a relatively long period of governance under France after the Thirty Years War (1618–1648), the Alsace and Lorraine were claimed in 1871 by Prussia, the declared victor of the Franco-Prussian War and political seat of the German Confederation (Goff et al. 2008). In 1919, the Alsace-Lorraine was returned to France as part of the reparations of the Versailles Treaty after Germany’s defeat in WWI (1914–1918). Two decades later, Hitler marched into France in the beginning years of WWII (1939–1945), after which the Alsace-Lorraine was occupied by Germany. When Germany was defeated in 1945, the Alsace-Lorraine was returned to France, and has since remained under its governance.

*The “not applicable” response signifies respondents who noted they had never spoken Alsatian with a Texas German.

Figure 1.2 “Can Texas Germans understand you?”
Chapter One. Introduction

It is important to note that political borders do not necessarily reflect linguistic borders. Although the Alsace was directly under the rule of France at the time of Castro's recruitment in the 1840s, most of the rural population in the Alsace still spoke Alsatian, a German dialect, although French was making inroads as the language of business and culture (Vassberg 1989: 60–1). Full assimilation was seen as a matter of national security by the central government (Craig 1984: 22). However, the majority of Alsatian peasants and urban workers, which constituted four-fifths of the population, viewed French as the language of the rich and saw no conflict between their German dialect and French patriotism (Craig 1984: 24). This is an important ideology which the first colonists most likely carried with them to their new home in Texas.

Erny (2003: 125) reports that “by the end of Louis-Philippe’s reign (1830–1848) a majority of the peasantry could neither read nor write and spoke only a dialect.” Schools in remote villages only existed due to the dedication of certain orders of nuns dedicated to teaching and healing, such as the Sisters of Divine Providence. For example, the head of the Sisters of Divine Providence motherhouse in Castroville, Mother St. Andrew (Louise Feltin), taught in Alsatian village schools in Krautergersheim, Epfig, Heiligenberg, and Batzendorf before being recruited by Father Dubuis for missionary work in Texas (Langford 2007).

Today’s Alsace region is divided into two main administrative “departments” or regional districts roughly dividing the Alsace in half, called the Bas-Rhin (‘Lower Rhine’), with its administrative capital, Strasbourg, and the Haut-Rhin (‘Upper Rhine’), with its administrative capital, Mulhouse (Vassberg 1989: 19). These two political divisions also mark the general linguistic area of two regional dialects which shall be termed Lower Rhenish and Upper Rhenish. Upper Rhenish is the main donor dialect of Texas Alsatian.

1.3.2 The Upper Rhenish donor dialect

The Medina County Alsatians are knowledgeable in their local history, ancestral origin, and linguistic heritage. The introduction to the Ellsasser Wordbuch (Tschirhart 1981), a locally compiled Texas-Alsatian dictionary, states:

The Alsatian language spoken in Castroville has scarcely changed since 1844...this dialect comes from the Mulhouse region of Alsace, and present-day people from Castroville have no difficulty in communicating with their friends and distant relatives in France.

According to the participants’ statements and historical sources determining specific ancestral villages (e.g., CCHA 1983, Laybourn 1986, Erny 1999, THC 2002, Smith 2004), it is possible not only to pinpoint the Upper Rhine Department as the