

## **Are confessional and administrative borders relevant to the areal dynamics of syntactical variants? Swiss German dialects under observation.**

CLAUDIA BUCHELI BERGER  
*University of Zurich*

Swiss German dialects are used in the German speaking part of Switzerland for every day communication by a large amount of the population. Geographically, culturally and politically the (small) territory splits into many different parts. It has become a kind of 'tradition' of the Swiss dialectologists to ask for the correlations between the areal distribution of the dialectal features and the external factors. In my paper, I will present how the areal partitions of Swiss German dialects morphology and syntax are actually influenced by two factors A and B and, surprisingly, hardly by factor C:

A. The accomplishment of the segmentations of the area under investigation into zones that oppose west vs. east or north vs. south. They had already been described for lexical, morphological and phonetic material (Hotzenkcherle 1984 and SDS) as main areal pattern, forming echelons of isoglosses in either of the two cardinal directions. Recently gathered data will show that morphology and syntax tend to adapt to this basic patterns. Especially the west-east opposition seems to be attractive.

B. The administrative-cantonal borders and the confessional borders (that are sometimes identical, sometimes different) stop or decelerate the intrusion of new variants. Further, one variant that previously was a part of a varying zone can be enhanced in a certain canton or confessional zone i.e. competition can be installed on one side of a border. Recently gathered data will show that isoglosses tend to drift as near as possible to the administrative-confessional borders.

C. Geography in the narrow sense i.e. topographical items like lakes, mountain chains or rivers play a minor role in the areal pattern or the diffusion of variants. However, the division of the territory into valleys that are acceded from one side and close on the other side continuous to be important for diffusion.

For example, the actual areal distribution of the prepositional marking of indirect objects (NP in dative case) will be explained to be due mainly to confessional influence. A complex interaction of a former situation of facultative variation and a confessional mentality influence created the actual situation that the preposition hardly shows up in protestant cantons (example 1) whereas it has nearby become obligatory in the catholic zones in the centre (example 2):

(1) *Aber ig ha doch das Buch dir gschänkt!* Frauenkappelen BE (west, protestant)

(2) *Aber ich ha doch das Buech i deer gschänkt!* Sempach LU (centre, catholic) In the canton of Lucerne, 85.7 % of the answers (n=182) contain a prepositional dative object whereas in the canton of Berne (n=650) only 0.4% of the answers do so, even when the dative NP is in contrastive focus, the best context for it.

Based on these findings, I will finally raise the question how one has to model that general areal drift. Theories of diachronic change propose the model of a continuous spread in space. The theory of the waves ("Wellentheorie" following Johannes Schmidt) supposes that a maximal pressure of change spreads from a central point like a wave to its environments, loosing step by step of its drive and assertiveness. In the dialectal pattern I will describe, one will have to model how the mental or linguistic pressure pushes dialects far away from a centre i.e. on the outermost line of the spread to give up variation in the way the 'centre' behaves. As my finding is that very often the varying zones change (diminish, shift, one variant is enhanced etc.) a model of attrition of the outermost lines or the varying zones of a spread has to be discussed. Do the actual confessional and/or administrative borders have a (mental) force (of linguistic) attrition?