

## A DIALECT IN SEARCH OF ITS PLACE

The Use of Texas German  
in the Public Domain

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This study investigates how the use of Texas German, established as the regional dominant language for upward of 100,000 speakers at its peak in the early 1900s, has declined over the past century, and why. Once considered one of the major languages of the Lone Star State, Texas German (henceforth: TxG) is now in its sixth and final generation of fluent speakers.<sup>1</sup> As this study illustrates, TxG used to play a vital role in both public and private domains, where it was the preferred means of communication among the descendants of German immigrants.<sup>2</sup> Of particular importance is the preferred use of TxG in different private and public domains, which declined dramatically in favor of English during the years following World War I. More specifically, it is argued in this paper that before World War I TxG—and not Standard German—was the more widespread language variety among the descendants of German settlers and their non-German neighbors.

The chapter is structured as follows. Section two gives a brief overview of German immigration to Texas and the subsequent development of the TxG speech community. Using data from Salmons (1983), Nicolini (2004), and Salmons & Lucht (2004), section three discusses the use of TxG, Standard German, and English in a number of public domains before and after World War I. Section four introduces new data on language use in different public domains to illustrate the declining use of TxG vis-à-vis English over the past

eighty years. Section five presents a summary and important suggestions for further research.

### Historical Overview

German immigrants started settling in Texas in the 1830s, with larger groups arriving in the 1840s due to a large-scale immigration effort of the *Adelsverein* ("Society of Noblemen") (Biesele 1930), which recruited its settlers primarily from the Duchy of Nassau. Throughout the remainder of the 19th century, large numbers of immigrants also came from Alsace as well as the present-day German states of Hesse, Lower Saxony, and Thuringia, among others.<sup>3</sup> The result of this large-scale immigration was the establishment of the so-called German-belt, which encompasses the area between Gillespie and Medina Counties in the west, Bell and Williamson Counties in the north, Burleson, Washington, Austin, and Fort Bend Counties in the east, and DeWitt, Karnes, and Wilson Counties in the south (see Boas 2005).<sup>4</sup>

Although most German immigrants settled in the German-belt, not all settlements were exclusively German. That is, in parts of the Hill Country (Gillespie County and Kendall County) the German population numbered 75% and more in 1870, whereas in other areas the German population was only about 20% (DeWitt County) or 6% (Goliad County) (see Gilbert 1978). This distribution of German settlers indicates that the German belt was not a consistently German-dominated area, but rather a conglomeration of numerous German-dominated *Sprachinseln* ('speech islands') that were spread throughout central Texas. Based on Jordan's (1970) map of population origin in Texas, Gilbert (1978) summarizes the ethnic mix of central Texas as follows:

In addition to German ethnic enclaves, Jordan's map shows areas settled predominantly by old stock Anglo-Americans (....), old stock Afro-Americans, persons of Spanish surname, American Indians, Wends (Sorbs, Lusatians), Swedes, Norwegians, Danes, Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, and Italians. [Gilbert 1978, 22]

Despite the geographic discontinuity of the German-speaking *Sprachinseln*, two important trends emerged during the latter part of the 19th century.

The first trend was the establishment of a stable linguistic situation with German being the dominant language in virtually all public and private domains. English was typically not learned until children entered school. Among adults, English was primarily used by men in business settings when traveling outside of German-speaking areas when they had to interact with non-German speakers. As Wilson (1977) points out:

Generations of Texans, though native born, lived out their entire lives as Germans—that is, they spoke German in their homes, they had their own German communities with their own churches and private schools, their newspapers were in German, they were baptized, married, and buried in German (and the official documents of these events were in German), and their graves have lengthy inscriptions (Bible verses, poetry, etc.) in their beloved mother tongue. Thus German was not only their home language but their official language for all private and community purposes. Only when they had official dealings at the county or state level did they have to use English. [Wilson 1977, 50]

The second trend was that newcomers were often assimilated linguistically (see Salmons 1983: 188) because most Texas Germans did usually not speak English or the newcomers' first language (e.g. Wendish, Spanish, Polish, Czech, etc.). As such, TxG served as the primary lingua franca among descendants of German immigrants as well as members of other ethnic groups.

This relatively stable linguistic situation began to change towards the end of World War I when English-only laws prescribed the use of English in schools (Salmons 1983, Guion 1996). One of the results of this legislation was that children entering the first grade were confronted with a new language to which they had to adopt very quickly in order to succeed. The children's difficulties as well as a general wave of anti-German sentiments due to World War I led many to limit their use of TxG to the home or with friends. A significant number of parents decided not to pass their first language on to their children because they wanted their children to succeed in school and in their professional lives (Guion 1996, Boas 2003). According to Salmons (1983), the years between the two World Wars are best characterized in terms of a diglossic situation where English was established as a high form (H) in most public domains (schools, newspapers, work place), whereas TxG was primarily used at home among family, friends, and neighbors.

Due to World War II, German underwent another era of low prestige, which in turn led to an eventual language shift in favor of English. Children who had been schooled in English felt more comfortable with this prestigious language and continued to use TxG (if they had learned it at all) only on occasion (Salmons 1983, Guion 1996, Boas 2003). Most of the churches that had offered regular services in German eventually switched to English by the end of the 1950s with only occasional services held in German throughout the 1960s. While some parents continued to raise their children in TxG throughout the 1940s, intergenerational transmission ceased to take place during the 1950s. Demographic factors also played an important role in the language shift to English, according to Salmons:

An expanded radius of activity gave the younger generation more opportunities to use English: more jobs outside of the TxG-speaking areas, the military, higher education, all in addition to the practical and economic advantages of being primarily English-speaking. The mobility that took more Germans away from the German-speaking areas also brought more non-Germans into those areas. [Salmons 1983, 188]

These developments led Salmons (1983) to the conclusion that "TxG seems to be strongest in private domains, among friends, family, neighbors." In addition, Salmons notes, "among more public domains, workplaces and shops seem to fare best in use of TxG." (1983, 190) At the end of his investigation into language shift in Gillespie County, Salmons expresses his hope that "perhaps TxG can secure itself a future" (1983, 195).

Unfortunately, Salmons' optimistic wish has not materialized. The past twenty years have seen a further decline in the use of TxG in both public and private domains. Large numbers of bilingual speakers have passed away which means that there remains no stable base of TxG speakers. Whereas Salmons notes that "TxG is spoken at some workplaces" and "business people in town can usually speak TxG" (1983, 190), this is not the case two decades later. A recent fieldtrip to Fredericksburg in November 2004 revealed that only 3 out of 54 businesses remained on Main Street where employees spoke German. Two out of these three were German immigrants who had come to Texas over the past twenty years. In addition, one of the last German-language radio programs out of New Braunfels stopped broadcasting in 2003 because of a lack of interest and funding.

At present, there remain only an estimated 8–10,000 fluent TxG speakers, almost all in their 60s and older.<sup>5</sup> Assuming the present trend continues, TxG will most probably be extinct within approximately thirty years. While this development seems inevitable, we are here interested in the following questions in order to determine the former importance of this unique New World dialect: (1) What was the status of TxG vis-à-vis Standard German and English before World War I? (2) How fast has the decline of TxG in the public domain really been over the past eighty years?

While most previous work on TxG has primarily focused on the linguistic properties and developments of the dialect (Eikel 1954, Gilbert 1963/1972, Salmons 1983, Guion 1996), there is relatively little research on the use and status of TxG in the public domain.<sup>6</sup> The following section turns to this issue by first discussing some differences between TxG and Standard German. It then focuses on previously published data on the use of German and English in the public domain.

### The Use of Texas German vis-à-vis Standard German

#### *Language Use Before World War I*

In answering the question of how widespread the use of German in the public domain was before World War I, we turn to Salmons (1983). He points out that the Texas Germans “set a cultural standard: numerous newspapers; good schools established at an early date; theater groups, and a notable literature—all in German of course.” (1983: 187) Although the use of German in these public domains was widespread throughout the German-belt, it is important to point out that Standard German was typically used at schools and in newspapers, and not the mix of different German dialects commonly known as Texas German.<sup>7</sup> In discussing the role of Standard German, Salmons & Lucht (2004) review data on the use of German in churches and newspapers and argue that

Standard German was a widespread, living variety in Texas for over 100 years (...). As long as German was a common medium of instruction and part of the most rudimentary education, active control of Standard German was commonplace, and a full range of styles existed, from standard to dialect. Even after German was entirely eliminated from schools, contact with Standard German remained important in the German-belt. [Salmons & Lucht 2004, 17]

The role of Standard German in the schools, churches, and newspapers was without doubt an important feature of the linguistic geography of Texas before World War I. As such, there was a diglossic situation (Ferguson 1959) where the high variety (H: Standard German) was typically used in the public domain, whereas the low variety (L: Texas German) was used in the private domain.<sup>8</sup> Church services were conducted by clergy in Standard German that was often “imported” from Germany, using materials printed in H (Salmons & Lucht 2004, 3). In school, H was used as the instructional language, and printed materials were in the standard variety. Similarly, newspapers were printed in H: “The newspapers were, as a matter of fact, one of the several strong factors that tended to preserve the German language and to ‘correct’ it towards the standard language.” (Wilson 1977, 50)

Although Standard German was undoubtedly important in the public domain before World War I, it appears as if its role and influence may have been over-emphasized by Salmons & Lucht (2004). That is, only a small number of German settlers (doctors, lawyers, teachers) coming to Texas beginning in the 1840s had a solid command of Standard German (=H). The majority of settlers were farmers who spoke their regional German dialects (=L) and had at best a passive knowledge of Standard German. Only when the children of the first settlers went to school did they have their first active encounter with Standard German as a medium of instruction. The set-up of the first German-speaking churches and newspapers in the 1840s and 1850s led to increased exposure to Standard German. However, this increased exposure does not automatically imply that the second and third generation Texas Germans all had a solid command of H (Standard German). That is, they would learn H at school, they would hear H at church, and they would read H in the newspaper. But when it came to talking to other people (except for the schoolteacher or in very formal situations), they would typically speak in L, according to all available information. As such, H was used in only a few public domains, and L was the preferred means of communication among rural Texas Germans. This situation is somewhat similar to the current distribution of H and L in Switzerland, where “it is impossible for any two Swiss of any class or occupation ever to address each other privately in anything but the ‘low’ variety,” according to Keller (1982, 91).

Another point to consider is the length and intensity of active use of H among Texas Germans. Since before World War I the majority of German settlers lived as farmers in rural areas; their children did usually not receive more

than four to six years of education. Whatever active knowledge of H acquired during the school years would soon be lost because only an insignificant number of fluent H speakers could be found in rural areas, according to available information. This means that although most Texas Germans who attended a German-speaking school had a passive knowledge of H, their active knowledge of H probably declined once they graduated and did not use it on a regular basis.<sup>9</sup> The shift in distribution in favor of the L variety is best characterized by Schiffman's (1997) treatment of diglossia. With respect to the distribution of H and L he points out: "in some linguistic cultures, all speakers exhibit diglossic behavior (i.e. use both H and L varieties in complementary distribution), while in others, only some members of the society do." (1997, 212). This split into different domains applies to school-aged Texas Germans who actively used H at school and in other formal settings. However, once they left school and used H less throughout their lives, their active command of H would have declined over the years (while still maintaining a passive knowledge allowing them to recognize and understand H). Schiffman characterizes this type of scenario as follows: "in many diglossic situations, only a minority or elite control the H domain successfully." (1997, 206)

In summary, although Standard German functioned as the H variety in the years preceding World War I, its lasting influence on the L variety has been overstated, in particular by authors such as Wilson, who claims that "most of the Texas Germans do not speak a dialect, but modified standard German." (1977, 47) I have argued above that the short exposure to H during the few years of schooling and the lack of venues for "practicing" H on a regular basis led to a situation in which nearly all rural Texas Germans would use L in most domains, public and private, while maintaining a passive knowledge of H. In a way, this period can be characterized as a "one-way diglossic situation" in which H was spoken by a relatively small elite and used in newspapers and at church. While maintaining a passive knowledge of H, most rural Texas Germans would not actively use H in either public or private domains. As the next section illustrates, English took over many of the public domains previously held by Standard German in the years following World War I.

### *Language Use After World War I*

Besides effectively ending German instruction in public schools, the English-only laws passed during World War I had a number of other

effects. They led to a dramatic decrease in German newspapers and German church services in the postwar years. As a result, English gradually replaced Standard German as H, which in turn affected the use of L (Texas German) as well.

Nicolini (2004, 86-92) discusses the development of German newspapers in Texas and cites a number of reasons for their eventual demise. First, the number of subscriptions dropped drastically by the end of the 1920s. This is attributed to the fact that fewer families subscribed to German newspapers because their children did not learn how to read German at school any more. As a result, subscriptions were cancelled in favor of English newspapers. Second, the decreased number of subscriptions forced a number of papers to close because they were no longer financially viable. Of 27 German newspapers throughout central Texas in 1907, only 18 survived the 1920s, according to Nicolini (2004, 88). Providing an in-depth investigation of the development of the German press in Texas, Salmons & Lucht (2004, 10) cite Nollendorfs (1985), who attributes another negative influence on German newspapers in the U.S. to the role of the postmaster general during World War I. During that time, every foreign language publication had to provide an English translation for all political or war-related articles before their publication. Such costly procedures and time delays forced many foreign-language newspapers to suspend their publications, according to Nollendorfs (1985, 194). While some papers went out of business entirely during the 1920s and 1930s, others switched from daily to weekly publications, or included an ever-growing English section. Some of the last papers to switch to English were the *Fredericksburger Wochenblatt* (1945) and the *Neu-Braunfelsener Zeitung* (1957). This development suggests that between the two World Wars, fewer and fewer Texas Germans had access to newspapers in Standard German (=H). As a result, their command of H most likely decreased over the years, which in turn led to an increased use of L (=TxG) when communicating with other German speakers in both private and public domains.

The use of German in churches saw a similar decrease in the years following World War I. Focusing on the role of German in the Missouri Synod, Salmons & Lucht (2004) point out that the number of all-German churches dropped from 39 to 10 between 1922 and 1928, "while the overall number of congregations in the district increased by 6" (2004, 4). They attribute the drop in all-German services to a number of different factors:

From this one might conclude that during the mid-1920s German-only churches ceased to be viable in Texas. While war-related strife was perhaps partly responsible, some members of these congregations probably needed English services as language shift to English advanced. Second, after 1935 the number of all-English congregations skyrocketed. In that year 35.2% of the churches were all English, by 1940 52.6%, and by 1945 73.8%. During this time, German retreated to its strongholds, the core areas of the rural and small town German-belt. [Salmons & Lucht 2004, 4]<sup>10</sup>

Discussing the decreasing number of all-German services in the Texas district of the Iowa Synod and the Texas district of the American Lutheran Church, Nicolini (2004) comes to similar conclusions. He points out that the rise of English was not uniform across all congregations, but depended on local circumstances such as the age of the congregation or whether it was located in an urban or a rural area.<sup>11</sup> For example, most heavily German-dominated communities in the Hill Country chose to continue their church services in German well into the 1930s before switching to English services in the 1940s and early 1950s (with occasional German services once a month). In contrast, in cities such as San Antonio, where every-day exposure to English was much greater than in the more isolated rural communities, church services were offered in English at a much earlier time. This step was taken to insure that younger people whose exposure to English was greater than to German were able to follow church services without any difficulties (cf. Nicolini 2004, 95).

During the 1930s, the number of German services in the Texas district of the American Lutheran Church decreased, while the number of English services continually increased. Based on the *Conventions of the American Lutheran Church*, Nicolini (2004, 100) shows that the numbers of visitors of German and English services were roughly equal, namely around 6,000. By 1940, the number of visitors to English services had increased to about 8,000, whereas only about 4,000 visitors attended German services. In 1948, only 1,000 churchgoers attended German services, while English church services numbered about 11,000. This development illustrates the fact that English effectively replaced Standard German as the church language for most Texas Germans by the late 1940s.

In summary, it is clear that the transition from Standard German to English in the public domain was not an abrupt, but rather a gradual change

comparable to a domino effect. What started in the schools during World War I soon spread to other public domains such as newspapers and churches. By the 1950s, Standard German was in effect replaced by English as the H language, while TxG remained the L language.

As noted above, it is important not to overemphasize the role of Standard German in the public domain in the years following World War I. That is, once school instruction in Standard German stopped during World War I, most children learned TxG as their first language and acquired English as their second. All available information suggests that when they used German in one of the few remaining public domains such as churches or official ceremonies, they would speak TxG rather than Standard German. Similar observations can be made about older Texas Germans who were exposed to the standard variety during their school years before World War I. As pointed out above, their active use of Standard German would have declined once they graduated from school because there were not many occasions to use Standard German in rural Texas during that period. This suggests that while they had a passive knowledge of Standard German at best (reading newspapers, attending church service), they would have preferred the use of TxG in all domains, both private and public. As such, it was Texas German that served as a lingua franca for bilingual Texas Germans before and after World War I, and not Standard German.<sup>12</sup>

#### *New Data on the Use of Texas German in the Public Domain 1925–2005*

Most previous work on the use of German in the public domain such as Nicolini (2004) and Salmons & Lucht (2004) is primarily based on official data extracted from censuses, statistics, yearbooks, church annals and other administrative sources.<sup>13</sup> While such data is important for research on the development of specific organizations (newspapers, churches, schools) and the languages they used throughout the years, they do not shed light on the use of languages among individual TxG communities. This lack of data makes it difficult to examine the changing diglossic situation (with eventual language shift) from the perspective of individuals who have used English and Texas German to varying degrees in different public domains throughout their lives.

In order to overcome this lack of data, members of the Texas German Dialect Project (TGDP) have been interviewing more than 150 of the



remaining fluent TxG speakers since 2001 (see Boas 2003 and <http://www.tgdp.org>).<sup>14</sup> Besides conducting open-ended sociolinguistic interviews and eliciting specific TxG words and phrases to study the current linguistic properties of TxG, members of the project have also collected written surveys.<sup>15</sup> These questionnaires capture the informants' personal data such as age, gender, place of birth, educational level, etc., and detail the use of English and TxG in different private and public domains. Of particular interest here is the use of English and TxG in the following public domains: schools, local stores, and churches. In what follows, I illustrate how the use of English and TxG in the public domain has changed throughout the informants' lives. This data is then compared with the official records cited by Nicolini (2004) and Salmons and Lucht (2004). Finally, the data regarding language use in the public domain is supplemented by an additional dataset detailing the use of English and TxG with neighbors.

### Language Use at School

For the present study, I focus on the language use among 86 Texas German informants from different locations throughout the German-belt: New Braunfels, Bulverde, Boerne, Comfort, Spring Branch, Doss, Fredericksburg, Victoria, Crawford, and Brenham. The informants, who were interviewed between January 2002 and March 2005, were born between 1918 and 1942. As Figure 1 ("When and where did you learn English?") shows, 82% of the informants grew up learning TxG as their first language, whereas only 18% grew up bilingually. Those who learned English later in their lives acquired the language between the ages of five and eight years, primarily from going to school and having to follow school instruction in English. Ten percent of the informants picked up English from their parents, older siblings, or other children the year before they started first grade.

Figure 2 ("English and German with teacher") demonstrates how little German was spoken at elementary school. Eighty-six percent of the informants stated that their interactions with their schoolteachers were always in English, whereas 6% of informants remember speaking English often with their schoolteachers. Five percent of the informants spoke English regularly, and 3% of informants sometimes. In contrast, 79% of informants never spoke German to their teachers, 16% sometimes, 2% regularly and 3% often. The informants who did speak some German with their teachers remember that

it was only used when students did not understand any instructions, which were in English. When this happened, teachers would typically take their German-speaking students to the back of the classroom and would quietly give them the instructions in German.

These data demonstrate two important points: First, the majority of

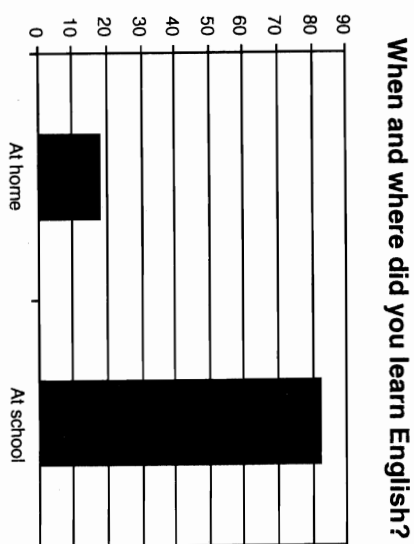


Figure 1

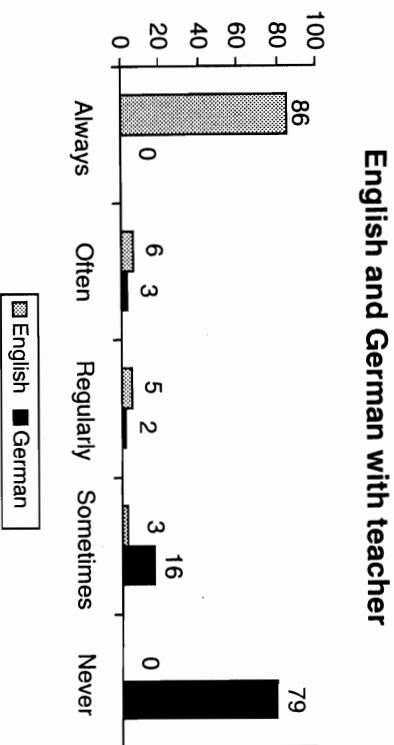


Figure 2

informants grew up learning Texas German at home, with only a small number growing up bilingually. Second, for the Texas Germans who went to elementary school in the years following World War I there was virtually no exposure to Standard German. Being exposed to English and subsequently learning the language at school effectively established English as the H variety for this generation of Texas Germans. While the discrepancy in language use was the most obvious at school in the years following World War I, this was not the case in other public domains as the following sections show.

### *Language Use at Church*

In order to shed light on the changing uses of English and German at church over the years, informants were first asked about how much German they spoke at church. For each of three phases throughout their lives ("as a kid," "1960s/1970s," and "today") they were given a five-point scale ranging from "always" to "never" with "often," "regularly," and "sometimes" in between.<sup>16</sup>

As Figure 3 illustrates, the distribution of German spoken at church is relatively diverse for the time when the informants were children. Since the 86 informants discussed in this paper were born between 1918 and 1942, this time period covers a span of almost 30 years (early 1920s to late 1940s).<sup>17</sup> During this period, 19% of the informants always spoke German at church, 21% spoke German often, 10% regularly, 31% sometimes, and

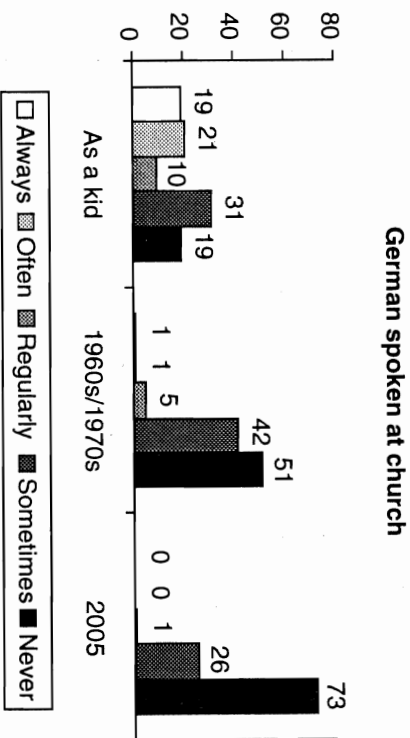


Figure 3

19% never.<sup>18</sup> One informant (born in 1934) noted in the survey that the use of language depended on the individual person. He pointed out that among children English was the predominant language spoken at church, but when addressing parents, grandparents and strangers, they would typically use German. Another informant (born in 1938) stated that the use of German at church drastically declined in the years immediately following the replacement of a German-speaking pastor with an English-only speaking pastor in the mid-1940s.

The numbers for the 1960s/1970s show a drastic decline in the use of German at church. More than half of the informants (51%) never spoke German at church during this time period, whereas 42% used German only sometimes. Five percent of the respondents used German regularly, whereas 1% used German often and always, respectively. One informant noted on the survey an important reason for the decline of German at church during this period: "Most of the German-speaking folks passed away during the 1960s and 1970s. There was no one left who knew how to speak German." Various informants also attributed the decline of German at church to the fact that many non-German speaking newcomers joined their congregations beginning in the early 1970s. This influx made speaking German at church more difficult as they did not want the non-German speakers to feel excluded. The decline of German progressed in subsequent years. Figure 3 shows that at present (i.e. in 2005), the majority of Texas Germans never use German at church any more (76%), with only 26% reporting that they use German sometimes. One percent speak German regularly at church, and none of the informants use German often or always.

If we compare the data on German with the complimentary data on the use of English during the same periods, we find—not surprisingly—that the use of English increased dramatically. Figure 4 shows that almost a third of respondents (29%) always used English at church when they were children, whereas 23% used English often. Nine percent never spoke English at church during this period, whereas 28% spoke it sometimes, and 9% regularly. During the 1960s and 1970s, this split was even more pronounced: almost three quarters of the informants (72%) spoke English exclusively at church, whereas 17% reported that they used English often, 7% regularly, and 4% sometimes. As Figure 4 illustrates, this trend continued until today, with almost all informants reporting to always (83%) or often (12%) speaking English at church, and only 5% speaking English regularly or sometimes.

### English spoken at church

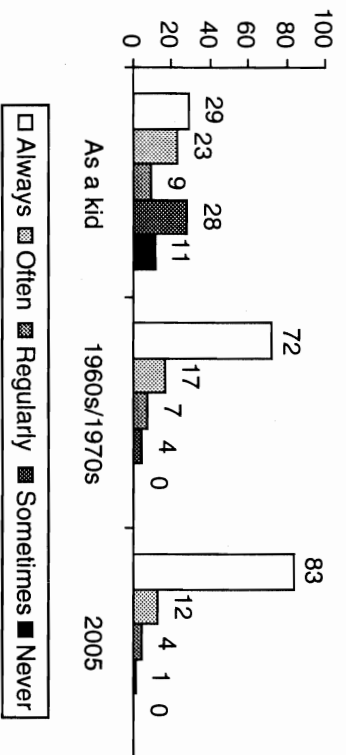


Figure 4

Our data support the claims made by Nicolini (2004) and Salmons and Lucht (2004) with respect to the use of English and German in churches. Whereas the two prior studies base their findings on official records to illustrate the declining role of German, the TGDP data offer a fresh perspective on this development by incorporating recent interview surveys on the use of the two languages throughout the past 80 years. The novel data presented here support the claim that English had effectively replaced German in churches by the late 1950s.

### Language Use at Local Shops

In this part of the survey, informants were asked how much German and English they had spoken at local shops throughout their lives. Similarly to the previous set of questions, informants responded on a scale that included “always” and “never” on opposite ends, with “often,” “regularly,” and “sometimes” in between. As Figure 5 reveals, the frequency of use of German at local shops was different from that reported for churches. 28% of the TxG informants never spoke German at local shops when they were children, and only 30% spoke it sometimes. More telling, however, are the responses to the other questions: only 13% used German always, whereas 24% and 5% used German often or regularly. With these data it is evident that the frequency of use of German in the 1920s–1940s differed according to public domain. Whereas churches seemed to have been a comparatively greater stronghold

for the continued use of German in the public domain, this does not hold for local shops.

Interestingly, the use of German at local shops did not decline as much as that at church during the 1960s and 1970s. “Never” is the most frequent response for the use of German at shops during that period (45%), followed by “sometimes” (42%). Only 8% of respondents reported to have used German sometimes, whereas 5% used it often. Turning our attention to the present, we see that the use of German has declined even more, parallel to the developments observed in the previous section. More than three quarters of informants never speak German at local shops any more (78%), whereas 19% report that they speak it sometimes. In comparison, only 2% use German in this domain regularly, and 1% often.

### German spoken at local shops

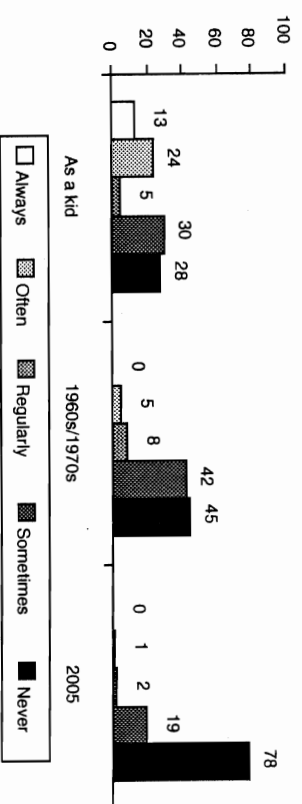


Figure 5

The responses to “How much English did/do you speak at local shops?” complement the results obtained for the use of German. Focusing on the exclusive use of English, Figure 6 reveals a more drastic increase of English use over the years compared to its use at churches.

Whereas 37% report to have always spoken English at local stores as children, this number increases to 58% for the 1960s and 1970s, and to 90% for 2005. A number of informants attributed this increase in English to economic and demographic factors. One informant noted that a number of German-owned smaller stores had closed down because of competition from large supermarket chains. Three informants pointed out that because



**English spoken at local shops**

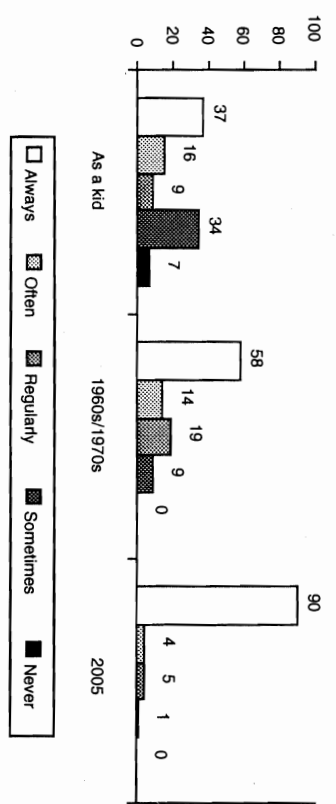


Figure 6

of the influx of Spanish speakers to Comal County and Bexar County over the past twenty years, supermarkets were more likely to hire employees who are bilingual in English and Spanish, rather than in English and German.<sup>19</sup> In summary, this section has shown that the use of English at local stores increased at a much faster rate over the past eight decades than its use at churches. The following section discusses a previously under-researched area, namely the use of German and English among neighbors throughout the years.

*Language Use Among Neighbors*

In this part of the questionnaire, informants were asked how much German and English they had spoken with their neighbors. This domain is particularly interesting for two reasons. First, there is a complete lack of data on the use of English and German among Texas Germans and their neighbors over the past eight decades. Second, data from this domain allows us to understand in more detail the local interactions between our informants, thereby supplementing our other data on the use of the two languages in other domains. For example, while six of our informants attended English-only speaking church services throughout their lives, they have always been living next to other Texas German speakers. Ignoring this important facet of their linguistic behavior would lead to an unbalanced description of our informants' language use.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly to the previous sets of questions, informants responded on a scale that included "always" and "never" on opposite ends, with "often,"

"regularly," and "sometimes" in between. Figure 7 shows that in contrast to churches and local shops, the use of TxG was comparatively widespread among neighbors from the 1920s well into the 1940s. The most common response was always (30%) followed by often (26%). 9% of our informants spoke TxG regularly, while 21% spoke it sometimes. Only 14% noted that they never spoke TxG with their neighbors when they were children. The data in Figure 8 mirrors this distribution. During this time, almost half of the respondents spoke very little English with their neighbors (never: 15%, sometimes: 34%). Other responses regarding the use of English are: always (21%), often (19%), and regularly (11%).

**German spoken with neighbors**

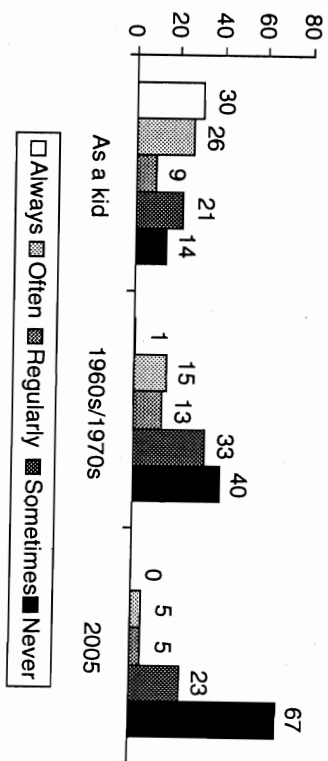


Figure 7

**English spoken with neighbors**

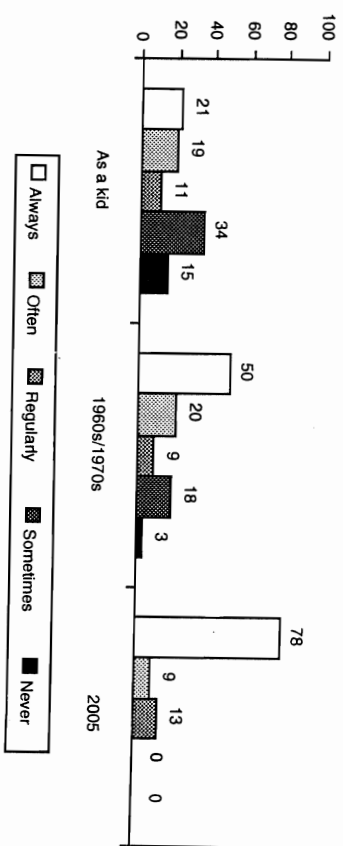


Figure 8

The statistics for the use of TxG among neighbors during the 1960s and 1970s show a significantly different distribution. They are, in descending order: never (40%), sometimes (33%), often (15%), regularly (13%), and always (1%). As with the other domains discussed above, the use of TxG declined drastically, leading to a distribution that resembles the one observed for churches and local shops. Various informants attributed this change to demographic factors: older TxG speakers passing away, and a significant influx of English-only speakers beginning in the late 1960s. The numbers for the use of English also reflect this development: During that period, English was the predominant language for more than two thirds of the informants (always: 50%, often: 20%).

This development continued, as expected, until today. At present, 67% of the informants never speak TxG with their neighbors (cf. Figure 7); in fact, one informant stated she would not want to speak TxG with another neighbor even if he or she spoke it, because she thought that it would be inappropriate to speak TxG when living in a neighborhood dominated by English-only speakers. Twenty-three percent of the informants claimed that they sometimes speak TxG with their neighbors, whereas 5% speak it regularly and often, respectively. This distribution is mirrored by the data on the use of English in Figure 8.

### Conclusions and Outlook

This study has reported on the use of TxG in some public domains over the past eight decades. As such, it has provided primary data on language use among Texas Germans, which is crucial to our understanding of language shift in the community. The written questionnaires administered by the Texas German Dialect Project throughout central Texas between 2001 and 2005 thus supplement previous data extracted from censuses, official statistics, and yearbooks of churches and other organizations (cf. Nicolini 2004, Salmons & Lucht 2004).

Our preliminary analysis of the new data has yielded a number of significant observations. First, the great majority of informants grew up learning TxG at home, subsequently acquiring English at school. Second, our data support previous claims that by the 1950s English had in effect replaced German at church. This development can also be observed for language use among neighbors and at local stores. Third, the use of English was already

widespread at local stores during the 1920s and into the 1940s. This result is expected, as it is an indication that in the years following World War I (and the English-only legislation) most Texas Germans would have preferred the use of the more prestigious English in order to show that they identified themselves as Americans. As such, the use of English at stores might be regarded as an immediate outcome of the use of English as the language of instruction at school. The fourth point emerging from the data concerns the use of TxG in different domains. It appears as if throughout the past eighty years, the use of TxG has been strongest among our informants and their neighbors, and weakest at local stores. Finally, I have argued that the role of Standard German and its influence on TxG should not be overemphasized.

Obviously, future research is required to investigate the full scope of language use and language shift in the Texas German community. Besides interviewing more Texas Germans during the years to come, much work remains to be done on language use in other domains (work place, family, friends, singing and shooting clubs, etc.), eventually leading to the description of an integrated continuum of language use. The strongest domain of TxG language use will be located on one end of the continuum, and the weakest domain on the opposite of the continuum, with points in between the two ends. In addition, it will be necessary to analyze the different factors leading to language shift in individual communities across central Texas (rural vs. urban, density of TxG-speaking population number, density of social networks, etc.). This step will help us understand the mechanisms underlying language shift in the TxG community and to analyze it in much more detail *vis-à-vis* language shift in other communities around the world. Clearly, the richness of such data also holds promise of further contributions to a theory of diglossia (Ferguson (1959), Fishman (1967), Schiffman (1997)).

### Endnotes

1. In this paper the terms language and dialect are used to refer to Texas German. The reason for this is that Texas German is technically a dialect of German (and mutually intelligible with Standard German), but does not face any serious competition from other German dialects in Texas and as such can be characterized as a language *vis-à-vis* English.

2. Texas German is not a coherent New World dialect such as New Zealand English (cf. Trudgill 2004) or Pennsylvania German (cf. Raith 1992). Instead, it is a conglomeration of different German donor dialects brought to Texas during the 19th century, resulting in what Fuller and Gilbert (2003, 165) call "an interesting koiné

language, derived from central/northern Germany, flourishing in semi-isolation for 75 years." As such, Texas German exhibits a very high degree of linguistic variation, which is documented by Gilbert (1972).

3. Immigration to Texas virtually ceased during the Civil War, but picked up again (although not in such great numbers) after 1865.

4. It is important to note that immigrants still spoke their original German dialects when they settled in Texas. The result was a diverse mix of phonological, syntactic, morphological, and lexical features that interacted and influenced each other over the next century or so. In contrast to other new world dialects (e.g. New Zealand English (Trudgill 2004) or Pennsylvania German (Raith 1992)), Texas German did not evolve into a coherent new world dialect with broad-scale leveling of linguistic features. This widespread variation is amply documented in Gilbert's (1972) pioneering Linguistic Atlas of Texas German as well as by more recent language documentation efforts under way by the Texas German Dialect Project (see Boas (2003) and <http://www.tgdp.org>).

5. Based on census data it is difficult to estimate the exact number of fluent TxG speakers. The 2000 census lists 82,117 Texans who speak German at home. In my view, two significant problems arise when interpreting this number. First, the census does not differentiate between different German dialects. That is, over the past five decades a significant number of Germans have moved from Germany to Texas, in particular to metropolitan areas and to the Hill Country. Second, at present it has become difficult to locate fluent speakers of Texas German, even in such former German strongholds like Fredericksburg or Comfort. My fieldwork experience over the past four years has shown that the majority of people who claim to speak Texas German have at best a passive knowledge of the dialect. Since they only have a limited command of a few words and phrases they should be classified as semi-fluent speakers.

6. Salmons (1983), Salmons & Lucht (2004), and Reeves Moore (1980) are notable exceptions.

7. Regarding the problem of how to define Standard German during the 19th century, see Salmons & Lucht (2004).

8. This split between Standard German and Texas German was not as clear-cut as it may appear and depended to a very large degree on the ethnic and linguistic make-up of the individual communities. For example, in areas in which German settlers were surrounded by English speakers (e.g. Clifton, Crawford, Waco) or Czech speakers (Schulenburg, Victoria, Goliad), English was typically used as the H language. Similarly, when German speakers would meet with non-German speaking business partners, English would be used as the H language.

9. This categorization (like so many others found in works on Texas German) does not hold for all community members, because it crucially depends on the character and make-up of the local population. In this case, not all Texas Germans lived in rural communities. San Antonio, Austin, and Houston all had significant numbers of citizens of German descent. People living in urban areas typically attended school

for more than 4-6 years and thus had a longer exposure to Standard German. In addition, there was more contact with Standard German in urban areas than in rural areas (theaters, singing clubs, businesses, etc.). This suggests that urban Texas Germans probably had longer exposure to Standard German and had more opportunities to practice it once they left school.

10. Another interesting observation made by Salmons & Lucht (2004: 5) is that in general, "the oldest congregations held on to German the longest."

11. Another interesting point mentioned by Nicolini (2004) is the fact that the preservation of German was most important for Lutherans. In contrast, most Methodist churches in Texas already switched to English at the end of the 19th century. Similarly, the continued use of German was not a top priority for most Catholic congregations in Texas, where English was often chosen as the primary language in the 1920s in order to attract non-German speaking Catholics of Spanish, Polish, or Anglo-American heritage (Nicolini 2004: 93).

12. The term *lingua franca* is used in a non-technical sense here. Originally, *lingua franca* referred to a Romance-based trade language spoken in the Mediterranean from the Middle Ages into the 19th century. In the present context, the term *lingua franca* is meant to express the idea that Texas German was the more common means of communication between the descendants of German immigrants throughout Texas.

13. Reeves Moore (1980) is a notable exception. Her longitudinal study on language use in Fredericksburg between 1969 and 1979 gives a detailed analysis of language shift in different public and private domains.

14. Interviews have so far been conducted in New Braunfels, Fredericksburg, Doss, Cave Creek, Spring Branch, Comfort, Bulverde, Comfort, Converse, Victoria, Houston, Brenham, Crawford, Georgetown, and Austin.

15. The Texas German Dialect Project (<http://www.tgdp.org>) is grateful for the financial support provided by the University of Texas at Austin (Center for Instructional Technologies, Liberal Arts Instructional Technology Services), Humanities Texas (formerly Texas Council for the Humanities), and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

16. The questionnaire was set up in a way that informants were asked to indicate their language use for both English and German at the same time for the same domain (e.g.: "always" English/ "never" German; or: "often" English/ "sometimes" German). This explains why the percentages for English and German language use do not always match each other.

17. Seventy-two percent of the informants are Lutheran, 28% are Catholic.

18. The percentage numbers for this period are not equal to those representing the two other periods in Figure 3. Five informants from the Comfort area grew up without any religious upbringing and only joined churches later in their lives.

19. Until the end of the 1960s, several supermarkets in Comal County specifically hired German speakers in order to better serve the German-speaking population.

20. Language use among neighbors is not typically considered a public domain. Since it is located somewhere between the public domain and the private domain, I have included it here to see whether language use differs from that at church and at local shops.

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