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Purpose of the Interviews

The goal of these interviews was to record and preserve pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar features of the dialects, using questionnaires and other interview techniques.

Interview Methodology

Interviews were usually conducted in this way:

1. Engage the speaker(s) in introductory small talk to set them at ease.
2. Ask volunteers to translate a questionnaire from English to German.
3. In some cases, use other interview tools such as describing pictures of farm life to elicit more natural speech than questionnaires give.
4. In some cases, follow up with more narrowly targeted follow-up questions and word lists to get grammatical forms and more vocabulary.
5. Ask speakers to relate any anecdotes, jokes, songs, recipes, etc. that they are comfortable relating in order to get more relatively free-speech examples of the dialect.

Some interviews followed the pattern more successfully than others. Language competence and enthusiasm to participate were important factors in a successful interview.¹ Since nearly all were bilingual, most speakers were prompted in English for responses in the dialect.²

Some speakers had some parochial or public education in standard German. From time to time, a speaker would have to be prompted to not respond in standard German.

The Recordings

Most recordings prior to 2000 were made with portable cassette recorders. These cassettes were later digitized into .mp3 files. The quality of these converted files is affected by the age and condition of the cassette at the time it was digitized, combined with the compression technology used during conversion. Similarly, any digital recording done in a large .wav (i.e. uncompressed) format has been compressed to .mp3, greatly reducing file size for posting online. Otherwise, most recordings done since 2000 have been captured directly as .mp3. The process of redacting recordings to remove any reference to the identity of a speaker or to select specific portions of a recorded interview has also resulted in some quality degradation, since a compressed .mp3 file is being further compressed when a selected portion is saved off as a new .mp3. Only a few recordings were done in perfect interview conditions, such as in a quiet room, with just the fieldworker and the speaker working one-on-one. Most were conducted in group situations, with every effort being made to keep others quiet when an individual working a questionnaire was being recorded. Group dynamics actually helped to encourage participation by shy participants and also resulted in some good back-and-forth among participants as to how something might have been said in the dialect.³ In a few cases, amplification has been added for some soft speakers. This may add a little noise to the recording. If tape hiss makes it difficult to hear a person, noise reduction may be applied. External noises, such as a clock striking the hour or a phone ringing or a running lawn mower or a baby babbling may occasionally occur while a person is being recorded.

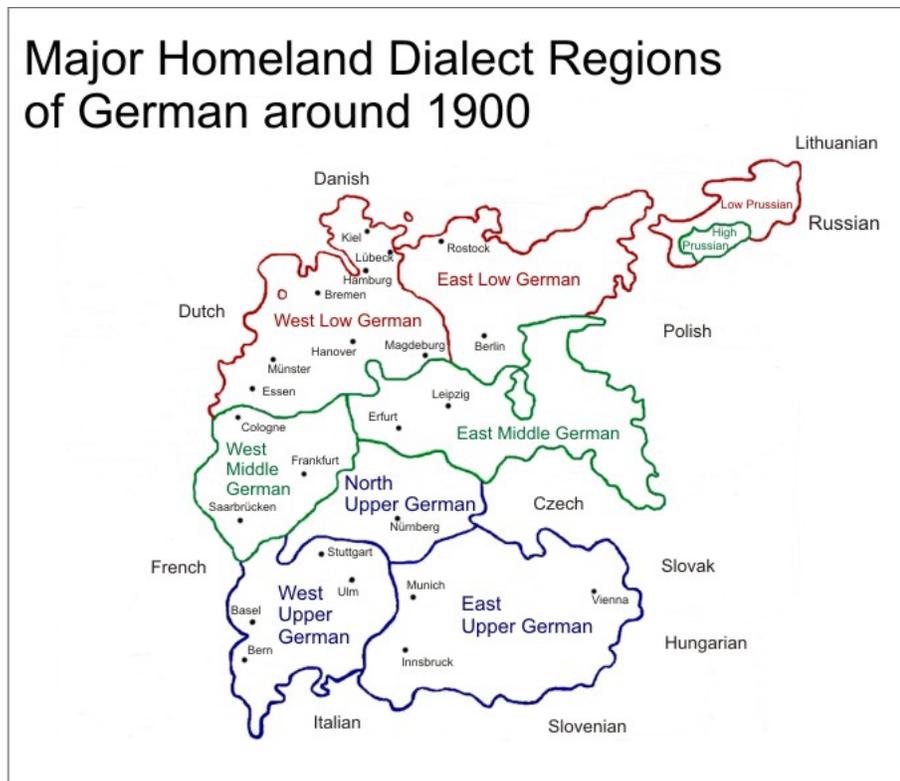
Questionnaire sets posted to ScholarWorks are zipped files containing full sets of questionnaire responses for a speaker. This is done to reduce download file size.

(As of the date of this document, new speakers are still being added regularly to ScholarWorks and additional recordings may be added to people already posted. Be sure to check back from time to time).

German Homeland Dialects

As the map below shows, German homeland dialects are divided into three major groups (moving north to south): **Low German**, **Middle German**, and **Upper German**. German-speaking immigrants to Kansas and Missouri were speakers of dialects from all three major regions. All these regions differentiate themselves in their pronunciation of certain consonants and vowels and sometimes in the loss of or differences in certain word endings. Major regions are then further subdivided into many smaller dialect areas (regions isolated by geographical features or historical borders or big city dialects, etc.)

The lines that separate the dialect areas on maps are called isoglosses. Although isoglosses are displayed as lines, they are actually transition zones where pronunciation gradually changes.⁴



Here are some regional dialects found in the prominent dialect sub-regions:

West Low German: Eastphalian, Westphalian, North Low Saxon, East Frisian

East Low German: Mecklenburgish, Vorpommersch, Brandenburgish, East Pomeranian, Low Prussian, Plautdietsch

West Middle German: Ripuarian, Mosel-Franconian, Rhein-Franconian, Hessian

East Middle German: Thuringian, Upper Saxon, Silesian, High Prussian

West Upper German: Alemanic, Swabian, Alsatian

North Upper German: East Franconian, South Franconian

East Upper German: Bavarian-Austrian, North Bavarian, South Bavarian

Vocabulary differences can also be used to identify dialects.⁵ This is especially helpful in Kansas and Missouri where years away from the German homeland have resulted in the loss of some expected pronunciation and grammatical results among recorded speakers.

The Speakers

Not all speakers showed the same level of fluency. Most older speakers from Kansas and Missouri spoke German in their childhood, but gradually moved over to using mostly English in adulthood. Translating the questionnaires for many after so many years of using mainly English meant speaking German from memory, with a word here and there never having been learned in German.⁶

Some people, though very few in numbers by 2020, still used German daily for social interactions with other German speakers. These speakers were more inclined to participate in conversations and to tell anecdotes and jokes. Some of the younger speakers, although raised in the dialect, may not have learned all the vocabulary found in the questionnaires.

Many of those recorded in the 1980s and 1990s are now deceased.

The identities of all recorded speakers are protected by disclosure agreements created to protect subjects who participate in human experimentation. Speakers will be identified only by Speaker ID, Gender, Year of Birth, County, City/Township, Dialect⁷ and Year of Recording. Posted narratives have been redacted to also remove the names of family members. Some interviews involved multiple speakers sharing the interview. With a few exceptions, speaker IDs begin with the state abbreviation where the person was recorded, usually KS (Kansas) or MO (Missouri). The numbering is arbitrary and is not based on the year of the interview or any other speaker attribute. All interviews were conducted in KS or MO. If a person is not from KS or MO, that is indicated in the speaker code, with a note provided containing more information. Some speakers were interviewed multiple times over the years by different fieldworkers.

Kansas Speaker Key

ID	Gender	Year of Birth	County	City/ Township	Interview Year	Dialect	Wenker Sentences	KU Questionnaire	Anecdotes/Conversation/ Jokes/Misc. Words	Song
KS01	M	1927	Ellis	Schoenchen	1991	Volga German (West Middle German)	✓		✓	
KS02	F	1945	Reno	Buhler	1990	Mennonite Plautdietsch (East Low German)	✓			
KS03	F	1905	Nemaha	Bern	1985	Swiss High Alemannic (West Upper German)	✓			
KS04	M	1935	Ellis	Ellis	1993	Bukovina Catholic Bohemian (North Upper German)	✓			
KS05	F	1923	Russell	Dorrance	1994	Volga German (West Middle German)	✓			
KS06	F	?? < 1930	Ellis	Munjor	1981	Volga German (West Middle German)	✓			
KS07	M	1927	Ellis	Pfeiffer	1981	Volga German (West Middle German)	✓			
KS08	M	1926	Ellis	Schoenchen	1993	Volga German (West Middle German)	✓			
KS09	M	1926	Ellis	Schoenchen	1993	Volga German (West Middle German)	✓		✓	
KS10	M	1921	Ellis	Schoenchen	1993	Volga German (West Middle German)	✓			
KS11	F	1922	Ellis	Victoria (Herzog)	1981	Volga German (West Middle German)	✓			
KS12	F	1918	Logan	Russell Springs	1980	Mennonite Plautdietsch (East Low German)	✓			
KS13	M	1919	Trego	WaKeeney	1996	Volga German (West Middle German)	✓			
KS14	F	1904	Rush	Liebenthal	1980	Volga German (West Middle German)	✓			
KS15	M	1942	Reno	Partridge	1990	Pennsylvania German (West Middle German)	✓			
KS16	F	1892	McPherson	Moundridge	1980	Schweitzer Mennonite (West Middle German)	✓			
KS17	M	1918	McPherson	Moundridge	1980	Schweitzer Mennonite (West Middle German)	✓		✓	
KS18	M	1898	Marion	Hillsboro	1991	Mennonite Plautdietsch (East Low German)	✓			
KS19	M	1934	Ellis	Catherine	1994	Volga German (West Middle German)	✓			
KS20	M	1921	Johnson	Leawood	2003	Yiddish (West Middle German)	✓			
KS21	M	1927	Marshall	Bremen	1999	North Low Saxon (West Low German)		✓	✓	
KS22	F	1918	Marshall	Marysville	1999	East Frisian (West Low German)		✓		
KS23	F	1972	Gray	Cimarron	2003	Mennonite Plautdietsch (East Low German)		✓	✓	
KS24	F	1959	Gray	Cimarron	2003	Mennonite Plautdietsch (East Low German)		✓		
KS25	M	1966	Gray	Cimarron	2003	Mennonite Plautdietsch (East Low German)		✓		
KS26	F	1966	Gray	Cimarron	2003	Mennonite Plautdietsch (East Low German)		✓		
KS27	F	1975	Gray	Cimarron	2003	Mennonite Plautdietsch (East Low German)		✓		
KS28	F	1992	Gray	Cimarron	2003	Mennonite Plautdietsch (East Low German)		✓		
KS29	F	≈ 1970	Haskell	Sublette	2000	Mennonite Plautdietsch (East Low German)		✓		
KS30	F	≈ 1970	Haskell	Sublette	2000	Mennonite Plautdietsch (East Low German)		✓		
KS31	M	1920	Harvey	Buhler	1999	Mennonite Plautdietsch (East Low German)		✓	✓	
KS32	M	1920	Harvey	Burrton	1999	Mennonite Plautdietsch (East Low German)		✓		
KS33	M	1918	Ellis	Ellis	1993	Bukovina Catholic Bohemian (North Upper German)	✓		✓	
KS34	F	1917	Marshall	Bremen	1999	North Low Saxon (West Low German)		✓		
KS35	M	1942	Marshall	Marysville	1999	North Low Saxon (West Low German)		✓		
KS36	F	1920	Harvey	Hesston	1999	Mennonite Plautdietsch (East Low German)		✓		
KS37	F	1975	Anderson	Garnett	2006	Pennsylvania German (West Middle German)	✓	✓	✓	
KS38	M	1970	Anderson	Garnett	2006	Pennsylvania German (West Middle German)	✓	✓	✓	
KS39	F	1917	Montgomery	Coffeyville	1999	Amana German (West Middle German)		✓	✓	✓
KS40	M	1940	Graham	Morland	1999	Volga German (West Middle German)		✓		
KS41	F	1924	Russell	Milberger	2007	Volga German (West Middle German)	✓		✓	
KS42	F	1915	Harvey	Hesston	2001	Mennonite Plautdietsch (East Low German)		✓		
KS43	M	1933	Russell	Milberger	1995	Volga German (West Middle German)	✓		✓	
KS44	M	1919	Ellis	Schoenchen	1993	Volga German (West Middle German)	✓		✓	
RU01	M	1953	Ellis	Hays	2001	Volga German (West Middle German)	✓			

Missouri Speaker Key

ID	Gender	Year of Birth	County	City/ Township	Interview Year	Dialect	Wenker Sentences	KU Questionnaire	Anecdotes/Conversation/ Jokes/ Misc. Words	Song/Poem
MO01	F	1917	Lafayette	Concordia	1993	Eastphalian (West Low German)	✓		✓	
MO02	F	1912	Lafayette	Concordia	1993	Eastphalian (West Low German)	✓		✓	
MO03	F	1916	Lafayette	Concordia	1995	Eastphalian (West Low German)	✓			
MO04	F	1951	Benton	Cole Camp	2019	North Low Saxon (West Low German)		✓		
MO05	M	1934	Benton	Cole Camp	2019	North Low Saxon (West Low German)		✓		
MO06	M	1920	Benton	Cole Camp	2000	North Low Saxon (West Low German)		✓	✓	
MO07	M	1935	Perry	Frohna	2014	Upper Saxon (East Middle German)	✓	✓		
MO08	M	1951	Morgan	Stover	2000	North Low Saxon (West Low German)		✓		
MO09	F	1921	Osage	Loose Creek	2000	Lower Rhenish (West Low German)		✓		
MO10	M	1924	Osage	Loose Creek	2000	Lower Rhenish (West Low German)		✓		
MO11	F	1926	Lafayette	Emma	1993	Eastphalian (West Low German)	✓		✓	
MO12	F	1912	Morgan	Stover	2000	North Low Saxon (West Low German)		✓		
MO13	M	1932	St. Charles	Femme Osage	2000	Westphalian (West Low German)		✓		
MO14	M	1925	St. Charles	Augusta	2000	Westphalian (West Low German)		✓	✓	
MO15	F	1926	St. Charles	New Melle	2000	Westphalian (West Low German)		✓		
MO16	M	1956	St. Charles	New Melle	2000	Westphalian (West Low German)		✓		
MO17	F	1919	St. Charles	Cappeln	2000	Westphalian (West Low German)		✓	✓	
MO18	F	1925	Benton	Cole Camp	2000	North Low Saxon (West Low German)		✓		✓
MO19	M	1928	Benton	Cole Camp	2000	North Low Saxon (West Low German)		✓		
MO20	M	1924	Benton	Cole Camp	2000	North Low Saxon (West Low German)		✓		
MO21	M	1927	Benton	Cole Camp	2000	North Low Saxon (West Low German)		✓		
MO22	F	1927	Benton	Cole Camp	2000	North Low Saxon (West Low German)		✓	✓	
MO23	F	1927	Benton	Cole Camp	2000	North Low Saxon (West Low German)		✓		
MO24	M	1922	Benton	Cole Camp	2000	North Low Saxon (West Low German)		✓		
MO25	M	1933	Benton	Cole Camp	2000	North Low Saxon (West Low German)		✓		
MO26	F	1935	Benton	Cole Camp	2000	North Low Saxon (West Low German)		✓		
MOGRP1	M/F	≈1910-30	Osage	Westphalia	2000	Westphalian (West Low German)		✓	✓	
MOGRP2	M/F	≈1930-60	Morgan	Versailles	2000	Mennonite Plautdietsch (East Low German)		✓	✓	
MOGRP3	M/F	≈1920-40	Osage	Loose Creek	2000	Lower Rhenish (West Low German)			✓	

The Questionnaires

Wenker Sentences⁸

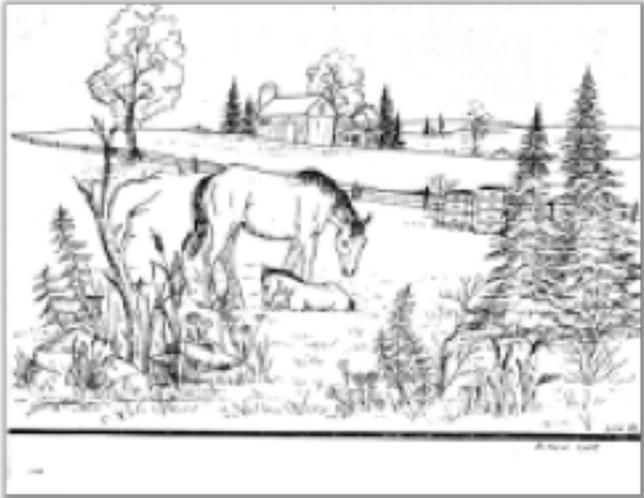
1. Im Winter fliegen die trockenen Blätter in der Luft herum.
In the winter the dry leaves fly around in the air.
2. Es hört gleich auf zu schneien, dann wird das Wetter wieder besser.
It will soon stop snowing, then the weather will get better again.
3. Tu Kohlen in den Ofen, daß die Milch bald an zu kochen fängt.
Put coals into the stove, so that the milk will start to boil soon.
4. Der gute alte Mann ist mit dem Pferde durchs Eis gebrochen und in das kalte Wasser gefallen.
The good old man broke through the ice with his horse and fell into the cold water.
5. Er ist vor vier oder sechs Wochen gestorben.
He died four or six weeks ago.
6. Das Feuer war zu stark. Die Kuchen sind ja unten ganz schwarz gebrannt.
The fire was too hot. The cakes are burned black on the bottom.
7. Er ißt die Eier immer ohne Salz und Pfeffer.
He always eats eggs without salt and pepper.
8. Die Füße tun mir sehr weh. Ich glaube, ich habe sie durchgelaufen.
My feet hurt so much. I believe, I have walked them off.
9. Ich bin bei der Frau gewesen und habe es ihr gesagt, und sie sagte, sie wollte es auch ihrer Tochter sagen.
I was at the woman's and told it to her, and she said, she wanted to tell it to her daughter too.
10. Ich will es auch nicht mehr wieder tun.
I also don't want to do it ever again.
11. Ich schlage dich gleich mit dem Kochlöffel um die Ohren, du Affe!
I am going to hit you around the ears with a wooden spoon, you monkey!
12. Wo gehst du hin? Sollen wir mit dir gehen?
Where are you going? Shall we go with you?
13. Es sind schlechte Zeiten.
The times are bad.
14. Mein liebes Kind, bleib hier unten stehen, die bösen Gänse beißen dich tot.
My dear child, stay down here. Those mean geese will bite you to death.
15. Du hast heute am meisten gelernt und bist artig gewesen. Du darfst früher nach Hause gehen als die anderen.
You learned the most today and were well-behaved. You may go home earlier than the others.
16. Du bist noch nicht groß genug, um eine Flasche Wein auszutrinken. Du mußt erst noch etwas wachsen und größer werden.
You aren't big enough to drink a whole bottle of wine. You have to grow some more first and get bigger.
17. Geh, sei so gut und sag deiner Schwester, sie sollte die Kleider für eure Mutter fertig nähen und mit der Bürste rein machen.
Go, be so good and tell your sister she should finish sewing the clothes for your mother and clean them with a brush.
18. Hättest du ihn gekannt! Dann wäre es anders gekommen, und es täte besser um ihn stehen.
If only you had known him! Things would have turned out differently and he would be better off.
19. Wer hat mir meinen Korb mit Fleisch gestohlen?
Who stole my basket of meat?
20. Er tat so, als hätten sie ihn zum Dreschen bestellt. Sie haben es aber selbst getan.
He acted as if they had hired him for the threshing; but they did it themselves.
21. Wem hat er die neue Geschichte erzählt?
Who did he tell the new story to?
22. Man muß laut schreien, sonst versteht er uns nicht.
One must shout loudly, otherwise he doesn't understand us.
23. Wir sind müde und haben Durst.
We are tired and thirsty.
24. Als wir gestern abend zurückkamen, da lagen die anderen schon zu Bett und waren fest am schlafen.
When we got home last night, the others were already lying in bed and were fast asleep.
25. Der Schnee ist diese Nacht bei uns liegen geblieben, aber heute morgen ist er geschmolzen.
The snow at our place stayed on the ground last night, but it melted this morning.
26. Hinter unserem Haus stehen drei schöne Apfelbäumchen mit roten Äpfelchen.
Behind our house stand three beautiful little apple trees with little red apples.

27. Könnt ihr nicht noch ein Augenblickchen auf uns warten? Dann gehen wir mit euch.
Couldn't you (all) wait a moment for us? Then we will go with you.
28. Ihr dürft nicht solche Kindereien treiben.
You (all) may not be so silly.
29. Unsere Berge sind nicht sehr hoch. Die euren sind viel höher.
Our mountains aren't very high. Yours are much higher.
30. Wieviel Pfund Wurst und wieviel Brot wollt ihr haben?
How many pounds of sausage and how much bread did you all want?
31. Ich verstehe euch nicht. Ihr müßt ein bißchen lauter sprechen.
I don't understand you (all). You must speak a little louder.
32. Habt ihr kein Stückchen weiße Seife für mich auf meinem Tische gefunden?
Didn't you (all) find a piece of soap for me on my table?
33. Sein Bruder will sich zwei schöne neue Häuser in eurem Garten bauen.
His brother wants to build himself two beautiful new houses in your garden.
34. Das Wort kam ihm vom Herzen!
That word came straight from his heart!
35. Das war recht von ihnen!
They did the right thing!
36. Was sitzen da für Vögelchen oben auf dem Mäuerchen?
What kind of little birds are sitting up there on the little wall?
37. Die Bauern hatten fünf Ochsen und neun Kühe und zwölf Schäfchen vor das Dorf gebracht. Die wollten sie verkaufen.
The farmers had brought five oxen and nine cows and twelve little sheep before the village. They wanted to sell them.
38. Die Leute sind heute alle draußen auf dem Felde und mähen.
All the people are outside today in the field and mowing.
39. Geh nur, der braune Hund tut dir nichts.
Go on, the brown dog won't hurt you.
40. Ich bin mit den Leuten da hinten über die Wiese ins Korn gefahren.
I drove with the people back there over the meadow into the grain field.

KU Questionnaire⁹

1. The four seasons: spring, summer, fall, winter
2. The days of the week: Sunday - Saturday
3. The numbers from 1 - 10
4. Mother, father, brother, sister
5. That woman is a relative of mine.
6. I have a headache.
7. A girl and a boy; 2 girls and 2 boys
8. That was my neighbor's barn.
9. I like little red apples.
10. If I were rich, I would buy a new house.
11. If only I had told the truth.
12. Horse, goat, lightning bug
13. Put the milk on the table.
14. Wheat
15. This year
16. Outhouse
17. Noodles, dumplings, potatoes, cucumbers, sweet cream, watermelon, pepper
18. The children cried all night long.
19. That skunk stinks really bad.
20. He's going into town./ He lives in town.
21. We did the right thing.
22. Give me the book!
23. I am hungry and thirsty.
24. I'm getting older every day.
25. The burial is tomorrow, right?
26. They speak German differently than we do. (Added 2000)

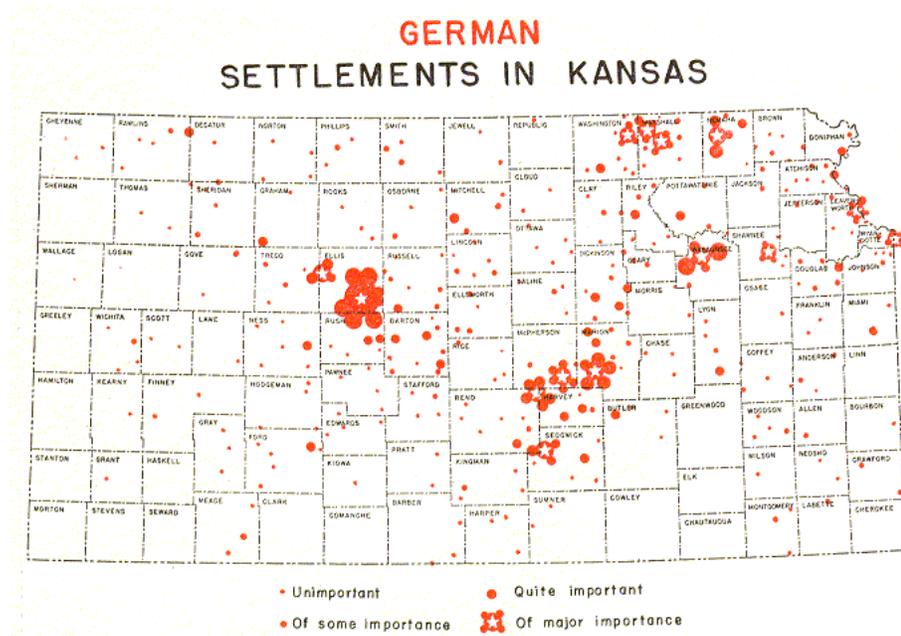
Three Pictures of Farm Life for German Dialect Free Speech Exercise



Reference Maps for Locating Potential Speakers

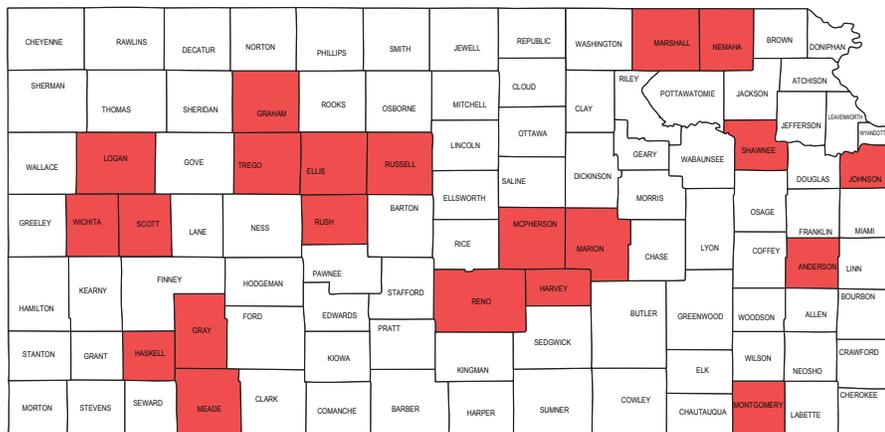
Speakers were sought out in those places that prior scholarly work had identified as locations where German-speaking immigrants settled throughout the 19th century. Two of those sources provided helpful maps. The top map in each state pair below is a reference map that identifies locations of interest. The other map shows the counties where interviews were conducted.

J. Neale Carman Reference Map of Kansas¹⁰

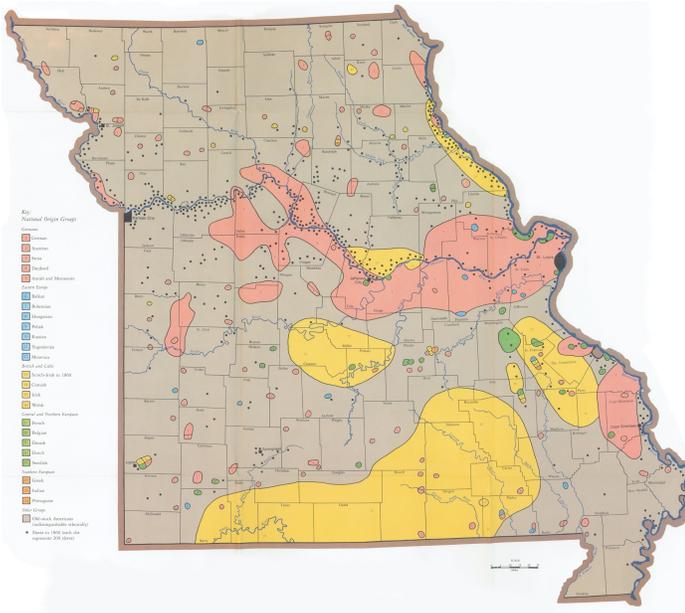


Map Source: J. Neale Carman. Foreign Language Units of Kansas, Vol. 1. Historical Atlas and Statistics. (FLUK) Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press. 1962. (Pg. 46). Cartographer: George F. Jenks

Kansas Counties Where Interviews Were Conducted 1979-2003

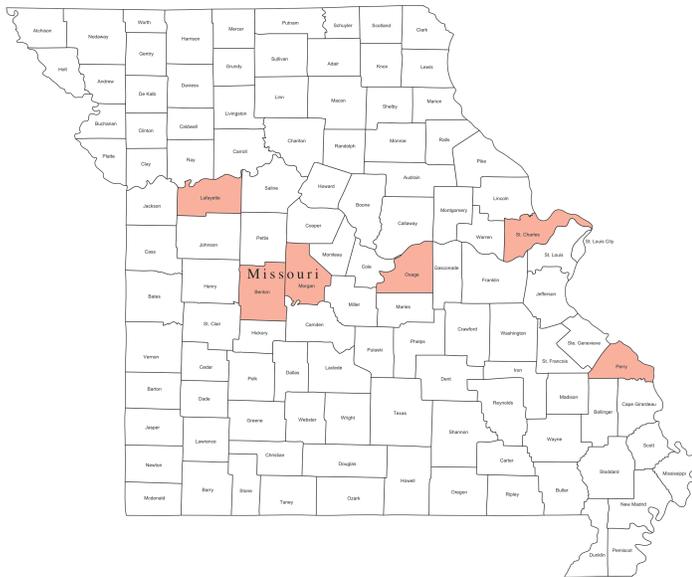


Russell L. Gerlach Reference Map of Missouri



Map Source: Gerlach, Russel L. Settlement Patterns in Missouri: A Study of Population Origins. Columbia: U of Missouri Press, 1986. Accompanying map. Cartographer: Melody Morris.

Missouri Counties Where Interviews Were Held 1993-2019



¹ A successful interview often led to a referral to other speakers.

² Some early interviews of Volga Germans in Ellis County, Kansas were conducted in German with mixed success resulting in a switch to English by the interviewer. Interviews were conducted in German with some Mennonites from Mexico whose English skills were weak. One speaker from Kazakhstan did not speak English at all. That interview was conducted entirely in German. Sometimes an interviewer will be heard prompting a speaker in English or German to ask for clarification or just to keep a conversation going.

³ You may hear soft prompting by family members on some recordings when a speaker is not familiar with a word.

⁴ Some of these isoglosses:

Where **Low German** has ik "I", **Middle German** has ich.

Where **Low German** has maken "to make", **Middle German** has machen.

West Low German speakers say mähet "they mow", while East Low German speakers say mähen.

Where (Low and) Middle German has appel "apple", Upper German has apfel.

Where (Low and) Middle German has pund "pound", Upper German has pfund.

West Middle German pund is pronounced fund in the East Middle German region.

West Upper German and North Upper German pronounce the 2nd person plural object pronoun "you(all)" as euch while the East Upper German speakers say enk.

West Upper German speakers say mähet "they mow", while North Upper German speakers say mähe.

⁵ For example, the standard German word Samstag "Saturday" predominates in the upper dialect regions of German, while Sonnabend is widespread in the low regions (with variations of Saterdag in the Low Saxony region). A good, basic guidebook (in German) with many word maps is the *dtv-Atlas Deutsche Sprache* by Werner König. For a deeper dive with very detailed maps, visit [Regionalsprache.de](https://regionalsprache.de) (REDE). It is available in both German and English.

⁶ Many less-fluent speakers sometimes translated a questionnaire sentence with the incorrect pronoun or an incorrect verb tense. In many cases, it was not productive to press for a correction if the goal was to ensure a pleasant interview experience for the speaker. If posted, it is hoped that the recording will still be interesting to listeners.

⁷ Many speakers grew up on farms away from the community/church that they identify with. If a person is known to be born in a different county than the interview county, that is noted. Many speakers have a family history that shows mixed-dialect marriages over several generations. Dialect assignment is sometimes a best approximation based on family history (or a speaker's self-identification) along with dialect features.

⁸ Original German by Georg Wenker, c.1876. English by Ilse Vogel-Shire, c.1979. From 1876-1887, Georg Wenker, a German linguist, utilized a network of schoolteachers throughout the German Empire to present a questionnaire of sentences to speakers in thousands of locations. The sentences were designed to present key lexical and grammatical items that could be used to differentiate the many German dialects. The data collected from this project were used to create the Deutscher Sprachatlas (DSA) that began to appear in print in 1927 and took 30 years to fully complete. The DSA folio sets of maps graphically depict the distribution of the dialects in the German Empire. To see the maps online and learn more about the evolution of the Wenker questionnaires, visit <https://regionalsprache.de> (in German or English). KU researchers used the 40-sentence version.

⁹ In the late 1990s, KU researchers began to use the KU questionnaire as an easier alternative/supplement to Wenker sentences for collecting words and phrases that help distinguish different German dialects in Kansas and Missouri. If people did well with the KU questionnaire and were still motivated, we would often ask them to try the Wenker sentences. Often during Wenker interviews, the longer sentences had to be segmented into shorter phrases. The recordings have been edited to try to obtain a natural flow to the full, long sentence.

¹⁰ Carman was also valuable to fieldworkers trying to assess the chances in finding good speakers in a particular community, especially if there was no known facilitator to help interviewers connect with speakers. Carman assigns a "critical year" for each community with regard to foreign language (f-lang) use. In his general introduction to Volume 1 of FLUK, he describes this critical year as an approximation of "the year in which a community ceased to use f-lang habitually in the majority of homes where there were growing children." (Pg. 2)