



The University of Texas at Austin, Department of Germanic Studies

The Texas German Endowment

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1. Introduction

Once considered one of the major languages of the Lone Star State, Texas German is a unique dialect that at the beginning of the 20th century was spoken by more than 100,000 Texans. English-only laws during World War I led to the loss of public institutional support for the widespread maintenance and use of German in such previously flourishing venues as German-language schools, newspapers, churches, and businesses. Whereas German was the principal language for most Texas Germans as late as the 1940s and German monolinguals anchored the community's language uses well into the 1960s, English became the primary language for most Texas Germans in both private and public domains in the 1970s. At the beginning of the 21st century, only an estimated 8,000 speakers of Texas German remain, most of whom are 60 years and older. Since this unique Texan dialect is not being passed on to younger generations, it will become extinct within the next thirty years. With the loss of Texas German, we will witness the end of a very special way of life that has had major impacts on Texas culture, history, and traditions for the past 150 years.

2. History of the Texas German Dialect Project

Members of the "Texas German Dialect Project" at the University of Texas at Austin are interviewing the remaining speakers of Texas German in order to document this unique dialect in the form of stories about all aspects of Texas-German life past and present. The resulting web-based multi-media archive will allow future generations to listen to and understand stories told by the last remaining speakers of Texas German. More precisely, the Texas German Dialect Project aims:

1. To preserve the Texas German dialect as it reflects the rich cultural and linguistic traditions of its residents;
2. To gather basic research information about linguistic diversity in order to understand the nature of language variation and change;
3. To provide information about language differences and language change for public and educational interests;
4. To use the material collected in research projects for the improvement of educational programs about language and culture.

From 2001-2004, more than 20 members of the "Texas German Dialect Project" in the Department of Germanic Studies at UT Austin have conducted oral-history interviews in order to transcribe and translate them. The interviews including their transcriptions and translations are



stored in a web-based multi-media archive which will be accessible to future generations (see <http://www.tgdp.org>). So far, more than 130 remaining speakers of Texas German have been interviewed in Fredericksburg, Doss, Spring Branch, New Braunfels, Bulverde, Brenham, Freyburg, and Crawford, totaling more than 250 hours of interviews.

3. Funding Needs

The process of adding entries to the Dialect Archive is extremely time intensive. Per hour of interview added to the archive, an estimated 50 hours of work are necessary for setting up the interview, traveling to the interview site, recording the interview, digitization, transcription, translation, and editing. So far, 12 undergraduate students, seven graduate students, and one faculty member have been involved in the activities of the Texas German Dialect Project. From 2001-2004 the project has received funding from various sources both inside and outside of the University (total direct funding received so far: about \$142,000 from Humanities Texas and the University of Texas at Austin).

After three years of funding by different sources, one cannot continue to rely on their continuing availability. In the best-case scenario, the outcome for future funding is inevitably uncertain. Long term, established projects have reduced cachet for continued support.

To maintain the current level of operation, the Texas German Dialect Project requires an estimated budget of about \$25,000 annually. Since both state and federal funding agencies have cut down on funding for the humanities over the past two years, it is very well possible that at some point the project might not be able to receive funding for a year or two which would mean a hiatus in recording and processing interviews. Since many of the current and potential Texas German informants are in their 80s and 90s this would mean that valuable interviews would be lost in case they passed away before they could be interviewed. For these reasons the sole option to guarantee continuity of this project, lies in the establishment of a Texas German Endowment to insure permanent maintenance of the Dialect Project.

In the event that no students or faculty request support from the endowment to conduct research on Texas German language or culture, a portion of the funds should be used to permanently maintain and support the Texas German Dialect Archive so that its contents are available for future generations. The remaining funds could be used for research and teaching of German language, culture, and literature in the Department of Germanic Studies at The University of Texas at Austin. All donations are tax-deductible.

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