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But Hoosiers *Do* Speak German: An Overview of German in Indiana

The study of German dialects throughout the Midwest has come far in the last decade and a half, thanks especially to the work of Eichhoff, Schach, Buchheit, Keel, Gilbert, Seifert, and numerous dissertations.¹ Yet the study of the German language in Indiana is in its infancy or, perhaps more accurately, is just being born. Apparently no scholarly work has ever been published on any non-Amish variety of German in Indiana; indeed, even the German spoken by Mennonites and Amish in Indiana has hardly been investigated.² Sorting out the complicated state of affairs for the diverse dialects which make up Indiana German is going to take years of work, but that work has at last begun, as discussed below. The present article should briefly introduce a few of the most important historical and contemporary aspects of German in Indiana, from sociological, sociolinguistic, and linguistic perspectives, treating some parallels to and differences from other German-American dialects.

The first goal must be to show that German is an important language in Indiana, something not even all German-Americanists have always been willing to concede. Before coming to Indiana, I reread Hofman's classic article (1966/1968) about German in the Midwest, finding Indiana labeled "peripheral" German-American territory, where German-American culture had long been exposed to Anglicization. Shortly thereafter at a conference, a very competent German-American linguist from the Midwest told me not to expect to find significant numbers of German speakers in Indiana. Trying to ease that obvious disappointment, he added, "Go to a little town called Ferdinand; you might still find a couple of people in their eighties who remember a little." After moving to Indiana to see for myself, I found numerous speakers from Ferdinand and other parts of Dubois County who are quite fluent and barely forty years old. Even younger (fluent?) speakers are said to exist. More recently, another German-Americanist and linguist, born and

Map 1

Approximate location of some German speakers in Indiana. (Percentages from 1980 US Census)



raised in Indiana, was unaware of other German-English bilinguals in the state. German in Indiana thus seems to be a well-kept secret.

In spite of this low profile among specialists, several substantial communities of German-English bilinguals still exist. According to the 1980 United States census, four Indiana counties reported over six

percent of the population using German as the normal language in the home. While the census data may well represent an inaccurate picture—presumably skewed toward more German use than actually goes on—it serves to locate strongholds of German-English bilingualism and perhaps give a rough idea of the size of those communities.³ The areas listed here are older communities, with long bilingual traditions, in three of four instances heavily Amish and Mennonite (cf. Map 1):

County	Percentage of Pop.	Number of Speakers
LaGrange County (NE Indiana)	15.0	3,428
Adams (S of Fort Wayne)	9.8	2,428
Daviess (SW Indiana)	7.2	1,845
Dubois (Jasper)	6.15	<u>1,937</u>
		Total: 9,638

In more urban areas, German speakers are numerous but tend to be first or second generation Americans, for example:⁴

County	Number of Speakers
Allen	3,780
Elkhart	2,173
Lake	2,266
Marion	3,515
St. Joseph	<u>1,562</u>
	Total: 13,296

Almost every corner of Indiana still reports significant pockets of German speakers. Eight more counties have between 600 and 1,000 speakers each:

County	Number of Speakers
Kosciusko	810
LaPorte	757
Marshall	753
Monroe	767
Porter	918
Spencer	641
Tippecanoe	713
Vanderburgh	943

In these 17 counties, less than one fifth of Indiana's counties, we find almost 30,000 people who claim to use German at home.

A crucial question is: Who speaks what to whom and when? The

answer parallels what is documented for many other German-American communities in recent decades. Among the southern Indiana speakers—with whom this article deals most—German is restricted largely to private domains and to use as a marker of ethnic group. German is strongest among family, friends, and neighbors. On some occasions, speakers will initiate a conversation in German and later switch to English. Here, German seems mostly a marker of ethnic identity: One begins in German, acknowledging that the speakers are “Germans” and German speakers; the switch is then made to accommodate those less comfortable in German or for technical vocabulary.

The vitality of an ethnic language of course need not be measured solely by its number of speakers. Language use for official or institutional purposes can contribute much to the maintenance of a tongue. Let us look at some historical examples of institutional German use in Indiana.

German language newspapers number well over 150 through the course of Indiana’s history and throughout every part of the state. *Der deutsche Beobachter* (Fort Wayne) was probably the first, founded in 1843. I must say “probably” because scholars are unsure whether it was ever published. Evansville has at least 18 separate titles in bibliographies listing German papers in Indiana (Arndt and Olsen 1961, Miller 1982), Indianapolis 22, and a town as small as Logansport has 12 entries.

Circulation climbed into this century for many papers, reaching impressive levels as late as the 1910s:

<i>Täglicher Demokrat</i>	Evansville	1918	5,149
<i>Der wöchentliche Demokrat</i>	Evansville	1918	8,631
<i>Freie-Presse/Staatszeitung</i>	Fort Wayne	1910	4,000
<i>Telegraph und Tribüne</i>	Indianapolis	1915	10,825
<i>Wöchentliches Journal</i>	Terre Haute	1915	2,075

Even German-language papers from villages sold over 1,000 copies, for instance, the *Huntingburg Signal* with a circulation of 1,700 in 1910.

Most German language publications appeared in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, many disappearing during the First World War. A few survived much longer, however. Two of the last secular German language papers in the state both failed in 1927, the *Freie-Presse/Staatszeitung* of Fort Wayne and the *Indiana Telegraph* of Evansville. After that, *Die Evansville Post* failed in 1930, the *Indiana Staats-Herold* of Hammond in 1931, and the Catholic monthly *Paradiesesfrüchte* from St. Meinrad in 1936. Some Mennonite publications in German survived into the 1940s.

Turning now to religion, some groups naturally maintained German in religious services much longer than others. Old Order Mennonites and Amish, who probably number between 4,000-5,000 in Indiana—according to Reimer’s 1979 estimate—still use German in many services across the state.

I take here as an example of German in church the Missouri Synod

Lutherans. First, an overview of German services in Indiana Missouri Synod churches:

Year	Churches With Some German Services	Over 50% German Services	All German Services	Total Number of Congregations	Percentage With Some German Services
1964	7			192	3.65
1960	12			189	6.35
1955	18			167	10.78
1950	31			155	20.00
1945	35			147	23.81
1940	66	31		125	52.80
1935	81	41	5	131	61.83
1928	100	48	8	133	75.19
1925	113	66	10	126	89.68
1922	109	69	10	127	85.83

The largest drop in percentage of Indiana's Missouri Synod Lutheran congregations offering some German services clearly comes during the Second World War, parallel to the large drops during this period found in Nebraska by Buchheit (1985) and in Texas by Salmons (in progress). In the late 1940s, the bilingual congregations were still scattered across the state, including over 15 in Fort Wayne and 5 in nearby Decatur. "The region," the area east of Chicago stretching along Lake Michigan, had a handful and several more were to be found in Indianapolis and in southwestern Indiana.⁵

These are, of course, simply numbers for one branch of Lutheranism in Indiana. Other churches, especially Catholic and other Lutheran groups, also continued German services until recently. Even after regular German services ceased, some congregations have continued to utilize bilingual pastors. Dubois County still has German-speaking clergy. A Standard German-speaking Lutheran minister from there reports using some German in visiting with older members of his congregation. The same pastor holds German-language services at a Jasper nursing home.

One of the most important institutions for language maintenance is the school. Through the nineteenth century, German-language schools were common in Indiana. In 1886, 231 German schools had just over 30,000 pupils enrolled. During the First World War, German disappeared entirely from public schools and almost entirely from private schools and did not reappear for decades. An article from 1938 talks of a contemporary anti-foreign language wave which would interfere with the "gradual reinstatement of German in secondary schools and colleges to a position approximating that which it once occupied" (Berrett 1938: 320). At that writing, a total of 47 Indiana high schools offered German, but only six offered more than two years of instruction. Fort Wayne, a predominately ethnic German community, did not reinstate

German until the late 1940s (Scott 1980b). In a more extreme example, Jasper High School in the middle of heavily German-speaking Dubois County only reintroduced German in the mid-1970s.

Institutional usage served an important function: It kept Standard German alive. With the loss of institutional usage, Standard German was doomed to be lost. Until about the First World War, many German-Americans spoke their local dialect(s) but came into constant contact with Standard German, learning it at school, reading it in their newspapers, hearing it from the pulpit, and so on. As noted above, during the 1910s anti-German (or more generally xenophobic and anti-foreign language) sentiment was strong enough that German and other languages were eliminated from schools across the United States. Indiana here follows the same path as bilingual communities across the United States. Many educators took it upon themselves, with help from government and academics, to discourage foreign language use, even in the home. Children were punished for using languages other than English at school. Teachers told their communities that their varieties of German, Spanish, Czech, etc., were only dialects, substandard varieties; that bilingualism caused insanity. As Clifford Scott (1980a, 1980b) has documented, German was forced out of Indiana public and parochial schools in even predominately ethnic German areas, and moves were made to censor German books in public libraries.

The irony here is obvious: The very educators who were denying students access to standard varieties of German and other languages complained that the spoken languages were not standard. Thus, a generation of bilingual Americans was denied literacy in their native tongues and told that they spoke substandard dialects. The widespread in-group attitude that the dialects spoken by German-Americans are "bad German" remains now as scar tissue from those old wounds. Today, children at school learn a German barely intelligible to many German speakers in Indiana.

The general perception of standard within the community also warrants mention. Speakers from several parts of Dubois County have reported that Jasper German is a higher, i.e., more Standard German than other dialects. This may well be based more on the social system in the county than on any linguistic reality, though the standard elements in the various dialects have not been systematically investigated. As in most German-American dialects, many Dubois County idiolects reflect some standard features not found in the base dialects. Also unclear at present is whether these standard features reflect the imported sociolects of the immigrants or a koine of south German dialects tending toward Standard German.

The ethnic revival movement of the 1970s created some ethnic institutions and recreated others, but usually without much effect on language use.⁶ Indiana lagged behind some other heavily German-American areas in the formation of ethnic organizations and the (re)introduction of German into institutional settings. For example, the Indiana German Heritage Society was formed during the German-American Tricentennial (1983), while similar organizations in Texas had

been underway for nearly a decade. The Indiana German Heritage Society, however, has grown with alacrity, numbering several hundred members in its first year, building a membership throughout the state.⁷

In the electronic media, Hoosiers have surprisingly little German-language radio, far less than their neighbors. In fact, French is broadcast twice as many hours per week as German in Indiana. An overview (compiled from the annual *Broadcasting/Cablecasting Yearbook*):

German-Language Broadcasting: 1986		
State	Stations Using German	Total Hours Per Week in German
Midwest:		
Indiana	3	4
Illinois	5	16
Ohio	11	39
Michigan	6	11
Wisconsin	14	49
Other:		
New York	12	23
Pennsylvania	13	28
Texas	5	20

The Indiana hours currently come from Indianapolis, New Albany, and Fort Wayne. Historically, German-language radio in Indiana has remained stable since the mid-1970s at three or four hours per week. In 1960 and 1964, no German broadcasting was reported.

Summarizing then, spoken German remains relatively widespread in Indiana, largely in private domains. Institutional use has largely if not yet entirely died out in Indiana, taking Standard German with it. In churches and print media, German died gradually; in the more directly government-controlled domain of education, the transition came practically overnight. Significantly, institutional use of German, as throughout the Midwest, was commonplace in the state well within living memory. Exceptions to the loss of institutional uses are still found among the relatively closed societies such as the Amish and Mennonites.

Turning to the German language in Indiana, we must deal with a definitional problem. What does "German" mean to these many Hoosier German speakers? Indiana has numerous varieties of German that many European German speakers can understand only with great difficulty. Two common kinds of German found in Indiana represent extremes, linguistically and in linguistic vitality. On the one hand, many speakers, especially first generation urban speakers, speak more or less contemporary Standard German. This German, as elsewhere in the United States, is seldom passed on to later generations. On the other hand, the most vital German in Indiana is the Pennsylvania German spoken by several thousand Amish and Mennonites, at least Old Order, a language by no means easily intelligible to Standard German speakers.

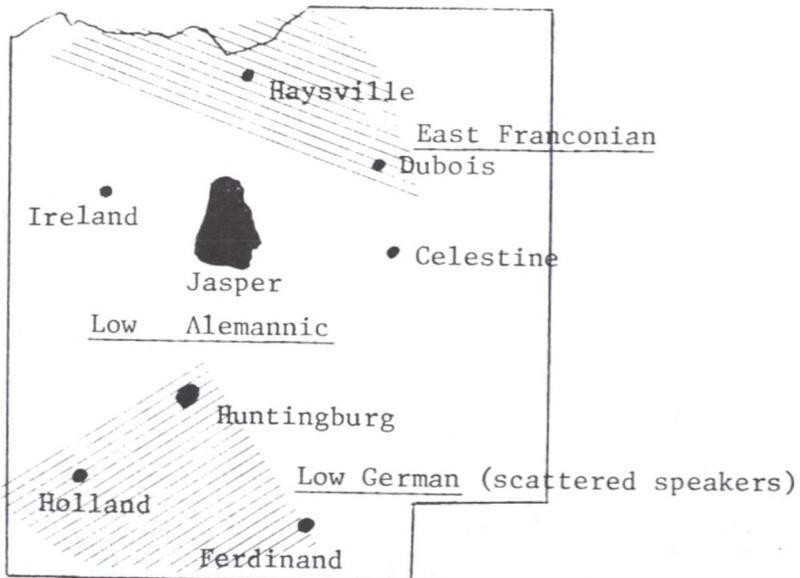
For the purposes of this discussion then, "Indiana German" refers to a number of divergent varieties, not all mutually intelligible, spoken within the state. One clearly may not posit a general Indiana German dialect as Gilbert has for Texas German (Gilbert 1972: 1 and elsewhere).

One finds almost every point along the scale from standard to extreme dialect. In Dubois County alone several distinct kinds of German have coexisted for a century and a half now.⁸ In northern Dubois County, including the Haysville area, a dialect based on East Franconian of Pegnitz and Bayreuth is spoken. Throughout central Dubois County a Low Alemannic dialect from the Freiburg area is still used. In the south, Westphalian Low German, from around Osnabrück, survives. Finally, Amish in Martin and Daviess counties at the northern border of Dubois County speak Pennsylvania German (cf. Map 2).

This dialectal diversity in a small, heavily German-speaking area after several generations is perhaps surprising, and certainly much more widespread than that found in many German-American bilingual areas. The situation can however be easily enough explained. First, Dubois County German immigrants formed cluster settlements. Thus, speakers of the same or similar dialects lived together in Dubois County. Colonization efforts were certainly aided by the first German priest in the county, Father Kundek, who brought Catholic families to central Dubois County. The maintenance of dialects was aided by sharp religious lines within the county. The so-called Catholic triangle—the points were Jasper, Celestine, Ferdinand—was bordered in several places by Protestant communities. Until quite recently—and to a quite

Map 2

Major dialects of Dubois County (approximate location)



limited extent even today—the religious boundaries represented cultural and linguistic boundaries. Niehaus's recent dissertation (1981) documents the limited social contact, limited intermarriage, etc. between Protestant and Catholic. While the outside—English-speaking—world may have regarded the "Dubois County Dutch" as a homogenous ethnic group, clear boundaries were maintained within the German-speaking communities.

Interestingly, some Haysville speakers and Jasper speakers even claim difficulty in understanding the other dialect, though the dialects are linguistically quite close. Such difficulty in communicating may have more sociological than linguistic causes. Both Haysville and Jasper speakers have had some contact with Amish from Daviess and Martin counties. All parties concerned—Amish and non-Amish—report that the other groups sound strange, but, in Lester W. J. Seifert's words, "with a little practice, accompanied by patience and good will, communication is quite possible" (1970: 18). Cross-dialect communication between the Low German speakers in the southern part of Dubois County and any other group there appears out of the question, though many *Plattdeutsch* speakers have been trilingual in English, *Plattdeutsch*, and another Dubois County German dialect.

Much linguistic analysis of Dubois County German will be forthcoming in the immediate future. For the purposes of this brief introduction, I sketch only two particularly important points.

First, even after preliminary taping in Dubois County, some isoglosses are clear. The verb "to speak" for instance shows considerable variation in Dubois County German, coming from the German base dialects. "To speak German" can take, among others, the following forms in Dubois County:

<i>deitsch blauere</i>	Haysville
<i>deitsch schwätze/schwatze</i>	Jasper
<i>deitsch babbele</i>	Celestine ⁹
<i>deitsch rede</i>	southeast & Haysville
<i>plattdütsch küren</i>	southwest
<i>deutsch/deitsch spreche(n)</i>	whole county

Every speaker is aware of social and geographical variation in this verb, which is of course automatically elicited by asking people if they speak German. Once beyond the ritualistic sentence, "I can speak German," many speakers use either *spreche* or *schwätze*. The other, locally distinct forms serve as markers of community, but then often give way in conversation to forms with greater currency across Dubois County.

The word for "potato" shows less variation, with only three words:

<i>Erdäpfle</i>	⟨ <i>Erd(s)apfel</i>
<i>Kartoffel</i>	
<i>Grumbeer</i>	⟨ <i>Grundbirne</i>

This distribution is however still complex. *Erdäpfle* is used in the northern part of the county, in the Haysville area. *Grumbeer* appears to

be limited to Alemannic speakers. The Standard German (and north German dialect) *Kartoffel* is used by Low German speakers in the southwest. In the northern or East Franconian area, all three words are understood even though the Standard German *Kartoffel* is rarely used. In the central or Low Alemannic area, the three words compete, though informants use their Alemannic form for the first word, i.e., *Erdapfe(l)* with a low back vowel in the second syllable and a schwa finally. In the southern part of the county, even speakers of Upper German dialects do not understand the Haysville term. Part of the ongoing work in Dubois County involves the study of lexical dialect mixing, including passive isoglosses, that is, where given words are understood even if they are not actively used.

Second, many or most of the changes away from the base dialects are found not only in Indiana but across German-speaking America in Pennsylvania, Texas, and across the Great Plains. One can talk, to some extent, of a set of American German features, widely found across the country. In the lexicon, for example, Dubois County speakers have borrowed many of the same words as other nineteenth-century German immigrants, often with the same morphology:

<i>die Car, -s</i>	'car'
<i>die Fenz, -en</i>	'fence'
<i>fixen (fixte, gefixt)</i>	'to repair'
<i>gleichen (gleichte, geleicht)</i>	'to like (someone)'

In conversational marking, the modal particles (*doch, mal, etc.*) of German have lost ground, occasionally being replaced by similar English items, e.g., *you know* and *well* as hesitation words.¹⁰ Code-switching appears rare. Switches are usually either German to English for an unfamiliar word or phrase or emblematic code-switching of conversational markers as just noted.

In conclusion, Indiana has more German than has been hitherto acknowledged, representing a *Paradebeispiel* of spoken German outside the obvious and more often studied German-speaking areas in the United States, such as Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and Texas.

The dearth of published work on Indiana German is quickly being eliminated. Research underway on German dialects in Indiana includes study of lexical isoglosses in Dubois County. Peter Freeouf, a doctoral student from Indiana University-Bloomington, is writing a dissertation on the morphology and phonology of some Dubois County dialects (primarily Haysville Franconian and Jasper Alemannic), with attention to age and social stratification. Direly needed are many other projects. For example, C. Richard Beam (personal communication) has suggested a lexical study of the rapidly disappearing Adams County Swiss German. Dialect boundaries, dialect shift, code-switching (between dialects and languages), the role of semi-speakers, the complex relationship between attitudes and language use, these and other issues will

yield a rich harvest for those interested in working on German in Indiana.

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Notes

¹ I am grateful for a range of comments from the following people: Sabine Jordan (Humanist in Residence, Dubois County, 1980-1981); Ruth Reichmann (President, Indiana German Heritage Society), Edgar C. Polomé (Univ. of Texas), Eileen Schaber (Haysville, IN), and Linda Moehle-Vieregge (Univ. of Texas).

² The exceptions here are a short sociology-of-language oriented article by Reimer (1979) on the Mennonites of northeastern Indiana and work on an eastern Indiana Amish community in Wenger's 1969 dissertation.

³ The reliability of census reports on language use in the United States has become the subject of considerable discussion among sociologists of language; cf. especially Veltman (1983) and Fishman (1984).

⁴ Allen and Elkhart counties are actually mixed settlements, including urban and rural speakers.

⁵ More general, but detailed comparisons of Missouri Synod language use and shift are available in Hofman (1966, 1968) and Dietz (1949).

⁶ Cf. Fishman 1984 and 1985 for general discussions of the "ethnic revival" and language maintenance in the United States.

⁷ The Indiana German Heritage Society can be contacted through:

Dr. Ruth Reichmann
Indiana German Heritage Society
400 E. Michigan Street
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204.

⁸ 1986 marks the sesquicentennial of German settlement to Dubois County. In 1836, 12 German-speaking families moved to near present-day Jasper.

⁹ Reported by Sabine Jordan (personal communication, cf. also Jordan 1981).

¹⁰ Amazing here is the fact that many speakers have kept translated forms of these modal particles in their English, but virtually lost them in German. For instance, Dubois County English includes "let me look once," Standard English "let me just have a look." The *once* functions here as its German equivalent *mal*—now essentially extinct in Dubois County German—does in Standard German.

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