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## Professor seeks to preserve 'Texas German' dialect



COURTESY PHOTO University of Texas  
Prof. Hans Boas conducts an interview to record a Texas German speaker before the dialect unique to this part of Texas disappears.

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AUSTIN — Wir sind nach Boerne gemoved. Die Eichkatz sitzt in mein Pecanbaum.

These aren't your typical German sentences. The first translates as "We moved to Boerne." The second sentence is "The squirrel is sitting in my pecan tree." To a speaker of "Texas German," these make perfect sense.

Usually, within two to three generations, the native language of immigrants is lost in favor of the tongue of their host country, according to Prof. Hans Boas of the University of Texas at Austin.

"But the interesting thing about Texas German is that it has now survived for several generations," he said. "Unfortunately, it will almost certainly disappear within the next 30 to 40 years."

Boas spearheads the Texas German Dialect Project, an attempt to record and preserve this dialect for future generations.

"Texas German" is a unique dialect that exists only in South Central Texas.

"It is a unique mix of German dialects with English words, idioms, and constructions," Boas said. "And it has survived so long. It is the result of a number of German dialects brought to Texas in the 1830s and 1840s, where the immigrants interacted with each other and mixed their dialects, creating a New World dialect."

Boas was on his way from California to Austin to begin a new job with the University of Texas in 2001, when a chance stop in Fredericksburg changed the focus of his work.

"I was sitting in a restaurant and heard some people at a nearby table speaking a German dialect I'd never heard before," Boas said.

Questioning his fellow diners, Boas discovered they were speaking Texas German. When he arrived in Austin, he discovered some efforts had been made to record its existence, but the work had lain dormant for many years.

"And now the speakers are dying out," he said. "Their average age is 60 to 65. The youngest we've spoken with is 53 and the oldest was 103."

With funding from the university and from the Texas Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Humanities, Boas and his team have been able to record 250 interviews to preserve and study. They have a waiting list of more than 200 more. Each interview is recorded, edited, transcribed in Texas German, then translated into English, in order to preserve the dialect for future generations to at least study. It is a laborious and costly task. One by one, Boas said, the native speakers are dying. At the same time, funding is drying up, so he and his team are racing to try to record as much as they can with what resources they have.

"Texas German tells of the cultural and linguistic heritage of these people, as well as the history of this group of immigrants," he said.

For several generations, this immigrant group lived on the frontier, isolated from other European settlers. Their day-to-day business, schools, newspapers, church services, and more were conducted solely in German for a long time. Their influence on their area of the state — from Fredericksburg to Boerne and Kerrville to New Braunfels — made it what it is today, Boas said.

Ivarene Hosek of Floresville has been interviewed for the project.

"I belong to two German heritage groups," Hosek said. "Through one of them, I heard about Professor Boas, and agreed to be interviewed."

Hosek grew up speaking Texas German.

"I had to learn English when I started school," she said.

Although her children don't speak the language, Hosek is trying to teach her grandchildren at least a little Texas German, so it won't be completely lost.

"It's slow going and a challenge, with everybody else speaking English!" she said.

Hosek and Boas hope that by sharing this information, other Texas German speakers will be encouraged to participate in the project.

Funding is also important if the work is to continue.

The interviews are all available digitally via the project's Web site.

"This type of oral history and its preservation are very important for Texas history and future generations," Boas said. He invites anyone interested to contribute to recording this part of the state's history to contact him to help with an endowment that will preserve the archive and provide scholarships for language students at the University of Texas.

Speakers must have been born and raised in Texas by people who came here from Germany or are fourth-, fifth-, or sixth-generation Texas Germans.

For more information on the Texas German Dialect Project, visit <http://www.tgdp.org> or contact Boas at 512-232-6358 or [hcb@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:hcb@mail.utexas.edu).

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