Linguist Drawn To Doss Residents’ Talk

Boas interviews Folks Speaking Unique Texas-German Dialect

A University of Texas linguist, Dr. Hans Boas, was in Doss on Thursday, Jan. 12 to interview some of the few residents there who continue to speak their own dialect of Texas-styled German.

A native of Germany, Boas stumpled onto the historic dialect while traveling from California to Austin. During a lunch break in Fredericksburg, he heard German spoken (with a Texas twist) at a nearby table.

Since then, he has delved into the dialect’s evolution and the interviews were part of his research. Assisting in setting up the interview was Warren Hahn. Boas spent that Thursday talking with the following residents: Eliza Wolge Treecher, Kathleen Geistweidt Crenwelge, Bertha Ann Wolge Royce, Roy Itz, Presley Athelger, Henry Louis Wolge, Harvey Ellebracht, Mr. and Mrs. Norbert Stehling, Bernard Stehling, Ralph Rode and Beuben Geistweidt.

The oral recordings were performed at the home of Heinz and Karin Roesech. She is also working toward a PhD in German at UT.

At the turn of the 20th century, the so-called “German belt” encompassed much of the Texas Hill Country, where 95 percent of all residents were either German-born or descendants of immigrants. In 1910, German was the first language of 110,000 Texans. Today, fewer than 8,000 native Texas German speakers are left.

“The language is going extinct,” Boas said. “In 30 to 40 years, it will most definitely be gone and there is nothing we can do about it.”

Texas German is less formal than the mother tongue spoken in Germany. It has also borrowed liberally from English when new ideas and inventions left it speechless, resulting in words such as das Boxupeer, der Cowboy, der Helicopter and der Taxolecturer—all spoken with a German accent.

Working with a team of UT students, Boas has posted much of his research and audio clips on the Internet at www.tsigp.org, the home page of his “Texas German Dialect Project.”

He has also launched an ambitious, five-year campaign for a $500,000 endowment that would permit ongoing research. Already, Boas has a $40,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, which has allowed him to take a sabatical from UT to write a book entitled Language Death in the Melting Pot. Its anticipated publication date is late-2006 or early-2007.

For more information about the “Texas German Dialect Project,” contact Boas at the following Internet e-mail address: kcb@uwc.utexas.edu.
Intrigued by Doss Residents who still speak their own unique Texas-German dialect is Dr. Hans Boas, a linguist from the University of Texas, who was in the area in mid-January to record and study the quickly-becoming-extinct language.