

**Viewing Texas Germans through the lens of transnationalism:
a new form of transmigrant?**

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses whether Texas Germans can be viewed through the lens of transnationalism. As a group, Texas Germans exhibit a rich linguistic and cultural heritage, both of which have significantly contributed to the formation of a strong sense of ‘Texas-Germanness.’ My goal is to investigate this particular instance of “Germanness beyond Germany” (Maxwell and Davis, 2016) and to determine if Texas Germans represent a previously unidentified form of *linguistic* transmigrant. The study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, consulting both quantitative (surveys) and qualitative data (open-ended interviews; semi-structured phone interviews). The results indicate the presence of various transnational elements and confirm that both linguistic and cultural heritage are defining elements in the construction and maintenance of Texas German identity. Language, moreover, appears as an important connector and mediator between these concepts.

Keywords: Transnationalism, Texas German, Linguistic Transmigrant, Sociolinguistics, Migration Studies

I. INTRODUCTION¹

Over the past two decades, transnationalism has emerged as an important approach to social sciences. While the concept originally grew out of economic theory (e.g. Keohane and Nye, 1971; Bartlett and Ghosal, 1989), its use has spread beyond the confines of global business into both the social and political arenas. In immigration studies, for instance, a growing body of literature describes manifold scenarios of migration and analyses the “multiplicity of involvements that transmigrants sustain in both home and host societies” (Basch et al., 1994: 7).

Transnational migration is “a process of movement and settlement across international borders in which individuals maintain or build multiple networks of connection to their country of origin while at the same time settling in a new country” (Fouon and Glick Schiller, 2001: 60). While researchers typically explore transnational migration in light of the characteristic cultural, political, and social processes associated with globalization as well as ongoing technological advancements, some literature has broadened the classic research agenda by applying the concept to historical groups (e.g. Howard, 2012; Pratt, 2009; Cano and Délano, 2007; Hoerder, 2002). More recently, the phenomenon has also attracted the attention of disciplines such as applied linguistics/sociolinguistics which aim to explore the intersections of transnationalism, identity, and language (see Duff, 2015).

Using the idea that “transnationalism has been with us for a long time, and a comparison with the past allows us to assess just what is new about the patterns and processes involved in transnational ties today” (Foner, 1997: 71), this paper investigates the transnational character of Texas Germans, a German-language diaspora group that emigrated to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. As a group, Texas Germans exhibit a rich cultural and specifically linguistic heritage, the Texas German (TxG) dialect. Despite the inevitable disappearance of the dialect from the linguistic landscape, this heritage has contributed significantly to the formation of a strong sense of ‘Texas-Germanness’ (Boas, 2009; Boas and Fingerhuth, 2017).² But what characterizes this particular instance of “Germanness beyond Germany” (Maxwell and Davis, 2016)?

The goal of this paper is thus to investigate TxG identity and its formative factors more closely, and to determine if Texas Germans may represent a previously unidentified form of *linguistic* transmigrant, namely a many-generation immigrant (i.e., any post-third generation immigrant or immigrant group) exhibiting cultural and emotional ties to the country of ancestry because of their linguistic and ethnic heritage. Given its transnational approach, the paper further investigates to what degree the hyphenated group may exhibit transnational ‘ways of belonging,’ i.e. practices signalling an identification with another people or place (Glick Schiller, 2003), and whether potential cultural, physical, and emotional ties suggest the existence of a ‘third space’ (e.g. Skop, 2014; Pries, 2010; Faist, 1999; Bhabha, 1994). The paper specifically looks at language attitudes, cultural expression (symbols, practices, and artifacts), and more complex factors such as identity and other emotional components (see 4). This paper is limited to one German-heritage group; it remains to be seen if the conclusions drawn here can be applied to other such groups (e.g. Irish Americans, Italian Americans, and so on).

The research utilizes a mixed-methods approach, consulting both quantitative (survey data on speaker biographies, language identity and attitudes) and qualitative data (open-ended interviews; semi-structured phone interviews) (see 5). Survey data and open-ended interviews stem from the Texas German Dialect Project (TGDP). To assess emotional components and other notions of belonging, the analysis is also informed by semi-structured phone interviews.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a background on Texas Germans and the TxG dialect. Section 3 sheds light on various local interpretations of Germanness. Section 4 discusses my theoretical approach. Section 5 introduces the data and methodology, while section 6 contains the analysis. Finally, section 7 concludes.

II. TEXAS GERMANS: SOCIOHISTORICAL AND LINGUISTIC BACKGROUND

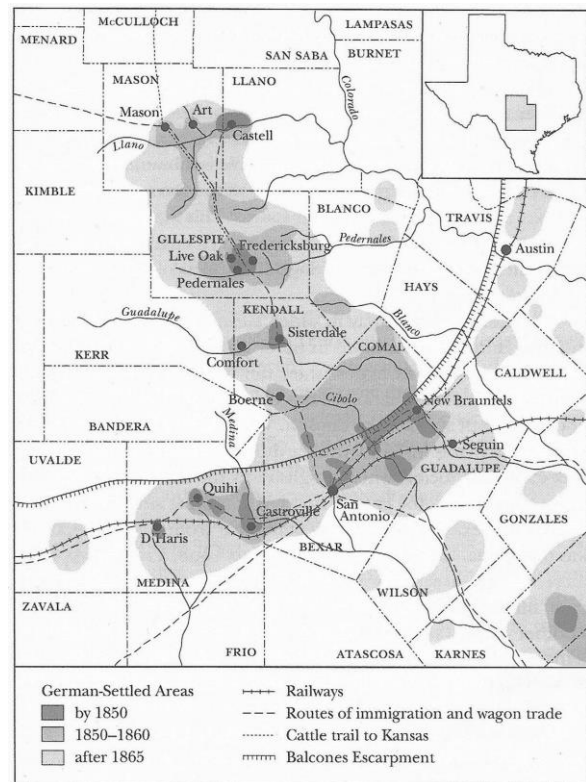
The first wave of German settlers came to Texas in the 1830s and 1840s. In the following decades, the prospect of land and organized safe passage promoted large-scale immigration, mainly from central and northern parts of present-day Germany. In 1850, 8,266 Germans lived in Texas, but by 1860, there were nearly 20,000, essentially monolingual German-born immigrants and around 30,000 American-born Texas Germans (Jordan, 1975).

The TxG population continued to grow significantly. Eichhoff (1986) states that in 1907, there were between 75,000 and 100,000 Texas Germans. Moreover, Nicolini (2004: 42) estimates that at the beginning of the twentieth century, one-third of the white Texan population was of German ancestry. By 1940, the TxG population was approximately 159,000 (Kloss, 1977), with the overwhelming majority settled in a broad, fragmented belt across south-central Texas.

During the early decades of German settlement, Texas Germans were comparatively isolated, particularly in the western part of the German Belt (see FIGURE 1), the so-called Hill Country. This geographic isolation and closely-knit networks between settlers motivated the formation of the TxG dialect (Boas, 2009).

The institutional support in existence after the arrival of the first immigrants in Texas remained strong for several decades. In 1917, there were 45 churches that held services in German. There were numerous German-language newspapers and magazines (at some point up to 100), as well as German-language schools and social clubs, choirs, gun clubs, etc. (Nicolini, 2004). With the establishment of these facilities, the presence of a lively *Festkultur* (Bungert, 2017) and subsequent institutional support, the Texas Germans remained a relatively robust speech island up until about World War I (see Boas, 2009; Boas, 2018).

**FIGURE 1
THE WESTERN PART OF THE GERMAN BELT (BOAS, 2009: 37)**



This situation changed dramatically starting around 1918, when a language law for public schools was implemented in 1918, following the 1917 entry of the USA into World War I. This regulation, along with increasing anti-German sentiment (also found in other states with significant German populations), led to the stigmatization and eventual decline of the status of German in the region (Salmons, 1983). Other factors, such as the replacement of German with English as the language of education, reduced exposure to Standard German, and improvements in transportation also contributed to a shift in bilingualism with English gradually replacing German as the primary language (Boas, 2009). The Second World War reinforced the stigmatization of the dialect and its speakers. Institutional support for German was largely abandoned, which had significant effects on the TxG community. German newspapers and magazines closed or made the decision to publish in English (Salmons and Lucht, 2006). Several German schools were closed, while others stopped teaching German, and German churches began conducting services in English.

After the war, the preservation of TxG language and culture faced significant challenges. Increased migration from non-German speaking counties to the formerly German enclaves led to the decline of the use of German as an ‘official’ language in the public domain (Boas, 2009). Simultaneously, younger Texas Germans left German-speaking areas to find employment, to join the military, or to pursue higher education; for them, the advantages of speaking English were pronounced. While the shift from German to English as the primary language weakened the mastery of the dialect, some Texas Germans also married non-German speaking partners. In such marriages, English often became the spoken language in the home. In the 1950s, the development of the interstate highways eliminated the isolation of the regions in which the dialect was spoken, while also making it easier for non-German-speaking people to visit or live in the originally German-speaking areas and for TxG speakers to accept work in more urban environments. These developments further intensified the use of English (see Boas, 2009).

As intergenerational transmission essentially ceased, the dialect declined sharply. While there were still approximately 70,000 TxG speakers in the 1960s, today only around 5,000-6,000 heritage speakers, all of whom are 70 and older, speak the language of their ancestors (Boas, 2018). Today, the vast majority of Texas German speakers are semi-speakers, with fading and passive oral skills and little to no competence in writing Texas German. English is their primary/dominant language, and the use of the dialect is restricted to an ever-decreasing number of friends, family, and neighbors, indicating that TxG will likely become extinct within in the next 20-25 years.

III. GERMANNESSE BEYOND GERMANY

The history of Germans in Texas parallels the histories of similar German communities around the world, including Barossa German in Australia, Michigan or Wisconsin German in the US, Germans in Brazil's Rio Grande do Sul, or German in Hungary. Besides having followed a similar trajectory with regards to settlement and language shift, these communities have reconciled a sense of German identity with their various host societies.

A 2016 collection examines how communities in the German diaspora have imagined and maintained their collective identity. In the introduction, Maxwell and Davis suggest that the formation and maintenance of a group's identity abroad, a "Germanness beyond Germany," is both inherently connected to a particular location, the host society, and the time of migration (e.g. until the 19th century, Germanness served as a marker of estate status, culture, and privilege). Strikingly, however, none of the studies published in *German Studies Review* discuss a present-day speech island, and only one study, Kranz (2016), deals with a diaspora community that is still intact.³ Kranz argues that German citizenship appears to be the identity-defining element for ethnically German Jews in Israel and Palestine, whereas speaking German plays only a marginal role. In addition, both institutions and social practices, such as food preferences (see also Groeneveld, 2016 on Tsingtau-Germans), help construct and maintain an understanding of Germanness abroad.

As for linguistic enclaves, research suggests that both cultural and linguistic heritage play a vital role in their hyphenated interpretations of Germanness (see e.g. Bender, 2016 for Brazil; Burnley, 2010 for Australia; Gerner, 2006 for Hungary). This identity appears to be strongly tied to the host society and these groups' locations, which is mainly rural. National citizenship does not play a role, but religion informs Germanness in these communities to a variable extent. For Amish, Hutterites, or Mennonite groups, for instance, it marks the defining element when it comes to their German identity (Louden, 2016), while religion plays a less important role for Texas Germans (Boas, 2015). Bender (2016: 236) sketches a more complicated picture, claiming that her Brazilian-German consultants' „identification with [the German] language and heritage hints at the importance of language for identity formation” as language carries “feelings, childhood, ancestors, and identification of one's personal family history” (175).⁴ Burnley's (2010) interviews also point towards ancestry as a formative factor. As both authors do not list any evidence (quotes) to substantiate their claims, this paper attempts to shed more light on both affect and language as well as their relevance for Texas German identity and language maintenance.

IV. TRANSNATIONAL WAYS OF BELONGING

As noted above, transnationalism has become an important concept in the field of immigration studies (e.g. Sarmistha, 2019; Faist et al., 2013; Howard, 2011; Pries, 2008, 2010; Vertovec 2009; Khagram and Levitt, 2008; Glick Schiller, 2003; Faist, 1999; Foner, 1997). The term describes “the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch et al., 1994: 7). In theory, these individuals construct their distinct identities around so-called ‘third spaces,’ a term which refers to a multiplicity of involvements (e.g. physical, social, cultural, economic, emotional) transcending the limits of geographic, cultural, and political borders (e.g. Skop, 2014; Laubenthal and Pries, 2012; Bhabha, 1994).⁵

Third (or transnational) spaces are “combinations of social and symbolic ties, positions in networks and organizations and networks of organizations that can be found in at least two geographically and internationally distinct places” (Faist 1999: 40). However, they are more than just alternative social spaces constructed between the poles of ‘here’ and ‘there.’ Transnational spaces stem “from the duality of migrant existence, a tension between a lived-in space and a distant, remembered space” (Prince and Whitworth, 2004: 185). Therefore, as Faist (1999: 40) points out, the concept denotes both “dynamic social processes, not static notions of ties and positions.”

An important concept to assess transnational practices was developed by Glick Schiller (2004, 2003), who decouples social relationships from a notion of common interest or norms and also distinguishes between ‘ways of being’ (practices denouncing ongoing cross-border activity) and ‘ways of belonging’ (practices signalling an identity with another people or place). “Ways of belonging” are of particular interest here. According to Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004: 1010), the term describes

practices that signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group. These actions are not symbolic but concrete, visible actions that mark belonging such as wearing a Christian cross or Jewish star, flying a flag, or choosing a particular cuisine. Ways of belonging combine action and an awareness of the kind of identity that action signifies.

A similar idea is expressed by Pries (2010, 2008), who points to “transnational social spaces,” one of three components that inform a third space.⁶ The author considers these spaces a form of “transgressive social interlacing,” in which particular social practices, symbols (e.g.

language, important holidays, rituals, music), and artifacts (e.g. communication technologies, food) intensify in a way that they become a major spatio-social component in the lives of individuals (Pries, 2010: 30).

In light of Pries’ and Glick Schiller’s proposals, this paper addresses elements that may represent transnational ‘ways of belonging’ for Texas Germans, focussing both on cultural symbols, practices and artifacts (e.g. holidays, rituals, music, and food) and on more complex factors such as identity and emotional ways of belonging. Although these spaces represent dynamic variables, i.e. they are subjectively perceived, change over time, and may vary in degree, researchers have attempted to assess these variables, for example by using a so-called “six-times-three field matrix.” Laubenthal and Pries (2012) developed this model to identify various types of age transmigration. The authors define a transmigrant based on six dimensions (identity; geographic centre of life; social relationships/communication; origin of resources; use of resources; remembrance/mental border crossing) and three locations (country of origin; country of residence/citizenship; third space/both countries). Naturally, there are potential limitations with this matrix, which arise from the dynamic and confounded nature of the variables it attempts to capture. Like any model or chart, this matrix simplifies and generalizes as it is pre-confined to a set of given categories. To account for some of the potentially defining features that might qualify Texas Germans as transmigrants, two additional dimensions were added to the model (see TABLE 1), namely speaking the German language and transnational ‘ways of belonging’ as investigated by means of cultural symbols, practices, and artifacts (see above), making this an “eight-times-three field matrix” (I revisit the matrix in the final section).

TABLE 1
“EIGHT-TIMES-THREE FIELD MATRIX”

	Country of origin	Country of residence/citizenship	Both countries/ third space
Identity			
Geographic centre of life			
Social relationships/ communication			
Language			
Cultural symbols, practices, and artifacts			
Origin of resources			
Use of resources			
Remembrance/mental border crossing			

V. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This paper relies on data collected by the Texas German Dialect Project (TGDP; www.tgdp.org), which has been carrying out field research in representative TxG speech communities in central Texas since 2001.⁷ To date, the TGDP has conducted over 700 interviews, which typically include three kinds of data: an open-ended sociolinguistic interview (in German), a translation task (mainly to assess the dialect's linguistic features), and an eleven-page biographical survey (written in English). These data are available to the general public through the project's webpage.

I utilized a mixed-methods approach, informed by a quantitative analysis of 91 TGDP surveys as well as two sets of qualitative data (TGDP open-ended interviews; semi-structured phone interviews). The biographical surveys are of interest as they reveal information about age, DOB, gender, religion, education, domains of language use, language attitudes, and a variety of questions connected to cultural expression and identity. Here I focus primarily on Boas (2009) and Boas and Fingerhuth (2017) – Boas and Fingerhuth is particularly important here, as there are very few studies involving German speech islands which address issues of identity and language attitudes in as much detail as they do. Boas (2009) analysed 52 speakers (30 males, 22 females; ages 62-96) from New Braunfels, while Boas and Fingerhuth (2017) looked at and 36 (19 males, 17 females; ages 63-92) speakers from Gillespie County. Surveys from six informants (3 males, 3 females; ages 72-81) from Fredericksburg (2), Giddings (2), Columbus, and New Braunfels, who participated in a phone interview (see below), were considered here as well.

The TGDP open-ended interviews provide insightful and readily available sets of semi-structured interviews based on an eight-page survey containing questions about topics like genealogy, childhood activities, community life, cooking, hobbies, and current activities. I used a concordancer to search online transcripts of TGDP interviews for relevant key words, focusing on New Braunfels and Gillespie County, which today are the strongest TxG communities.

To assess various notions of belonging, including affective components, a series of specifically tailored questions (see appendix) were addressed in a semi-structured phone interview. A long-time TGDP employee initially provided a list of 17 potential informants, which was based on this colleague's judgment about the TGDP informants who would most likely be willing to participate. While this means that these informants could be more fluent or have a more positive attitude towards Texas German, this step was necessary, as some people are quite simply unwilling

or unable to participate in such interviews, meaning that the list helped streamline the selection process.

Six interviews were conducted in late November 2018, all of which lasted between 14 and 26 minutes and were recorded with the consent of the informants for later analysis. To create a more relaxed atmosphere, the interviews were conducted mainly in English, although the informants are fairly fluent in Texas German, as indicated by their TGDP interviews. In total, there are 126 minutes of interview data. The interviews are best described as semi-structured, since, in addition to a few yes/no questions, I asked several key questions to help define the areas to be explored. These key questions were either connected to identity and Germanness, cultural expression and artifacts, or physical ties. In the actual phone interview, informants were considerable latitude to pursue an idea or response in more detail.⁸

VI. ANALYSIS: VIEWING TEXAS GERMANS THROUGH THE LENS OF TRANSNATIONALISM

This section first investigates how speakers of TxG primarily identify themselves and establishes how both linguistic and cultural heritage are an integral part of TxG identity. It draws primarily on the TGDP survey data on speaker biographies, language identity and attitudes. The next part of the analysis explores TxG cultural expressions today and sheds light on a few cultural practices (language, holidays, music, and food) that may be interpreted as transnational ‘ways of belonging.’ This part relies on TGDP open-ended data, personal interviews with informants, and information cited in Boas (2009, 2018). The final part of this analysis revolves around the question of whether hyphenated ‘Texas-Germanness’ carries an emotional component and elements that support the idea of the existence of a metaphorical ‘third space.’ This part relies primarily on phone interview data.

Identity: language and culture

The TGDP’s biographical survey directly assesses the question of how Texas Germans primarily identify themselves. Of the 52 participants (N52) in New Braunfels discussed in Boas (2009), 68 per cent primarily identify themselves as Texas Germans, while 22 per cent call themselves Texan.⁹ Only 6 per cent view themselves as Americans, whereas 4 per cent choose the term German-American (Boas 2009, 18). The data for 36 participants (N36) from Gillespie County yields very similar results, as approximately two in three speakers identify themselves primarily

as TxG (Boas and Fingerhuth, 2017). Similarly, 4 of the 6 speakers (N6)¹⁰ interviewed for this paper identified as TxG, whereas 2 chose Texan as their primary identity.

Two questions in the biographical survey address general language attitudes and whether speaking the heritage language informs one's identity: I) "I am proud to be a speaker of Texas German;" informants were asked to circle one answer on a five-point scale ranging from "I strongly agree" to "I strongly disagree." For the Fredericksburg region (N36), 72 per cent strongly agree and 25 per cent agree that there is a sense of pride when it comes to speaking TxG (Boas and Fingerhuth, 2017). Similarly, the results in Boas (2009) show that the overwhelming number of informants from New Braunfels (N52) either agree (33%) or strongly agree (63%). The answers given by my informants mirror these numbers: 4/6 strongly agreed, 2/6 agreed. These numbers are small, but suggestive. II) Informants were asked whether they see the heritage language as a vital part of their identity, and were prompted to choose one of the following answers: (1) "Texas German is an important part of my identity;" (2) "... is part of my identity;" or (3) "... is not an important part of my identity." The results in Boas (2009: 267f) and Boas and Fingerhuth (2017: 102f) reveal that a respective amount of 65 per cent (N52) and 66 per cent (N36) chose (1) as their answer. Another 33 per cent (N52) and 30 per cent (N36), respectively, view the dialect as "an important part" (2) of their identity. That speaking the dialect greatly informs one's identity was also confirmed by my informants. The same four informants that strongly agree to the aforementioned question also declare that "Texas German is an important part" of their identity – the rest (2/6) chose (2) as their answer.

While speaking the heritage language signifies a sense of pride and informs Texas-Germanness to a very great extent – essentially all informants view TxG as an important or very important part of their identity – Boas (2009) stresses that his informants also point towards an important cultural component, namely that "one can [also] be classified as a Texas German when one exhibits a positive identification with one's cultural heritage and local customs such as singing German songs, polka dancing, knowing how to make sausage, and keeping one's house and yard in an orderly shape" (19). Moreover, Boas argues that there is a particular form of group identification that appears both with speakers of the dialect and non-German speaking Texas Germans: "When talking to both groups of people, they referred to people of Anglo heritage as *Amerikaners* 'Americans'" (19). These results both attest to the enduring presence of sociological othering that defines Texas Germans vis-à-vis other ethnic groups in Texas based on both linguistic and cultural otherness, and indicate that the overwhelming majority of Texas Germans display an

overwhelmingly positive attitude towards their culture and language. Moreover, an average of 2 out of every 3 informants would like their children and grandchildren to speak the heritage language and the great majority (80%) believe that TxG should be preserved (Boas, 2009).¹¹ It is thus fair to say that the vast majority of informants exhibit strong emotional ties to Texas German.

Cultural expression today

Despite the rapid disappearance of the dialect from the linguistic landscape (see 2), there are still a few organizations, media outlets, and clubs that promote the rich cultural heritage, and, to some extent, also the use of TxG. The German-Texan Heritage Society and the Texas German Society are two organizations that are particularly committed to this cause. In addition to their regular meetings and festivals, there are also still dance halls that play German music and have Polka nights all over Central Texas (Boas 2018: 178).

At present, many towns in the German-belt still have *Schützenvereine*, *Turnvereine*, *Tanzvereine* as well as bowling, skat, and singing clubs – the *Gesangsvereine*, in particular, represent a last stronghold for the TxG community.¹² There is still a daily, thirty-minute German radio program in Fredericksburg, German Christmas songs are still sung in a handful of churches, and a few congregations still offer a (partly) German mass on Christmas Eve. Despite the ongoing disappearance of the dialect, other German traditions are also very visible in central Texas, in history books and museums like Fredericksburg’s Pioneer museum, in family names, in the names of many places, road signs, and, of course, in the area’s architectural and culinary heritage – one of the largest Texas Breweries is called *Spoetzl*; Texas BBQ can be traced back to German and Czech settlers, and so on. Finally, there are also the various Mai- and Oktoberfeste, and most prominently the so-called Wurstfest,¹³ which feature traditional German dishes, polka music, and beer. Although Bungert (2017: 535) observes that such festivals have lost “much of their original authenticity” and are tailored to non-German tourists, the contention of Burnley (2010: 437), who argues that, for Australian-Germans, such commodification of culture and heritage for touristic reasons has “reinforced cultural identity, rather than presenting an artificial cultural facade” also holds true for TxG.

Transnational cultural symbols, practices, and artifacts

As previously mentioned, a particular focus lies on music, food, and the celebration of holidays/customs. The relevance of music to the TxG community is discussed first.

All my informants report that they listen to some German music (e.g. classical music like “Johann Strauß,” polka, or “Alpenmusik” – informant 281 emphasizes that they also have an extensive collection of German songs on CDs), and three interviewees are members of a *Gesangsverein*. Two informants also listen somewhat frequently to a German radio program called “Die Polka Party” which airs Mondays through Fridays from 8:30-9:00am in Fredericksburg. Another informant pointed out that his brother-in-law hosted a similar German radio show in New Braunfels, where the local “Gemischter Chor Harmonie” still sings at *Wurstfest* (All Güt Things, 31:04). In the TGDP open-ended data, informant 151 states: “and when there is German music from Germany... I really like listening to it... and there are also other musicians from Houston called Alpenfest. They always play great German music.” [9-151-2-9-a]¹⁴

When asked about German Christmas songs, five informants enthusiastically named titles like “O Tannenbaum,” “Stille Nacht,” or “Weihnachtsglocken,” and provided me with a few names of hymns sung at church during their childhood. According to informant 699, funerals of people with German heritage in some congregations feature “at least one German song.” Besides singing and listening to German music, both the data and the literature suggest that dance, specifically polka and waltz dances, has always played a great role in the lives of many Texas Germans. TGDP informants 29 and 38 remember:

“...we wanted to go to a dance or something like that, we always went to New Braunfels... They had a dance hall there and they played German music and people danced to it. On the first Saturday, we went to Gruens, which is now Gruene Hall. They had German music there. Like polka and waltz. And the second Saturday, we went to Echo. And the third Saturday to Schumannsville. And then, on the fourth Saturday, we went to Echo again.”¹⁵ [1-29-1-23-a]

“Oh, we danced. We danced, indeed. Dance halls were everywhere. Not just in town... we had a hall there as well, the Petershalle, and we danced there. And then the Turnerhalle, which belonged to the gymnastics club. We danced there and close to Stonewall, oh and let’s see where else: Berohnskri, Comfort, Ratskeller, everywhere.”¹⁶ [1-38-1-9-a]

It is vital to understand the importance of memory and identity, as they are “closely intertwined” (Bungert 2017: 14), and both individual and collective memory greatly informs the construction and maintenance of identities (see Drozdowski et al., 2016; Piccirillo, 2010; Gerner, 2006).¹⁷ Although the dialect will inevitably disappear, informants were born, socialized, and have lived a great deal of their lives in times with a much stronger presence of cultural aspects and of the dialect itself (see 2). For many, these times and memories are therefore still highly relevant.

Like music, German cuisine marks a strong component of TxG culture; one that transmits Germanness. Traditional dishes such as *Sauerkraut*, red cabbage, home-made bread, *Stollen*, German potato salad, and *Wurst* are still cooked and consumed in TxG homes today. The TGDP includes numerous interviews involving TxG cuisine, beer brewing, food preparation, and the like, for example speaker 446: “Sauerkraut, for sure. Potatoes and a lot of meat – uh – beef... Oh, and on my dad’s side... Kaiserschmarren.”¹⁸ [1-446-1-5-a]

“[G]oing to Wurstfest or St. Nikolaus Day or learning to waltz and polka” represent important traditions within the community (Boas, 2009: 269). The celebration of holidays such as St. Nikolaus Day, a holiday largely unknown to US mainstream culture, and Christmas mark an interesting field. Informant 699, for instance, recalls that: “All and everyone came over to celebrate and sing German songs, my parents, all the nephews and everyone came.” But beyond the music and baking goods, Christmas carries a heavy German element, as Texas Germans traditionally celebrate it on Christmas Eve, and not on December 25, as most other Americans do. Informants 595 and 699 further reported that, as children, they were not allowed to enter the room in which the Christmas tree was set up – another TxG tradition going back to German heritage. In addition, today, the Vereins Kirche Museum in Fredericksburg cohosts a so-called “Zweite Weihnacht” with the Montabaur Sister City Organization,¹⁹ where Texas Germans, Texans of non-German heritage and German retirees meet for *Plätzchen*, *Glühwein*, and German Christmas music. In addition, some singing clubs also host *Weihnachtskonzerte* and sing German songs at retirement homes throughout December.

Emotional ways of belonging

The discussion so far reveals that there are still various connections between Texas Germans and the former homeland. While Texas German identity appears to be inherently connected to cultural heritage, the importance of the dialect, and of memory, which inform identity to a great extent were also noted.

Boas (2009) writes that “it is fair to say that the great majority of informants have fairly emotional ties to Texas German” (271). This raises the question of speakers of the heritage language exhibited other traits that could be interpreted as emotional ways of belonging. The informants were therefore asked the following questions: (1) What does the “German” in Texas German mean to you?; (2) Do you feel more Texan or German?; (3) Do you feel like you have a special connection to Germany because of Texas German?; and (4) What does Germany mean to

you? Does it trigger certain emotions? The answers were very revealing, and all six informants answered similarly. While after a few seconds they all claimed to feel more Texan than German, their answers indicated that they all indeed also feel German:

“Texan, but that’s hard to say. There is a lot of German in Texas... I still feel very much German.” [697]

“Texan, but I am proud of the German heritage.” [637]

“Texan, but there is a very strong connection to German heritage. That is why living here in Fredericksburg over the past 30 years we have been paying more attention to our German heritage.” [595]

As indicated above, my informants pointed towards their ethnic and cultural heritage as well as to their language. They approached questions (1), (3), and (4) in the same manner:

“Germany means a lot to me cause that’s where mine and my husband’s forefathers came from.” [699]

“[Germany]. That is where I came from.” [637]

“Well, it means where my roots are. And language, of course, 'cause I spoke German before I spoke English.... it means what I grew up with. Yeah, there is a connection, I would say.” [281]

“I would say that all of my ancestors came from the parts of Germany that I visited, and I feel like they have passed down to all these ... five or six generations. ... they have passed down a very strong work ethic and I am proud today, I wasn’t so much as a child but I am more so today, to say yes, I am of German descent.” [595]

When asked “What do you feel when you hear German or Texas German spoken or sung? What does it remind you of? Does it trigger certain emotions?,” informants gave very elaborate answers. Again, all informants pointed towards their childhood and other memories, while frequently referring to nouns and adjectives such as parents, grandparents, home, and happiness. Two informants also included anecdotes from their first conversations with Germans in Texas and expressed surprise that they were able to “actually” communicate.²⁰

During the phone interviews, I also asked whether there were actual physical ties to Germany and whether their German heritage sparked some sense of curiosity about the country. Five of six informants had already travelled to Germany, some of them up to five times. The same five informants revealed that either they or their partner had traced the roots of the family, some to very specific locations and lineages, and that visiting these places had been part of the travel agenda. Three informants even had friends in Germany with whom they exchange Christmas cards

or email; such transatlantic friendships were driven either through personal travel, church trips, or cultural organizations such as Fredericksburg's sister city program with Montabaur.

Becoming aware of these ties, I asked informant 595 whether she would agree with my assumption that once you grew older, you become more interested in your roots. The 74-year-old woman, who works at the local museum, believes that this observation is "certainly true" and applies to many Texas Germans. She went on to tell me that, before the interview, a woman had just stopped by to drop off some old newspapers. In a conversation between the two, the other woman apparently "made that very comment" and said: "You know, the older we get, we get more interested in things we should have probably asked more questions about when we were younger." The informant elaborated on the statement, and remarked about her late parents: "I wish I had asked them more questions." A very similar quote can be found in the Texas German documentary film "All Güt Things," when another woman states: "When you're a young person, you just don't think of that being that important. That comes to you a little later on down the road when it's too late" (All Güt Things, 3:15).

While the prior paragraph reflects to a rather complex phenomenon that is yet to be unpacked, the discussion here shows that there are cultural, emotional, and even physical qualities that allude to the existence of a metaphorical third space. German heritage, both linguistic and cultural, plays a vital role in the construction of Texas-Germanness, which is also based on the group's demarcation and delimitation from other ethnic groups. The results suggest both the presence of more salient cultural ways of belonging (e.g. language, food, music, holidays) and the presence of emotional components, specifically memories of the family and the family language. In retrospect, and in conjunction with other external factors, these affectual components have impacted the maintenance and possibly also the degree of a cultural belonging of "the self." That there are also physical ties and a potentially rediscovered interest in one's origins may also be in parts due to aging (introspection) and factors connected to increasing technological advancements.

VII. CONCLUSION

This paper investigated both Texas-Germanness and whether present-day speakers of the dialect exhibit transnational ties to their country of origin. Having shed light onto both cultural and emotional 'ways of belonging,' the results indicate the presence of various transnational, or 'third space,' elements (e.g. language, food, music, or the celebration of holidays such as St. Nikolaus

or Christmas) and confirm that linguistic and cultural heritage are defining elements in the construction and maintenance of TxG identity. In addition, the analysis demonstrates that I) identity is inherently connected to both individual and collective/cultural memory, and that II) language serves the function of an important connector and mediator between these concepts. Identity and memory appear to be tied together by a linguistic band. Language maintenance, along with other cultural practices such as singing German songs or cooking German cuisine, may thus potentially help preserve and ‘hold on’ to these memories.

The clear presence of transnational ways of belonging and considering the important role of language for both identity and memory points to the existence of a previously unidentified form of *linguistic* transmigrant. Based on the “eight-times-three field matrix” (see TABLE 2), this transmigrant may be defined as follows:

TABLE 2
THE LINGUISTIC TRANSMIGRANT – “EIGHT-TIMES-THREE FIELD MATRIX”

	Country of origin	Country of residence/citizenship	Both countries/ third space
Identity			
Geographic centre of life			
Social relationships/ communication			
Language			
Cultural symbols, practices, and artifacts			
Origin of resources			
Use of resources			
Remembrance/mental border crossing			

The history of Germans in Texas parallels similar German linguistic enclaves, which followed a similar trajectory with regards to language shift and identity formation (see 2). But what is it that characterizes Texas-Germanness vis-à-vis other local instances of ‘Germanness beyond Germany’? Institutions, social practices, and the reconciliation of German heritage with the host society have played a significant role in all the German diaspora. State and citizenship, on the other hand, are not of relevance to the Americas or Australia, whereas there is some relevance for speech islands in Europe (e.g. Hungary, Russia, Romania, etc.). This paper has found that language and affective variables inform Texas-Germanness to a great extent. Texas Germans are conscious and proud of their hyphenated identity, in which some historical concepts (food, music,

keeping one's yard in an orderly shape, etc.) have prevailed. While it is hard to claim that memory might be more important for TxG identity, this may be the case because language death is more imminent to Texas and because institutional support is lower than in areas like Brazil or Australia (see Bender 2016; Burnley 2010). For the future, comparative research between different German speech islands would help further intensify our understanding of transnational practices of historical diaspora groups and to further investigate the similarities and differences. Another natural extension of the paper would be to see if the same approach yields comparable results when used with other heritage groups. (Preliminary research suggests that it can, but considerable additional work is necessary before any conclusions can be drawn.)

Operating at the interface of immigration studies and sociolinguistics provides new insights regarding the concept, theory, and experience of transnationalism. The finding of a *linguistic* transmigrant represents a new approach to the study of these communities and in transnational (German) studies. It stresses the vital role of language with regards to understanding concepts of hybrid/transnational identity and sheds light on the inherently complex interplay of a heritage language, culture, and identity. These findings also provide evidence for Bender's (2016) claims (see 3), which hint at the complex interplay between language, culture and affect.

NOTES

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 43rd German Studies Association Conference (Portland, Oregon, USA, October 2019). The author thanks Marc Pierce, Barbara Laubenthal, and three anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments.

² In line with scholars like Maxwell and Davies (2016: 1), I use the term ‘Germanness’ to address a collective and individual identity that has been “durably constructed within a given social and historical context.” For a discussion on Germanness and its terminological problems see Maxwell and Davis (2016).

³ For many other comparative works on Germanness outside of Germany, most prominently O’Donnell et al. (2005) and Penny and Rinke (2015), a similar observation is made (no articles discussing present-day speech islands; only few articles that cover post-1945 German diaspora groups).

⁴ Translated from German by the author.

⁵ In his essay *Soziologie des Raumes*, Simmel (1908: 63ff) already indicated the existence of such third space.

⁶ Pries (2010) distinguishes between ‘transnational social spaces,’ ‘transnational networks’ and ‘transnational relationships.’

⁷ The fact that here is hardly a speech island database comparable to the TGDP in size, organization, and consistency in interview techniques, makes TxG a promising subject of study. The TGDP relies on a word-of-mouth technique that is common in sociolinguistic research (snowball principle) to find informants. This “friend-of-friend technique” primarily relies on contacting cultural institutions and individuals, who might refer the TGDP to speakers of the dialect. While the TGDP has been very successful with this technique, its use means that the TGDP only interviews people who (claim to) speak Texas German, are willing to talk to the TGDP workers, and are within reach of its networks. This means that informants are somewhat self-selecting and potentially have a different attitude towards the subject itself, which further means that not very much can be said here about non-German speaking Texas Germans.

⁸ This approach differs from traditional speech island research, as such accounts often disregard affective factors or fail to consider non-linguistic information as it pertains to the state of a certain dialect, for example language shift.

⁹ Speakers often rank their answers. In such cases, “Texan” is often ranked second for informants who ranked “Texas German” first and vice-versa.

¹⁰ The total number of biographical surveys is 91 (and not 94). Three of six phone interview informants are from either New Braunfels or Fredericksburg, which is in Gillespie County.

¹¹ These attitudes are somewhat at odds with the reality, i.e. that TxG will go extinct due to the end of intergenerational transmission and lack of concrete revitalization efforts. For a discussion see Boas and Fingerhuth (2017).

¹² Boas (2009: 260f) states that 26 per cent of his 52 New Braunfels area informants are still part of such social organizations.

¹³ *Wurstfest* has taken place in New Braunfels since 1961. Over the years, the German-style beer and sausage fest, which features food, drink, and music from Texas and Germany, has gained immense popularity in Central Texas (233,000 visitors in ten days in 2019). It has even attracted attention from national television.

¹⁴ The TGDP data is organized as follows: the first digit represents the interviewer, the second for the informant, the third digit stands for the order in which the three data sets (survey, open ended interview, translation task) were elicited, the fourth stands for the part, question, or cut of the individual data set. This has been standard practice since the TGDP’s inception so that interviews can be uniquely identified.

¹⁵ Translated from German by the author.

¹⁶ Translated from German by the author.

¹⁷ See Gerner (2006) on the construction of ethnic identity with regards to another German heritage groups in Hungary and for a discussion of terminology.

¹⁸ Translated from German by the author.

¹⁹ The fact that such an organization exists could be interpreted as a transnational way of belonging.

²⁰ Here, one must also consider that many Texas Germans grew up thinking that their variety reflects an improper, corrupted form of German. This becomes apparent when informants refer to themselves or other speakers as “Deutschverderber” (see Boas, 2009: 267).

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