

The alveolar trill in Texas Alsatian

This presentation provides an overview of the preservation of the alveolar trill in the Alsatian dialect brought to central Texas in the 1840s from southern Alsace, France, by the entrepreneur Henri Castro. The densest population of Alsatian speakers is located in and around Castroville in Medina County, Texas, 13 miles to the west of San Antonio. European Alsatian remains robust with approximately 600,000 Alsatian speakers in the Alsace today (Héran et al. 2002: 3, Duée 2002). Two main regional variations, Upper and Lower Rhenish (Matzen 1973), roughly follow internal political boundaries of the Upper and Lower Rhine Départements. Most of the Castroville colonists can be traced back to Upper Rhine villages between Mulhouse and Colmar. Unlike European Alsatian, Texas Alsatian (TxAls) is critically endangered, like all other dialects of Texas German (TxG).

There are as many varieties of European Alsatian as there are speakers, villages, or cities (Matzen 1973). Matzen (1973), however, notes a process of unification and convergence towards the two cultural and economically influential cities of Strasbourg (Lower Rhine) and Mulhouse (Upper Rhine). Philipp & Bothorel-Witz (1989), for example, transcribe a uvular trill [ʀ] in their data samples for Colmar at the northern boundary of the Upper Rhine. Adolf (2006) describes the presence of both an alveolar and uvular trill and the absence of a glide allophone [ʋ] for European Alsatian. TxAls exhibits an alveolar trill/tap, as in the following examples:

- (1) a. #202: Ař hât d'namlig g'fřo:gt geschteřt.¹
Eikel 6.1: He asked the same question yesterday.
- b. #234: Àwer d'Kinner hân immř gsait, wařum kenna miř
nitt ols mitgeh.
'But the children always said, why can't we ever go along.'
- c. #240: Mř hân müesse ředa mit salli un elsassisch isch widdeř
zuřukumma.
'We had to talk with them and the Alsatian came back.'

Gilbert (1972, Map 2) reports extensive use of the alveolar trill in Medina County in his 1960s survey of TxG in thirty-one counties. Roesch's (2012) re-samplings of Gilbert's (1972) data show a continued robust use of the alveolar trill in the following table:²

¹ The grapheme ř is used to differentiate the alveolar (apical) trill from other /r/ allophones in narrative examples.

² Gilbert identified several of his participants as having either Alsatian parents or grandparents, whereas Roesch's (2012) re-samplings of the translation task polled only Alsatian speakers.

(2): The realization of /r/ in Texas Alsatian

Gilbert (1972) Map 2, (phonetic realization of /r/)
“He’s running now,” SG *Er r̥ennt jetzt*, UR *Ař řennt jätz*.

<i>Gilbert (1972): 27</i>	<i>Roesch (2012):</i>	<i>27</i>
Trilled [r̥] (UR): 8, 9, 12, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27	202, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 247, 248, 249a, 249b, 249c, 249d, 250, 251, 252a, 252b, 253, 254, 255, 257	24
Retroflex [ɺ]: 10	(241, 253)	(2)
Uvular [r]: (SG) 4		
[Unable to recall:	233, 256	2
Not polled: 11 participants;	243	1]

I begin with a brief description of the realizations of /r/ in the Alsatian donor dialect, *Upper Rhenish*, accompanied by audio samples of current European Alsatian speakers. A diachronic comparison of occurrences of the alveolar trill in Gilbert’s (1972) TxG data and Roesch’s (2012) re-samplings of TxAls speakers (which also includes qualitative data from open-ended interviews) follows. Finally, I examine markedness and ethnic identity as important factors in the preservation of the alveolar trill by examining language use in “intermarriages” between TxG - TxAls couples and questionnaire responses concerning language use and identity markers. This preservation of the alveolar trill is indicative of other features preserved in TxAls, such as rising diphthongs and the spirantization of the intervocalic voiced bilabial stop [b], despite intense contact with speakers of standard-near TxG in the community.

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