

THE GENDER OF THE NUMERAL TWO IN BERNESE SWISS GERMAN

Bernese Swiss German

Swiss German Dialects are Alemannic dialects. Bernese Swiss German is the general term for the Swiss German dialects spoken in the Canton of Bern.

PhD project

Main research question:

- How and why did the Bernese Swiss German dialects within the research area change in the past 80 years?

In the present project, 20 locations in the Berner Mittelland are examined. 4 interviews in 4 age groups are recorded at each location. The resulting data is finally compared with the data of the Atlas of German-speaking Switzerland (SDS).

The Phenomenon and its development

The dialects of German-speaking Switzerland differ in several features from the German standard language, e.g. in the existence of numeral gender. This variable, present in the Old-High-German (OHG) and Middle-High-German (MHG) period, is still documented in the 20th century in the Alemannic dialects, but has been lost in return in Standard German (cf. Christen et al. 2012).

In OHG and MHG numerals were treated like adjectives and took therefore gender, number and case.

e.g. MHG trichotomy: *zwene, zwo, zwöi* (two; masc., fem., neutr.)

Development in Northern and Middle Germany

16th century
Unclear us of the trichotomy.
Syntretism and simplification

17th century
Preference of neutral
form *zwei* (two)

Development in Upper Germany

Trichotomy remained until the 18th century, then Standard German

Zwei (two) in contemporary Standard German

No distinction in case, gender and number left, with exceptions

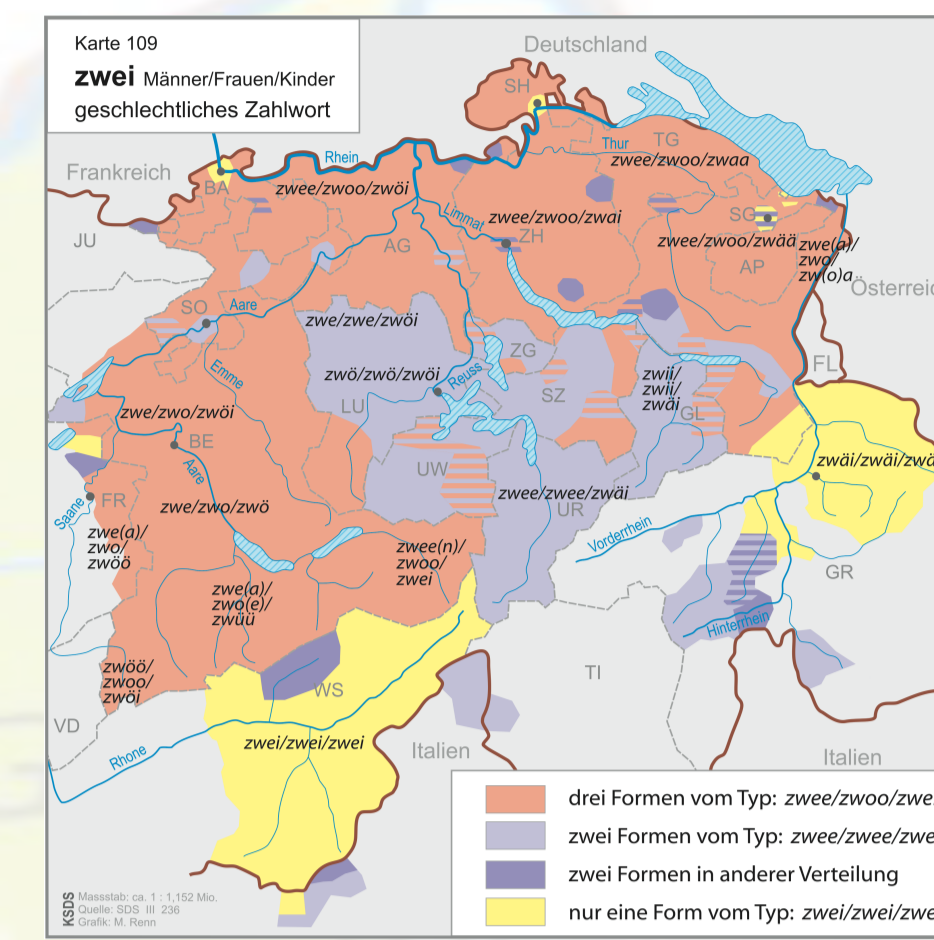
e.g. *ein Mann, eine Frau* (one/a men, one/a women)

e.g. *drei Söhne, Vater dreier Söhne* (three sons, father of three sons)

Christa Schneider
Walter Benjamin Kolleg
Muesmattstrasse 45
3000 Bern 9
christa.schneider@csls.unibe.ch



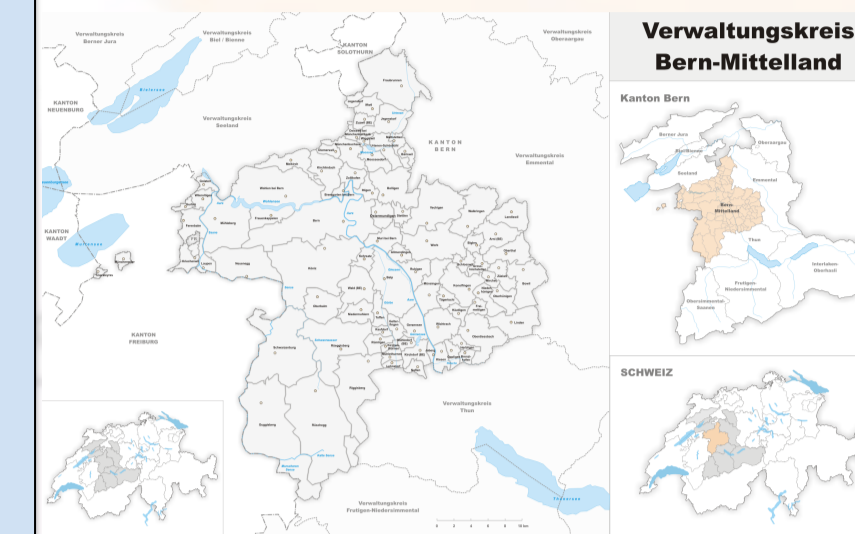
Zwei (two) in the Alemannic dialects of Switzerland



Data from 1940ties

- Trichotomy in most areas, but also dichotomy
- Reason: Closeness of Alemannic dialects to MHG

Research area



Trichotomy: *zwe* (masc.), *zwo* (fem.), *zwöi* (neutr.)

Dichotomy: *zwe* (masc. and fem.), *zwöi* (neutr.)

Single from use: *zwöi* (masc., fem. and neutr.)

Research Questions

Is the historically documented trichotomy still in use?
If yes, who still uses it? If no, what is used now?

Results

Location "Ferenbalm"

	Trichotomy	Dichotomy	One form
SDS	x		
F'balm1			x
F'balm2			x*
F'balm3	x		
F'balm4	x		

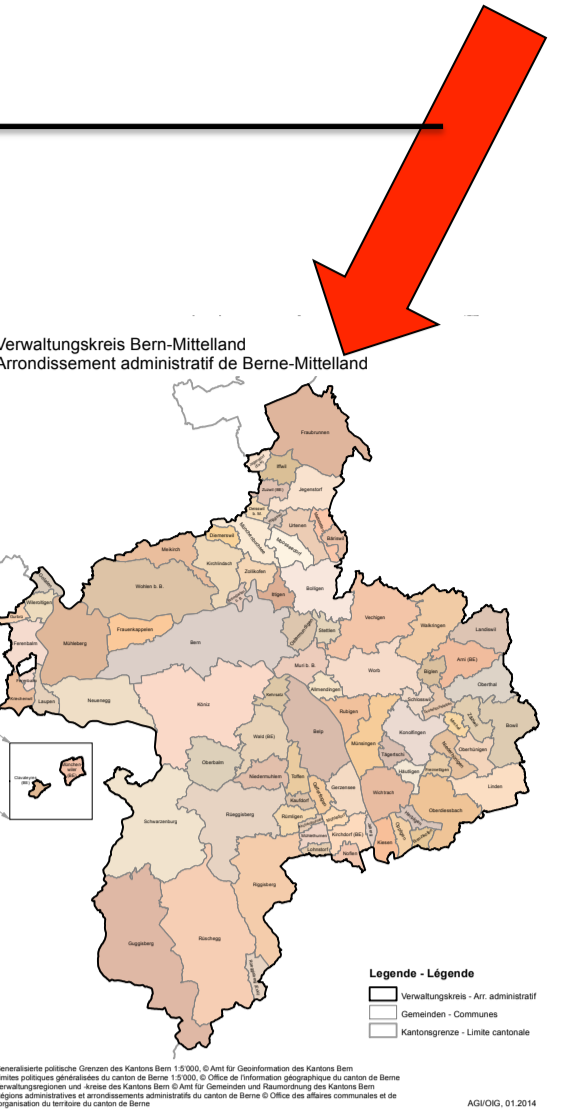
*Speaker is aware of trichotomy, produces it when conscious, spontaneous only one form

Location "Bern"

	Trichotomy	Dichotomy	One form
SDS	x		
Bern1			x
Bern2	x		
Bern3	x		
Bern4	x		

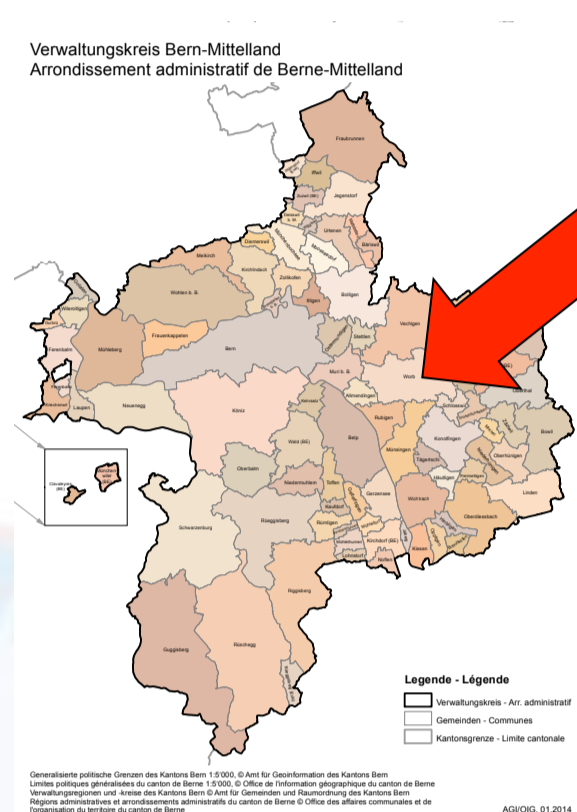
Location "Fraubrunnen"

	Trichotomy	Dichotomy	One form
SDS	x		
F'brunnen1			x
F'brunnen2		x	
F'brunnen3	x		
F'brunnen4			x



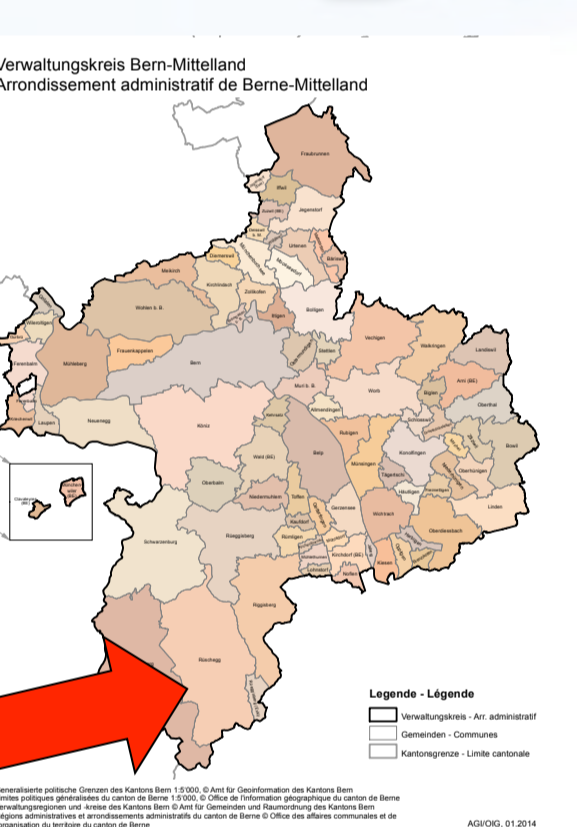
Location "Worb"

	Trichotomy	Dichotomy	One form
SDS	x		
Worb1			x
Worb2	x		
Worb3	x		
Worb4	x		



Location "Rüeggisberg"

	Trichotomy	Dichotomy	One form
SDS	x		
R'berg1	x		
R'berg2	x		
R'berg3	x		
R'berg4	x		



Discussion

Older and more conservative speakers are still able to produce the trichotomy spontaneously. Exception is speaker 4 from Fraubrunnen, who is influenced by his younger siblings. The youngest generation only uses one single form (*zwöi*, the neutral form). The reason why the neutral form is used is still unclear (cf. Schwarz 2015). The exception in the youngest group is speaker 1 from Rüeggisberg, who highly identifies herself with her village. The middle generation is inconsistent and uses all the forms, even the dichotomy.

Numeral Gender in Bernese Swiss German is an example for change in progress. We can expect a loss of the trichotomy in the next generations. Reasons for this change are subject of my current research, the influence of Standard German plays an important role.

Bibliography:

- Christen Helen, Glaser Elvira und Friedli Mathias (2012). Kleiner Sprachatlas der deutschen Schweiz. Frauenfeld: Verlag Huber
Hotzenköcherle Rudolf (1986). "Historische und geographische Zahlwortprobleme". In: Hotzenköcherle Rudolf (ed.):
Dialektstrukturen im Wandel. Aarau, Sauerländer: 309-317.
Schwarz Christian (2014). "Entwicklungstendenzen der Genus-Kongruenz bei Zahlwörtern in den deutschen Dialekten." In:
Bergman Pia et al. (eds.): *Sprache im Gebrauch: räumlich, zeitlich, interaktional*. Heidelberg, Winder: 143-156.