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# P A R A D I G M S

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## Transylvanian Saxon 900 Years Old, and Still Alive



### 1. Introduction: Historical Background and Geographic Information

LOCATED IN the central and northwestern parts of present-day Romania, Transylvania, encompassing some 60,000 square kilometers, may be described as one of the most significant—and very large, at that—traditional regions of East-Central Europe, having been formed

This article was originally written in 2017, as part of a comprehensive volume on *varieties of German worldwide* to be published by Oxford University Press. Due to unknown circumstances, this never happened, with the prospective editor of the volume seemingly gone into hiding and unreachable now for years. To have it published in the highly reputable *Transylvanian Review* cannot be seen as anything other than a stroke of luck. Nowhere would this article fit better. The author has to thank the editors of this journal, and, with this article, he is hoping to have submitted a useful, comprehensive, and comprehensible presentation of Transylvanian Saxon as a fundamental part of Transylvanian history and identity.

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roughly a millennium ago in the context of the Hungarian settlement and, subsequently, sovereignty over the Carpathian Basin. Correspondingly, the Latin word *Transsylvania* seems to be an exact translation of Hungarian *Erdély*, meaning ‘on the other side of the woods.’ The woods mentioned here are the Apuseni Mountains of the Western Carpathians, in northwestern Romania. Transylvania stretches between them, forming a part of the Western Carpathians and of the Eastern and Southern Carpathians. Although Transylvania has to be seen in the context of the Hungarian rule over East-Central Europe over the centuries, its majority population has primarily consisted of (what are called today) Romanians, (probably) from the beginnings and up to the present.

Transylvania’s popular name in Romanian is *Ardeal*, a direct borrowing from Hungarian, of course. In German, Transylvania is called *Siebenbürgen*, meaning ‘seven fortresses,’ a term to be directly linked to the German settlement and its organization in the region. The immigration of—what would only later be called—German settlers and, thus, speakers of German started as early as the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century and then continued for roughly two centuries. Smaller groups of German-speaking immigrants followed, until as late as the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Hungarian chancellery used the (Latin) term *Saxones* for the armored men of the lesser nobility, and, indeed, the first settlers seem to have come from this group, the term being extended to all German-speaking settlers later on. The first settlers arrived upon invitation by the then Hungarian King Géza II, their main areas of origin being the westernmost parts of the German language area in what are nowadays the (central) Rhine and Moselle areas of Germany, Luxembourg, East Belgium, and eastern (‘Germanophone’) France in Alsace and Lorraine, even comprising groups of Romance-speaking settlers from these areas.<sup>1</sup> The eastward movement of German settlers in the Middle Ages to a region like Transylvania has to be seen in the context of the greater German *Ostsiedlung*, as well as in the specific context of the establishment of Hungarian rule and economic development in the area, with the invitation extended to colonists with specific skills and expertise, such as in the field of mining, whose other task was to defend the country’s southeastern borders. It must also be linked to the Crusades undertaken by the Latin Church from 1099 up to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, which brought men from all over the German language area and beyond to the Carpathian Basin. This is especially the case in the southeastern area of Saxon settlement to be mentioned below.

German settlement in Transylvania is mainly located in three separate areas. First and foremost, a main body roughly 200 kilometers in length stretches from Broos/Oraştie/Szászváros in the west to Reps/Rupea/Kőhalom in the east, between the rivers Marosch/Mureş/Maros and Alt/Olt/Olt and parallel to (and north of) the Southern Carpathians. Here we find the oldest of all Saxon set-

lements, originally organized in administrative units called the “Seven Sees” (German *Sieben Stühle*), with seven fortresses, of course, hence Transylvania’s German name *Siebenbürgen*. Among them we find cities that remained important up to this day, such as Hermannstadt/Sibiu/Nagyszeben and Schäßburg/Sighișoara/Segesvár. These were also called the *Königsboden* (‘royal lands’), lands under the direct rule of the Hungarian kings, offering many privileges to their settlers. These royal lands were later extended to the other areas of Saxon settlement in Transylvania. Thus, second, we have a pocket of German towns and villages in the far southeast of the region, around the city of Kronstadt/Brașov/Brassó, called *Burzenland/Țara Bârsei/Barcaság*. This ‘sub-region’ was colonized starting from 1211 under the direction of the Teutonic Knights (or Teutonic Order, German *Deutscher Orden*), the settlers coming from the areas colonized earlier (these would later be called the *Altland*, ‘old land’) and, again, from the areas of origin in western Germany. The third region of Saxon settlement is situated in the north of Transylvania around the city of Bistritz/Bistrița/Beszterce. It is called *Nösnerland/Țara Năsăudului/Naszód vidéke* (Nösen being the historically older name for Bistritz) and was settled by Saxons mainly in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Dialectological research on Transylvanian Saxon suggests that the direction of settlement at this time was one from north to southeast, from *Nösnerland* to *Burzenland*. At its peak, the area of Saxon settlement in Transylvania comprised around 270 towns and villages.

Dialectological research on Transylvanian Saxon (*siebenbürgische Dialektologie*) has been very productive for almost two centuries, from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the present, culminating in a language atlas published in two volumes—*Siebenbürgisch-deutscher Sprachatlas* (SDSA), vol. 1, *Laut- und Formenatlas*, part 1 (SDSA 1-1) and part 2 (SDSA 1-2); vol. 2, *Siebenbürgisch-deutscher Wortatlas* (SDWA)—and in two large dictionaries, one of them completed (*Nordsiebenbürgisch-sächsisches Wörterbuch*, 1986–2006), the other one (*Siebenbürgisch-Sächsisches Wörterbuch*, 1924ff.) still under development in its home at the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities of the Romanian Academy of Sciences in Hermannstadt. In the first of the two aforementioned centuries, the dominant issue in Transylvanian Saxon research was the question of the linguistic and, furthermore, historical and geographic origins, the search for the original lands and even villages in the west of the German language area where the first settlers had come from. Convinced that local dialects in Transylvania had their perfect counterparts in the local dialects of their forefathers’ villages in western Germany and Luxembourg which were yet to be found, in 1905 the so-called *Urheimatkommission* (‘original home commission’), a group of Transylvanian historians, linguists, and ethnologists, went on a legendary journey to Luxembourg (the *Luxemburgfahrt*, Agache 1996, 235)—only to be greatly disappointed by its re-

sults. This very positivist view, even expecting one-to-one accordance between (supposed) villages of origin and villages of colonization in Transylvania, characteristic for the so-called *Nösen* (i.e. Bistritz) *school of Germanists*, was later on completely demystified by the work of Karl Kurt Klein,<sup>2</sup> the Transylvanian dialectologist in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Klein 1943). The overall classification remains, however, that Transylvanian German dialects are of Middle Franconian and Riparian origin, modified only by influences and developments in the centuries that followed the original settlement (see chapter 3).

## 2. Sociohistorical and Sociolinguistic Aspects

**F**ROM THE beginning, the Saxons in Transylvania have to be seen as a (mostly) more or (in very recent times only) less privileged group of settlers—privileged in many ways. Starting as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> century and for many centuries to come, the *Saxones* or *Flandrenses*, as they were then called by the Hungarian chancellery, were part of the ‘upper’ segment within the Hungarian Kingdom’s feudal hierarchy. In 1224, King Andrew II, Géza’s grandson, confirmed their privileges in the *Andreamum* diploma, also called the ‘golden free letter’ (*Goldener Freibrief*), ensuring the right to freely elect their own magistrates and priests, privileges in trade and taxes, the free use of waters and woods, and other ‘classical’ medieval privileges. After the major disruptions caused by the Mongol invasion of 1241, the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries turned out to be the heyday of Transylvanian Saxon history, a time of economic prosperity and flourishing political influence. Hermannstadt was then the size of Vienna, and Transylvania itself stood at the center of Euro-Asian trade and commerce.

In 1485, Matthias Corvinus, king of Hungary, even extended the *Andreamum* privileges—initially enjoyed only by the original royal lands, the *Königsboden*—to all the Saxon lands, which were to be united and defined as the *University of the Saxon Nation* (*Sächsische Nationsuniversität*), thus standing side by side with the Hungarian and with the Székely<sup>3</sup> nation in the *Unio Trium Nationum*, the ‘unity of three nations’ ruling Transylvania. It might be noticed that the then and present-day majority Romance-speaking population in Transylvania, then and up to this day called *Vlachs* (German *Walachen*) by the Transylvanian Saxons, seems to be invisible. The Romanians had altogether disappeared from the ruling hierarchy in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, due to their Orthodox faith and also due to a fundamental inability to play a role in the contemporary struggle for power. The Romanian nobility was assimilated into the leading Hungarian nobility at that time.

The main reason for creating the ‘unity of three nations’ seems to have been that from the 15<sup>th</sup> century on Turkish invasions successively threatened Christian

Europe,<sup>4</sup> the Ottoman Empire in the end conquering almost all of Hungary and turning Transylvania into a Turkish-controlled principality. Eventually, it managed to operate relatively freely under Turkish sovereignty, with a high degree of autonomy. The privileged status of the Saxons and of their German language remained intact, a vital requirement for what probably became the most important factor of all in keeping the language's advanced position, the Reformation. Just like in Central Europe, it was closely linked to the development of printing, the first press being established in Klausenburg in 1550. In the same year, one year after the death of the Transylvanians' own reformer, Johannes Honterus of Kronstadt, the 'university' of the Saxon nation decided to adopt the Reformed belief of Christianity, thus strengthening the Saxon 'national' identity in a very remarkable way. Henceforth, being Saxon meant being Reformed and—absolutely vital in terms of language identity—it also implied that the language of the Saxons and of the Reformation in Transylvania could only be German. In Klausenburg, where the local Saxons had not embraced the Reformation, they rapidly assimilated into the Hungarian community, while south of the Carpathians, in what was then called Langenau in German (i.e. Câmpulung-Muscel in present-day Argeş County of Romania) the local Saxons (in a very exposed position outside Transylvania) turned to Romanian within a century (see Ciocîltan 2015). With the Reformation, the connections with the German lands in Central Europe again intensified, Transylvanian students increasingly coming to universities like Wittenberg and Leipzig, which once more served to stabilize and even strengthen the position of the German language in Transylvania.

Towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Turks' grasp of East-Central and Southeast Europe became increasingly weak, and in 1690 Austria, i.e. the House of Habsburg, gained control over Transylvania, establishing the Principality of Transylvania (German *Fürstentum Siebenbürgen*, from 1765 Great Principality, *Großfürstentum*). Being—for the first and only time in history—part of the German Empire (indirectly, at least, as it was controlled by the then leading dynasty of Germany), the position of the German language could have further improved, impaired only by the Habsburg-led Counter-Reformation, which, on the other hand, brought new and different groups of Germans into the country, most prominent among them being the Protestants expelled from Upper Austria, the so-called *Landler*s. In the wake of the Counter-Reformation and of the Austrian administrative reforms undermining and, at last, eliminating Transylvanian autonomy, Emperor Joseph II, in 1783, introduced the German language as the language of government and administration instead of Latin, but, in 1784, he also abolished the 'university of the Saxon nation.'

Introducing German as the official language of government and education served to strengthen Hungarian nationalism, eventually weakening the centu-

ries-old privileged position of German—which had been already weakened by tying social advancement to being Catholic. In 1867, after the so-called *Ausgleich* (i.e. Compromise) between Austria and Hungary, leading to the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy, the Great Principality of Transylvania came to an end and was then, in 1867, and again in 1876, in the context of far-reaching administrative reforms in Hungary, incorporated into Hungary's administration without any compensation.

Linguistically, the times of undisputed privileges had come to an end, as well. At the 'upper end,' Hungarian became the language of government, and more and more even of schooling and education, while at the 'lower end' Saxon dominance in the towns and cities, especially, dwindled as the number of Romanians grew. Nevertheless, from today's perspective, German was on the whole able to keep its social position. This was due to many factors, one certainly being the overall prestige of the German language, its position as dominant language in the monarchy's Austrian half, its long tradition as a language of learning for Transylvanians—traditionally studying in Vienna and at the universities in Reformed central Germany—but foremost on account of its strong position within the Reformed Church of Transylvania and its institutions of education. When the monarchy came to an end in 1918, the Transylvanian Saxons seemed to have gained a deeper and additional knowledge of Hungarian rather than to have lost their skills in the German standard language.

On the whole, the use and knowledge of the German standard language seems to have been in no way different from the developments in Germany, the standard form of the language emerging there as well as in Transylvania with the Reformation as a major driving force. Apart from this close connection to the German language and cultural space in Central Europe that functioned via learning and education, we have to bear in mind that, in the course of almost eight centuries of existence in the Carpathian Basin and of co-existence with speakers of Hungarian and of Romanian, predominantly, the Transylvanian Saxons developed their very specific varieties of German in the form of around 250 different local dialects, including highly esteemed varieties like the city dialects of Hermannstadt and Kronstadt. These dialects shared a fundament of common features, they were used in everyday life in the villages and in the cities, and the latter varieties also developed a written tradition. In the cities and in liturgy Saxon was used until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and only then was it superseded by Standard German. Even today, in the villages, Saxon dialects are still alive among the very few remaining Saxon inhabitants.

After centuries of privilege for the Saxons and their German language, the situation started changing in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Following World War I, 'Greater' Romania, *România Mare*, founded on 1 December 1918, incorporated Transyl-



vania, due to its majority Romanian population. The Saxons became Romanian citizens and were confronted with a new and very self-conscious state, Romanian in a very ostentatious way. Nationalism reached its peak in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Just like Romania's Hungarians looked to their 'mother country' Hungary, the Germans in Romania strengthened their ties with Germany, which, from 1933, was Nazi Germany—a development, as we know, leading to the apocalypse of World War II and all its consequences. Toward the end of the war, the German population of northern Transylvania, the *Nösnerland*, which had become Hungarian again in 1944, had to leave for Germany, and only a very small fraction there remained in the country. (What remained of) Romania itself did not expel its Germans, the only country of Eastern Europe to do so. At the end of World War II, roughly 250,000 Germans still lived in Transylvania.

After all, Greater Romania, the Romanian state between the wars, had been a democratic state, and Germans had had the institutions that people need to survive linguistically. In 1945, apart from the serious loss of population in the *Nösnerland*, the position of German in Transylvania, on the whole, was not very different from what it had been in the previous centuries. This all changed severely after the war. Around 30,000 Transylvanian Saxons were deported to the Soviet Union to work in labor camps, and the discrimination against Germans in Romania started just like elsewhere in Eastern Europe, with all the consequences Germans had to endure for being Germans. Expropriation and collectivization began in 1948 in then communist Romania. More than any other ethnic group, the Germans were exposed to everyday repression. So, having the opportunity to leave in the framework of postwar (West) Germany's policy of reparation and repatriation, from the 1950s on, the Germans began to emigrate, Germany paying bounties of up to 10,000 German Marks per head. At the end of 1989, when the communist regime fell, Transylvania's German population had decreased to some 110,000 people, intimidated, hopeless, and marginalized in their former strongholds, in cities like Hermannstadt and Kronstadt, due to the massively forced influx of Romanians from southern and eastern Romania in the communist years. Still, the traditional Saxon villages were mainly, and sometimes exclusively, German, the Saxon dialects being spoken as in the centuries before.

This again changed severely after the Romanian revolution. In 1990 and 1991, just like all the Germans from all over Romania, lacking any trust in a new and probably democratic state to come, the Transylvanian Saxons left their homes for Germany in numbers unseen before. In 1992, we find around 20,000 left.

A quarter of a century later, the situation has stabilized. The number of Saxons is between 15,000 and 20,000, some villages have been altogether deserted by Saxons, but in most villages a few people are left, very old now, of course. In the cities the Saxon population has shrunk to a marginal minority of less than

one percent. No place can now be found where Saxons are the majority. This could sound very hopeless. Despite all predictions, though, the German population of Romania has recovered slightly, gained political influence in a new and democratic Romania offering everything a language needs to survive, including education in the native language, German newspapers, publications, theater, etc. Among the Germans of Romania, the Transylvanian Saxons may now be seen as the most influential group. Well-educated, well-organized politically, no other indicator of full-fledged German participation may show this clearer than the fact that, since 2015, the president of the Romanian state is Klaus Iohannis, a Transylvanian Saxon from Hermannstadt.

To sum up, in what regards the situation of German in Transylvania, this means that we cannot see a language or dialects in any state of language loss or decay. What has decreased significantly during the last decades is the sheer number of people using the language as their native language. Everything else is being provided—sometimes in abundance: schooling in the native language (actually used by many more speakers of Romanian than by Germans) and all the other necessary components. Thus, Transylvanian German dialects exist as they have existed in the centuries before—provided there are speakers left in the respective villages, at all. Due to the high standard of education and literacy, in general, even a Romanian variety of Standard German has established itself, now recognized and accepted in German variation linguistics. Still, as in the previous centuries, German in Romania and in Transylvania, especially, cannot be characterized as a ‘typical minority language.’

### 3. Transylvanian German

LOOKING AT German in Transylvania, we may differentiate between three main strata, (1) the local dialects in towns as well as in villages, (2) a Saxon regional language, the *Gemeine Landsprache* (‘common language of the land,’ cf. Gadeanu 1998, 101ff.), and (3) Romanian standard German. We cannot find a sort of a linguistic continuum from local dialects to standard language, but rather diglossia, (1) and (2) having been the case up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, regional Saxon then slowly being superseded by standard German, leading to (1) and (3) having existed side by side since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Regional Saxon emerged from the city dialect of Hermannstadt,<sup>5</sup> the old and current center of Saxon political and cultural life. It could have asserted itself as a standard language of its own, but did not complete this line of development due to the emergence and subsequent acceptance of standard German, this again due to German nationalism replacing the older and different form of Saxon national-



ism or ‘nationhood,’ rather, as seen in the medieval Saxon nation. Consequently, (Saxon) Transylvania’s main cities, foremost among them Hermannstadt, Kronstadt, and Bistritz, started giving up their local dialects for (regionally colored) standard German as their everyday languages around one century ago. Regional Saxon was mainly used in church and in the schools, in public affairs and negotiations, but it lacked a written norm, this being the main cause for not having attained the status of a standard language. As long as it existed, regional Saxon, the *gemeine Landsprache*, called *Detsch* in Saxon, functioned as an outstanding means of defining Saxon identity as opposed to Hungarian, Székely, and Romanian identities, as well as to a generic German identity. Due to regional Saxon’s strong position up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the specifically Austrian influence in the formation of urban varieties of German throughout the former Austria-Hungary like, for instance, the urban vernaculars of Temeswar (Romanian Timișoara) or Czernowitz (now Ukraine, Чернівці in Ukrainian, Cernăuți in Romanian), could not really shape such an urban language in Saxon cities. There it appears in sort of a ‘reduced’ variety, described as *Kucheldeutsch* (i.e. ‘kitchen German,’ see also Protze 1959, 91ff.), as used by the lower social strata of Hermannstadt, indeed located physically in Hermannstadt’s *Unterstadt*, the (geographically) lower parts of the city. Gadeanu’s (1998, 112ff.) table of words as spoken in five different varieties of German in Romania is based on Andreas Scheiner’s (1928) list of 116 words in regional Saxon (*gemeine Landsprache*) and in *Kucheldeutsch* (called *bequemeres Deutsch*, i.e. ‘more comfortable German’ by Scheiner), citing these in the first two of five columns. Here are a few examples, comparing *gemeine Landsprache* and *Kucheldeutsch*:

ʉʃ—aʃn *Asche* ‘ash’  
 muəl̩n—ma:l̩n *mahlen* ‘to grind’  
 regdn—raitn *reiten* ‘to ride’  
 ʃveŋ—ʃvain *Schwein* ‘pig’ (‘swine’)  
 bo:x—baux *Bauch* ‘belly’  
 fli:ʃ—flaiʃ *Fleisch* ‘meat’ (‘flesh’)  
 du:f—taup *taub* ‘deaf’  
 bax—bux *Buch* ‘book’  
 gɔ:s—gants *Gans* ‘goose’  
 haŋt—hunt *Hund* ‘dog’ (‘hound’)

For the dialectal and dialectological classification of the Saxon varieties, especially, cf. the explanations on the characteristics of Transylvanian Saxon dialects in the following chapters.

#### 4. Transylvanian German Dialects: Classification

**I**N THEIR specific characteristics, German dialects anywhere in the world doubtlessly show features of the German dialects in the originating language area in Central Europe. These may be mappings one-to-one in the case of isolated and self-contained villages of speakers from one and the same area of origin, the classical ‘language island,’ and there may be countless forms of mixes and independent developments over the years, mostly in contact with neighboring languages. All these ‘new dialects’ can nevertheless be classified according to the common and well-known features of German dialects and dialect areas, respectively, and probably all these dialects ‘outside’ are indeed shaped by specific proportions of these features (augmented, at that, by new and independent features never and nowhere seen before), enabling us to characterize them as, e.g., ‘mainly Franconian,’ ‘mixed Bavarian-Franconian,’ ‘Alemannic with a slight Bavarian interference,’ etc.

Transylvanian Saxon—and this is, no doubt, *communis opinio*, supported by thorough dialectological research as well as by intensive discussions of the subject—is of mainly Franconian origin and up to this day showing characteristically Central Franconian features of the German dialects. In a more detailed classification, its dominant features can be assigned mainly to Ripuarian, from the greater Cologne area, and to Moselle-Franconian, the area from the river Rhine along the river Moselle up to present-day Luxembourg and Lorraine. In a wider and more extensive classification, (increasingly Low German) dialect features from areas north of Cologne and Düsseldorf and (increasingly High German) dialect features from areas south and east of the Rhine-Moselle area can be detected and have been described in depth over the years. Being constantly aware of the fact that a one-to-one correlation between the originating area and the place of settlement in Transylvania must not be done (and being also aware of the constant temptation to do), Transylvanian Saxon dialects may be projected upon the area of the so-called *Rhenish Fan*, showing the gradual non-appearance of features typical for the *High German Sound Shift* going from south to north. “Das Siebenbürgische läßt sich dem ‘rheinischen Fächer’ der heutigen Lautverschiebungsstände an Rhein und Mosel zwanglos einordnen” (Klein 1959, 15). Thus, first of all, the High German Sound Shift’s specific appearance in Transylvanian Saxon has to be investigated. Again: it has to be kept in mind that it must be interpreted as specifically Transylvanian (Protze 1969, 300: “steht der mittelfränkische Charakter der siebenbürgisch-sächsischen Mundarten nicht am Anfang, sondern am Ende eines etwa ein halbes Jahrtausend währenden sprachlichen Ausgleichs”).

## 4.1. Sounds—Characteristic Features

### 4.1.1. THE HIGH GERMAN SOUND SHIFT

Germanic *k* is realized as High German [x] in almost all the lexical items and in almost all geographic parts of Transylvanian Saxon (SDSA 1-1, map 6): ma:xən, mau:xən etc. *machen* ‘to make’ (SDSA 1-1, map 20); gəbro:xən, gəbreoxən etc. *gebroschen* ‘broken’; zɛ:kən/zai:kən etc. *suchen* ‘to seek’ is described as being the most common word exception to the rule, the areal exceptions being three villages in the eastern Nösnerland, and the village of Brenndorf/Bod/Botfalu, where SDSA 1-1, map 6, reports *k* in mɔ:kɿ, mau:kən etc. *machen* ‘to make,’ and (map 20) gəbro:kə etc. *gebroschen* ‘broken.’

Germanic *t* also shows High German realizations in almost any case (tsekt, tsait *Zeit* ‘time’ (‘tide’), vasər, vəsər *Wasser* ‘water,’ nas, nəs *nass* ‘wet,’ cf. Klein 1959, 12). Common exceptions all over the Transylvania Saxon area are the ‘little’ words dat, dət etc. *das* ‘that’ (SDSA 1-1, map 49) and wat, wət etc. *was* ‘what’ (SDSA 1-1, map 59) as well as -t in neutral endings like ga:dət *gutes* ‘good’ and gent, gi:nət *jenes* ‘that’ (sg. of ‘those’); dat and wat are well-known shibboleths for almost all the Rhenish Fan area (north of the das-dat-isogloss).

Germanic *p* is realized as original *p* as well as High German *f* and in this way shows compromise forms word by word in word-internal positions (fta:pən *stopfen* ‘to stuff,’ helfən *helfen* ‘to help’). In word-initial positions, *f* is the rule like in faɿt, fant etc. *Pfund* ‘pound’ (SDSA 1-1, map 38), faif *Pfeife* ‘pipe.’ This word-initial *f* is definitely referring to East Middle German and may thus be seen as the most explicit indicator for Transylvanian Saxon as a compromise language developed with remarkable influences adopted in the course of *Ostsiedlung*. The fact that so-called older Romance loanwords in the lexicon of Saxon do normally show *p* like in pho:l *Pfahl* ‘pole’ and phets *Brunnen* ‘well’ (from Latin puteus) is well suited to this *f* being the rule. It will be shown that the *p*-/*f*-occurrence also represents an important factor in Transylvanian Saxon dialect geography.

### 4.1.2. -S- FOR -HS-

Just like Dutch and Low German and unlike English, Middle Franconian dialects have developed Germanic -hs- to -s- in examples like fos *Fuchs* ‘fox,’ fluə:s *Flachs* ‘flax,’ ziə:s *sechs* ‘six,’ and i:sən *Ochsen* ‘oxen.’ This feature has to be interpreted in connection with the other prominent consonant loss before *s* (and *f*). SDSA 1-2, map 136, displays all the variants of *wachsen* ‘to grow,’ showing forms with -s- without any exception in the Saxon areas.

### 4.1.3. LOSS OF *N* BEFORE *S* OR *F* (‘ERSATZDEHNUNG’)

*Ersatzdehnung*, i.e. compensatory lengthening of the vowel when *n* is omitted before certain fricatives, in cases before *s* or *f* is a main feature of English and

Dutch as compared to (High) German. It also appears in Middle Franconian dialects (and, thus, it is also part of standard Luxemburgish) and in Transylvanian Saxon in examples like *gɔ:s*, *gais* etc. *Gans* ‘goose’ and *fɔ:f* etc. *fünf* ‘five.’ SDSA 1-1, map 25, shows forms with compensatory lengthening in *unserm* ‘our’ (dat. *sg.*). Protze’s (1969, 301) map is based on the SDSA map.

#### 4.1.4. (RHENISH) VELARIZATION

In West Central German dialects, especially, velarization (formerly called gutturalization) of *-nd-* and of word-final *n* after historically long vowels is common, and it may also be seen as one of the outstanding characteristics of Transylvanian Saxon. *hoŋt*, *haŋt* etc. *Hund* ‘dog’ (‘hound’) is a well-known example (cf. SDSA 1-1, map 23) for the *-nd > -ŋt-* development, variants like *veŋ* *Wein* ‘wine’ and *bruŋ* *braun* ‘brown’ representing the other string. The map depicting velarization in German dialects as seen in Werlen (1983, 1131) may be understood as the core area of West German emigration to, eventually, Transylvania in the Middle Ages. The feature is characteristic for the Central Transylvanian and Burzenland dialects of Transylvanian Saxon, and it is almost non-existent in the Nösnerland—another indication for inner-Transylvanian differences (to be dealt with below).

#### 4.1.5. VOCALISM

Descriptions of Transylvanian Saxon dialects tend to sum up their remarks on vocalism with the adjective *vielfältig* ‘diverse, manifold.’ It is indeed so, its main characteristics being Central Franconian, of course, with many specific features developed over the centuries in Transylvania. Protze (1998, 59) counts 34 vocalic variants in only 51 villages in the case of original *a* lengthened due to loss of the *n* in *Gans* ‘goose,’ most widespread among them *guis* (5 villages), *goas* (5 villages), and *gas* (4 villages), adding 6 variants in 2 villages each and 25 variants in only one village each. *Gänse* ‘geese’ in SDSA 1-1, map 27, displays around 30 different vocalic variants. On the other hand, map 26 in SDSA 1-1 seems to show only orthographic variants of one and only *vi:s* *Wiese* ‘meadow’ all over Transylvanian Saxon (indeed, not worth being mapped).

Just like Franconian dialects in the Rhineland and like Central German dialects, on the whole, Transylvanian Saxon shows a strong tendency towards vowel reduction. Thus, *i* and *u* are reduced to *e-* and even *a-* types. Map 9 in SDSA 1-1, *Kind* ‘child,’ predominantly displays forms like *kent*, *kant*, *keŋt*, map 39 there, while *Luft* ‘air,’ shows forms like *loft* and *laft*. On the other hand, historically long vowels as in SDSA 1-2, map 127, *Schnee* ‘snow,’ and in map 74 there, *Brot* ‘bread,’ have forms like *bri:t* and *fni:*, predominantly. Additionally, an overwhelming wealth of diphthongs of all kinds results from historical lengths and

diphthongs, especially. Counting all the diphthongal variants for *Brot* in map 74 of SDSA 1-2, we come to *bruit, brüit, briut, briæt, bruæt, brüæt, breit, broit, brait, briuæt, breut, bræut, bröit, bröüt*—not even differentiating between short and long components of the diphthongs.

## 4.2. Morphology—Eifeler Regel

**T**HE *EIFELER Regel*, i.e. the ‘Eifel rule,’ named after the Eifel, a low mountain range in Germany’s far west and in southeastern Belgium, describes a phonological process heavily affecting morphology in the dialects of the Eifel area and in surrounding areas in the westernmost parts of German. Thus, it is also part of Luxembourgish dialects and of the standard language of Luxembourg, *Letzebuergesch*, and it is part of Luxembourgish grammar and orthography.

In short, it says: “Stammhaftes und Endungs-*n* wird im Satzzusammenhang nur bewahrt vor Dentalen, *h* und Vokalen, sonst schwindet es” (Klein 1959, 16). Capesius (1966/1990,<sup>6</sup> 149) formulates it as follows: “Das -*n* der meisten Flexionsendungen und das stammhafte Auslaut-*n* in einer Reihe von Wörtern fällt vor Konsonanten (außer *h, n, d, t, ts*) im Satzzusammenhang (bei fließender Rede) sowie in der Kompositionsfuge aus.” Klein (1959, 16) takes a (not really convincing) example from Schullerus (1906):

ex bleiwən hø *ich bleibe hier* ‘I stay here’  
 ex bleiwə bø *dir ich bleibe bei dir* ‘I stay with you.’

Capesius’s (1990) article, dealing with the Eifel rule in depth, cites examples galore, e.g.:

sə hun diə gəgin *sie haben denen gegeben* ‘they have given them’ /  
 diənən hu sə gəgin *denen haben sie gegeben* ‘them have they given’ (151),  
 gədrənkən hadə sə gənax *getrunken hatten sie genug* ‘drunk had they enough’ /  
 bədrənkə wø:rə sə net *betrunknen waren sie nicht* ‘drunken were they not’ (152).

Due to its fixing in Luxembourgish, the rule seems to be stable there. In all the other areas of western Germany and of Transylvania it shows variations from place to place and exceptions all over. Its stable linkage to Luxembourg tempted Transylvanian dialectologists all over the 20<sup>th</sup> century to favor the *Urheimat* hypothesis, but, as we have seen, this must not be overestimated. Nevertheless, the connection between Transylvanian Saxon and Central Franconian is obvious in

this case, and this is additionally supported by the fact that the application of the Eifel rule in Transylvania is concentrated in the *old lands*, in southern Transylvania.

### 4.3. Morphology (1)—the Masculine Singular Personal Pronoun *he*

**A**LL OVER the Transylvanian Saxon area the personal pronoun for the masculine singular is a form of *he*, just like English *he*, Dutch *hij*, West Frisian *hy*, and, of course, Low German *he*. This form has been described definitively as an *ingvaeonism*, a feature common to the North Sea Germanic languages. The Central Franconian dialects, just like in the case of compensatory lengthening, share this feature with their neighbors to the north and northwest. SDSA 1-1, map 29, depicts this form without any exception for Transylvanian Saxon, clearly showing initial *h-* in stressed positions, and reduced *ə* when unstressed, but nowhere realizing word-final *-r* as in High German. Especially for the northern area of Saxon in Transylvania, the Nösnerland, this is somewhat surprising and may be interpreted as a very distinctive feature to be identified with Saxon, having thus superseded earlier Bavarian forms there in developing a compromise language.

### 4.4. Morphology (2)—western *-a*-types in *gehen* ‘to go’ and *stehen* ‘to stand’

**J**UST LIKE English, Dutch, and Low German, and like all the western dialects of High German, Transylvanian Saxon has *a* in *gehen* and *stehen*, once again clearly assigning it culturally and linguistically to the ‘western sphere’ of German. SDSA 1-2, map 93 and map 132, shows this impressively with dominating *gon* and *fjon*-variants.

### 4.5. Morphosyntax

**O**VER THE years, the morphosyntactic features of Transylvanian Saxon have not been the focus of dialectologists. Certainly, they are not as obtrusive as the phonological or lexical features, and the geography of syntax all over German is more spacious, on the whole. Mostly, syntactic features cannot be constricted to smaller areas such as Transylvania.

Nevertheless, the *Audioatlas siebenbürgisch-sächsischer Dialekte* at the University of Munich,<sup>7</sup> interpreting audio material gathered in the 1970s, gives us hints



for, at least, one morphosyntactic phenomenon of Transylvanian Saxon, the doubling of prepositions as *an zu* for Standard German *zu* ‘to.’

Wenker sentence 2, *Es hört gleich auf zu schneien, dann wird das Wetter wieder besser* ‘It will stop snowing in a moment, then the weather will get better again’ shows variants with *hört auf an zu* in several villages in central southern Transylvania, about one fifth of the overall sample, e.g.

ət hi:rt glɛç 'ɔv ʊn tʂə 'fn̩o:an dro: vɪrd dət 'vadər vɛdər ,be:sər (Gergeschdorf/Ungurei/Gergélyfája)

ət hɛirt glɛç 'ɔf ʊn tʂə 'fn̩ə:n dra vɪd dət 'vadər vɛdər ,bəʊsər (Almen/Alma-Vii/Szász-Almád).

Wenker sentence 3, *Tu Kohlen in den Ofen, dass die Milch anfängt zu kochen* ‘Give coal into the stove, so that the milk will start boiling’ shows double preposition in about half the samples, e.g.

da: 'ky:lən ən dən 'iʋən dət 'ə 'mæltç bə:ld 'ɔfe:t ʊn tʂə ,kəʊ:xən (Kerz/Cârța/Kerc)

deā 'kiʋlən ən dən 'iʋən dat 'ə 'mæltç bə:ld 'ɔfe:t ʊn tʂə ,ko:xən (Arbegen/Agârbiciu/Szászegerbegy).

#### 4.6. The Lexicon

**T**RANSYLVANIAN SAXON’S lexicon has, for a long time, been in the focus of dialectological research in connection with the question of the area of origin in western Germany. And, indeed, one specific part of the lexicon is pointing very strongly to the area at the crossroads of Romance and Germanic located in present-day Germany, Luxembourg, eastern Belgium, and northeastern France. These are the *altromanische(n) Lehnwörter* ‘loanwords from Old Romance.’

Loanwords from Old Romance tend to be very conservative in respect to their sound shape—as we have seen with respect to the High German Sound Shift with examples like pho:l *Pfahl* ‘pole,’ phɔrts *Pforte* ‘gate,’ and phets *Brunnen* ‘well’ (from Latin *puteus*). They originate from centuries of Roman dominance in the western Rhineland and can be found in cultural fields especially where Roman culture was elaborate and exemplary, like in wine growing. In this field, we have words like *Kelter* ‘wine press’ from Latin *calcatorium*, or *Leier* ‘pomace’ from Latin *lor(e)a* (cf. Klein 1959, 13, and Protze 1998, 60). Further examples may be komp *Trog* ‘trough (for watering the cattle)’ (Protze 1998,

60), and *prom* etc. *Pflaume* ‘plum, prune’ from Latin *prunum* (cf. Haldenwang 2017, 75). This part of the Transylvanian Saxon lexicon may indeed be classified as very specific in comparison with other German dialects.

On the other hand, everyday language contact with their ethnic neighbors in Transylvania enriched the Saxons’ lexicon with loanwords from languages like Hungarian and, very intensively, Romanian. These are part of everyday Saxon and very common all over the area, at times, like *Palukes* ‘boiled cornmeal’ (probably) from Hungarian *puliszka*, and *Tschismen* ‘(men’s) boots’ from Hungarian *csizma*, loanwords from Hungarian representing, of course, an older string of contact. In the meantime, having been part of Romania for a century, the influence from Romanian has grown considerably. Nevertheless, contact with Romanian has existed for centuries, the Romanians having been the majority population in Transylvania throughout modern times. Older loanwords from Romanian tend to occur mostly in the agricultural field. Quite good examples may be the various loanwords for and besides the German/Saxon *Pferch* ‘pen (for fencing in sheep etc.)’ from Romanian, *Okol*, *Strunga*, and *Zark*.<sup>8</sup> Map 33 of the *Siebenbürgisch-deutscher Wortatlas* (SDWA) also displays ‘Buretz’ *Pilz* ‘mushroom’ from the Romanian *bureți* all over central Transylvania as one of the old Romanian loanwords.

Words from Romanian in everyday modern life are omnipresent, of course, in all fields of communication. They include terms for food, cooking etc. like *Klettiten* ‘pancakes’ (Rom. *clătite*), *Mamaliga* ‘boiled cornmeal’ (see above: *Palukes*) (Rom. *mămăligă*), and *Prenz* ‘cheese’ (Rom. *brânză*), and they appear in all fields connected to public life in Romania and Romanian in words like *Programm* ‘service hours (in stores, offices etc.)’ from Rom. *program*, *Generalschule* ‘(compulsory) public school’ from Rom. *școală generală*, and they are often taken from Romanian directly in examples like *ferm* ‘farm’ or *președinte* ‘president.’ This, of course, leads us away from Saxon dialects to Standard German in Romania and to the wide field of bilingualism. Transylvanian Saxons, like all Germans in Romania, are today bilingual, probably without any exception.

#### 4.7. Transylvanian Dialectal Geography

As could be seen in several cases, Transylvanian Saxon—apart from microgeographical differences to be noticed from village to village—can be divided into at least three different larger areas corresponding to underlying historical facts pertaining to settlement and to geography. On the whole, in Central Franconian characteristics of German can be diagnosed most densely in central Transylvania, the ‘old lands.’ Due to developments of inner-Transyl-

vania linguistic compromise, the *Burzenland*, the smaller Saxon area ‘far south-east’ around Kronstadt, is mostly Franconian, as well, which may be exemplified in the lexicon with words like *Büttner* ‘cooper’ (SDWA map 18, old lands and Burzenland, (*Fass*)*binder* in the Nösnerland) or *wiederkäuen* ‘to ruminate’ (SDWA map 45) in Altland and Burzenland as opposed to the (mainly Bavarian) variant ‘*iterucken*’ in the Nösnerland. The inner-Transylvanian compromise seems to have ‘franconized’ the Burzenland over the time, having been originally more Bavarian due to its status as a secondary settlement originating from the Nösnerland. A very robust remnant of older Bavarian characterizing the Burzenland Saxon dialects up to this day may be determined in *b* for *w* in, e. g., words like *zwei* ‘two’ (SDSA 1-1 map 52). A ‘key sentence’ (*Burzenländer Regel* ‘Burzenland rule’) is formulated by Protze (1969, 302): *spenəntspintsich şpuarts şpentcher huan spenəntspintsich şpuarts şpintsker zweiundzwanzig schwarze Schweinchen haben zweiundzwanzig schwarze Schwänzchen* ‘22 black piglets have 22 black little tails.’

It is heavily due to the Nösnerland that Transylvanian Saxon dialects may be characterized as ‘mainly Central Franconian, and with additional features from East Central German and from Bavarian.’ Northern Transylvania around the city of Bistritz seems to have been originally settled by Bavarians. Traces of Bavarian may be detected there in large numbers (v. Protze 1960), even including one-to-one relations of place names like *Tekendorf/Teaca/Teke* and *Deggendorf*, Bavaria, and the direct nomination of Bavarians in *Baierdorf/Crainimăt/Királynémet*. Historical evidence is strengthened by linguistic evidence, in the sound system as well as in the lexicon. Protze (1960) presents examples galore for the Nösnerland’s still heavily Bavarian features like *b* for *w*, as cited above. The three volumes of the *Siebenbürgisch-deutscher Sprachatlas* (SDSA 1-1 and 1-2, SDWA) present a wealth of examples, as well. In addition to the examples mentioned before various forms without compensatory lengthening are to be mentioned, such as *tsəns Zins* ‘interest’ or *fənəf, finəf fünf* ‘five’ in Kleinbistritz/Dorolea/Asszubeszterce, especially (Protze 1960, 335). In the lexicon, we may mention *foarkreut Sauerkraut* ‘cabbage’ as opposed to forms of *Kampest* (from the Slavic *kapusta*) in the south.

## 5. Conclusion

**T**RANSYLVANIAN SAXON may be characterized as a very special variety of German ‘outside’ and far apart from the main body of German in Central Europe. It may be seen as a kind of exclave, not really as a ‘language island’ in its classical sense, isolated, utterly conservative, a relic of former times.

It is not a typical minority language, underprivileged, striving to eventually assimilate to the majority language. On the contrary, Transylvanian Saxon—for almost nine centuries—has been privileged almost all the time, having had all the possibilities to flourish and to take part in all the cultural and linguistic developments within the larger German language and cultural area. Comprising around 250 villages and towns, including cultural and economic centers like Hermannstadt, Kronstadt, and Bistritz, it developed its own very specific forms of Transylvanian Saxon dialects, heavily based upon Central Franconian due to the origins of the first settlers, subsequently incorporating East-Central German and Bavarian features.

After World War II, especially, Transylvanian Saxon entered a most difficult phase in its long history, culminating in the massive departure of its speakers from the country after the fall of communism in 1989. Many villages were abandoned, and the number of speakers in the cities, once exclusively Saxon, shrunk to less than one percent. In these cities, the Saxon inhabitants switched to Standard German. In the villages Saxon is still alive, heavily shaken, but—as it seems—surviving and supported by those who stayed and remain determined to pass the language on to future generations.



## Notes

1. The name of the village of Wallendorf/Unirea/Aldorf, now part of the city of Bistritz/Bistrița/Beszterce, may be seen as one of several pieces of evidence regarding these Romance speaking settlers, *Walen/Wälben* being the older German(ic) term for the Romans, cf. (etymologically) English *Welsh*. Transylvanian place names will be given in their German, Romanian, and Hungarian forms, respectively. Only the Romanian form is official in present-day Romania, and only the Hungarian one has been so, when Transylvania was part of the Kingdom of Hungary. Nevertheless, the German variants do have a centuries-old tradition and present-day Romania is tolerating and even promoting the use of the German forms without any restriction. After its second citation, only the German form will be used.
2. Karl Kurt Klein (1897–1971) was professor of German at the University of Iași (German Jassy) from 1932, and at the University of Klausenburg/Cluj/Kolozsvár from 1939. He had to leave Transylvania during the Second World War and was professor at the University of Innsbruck, Austria, from 1946 to 1963. He died in Innsbruck in 1971. Besides Karl Kurt Klein, Helmut Protze (1927–2015) has to be mentioned as an outstanding researcher on Transylvanian Saxon outside Transylvania or Romania, respectively. He worked at the Saxon Academy of Sciences in Leipzig.

3. The Székelys have to be understood as a Hungarian-speaking group, although in former times they were considered a distinct ethnic group and thus operated as a *nation* at that time. Their foremost task was to protect the eastern border of the Kingdom of Hungary. Still, the Székely, i.e. the Hungarian-speaking population in the Eastern Carpathians, account for the majority of Romania's roughly one and a half million speakers of Hungarian.
4. This triggered the rapid fortification of churches all over Transylvania, these fortified churches being nowadays one of the foremost characteristics of Transylvanian landscape and culture.
5. Tröster's (1666) version of the Lord's prayer may be cited as an example for this compromise language: *Foater auser dier dau best em Hemmel, gehelget verde deing numen, zaukomm aus deing rech, deing vell geschey aff ierden, als vey em hemmel, auser däglich briut gaff aus heigd, ond fergaff aus auser schuld, vey mir fergien auser en schuldi-geren. Feir aus net en fersechung, saunderen erlüs aus von dem iüvell. Denn deing ess dat rech, dei krafft, ond dei herrleget, von ieveget, zau ieveget, Amen.* [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siebenbürgisch-Sächsisch#/media/File:Das\\_Vaterunser\\_auf\\_Siebenbürgisch-Sächsisch\\_1666.jpg](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siebenbürgisch-Sächsisch#/media/File:Das_Vaterunser_auf_Siebenbürgisch-Sächsisch_1666.jpg).
6. Capesius (1666), reprinted 1990. Citations follow the 1990 reprint.
7. <http://www.asd.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/>
8. See the map for Wenker sentence 41 in the *Audioatlas siebenbürgisch-sächsischer Dialekte* (<http://www.asd.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/?karte=qual>), and Krefeld (2015, 215).

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### **Abstract**

Transylvanian Saxon: 900 Years Old, and Still Alive

The present article provides an overview of the main features of Transylvanian Saxon, which may be characterized as a very special variety of German ‘outside’ and far apart from the main body of German in Central Europe, a kind of exclave but not really a ‘language island’ in the classical sense. For almost nine centuries, Transylvanian Saxon has been a privileged language, having had all the possibilities to flourish and to take part in all the cultural and linguistic developments within the larger German language and cultural area. Spoken in around 250 villages and towns, including cultural and economic centers like Hermannstadt, Kronstadt, and Bistritz, it developed its own very specific dialectal forms, heavily based upon Central Franconian due to the origins of the first settlers, and subsequently incorporating East-Central German and Bavarian features.

### **Keywords**

linguistics, German language, dialectal features, Transylvanian Saxon