

# Preserving Swiss Dialect Features in the Diaspora: The Case of New Glarus

Anita Auer and Alexandra Derungs

## 1. Introduction

When many people from different nations left Europe for North America during the so-called “Age of Mass Migration” (1850–1920s), a great number of Swiss also left their homeland<sup>1</sup> in search of betterment in North America. A Swiss settlement of particular interest is New Glarus, Wisconsin, which started as a colony in 1845 and has retained its Swiss identity until now. After all, it is still known as *America’s Little Switzerland* today. While other German dialects in the diaspora have already received a fair amount of attention (cf. for example Salmons 1993 and Boas 2009), in comparison, Swiss German dialects have hitherto been marginalized, i.e. the only existing studies we are aware of are those by Lewis in relation to New Glarus (cf. Lewis 1968, 1969, 1973) and Fleischer & Loudon (2010) on the Swiss (Bernese) dialect spoken around Berne, Indiana. Usually, historical sociolinguists can only rely on surviving letters and diaries by migrants in order to get a partial insight into their language use, the maintenance of the homeland variety, and the possible shift to the new language. In the case of New Glarus, however, recordings made in the 1960s of heritage speakers born as early as the late 1800s (now held in the Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies in Madison, Wisconsin), notably made by the previously mentioned Brian Lewis, allow us to better trace the development of a Swiss heritage dialect, as well as processes such as dialect levelling, language attrition, and gradual language shift in the diaspora.

In this paper, we will be concerned with what happened to a selection of Glarner dialect features in the diaspora, i.e. the dialect use of New Glarus speakers. More precisely, we compare selected New Glarus recordings by Brian Lewis to Glarus homeland data that is held in the Zurich Phonogrammarchiv. The focus will be on lexicon, phonology and morphology. The comparison of New Glarus heritage data to Glarus homeland data – combined with socio-historical information on New Glarus – will allow us to shed some light on what happened to specific Glarus dialect features in the diaspora.

The paper will be structured as follows: Section 2 will provide some background information on the New Glarus settlement and its socio-political background. Section 3 will be concerned with the homeland data, i.e. the Glarus dialect, in the context of the Alemannic group of Upper German dialects. In Section 4, we will present our data and method. In Section 5, we present and discuss the findings of our preliminary and largely qualitative study of Glarner dialect features in the diaspora. The conclusion (Section 6) will summarise the main findings and provide an outlook for future research related to this data.

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<sup>1</sup> Switzerland, which is a federal state since 1848, covers different linguistic areas, notably a German-speaking, a French-speaking, an Italian-speaking and a Romansh-speaking area. Diglossia exists in the Swiss German-speaking part (Sieber 2007) where the written dimension is predominantly carried out in Standard German while different Swiss German dialects are spoken (Haas 2004: 85; Christen 2005a: 85–86).

## 2. The New Glarus settlement in a socio-political context

The first settlers from Canton Glarus in Switzerland arrived in Green County, Wisconsin and founded New Glarus in August 1845. According to the descendants (Tschudy 2014: 9), the first settlers were very poor people. In the context of the industrial revolution in Europe, in Canton Glarus, weaving at home – like elsewhere – was supplanted by weaving in factories. As these factories had not enough work, there was also not enough food for the people. According to a Swiss report from 1842, the village of Matt in Canton Glarus had 800 inhabitants of which there were 69 pauper families, 21 beggars, and more than 100 people without land. In order to improve the situation, the Glarus emigration society was founded in 1844. It held their first meeting on 24 March 1844 in the town of Glarus to plan the emigration to America. On 16 April 1845, 193 Glarner left for the ship that would take them to America (Peter-Kubli 2004; Tschudy 2007).

According to letters, diaries and other records (Peter-Kubli 2004; Hale 2007), the first couple of years in New Glarus turned out to be difficult. The emigrants tried to grow grain but without success. Initially, in order to survive, they had to rely on financial support from the home country. Growing wheat turned out to be slightly more successful but even that was not enough to ensure the survival of the New Glarner. Eventually, they realised that dairy farming worked on the land that they were given. Bernese migrants, i.e. people from the Swiss Canton of Bern, also settled in Green County, especially in Monticello and Monroe (in the vicinity of New Glarus). The Bernese decided to specialise in dairy production and opened cheese factories, which turned out to be the perfect combination with the Glarner's dairy farming. Together the migrants from Glarus and Bern specialised in cheese production (Tschudy 2007: 8). In the diaspora, this settlement and collaboration pattern allowed for two dialects to come into contact, which would not have been the case in the homeland (see Section 3).

Apart from raising the children with Swiss German dialect, notably Glarus dialect, at home, efforts are made to teach High German at school as well. Since the foundation of New Glarus in 1845, there had been several efforts at operating schools. A German-language school was started with few resources in winter of 1846–1847. A school district was organised under territorial laws, with classes being held in several homes. In 1849, a schoolhouse was constructed on colony land. German classes were also offered by Swiss Reformed and German Methodist pastors. The arrival of a teacher from Switzerland in 1867 allowed for a more formal and lasting German School in New Glarus (Freitag 2012: 8). In 1889, the controversial Bennet Law was passed in Wisconsin that required the use of English to teach major subjects in all public and private elementary and high schools. Even though the Law was repealed in 1891, the decline of German language teaching had already started. The German language was then further supplanted with the beginning of the First World War in 1914 (Freitag 2012: 48, 100).

The New Glarner printed newspapers in the High German language, e.g. *New Glarus Bote* (1897 and earlier) that contained brief items about local people and news from the *Heimat*, i.e. the 'homeland'. Another German-language newspaper that existed from 1897 onwards was the *Deutsch Schweizerische Courier*, which was dedicated to the interests of the Swiss colonies in the Middle and Western states. After the publication of a German-Swiss newspaper for 15 years, an English language paper – the *New Glarus Post* – was produced in 1912. In line with new language policies in schools, the shift from German to English language papers also took place around the beginning of the First World War (Freitag 2012: 126, 173).

The inhabitants of New Glarus and its surroundings were predominantly of Swiss origin in the nineteenth century as Hale (2007: 3) indicates in a map that details Wisconsin's Swiss-born population around 1870, notably showing that the persons per square mile ratio is greater than 0.99 and therefore the highest density. Based on personal interviews carried out in November 2016 in New Glarus and Monroe, we learned that intermarriage took place amongst the Swiss in the first instance, but gradually also with other German-speaking migrants, Norwegian migrants (many of whom settled in Wisconsin, e.g. Mount Horeb), and others. Increasing mobility, intermarriage with non-Swiss, and the shift to schooling in English are all factors that play a role in the shift from Swiss dialects to the majority language English. Today, only very few elderly people who are descendants of the early settlers still self-identify as Glarner dialect speakers, but note that the acquisition process of the dialect stopped at school age and since then the English language has taken over. Several inhabitants of New Glarus speak Swiss German dialects

today but these are recent immigrants from different parts of Switzerland who work primarily in the tourist industry of New Glarus and help to keep ‘America’s Little Switzerland’ alive. Nevertheless, English is the dominant language in New Glarus today.

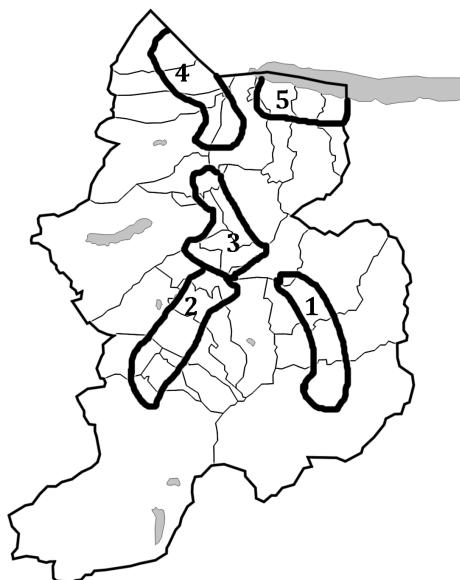
### 3. The Glarus dialect as homeland data

As previously indicated, the Glarus and Bernese migrants in Wisconsin are from German-speaking cantons. The vast diversity of Swiss German dialects can be seen in the *Sprachatlas der Deutschen Schweiz* (SDS), which shows spatial differences of the Swiss German dialects as well as differences on a lexical, morphological and phonological level (Christen 2005b: 22–23). For instance, if one considers the morphological variants of *we have / you have / they have*, it is noteworthy that there are marked West-East and North-South differences. Glarus has a specific form, namely *häid* for all three forms while the Bernese Oberland has completely different forms, notably *hee(n) / heet / hee(n)* (see Christen, Glaser & Friedli 2013: 300).

If we consider the linguistic situation in Green County, Glarner dialect forms did come into contact with Berner forms, as well as other Swiss and German dialect features. From a historical linguistic perspective, the Swiss German dialects are traditionally categorised into three groups, notably Low, High and Highest Alemannic (Rash 1998: 130–131; see also Christen 1996). Most of the Swiss German dialects, or at least the ones from the Swiss Mittelland (i.e. the Cantons of Bern and Argovia), are classified as High Alemannic, despite various regional and local differences among the Swiss German dialects of that region (Rash 1998: 131). The differences are most prominently exemplified by three isoglosses running in a North-South and East-West divide (Christen, Glaser & Friedli 2013: 32–33).

For instance, the Cantons such as Zug, Schwyz, Nidwalden, Uri and also the Canton of Glarus differ from the dialects in Bern, Lucerne, Zurich and St. Gallen in terms of hiatus diphthongization: in the northern part, people say *schneie* ‘to snow’ (hiatus diphthongization) while to the south of that linguistic boundary people say *schniie* and thus lack hiatus diphthongization (Rash 1998: 133); this is thus also the case in the canton of Glarus.

Map 1. Canton Glarus (based on “Karte Gemeinden des Kantons Glarus 2007 blank.png”, Wikimedia Commons).



The Glarner dialect, according to Streiff (1915), can be split into five major dialects, corresponding to (1) the Semftal (i.e. Elm, Matt and Engi), (2) the Hinterland, (3) the Mittel- and (4) Unterland as well

as (5) Kerenzen. The difference is reflected on a morphological and phonological level. On the level of morphology, the differences are for instance recognised in the first plural form of *haben* ‘to have’ and *wollen* ‘to want’ in the present tense. The variants used in the *Hinterland* are *mir häid* ‘we have’ and *mir wäid* ‘we want’, whereas the forms used in the rest of the canton up to the present day are *mir händ* und *mir wänd* (see Lewis 1969: 12 or *SDS* Bd. I, 1881: 21). On the phonological level, the difference can be perceived with regard to the varying degrees of openness of /e/, which is due to the different historical developments of the /e/-sounds (Lewis 1969: 12). The dialect of the *Hinterland*, which includes communities such as Elm, Engi, Matt, Schwanden uses a closed /e/ before a consonant, e.g. *Federä* ‘feather’ or *Pfeffer* ‘pepper’ (Lewis 1969: 12). However, the forms of the Glarner Mittelland and Unterland (except for Mollis), are an open /e/, which corresponds to /æ/, as in *Fäderä* and *Pfäffer*, before consonants (Lewis 1969: 12).

Other phonological features that are typical of the Glarner dialect are the following:

- /gg/ instead of /k/ in words like *Deggi* or *Dangge* instead of *Decki* or *Danke* (for ‘blanket’ or ‘thank you’, respectively);
- The lack of hiatus diphthongization in words such as *schniie* ‘to snow’, *buue* ‘to build’, *nüü* ‘new’;
- Schwa as *Auslautvokal*: schwa replaces nasal as found in *Hore* for ‘horn’, i.e. where the process /n/ to schwa applies in the word final /rn/-cluster.
- Raising of /o/ > /u/ and /ö/ > /ü/ like in *Kantu* ‘canton’, *schüü* ‘nice, beautiful’, *Zitruune* ‘lemon’.

According to the *SDS* (Bd. III, 1895: 374), the last feature of this list is exclusively found in the Canton of Glarus. As this feature, i.e. raising of /o/ to /u/ and /ö/ to /ü/, occurs in the Glarner dialect, and does not, for instance, in the Berner dialect (see *Kleiner Sprachatlas der deutschen Schweiz*, Christen, Glaser & Friedli 2013), it is an interesting linguistic feature to consider.

An important question is whether this and other features have survived more than 100 years since the first settlers came to Green County, and whether Glarner heritage speakers still used this feature at the time when Lewis gathered his data. Or, has this typical Glarner feature and other dialect features been replaced by other Swiss German variants? Similarly, did High German, which was taught in schools and found in print, influence the dialect features?

## 4. Data and method

Following some background information on the New Glarus settlement as well as the dialect that they brought to the diaspora, we will provide details concerning the data that we discuss in this section. In preparation for his PhD thesis, Lewis recorded the descendants of Glarner emigrants in 1966–67 in New Glarus. The recordings are held in the Max Kade Institute of German-American Studies. The people interviewed by Lewis were born between 1880 and 1910 in New Glarus and surroundings, which means that they were mostly 2nd and 3rd generation speakers of what they call *Glaarnertüütsch*, i.e. the Glarner dialect. In fact, the parents of the recorded heritage speakers originated from Elm, Matt, Engi and Schwanden.

### 4.1. Heritage language data

The main investigative tool used was a slightly revised version of Lester W.J. Seifert’s Wisconsin German Questionnaire (cf. Seifert 1951) that was completed by eleven speakers (8 men and 3 women) at the time. The workbook is a collection of more than 700 English sentences that were grouped according to various topics and were intended for translation into German. In addition, Lewis recorded some spontaneous spoken material. The translation method worked well with the interviewed people in that they were fluent in English – if sometimes speaking with a Swiss German accent. As for the elicitation of natural, everyday speech, asking questions in English is not necessarily advantageous (cf. also Clyne 1967 in his work on “Transference and triggering”). From the perspective of heritage language research and linked to questions of language acquisition, attrition and change, Lewis’ recordings are very precious.

Considering that all 11 people were asked the questions at roughly the same speed, it can be observed that some of them had severe difficulties retrieving and translating the sentences into Swiss German.

#### 4.2. *Homeland data*

As regards Glarner homeland data, the description of Glarner phonology from 1915 by Catharina Streiff is of great value for our research. The Phonogrammarchiv in Zurich holds recordings from different villages in Glarus from the early twentieth century, which constitutes our baseline data. The data is not perfectly comparable in that it is not based on the Seifert questionnaire and it seems rather performed than natural speech at times. The corpus consists of different speakers and text types (1909–1916), most of which are recounted stories such as the *Tell-Erzählung*.

#### 4.3. *Method*

In our preliminary study of historical Swiss German heritage language, we have focussed on lexicon, phonology and morphology – in line with the *Kleiner Sprachatlas der Deutschen Schweiz* (Christen, Glaser & Friedli 2013) and also conforming to their conventions. We have taken a 2-step auditive approach:

- (1) We compared the words and forms that the baseline and the heritage data recordings have in common. As the baseline recordings from the early twentieth century are limited in size, only few features can be compared such as words like *not* and phonological features like the hiatus diphthongization or the lack thereof ('to snow' – *schnie*).
- (2) The fact that the 11 recorded heritage speakers translated approximately 700 sentences into Swiss German means that we have many more tokens than found in the baseline data. While we indicate the tokens and the variation of them for the baseline data (see "Table 1: Comparison between homeland and heritage language features" below), we only indicate whether the different speakers' use the features categorically or whether we can observe intra-speaker variation.
- (3) In a second step, we compared the Swiss heritage data to findings from the *Kleiner Sprachatlas der Deutschen Schweiz* (Christen, Glaser & Friedli 2013). The latter data was collected in the first half of the twentieth century and is therefore also comparable to the timeframe of the heritage data collection. This comparison gives us more insight into whether Glarner dialect features were still present in the heritage speakers' language at the time or whether features had already been replaced by other variants or levelled out. Like previously indicated, at this preliminary stage of our study, we restrict ourselves to a specific set of lexical features and we are, again, concerned with the categorical use of the variants as opposed to other non-Glarus dialect features found in the diaspora.

### 5. A comparison of homeland and heritage data: a preliminary study

#### 5.1. *Comparison of Glarus (1909/1916) and New Glarus (1960s) data*

As for the first step, here is a selection of words that occur both in the baseline data and the New Glarus heritage data (Table 1 below). We make a distinction here between lexicon, phonology and morphology, notably based on Christen, Glaser & Friedli's (2013) subdivision. The Glarus column shows all the Glarus homeland features, while the right one provides the New Glarus variants.

It is striking that in the cases of *Getreide/Korn* 'corn', *schneien* 'to snow', *Schnee* 'snow', *Bett* 'bed', *trinken* 'to drink', and *Bruder* 'brother', all 11 speakers categorically use the Glarner variant. Interestingly enough, with the word *nicht* 'not', we find different variants in the data, notably the Glarner variant *nüt*, the Bernese variant *nid* and the variant *nöd*, which usually occurs in the Eastern part of Switzerland, namely in the Cantons of Zurich, Thurgau and St. Gallen.

Table 1: Comparison between homeland and heritage language features; no. of speakers in parentheses.

		Glarus (1909/1916)	New Glarus (1960s)
Lexicon	Getreide:	<i>chore</i> (1)	<i>chore</i> (11)
	nicht:	<i>nü(ü)d / nü(ü)t</i> (11)	<i>nüt / nid</i> (BE) / <i>nöd</i> (ZH, TG, SG) <sup>2</sup>
Phonology	schneien:	<i>schniie</i> (1)	<i>schniie</i> (11)
	Schnee:	<i>Schnee</i> (1)	<i>Schnee</i> (11)
	Bett:	<i>Bett</i> (2)	<i>Bett</i> (11)
	trinken:	<i>tringge</i> (2)	<i>tringge</i> (11)
	schön:	<i>schüü(n)</i> (3)	<i>schöö(n) / schüü(n)</i>
Morphology	zwei:	<i>zwee / zwäi</i> (2)	<i>zwee / zwei</i> (intra-speaker variation, except 1)
	Bruder:	<i>Brüeder</i> (1)	<i>Brüeder</i> (11) <sup>3</sup>
	haben (pl.):	<i>häid (hand)</i> (5/9)	<i>häid</i> (Hinterland) / <i>hand</i> (Unterland, ZH) / <i>häind</i>

Another interesting feature concerns the vowel sounds of the word *schön* ‘beautiful’, which is raised to *schüü(n)* in the Glarner dialect. The New Glarus data contains near-categorically *schön* as the variant, which is not the Glarner feature. In fact, *schön* is the variant that you can find in the greatest part of Switzerland as well as in Standard German.

As regards the morphological variants of *zwei* ‘two’, we can find intra-speaker variation in the speech of 10 heritage speakers, i.e. variation between *zwei* and *zwee*. Interestingly enough, it is only the youngest speaker that uses categorically *zwei*. As with *schön*, these are the variants also found in written Standard German. The final feature – *haben* (‘have’ in the plural present tense) exhibits a fair amount of variation. We can find the Glarner Hinterland variant *häid* alongside the Glarner Unterland variant *häind*, which can also be found in other cantons such as Zurich and Argovia. Apart from that, the variant *häind* can be found in the heritage data. While this variant is also recorded in some Swiss German pocket areas, none of them border the canton of Glarus.

Even though we have only been able to look at a very restricted set of items, it is striking that so many Glarner features can still be found in the language of the heritage speakers in the 1960s, i.e. approximately a century after the settlement. This does suggest that the New Glarner community was for a long time rather close-knit and retained their own dialect to a large extent, with only few features from other Swiss dialects.

## 5.2. Comparison of Kleiner Sprachatlas der Deutschen Schweiz and New Glarus data (1960s)

The comparison between some more Glarner lexical variants and New Glarner choices provides some more interesting results (Table 2 below).

For instance, some words are categorically replaced with English words, notably with Swiss German pronunciation, e.g. ‘bull’, ‘fence’, and ‘candy’. As for the *Christkind*, even though there is some variation, *Santa Claus* and *Samichlaus* were the most frequently chosen variants, which are not the Glarner variants.

Only for the word *Zwiebel* ‘onion’ was the Glarner variant used categorically, namely *Bölle*. When randomly listening to additional New Glarner heritage data that was recorded in the second half of the twentieth century, we came across an interesting conversation where one of the original speakers translated ‘onion’ without hesitation into *Zibele*, which is the Bernese variant. She then immediately corrected herself, this time stating the Glarner variant *Bölle* and also pointing out that the former was the Bernese and the latter the Glarner variant.

<sup>2</sup> The abbreviations BE, ZH, TG and SG stand for the Cantons Bern (BE), Zurich (ZH), Thurgau (TG), and St. Gallen (SG).

<sup>3</sup> The singular form of *Bruder* ‘brother’ in Bernese dialect, for instance, i.e. *Brueder*, does not contain the umlaut (cf. Christen, Glaser & Friedli 2013: 292–293).

Table 2: Comparison between homeland lexical dialect features and heritage variants; no. of speakers in parentheses.

	Kleiner Schweizer Sprachatlas der Deutschen Schweiz (Glarus feature; 1939-1958)	New Glarus (1960s)
Zuchstier:	<i>Stier / Muni</i>	<i>bull</i> (11)
Zaun:	<i>Zuu</i>	<i>fäns</i> , thus <i>fence</i> (11)
Bonbon:	<i>Möggli</i>	<i>candy</i> (11)
Christkind:	<i>Chrischt-Chind</i>	<i>Christchindli / Samichlaus / Santa Claus</i>
Küchenzwiebel:	<i>Bölle</i> (east)	<i>Bölle</i> (11)
Abend:	<i>Ààbet</i>	<i>Ààbet / Aabe</i> (BE)
Kater:	<i>Mäuder</i>	<i>Maudi</i> (BE) / <i>Mauder</i> (LU)
Butter:	<i>Angge</i>	<i>Angge / Butter</i> (TG; German, English)

As for the word *Abend* ‘evening’, half of the speakers opted for the Bernese variant *Aabe*. In the case of *Kater* ‘tomcat’, the Glarner variant is not used at all, but only the Bernese and the Lucerne variants, which are *Maudi* and *Mauder* respectively.

The term for *Angge* ‘butter’ is mainly expressed with *Butter*, which is the variant frequently found in Eastern and Northern Swiss German dialects (Christen, Glaser & Friedli 2013: 101), but it is very likely that written Standard German or even English could have had an influence here. Based on this fairly small sample, we can see that both the Bernese dialect and the dominant language – English – also had an impact on the New Glarus heritage dialect.

## 6. Conclusion

It was the aim of this preliminary study to compare New Glarus heritage data samples to homeland data in order to shed light on the development of the heritage dialect in the diaspora, i.e. possible influence by other (Swiss) German dialects and the dominant language English. Our preliminary study has shown that the heritage dialect has (slightly) changed over the generations in comparison to the homeland dialect, which was namely based on a rather small sample. What we observed in the data is that dialect contact with the Bernese – as well schooling in Standard German – has had some influence on the language of New Glarus Swiss German speakers, notably with regard to phonology and morphology (selected features). Apart from that, contact with English is also reflected in the lexical choices and the pronunciation of some words, e.g. *fäns*, *candy* and *bull*.

While these preliminary findings have already given us some valuable insights into the sociolinguistic life of New Glarus, there are still a number of questions that deserve further and more detailed research, e.g. the consideration of a wider range of dialect features on all linguistic levels, the development of the New Glarus dialect across selected people’s lifespans (i.e. where recordings survived), as well as a systematic comparison between Berner and Glarner dialect features in the New Glarus dataset. After all, the dialect data in the diaspora gives us unique insight into processes of contact-induced language change.

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