

# The Syntactic Atlas of Swiss German Dialects: empirical and methodological problems

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## ▪ ABSTRACT

In this paper, we will give a description of the aims, the methods and the material of the Syntactic Atlas of Swiss German dialects (Syntaktischer Atlas der Deutschen Schweiz, SADS). Dialectal syntactic structures are the subject of various disciplines: dialectology, theory of grammar and typology. Only some years ago the Swiss German Dialect Atlas (Sprachatlas der deutschen Schweiz (SDS)), which is considered a major work in German dialectology, was completed. Although the authors initially had the intention of including syntactic phenomena, the atlas only shows half a dozen maps demonstrating geographical syntactic variation. The reason why there are so few syntactic maps is not to be found in the research object itself, but in the specific difficulties of syntactic investigation in general. In this paper, we'll deal with the different research methods of various syntactic phenomena we use in our research project. We'll also give an overview of the investigated phenomena and we'll show the first results of our investigation with written questionnaires.

## I GOALS AND METHODS

### 1 ▪ PROBLEMS OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY CONCERNING DIALECT SYNTAX

In our paper, we'll try to give a brief outline of the goals, the methods and the content of the Syntactic Atlas of Swiss German dialects we are preparing. Our presentation is divided into two parts. The first part discusses more general points and the second part presents our questionnaire and elicitation techniques.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The whole paper was produced in collaboration. Part I is written by Elvira Glaser, part II by Claudia Bucheli. We are grateful to the two reviewers for their useful comments and to Anna Dale and Katherine White for improving our English.

It was only some years ago that the Swiss German Dialect Atlas (SDS), which is still considered a major work in German dialectology, was finished. Although in the beginning the authors intended to include syntactic phenomena, the published volumes contain only a very few maps concerning syntactic variation.<sup>2</sup> That means that our knowledge about the geographical variation of syntactic structures within the Swiss German area is far from complete. If one is convinced as we are that geographical variation exists also in syntax, then the research program is clear. We demonstrated this to the Swiss National Science Foundation (Schweizerischer Nationalfonds, SNF) who - as a result - gave us financial support for two part-time postgraduates and a part-time undergraduate for three years. We are required to present first results at the end of the 3 years' period. Compared to the SAND-project,<sup>3</sup> our funds are much smaller. But the same holds true, of course, for the area in question, which is to be seen on the map at the end of our paper.

We started our research program at the beginning of this year (3 January 2000). Until now we have had intensive discussions about the range of phenomena to be included and on the exploration methods to be used. In the meantime, we have sent out our first questionnaire, which will be discussed in greater detail in the second part.

As our first impetus was to complete the Swiss German Dialect Atlas we wanted to know, before even starting our work, why the research team had provided so few syntactic maps. We discussed this question with Rudolf Trüb, the major editor of the last volumes and one of the few persons involved in the project since its start in the forties who are still alive. Ultimately we came to the conclusion that the main reasons are the specific difficulties of syntactic investigation in general and the impossibility of combining traditional empirical research on phonetics, or phonology, and on lexical items with a syntactically oriented investigation. That is why we dedicated considerable time to the elaboration of the adequate elicitation technique. We also contacted other atlas

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Glaser (1997) on this topic. M. Gerritsen (1990: 49) gives an overview over the percentage of syntactic maps in linguistic atlases. The SDS is mentioned with 7 maps (= 0,8%).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the paper of Hans Bennis at the conference and the website of Meertens Instituut.

projects in the German-speaking area, dealing at least partially with syntactic phenomena, such as the 'Sprachatlas von Bayerisch Schwaben' (SBS) at Augsburg, the 'Sprachatlas von Österreich und Südtirol' (cf. Patocka 1988) and the 'Sprachatlas von Niederbayern' (SNIB) at Passau, because we consider it crucial not to neglect the results of other surveys.

The classical method of dialectological fieldwork is the interview, with the help of a questionnaire containing essentially naming questions and to a lesser extent completing questions,<sup>4</sup> generally organized according to semantic fields. Everybody familiar with this kind of survey can attest that after a short period of adjustment to the questioning system, good informants are normally able to answer quite quickly. Even so, this kind of interview required four or even more days (cf. Hotzenköcherle 1962: 128) for each questionnaire; the fieldworkers of the SDS, who had to visit e.g. 600 villages in Switzerland, had to hurry to complete their work. The similarity of the basically onomasiological questions such as 'How do you call what you have to do, if the scythe is blunt?' if you want to hear 'to sharpen' or 'What can you make from milk?' if you want to hear 'butter, cheese' etc.<sup>5</sup> helped a great deal in limiting the duration of the interviews. But it is quite difficult to take this sort of short-cut if you are interested in a specific syntactic construction. In the case of the Swiss German Atlas, as in the atlases of Bayerisch Schwaben and Niederbayern, the method used for eliciting syntactic properties was the translation from standard German in oral interviews.

Obviously, there are several problems with this kind of elicitation. It is generally known that the presentation of a linguistic form may influence the responses. And this kind of interference seems to be much greater in syntax than in phonetics or phonology, or even in vocabulary. But there are still other problems. Translations of sentences very rapidly exhaust the informants, because of the concentration on more abstract phenomena. And even informants good at

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Chambers/Trudgill (1998: 22f.).

<sup>5</sup> For further detail concerning the method of questioning cf. Hotzenköcherle (1962: 127) on the 'Zeige- und Vormachmethode' [demonstration technique E.G.] and 'umschreibende Fragen' [description technique E.G.].

providing phonetic and lexical material can be bad at translation or get rattled very quickly by the questions. Though such observations are shared by many fieldworkers, there hasn't existed until now a description of the specific difficulties. The experiences of the Swiss German Dialect Atlas team with syntactically oriented translation questions were quite bad, as Rudolf Trüb told us, because either the informants too often provided a literal translation from standard German and getting the natural responses would have taken too much time, or the informants often didn't understand at all the task they were faced with.<sup>6</sup> That is why the atlas ended with so few syntactical maps. And, moreover, most of the maps are based primarily on so-called spontaneous material: forms and structures the interviewer came across in spontaneous speech during the interview. That holds true for example for the maps showing the occurrence of the pronominal partitive genitive (as in (1), cf. SDS III, 235) and the marking of the copredicative function of an adjective (as in (2), cf. SDS III, 256, 257, B. II).

- (1) i        wott er                      o:  
      I        want Prn:3Pl.Gen.Prtv    too  
      'I want some [cherries], too'  
      'Ich will auch welche [Kirschen]'

This construction shows up in the so-called Highest Alemannic dialects in the southern and western part of German-speaking Switzerland (cf. Glaser 1995: 70f.):

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Hotzenköcherle (1962: 127 note 2): "Dem Ergebnis solcher 'Übersetzungsfragen' stehen wir heute im ganzen eher skeptisch gegenüber; es hängt in besonders empfindlichem Maße von der Qualität der Gewährsleute ab. ['after all we are now quite skeptical about the results of translation questions. They are particularly dependent on the quality of the informants.' [transl. E.G.]

- (2) sie sollten die Milch warme trinken<sup>7</sup>  
*they should the milk warm\_COPRED drink*  
 'they should drink the milk warm'  
 'sie sollten die Milch warm trinken'

The special marking of the copredicative function<sup>8</sup> with a (petrified) adjective ending (*warme*) not identical with a potential feminine adjectival inflection in the VP (as e. g. ... *isch warmi* '... is warm') is concentrated in the area of Appenzell (eastern Switzerland).

As a matter of fact, the major editor of the SDS, Rudolf Hotzenköcherle, writes in his introduction (1962: 134) that it was primarily with the help of spontaneous material that he was able to include maps for those phenomena otherwise almost impossible to elicit, 'wie die meisten Probleme der Satzphonetik und zahlreiche eigentlich syntaktische Probleme' ('as most of the phenomena depending on sentential stress and quite a lot essentially syntactic problems'. Transl. E.G.). But as he points out there were also translation questions with quite good results (Hotzenköcherle 1962: 128), e.g. concerning morphology, verbal conjugation, etc.

So we can conclude that it may be difficult to elicit certain syntactic phenomena in a survey alongside with phonology and vocabulary because of different requirements concerning the informants and the elicitation techniques. With the appropriate technique, it is, however, possible to uncover syntactical isoglosses, too, as it is shown by the map on pronominal clitics in the Atlas of Swiss German Dialects (SDS III, 259: nom. acc. vs. acc. nom: *du es/ es du*)<sup>9</sup>. Nevertheless, some phenomena will in fact remain inexplorable by a questionnaire. As far as we can see, that holds true especially for phenomena dependent on particular discourse conditions, as e.g. the so-called 'downtoners'

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<sup>7</sup> This example is given here in the standard German form.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the construction types C and I in Plank's typology (1985: 163, 170). Plank, however, doesn't mention types with overt marking of the copredicative function.

<sup>9</sup> The serialization was explored by a translation question: *hast du's gern?* 'do you like it?'

(Abtönungspartikeln).<sup>10</sup> That means, given these limitations, that we have to carefully choose which phenomena to explore. It remains, however, our intention to cover as much geographic variation as possible, because our primary goal is to show the dialectal differentiation of syntactic structures in the Swiss German area. The elicitation methodology has to be adapted to different types of phenomena, and in the final analysis of the data obtained we have to evaluate the exploration differences and to allow for different kinds of variants, as there are preferred constructions, unique constructions, tolerated ones and so on. And we have to cover the variation within the community, because we have up to ten informants in the same place. The adequate presentation of these data is another problem to be resolved at the end of our investigation.

## 2 ▪ WHY INVESTIGATE DIALECT SYNTAX?

So far, we have treated questions of research methodology, but one might ask whether a syntactic survey is worthwhile, if it causes so much trouble. We think that there are at least three reasons in favor of it.

In the first place, it is a question of general linguistic interest whether syntactic isoglosses within given dialect areas do exist. With the development of spoken language research in the sixties, most linguists were convinced that dialectal syntactic features were mere features of spoken language and that essential syntactic isoglosses do not exist at all. This conviction was backed up by the fact that syntactic areas normally are much larger than phonological ones, and that, perhaps as a result, regional syntactic variants often are not recognized as such even by conscious speakers. Until now, we have no way of knowing whether in fact syntactic constructions vary more freely than e.g. pronunciation, as is commonly held. It is likely that syntactic phenomena do not behave in a uniform manner. That means that there are phenomena with quite clear borderlines and

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Glaser (1999) on the downtowner *fai* in Bavarian, as for example in the sentence: "mit Eahnan dreckigen Bett brauchan S' mir fei's Maul net abwisch'n!" ([I inform you] you shouldn't wipe my mouth with your dirty blanket).

others where variation dominates over a large area. But the existence of syntactic isoglosses as such cannot be doubted. Isoglosses may also mark off a variation zone. Otherwise, a syntactic atlas, a basically geographic presentation, wouldn't make any sense. We'll give here some examples of various types from the German-speaking area.<sup>11</sup>

In a large south-eastern area, mass nouns can take - and normally do take - an indefinite article, like in Bavarian (cf. Kolmer 1999, Glaser 1996:163-166):

- (3) gib ma-r-a geld!  
*give me-0-a money*  
 'Give me some [sm] money'  
 'Gib mir Geld!'

In other areas, as in German-speaking Switzerland, this construction is completely ungrammatical, except in some transitional zones, i.e. in Baden-Württemberg (cf. Glaser 1995: 74), which show variation.

Variation zones often show the standard German constructions alongside the local variants, as also in the case of phrasal verb constructions (4), like in Southern Rhine Frenkish dialect where we find the equivalents of 'it begins to rain' with and without the infinitive particle *se* as in (4a) and (4b), respectively:

- (4a) s fangd aa rächne  
*it begins rain*  
 (4b) s fangd aa se rächne  
*it begins to rain*

The construction with the infinitive particle corresponds to the standard German sentence *es fängt an zu regnen*.

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<sup>11</sup> A comparative syntax of the German dialects remains still to be written, cf. Schirmunski (1962: 150, 411), Henn (1983: 1272f.).

The same holds true in the case of conditional (and other subordinate) clauses, like in Bavarian where we find left-hand-extraction (cf. Weiß 1998: 36-41) as in (5a) alongside the standard German word ordering as in (5b):

(5a) *dees wenn i gwisst hääd, (wààr i need kema)*  
*this if I known had (were I not come)*

(5b) *wenn i dees gwisst hääd, (wààr i need kema)*  
*if I this known had, (were I not come)*  
 ‘if I had known this (I wouldn’t have come)’  
 ‘wenn ich das gewusst hätte, wäre ich nicht gekommen’

In most German-speaking areas, it is completely impossible to topicalize the object in this way, but until now we do not know exactly where. There is, however, some evidence that this construction doesn’t exist in Alemannic and Rhine/Middle Frenkish dialects.<sup>12</sup>

There are in fact very few non-standard syntactic constructions which seem to fail a geographic distribution within the German-speaking area (cf. Mironov 1957: 394-397), as e.g. the possessive construction with dative NP (cf. Henn 1983):

(6a) *wem sein Hausist abgebrannt?*  
*WH.Dat his houseis burnt\_down*  
 ‘whose house has burnt down?’

(6b) *dem Bäcker sein Hausist abgebrannt*  
*the baker:Dat his houseis burnt\_down*  
 ‘the baker’s house has burnt down’

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<sup>12</sup> At least it is not mentioned in Labouvie (1938: 118-120). In my own dialect (southern Rhine Frenkish) it is completely impossible. Staedele (1927: 77) only mentions the extraction type with resumption of the focused element.



or the periphrastic progressive construction with *am* + infinitive, its overall occurrence, however, not yet being proved:<sup>13</sup>

- (7)    *ich*    *bin*    *am*    *Lesen*  
       *I*       *am*    *at\_the* *read:Inf*  
       'I am reading'

But even if these constructions (6) and (7) are widespread there can still be differences with respect to the syntactic distribution, to the semantic classes of the elements involved, to the obligatoriness of the construction and so on (cf. Ebert 2000).

What we have tried to underline with these examples is the necessity of exploring the geographic distribution of syntactic constructions, if only because there exist a lot of so-far unproved assumptions about geographical variation. Of course it would be possible to draw syntactical maps on the basis of hundreds of dialect monographs, but they do not yet exist. And the few existing ones normally do not contain syntax.

Moreover, the scarcity of syntactic descriptions of dialects may be one of the reasons why dialectal structures normally are not taken into consideration for typological accounts. And that is the second reason why dialect syntax is a desideratum. There is no doubt that alongside data from standard languages, typological research should also take dialectal structures into account. In this way, the range of phenomena can be widened, the areal distribution of typological features can be determined more precisely, and sometimes even implicational statements can be corrected.<sup>14</sup> The difference in the use of the indefinite article between mass nouns and common nouns, which seems to characterize the European article-languages for ex. is not shared by Bavarian, as we already pointed out (cf. also Kolmer 1999). Frans Plank (1994) discussed Bavarian data to correct

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Lehmann (1991: 513-515), Andersson (1989) and Ebert (2000: especially p. 636) where some regional differences are mentioned.

<sup>14</sup> Kortmann (in this volume) mentions several instructive examples.

assumptions on number marking with *one*-based indefinites.<sup>15</sup> This is a rather rare example of relying on dialect data for the purposes of the Eurotyp project (Noun phrase group) (cf. König 1996).<sup>16</sup> It is, however, true that in the meantime typologists are becoming more and more interested in dialect data, which could be provided by dialectologists (cf. Kortmann (in this volume)). Of course, typologists planning a wide-range survey on a certain phenomenon are dependent on published data. Dialectological research should therefore cover as many typologically relevant constructions as possible. Even though it is not easy to define what is relevant to a general audience because of changing preferences, the topics of the Eurotyp working groups could perhaps be mentioned as a starting point.

A third reason for investigating dialect syntax can be recognized in the interest of grammar theory in syntactical microvariation. Dialects provide the opportunity of studying minimally different linguistic systems. In several recent publications, this topic is treated at some length (cf. Kayne 1996: ix-xviii; Penner / Bader 1995: 7-9; Kortmann in this volume). Helmut Weiß, who dedicated a whole book to the generative analysis of Bavarian syntax, is convinced that the investigation of dialectal syntactic structures is crucial to the outline of grammar theory (1998: 20f.) because dialects represent prototypical natural, consistent and regular systems and show a lot of variants suppressed by prescriptive standard norms. Hans Bennis also pointed out this argument concerning Generative Grammar in his conference paper and argued in favor of the investigation of dialect syntax. Therefore, we will skip the details of this subject and pass on to a closely related final argument.

Areal distribution is still considered to be a reflex of the spread of innovations. As far as phonology is concerned, it is common practice to control theoretical assumptions on the conditions of language change by comparing

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. also Glaser (1996) on the topic.

<sup>16</sup> In the meantime you can check the publications of this large typological research programme of the European Science Foundation, i.e. de Groot (2000), which covers above all the European standard languages.

different dialect systems, in order to find out the triggering elements and relevant combinations. A theory of language change including grammatical change should therefore take into account that systems of neighboring dialects may provide data concerning the direction and the stages of a certain development. In our opinion, dialectal data is crucial for the construction of any theory of syntactic change, be it grammaticalization theory or other theoretical conceptions, because of the possibility of comparing very similar syntactic systems and controlling our assumptions about linguistic diversification on a more or less common basis. And last but not least: If we concentrate on standard languages, we neglect the vast quantity of dialectal data on natural language change.<sup>17</sup>

It is well known that dialect geography arose as an empirical test of the Neogrammarian sound laws. Additionally, we expect it to propose answers to some of the questions concerning syntactical change, as for example its regularity, directionality, intermediate stages of variation, the structural requirements, and the possibilities and limits of dialectal borrowing. Harris/Campbell (1995: 326) suggest that a regular difference between two living dialects provides evidence for the regularity of syntactic change just as two stages of a language would. Obtaining direct evidence for diachronic change and syntactic reconstruction is a well-known problem due to the limitations of historical corpora. A comparative study of related dialects provides us with a perspective similar to that offered by diachronic studies. The important advantages, however, are that the variants to be compared can be investigated directly, and can be studied with respect to their interdependency with other phenomena in the same geographical area. By employing the appropriate question techniques, we are sure to get corresponding structures to identical stimuli, a problem often discussed in historical syntax (cf. Harris/Campbell 1995: 346-353).

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<sup>17</sup> Even if we would not go so far as Helmut Weiß (1998) who considers dialectal data the only natural language data at all.

It is then, of course, the historical syntactician's task to differentiate between the older and the innovative patterns. As a result, we hope, for example, to gain new insights into the development of different kinds of constructions of non-finite purposive clauses (see below II (8) - (10)) and into the loss of adjectival congruity in certain syntactic positions (see above (2)).

This basically sums up our goals and methods and at this point we'll continue on with the discussion of the questionnaire.

## II THE FIRST QUESTIONNAIRE OF THE SYNTACTIC ATLAS OF SWISS GERMAN DIALECTS

### 1 ■ INTRODUCTION

In this second part, we will present how our investigation is organized, what our questionnaire looks like and what our experience is with the first part of the investigation. Some preliminary remarks are necessary.

First, it is important to emphasize that we use the indirect method of sending a written questionnaire to the informants. However, we don't send the whole questionnaire to an informant at one time. It is split up into 4-5 parts, each containing about 20 questions, distributed on 10 to 15 pages. An informant should not have more than 45 minutes to fill in one exemplar. The reason for this is clear: on one hand, the informant should not get too tired, on the other hand this allows us to work on our method after the first part of the investigation for the profit of the further parts.

Secondly, the informants are asked to write down the answers at his or her own discretion. There is no transcription system to be learned. The persons are advised to write down their answers according to their own pronunciation. Thirdly, as a new method, we try to get 10 informants at each location in order to have enough material for comparison, in contrary to a direct, oral investigation that usually interviews only one single person per place.

## 2 ▪ THE QUANTITATIVE FACTS

In August, September and October 2000, exactly 3,770 dialect speakers received the first questionnaire. By the end of January 2001, 2,672 questionnaires had been filled in and sent back (70.9 %). Only 138 of the completed questionnaires were absolutely unfit for use (see section 3 for details). These persons have been canceled from the informants' list. The remaining 2,534 questionnaires will be evaluated and will constitute the data reference pool of the Syntactic Atlas of the Swiss German Dialects.

The 2,534 informants live at 344 different reference points distributed over the whole area of German-speaking Switzerland. These are small and larger villages, small and larger towns in the Midlands ('Mittelland'), the Jura Mountains and the Lower Alps. In the highest mountains (Wallis, Graubünden, Innerschweiz) some communities, which are in size larger but in number of inhabitants smaller, are subsumed to one reference point. Our 344 reference points were selected out of the 600 points the *Sprachatlas der Deutschen Schweiz* (SDS) had used. Even though our reference point system contains only half of their quantity, a comparison of the isoglosses should be possible.

As a pleasant surprise, we received in 10 locations more than 10 answers, in 3 communities even more than 20. This amount of material will allow us a special control, comparison and evaluation of the written elicitation technique. In the meantime, our database (Filemaker) is fed with all the answers of the first questionnaire and allows rapid search and retrieval. For the drawing of maps, an interdisciplinary collaboration with the Geographical Institute of the University of Zurich is in progress. Our database will provide the data tables which will be imported to a Geographical Information System (GIS) for the purpose of making maps corresponding to our requirements.

## 3 ▪ UNHELPFUL AND PROBLEMATIC ANSWERS

124 of the 138 completed questionnaires which proved to be of no use for our investigation were filled in by 'migrated' informants, i.e. who no longer live where they grew up or whose parents were not from this place.

After all, only 14 informants were simply not able to reply to the questions because they didn't understand the aim of the questionnaire at all. Three persons (aged 46, 86 and 87, all male), who gave consistently standard German answers to translation questions, were obviously unable to translate into dialect. Five persons (all ages, male and female) could not decide between all the suggested sentences in the multiple choice questions: they marked everything as being correct in their dialect. Other persons gave completely aberrant responses by continuing the context-stories. Some of these responses are listed below:

- Question 2: Instead of the translation of the sentence "Wem will er diese Blumen bringen?" 'To whom will he bring these flowers?' someone made out of this speech act another one:

*Was muess dä ächt guetmache?* 'What does he have to compensate for?'

- Question 4: Instead of completing the sentence with "she is *shopping*" a person wrote: *Si isch im Chäller* 'She is in the cellar'.

- Question 6: Instead of completing the sentence with "I even have to take pills *in order to get to sleep*" someone replied: *...wells im Gsundheitswese so vil Problem git.* '...because there exist so many problems in the public health service'.

- Question 12: Instead of choosing one of the variants of the sentence "You have to fry the fish fingers frozen", an informant gave the advice: "I always defrost them."

These persons obviously didn't understand that the investigation asks for linguistic patterns and not for opinions or comments about real-life situations. We note a strong tendency for those persons to be very old (80 years and more). Obviously, they will not receive any further questionnaires.

Moreover, among the 2,672 informants who answered correctly, a special social group can be identified who had a negative impact on the results. Some very well-educated persons (mostly male) or some persons who concentrate on dialectological research on words (mostly male too) sometimes don't understand the aim of our syntactic questionnaire: on one hand, they are very influenced by standard German, on the other hand, they are convinced to know how one should speak and focus too much on the words' pronunciation (and writing). As a

consequence, their answers contain variants which aren't alive anymore or which simply don't exist (hypercorrection). It is evident that their answers don't account for the synchronic reality of the Swiss German syntax. We hope to minimize these effects by keeping the group of highly educated persons, which at the moment totals 21.5%, as small as possible. Nevertheless, we will pay special attention to these persons' responses.

#### 4 ■ THE PHENOMENA INVESTIGATED IN THE FIRST QUESTIONNAIRE

The following list supplies all the phenomena that were investigated in the first questionnaire,<sup>18</sup> with the respective question type (translation, completion, multiple choice, see below II.5) and the question number. Only one phenomenon is inquired into by all three types, i.e. the purposive clause. The prepositional dative marking is asked for with a translation and two multiple choice questions. As the project's time is limited, most of the phenomena will be covered only once by one type of question, usually multiple choice. In the first questionnaire, 14 of 20 questions make use of it.

- 1 • Purposive clause: translation (Q 1), finishing a sentence (Q 6), multiple choice (Q 11)
- 2 • Prepositional dative marking: translation (Q 2), multiple choice (Q 7 and Q 20) (see Guido Seiler in this volume)
- 3 • Infinitive replacing past participle in perfect construction with the verb *hören* 'hear' and *helfen* 'help': translation (Q 3), multiple choice (Q 8)
- 4 • Infinitive particle *go*: finishing a sentence (Q 4)
- 5 • Resultative vs. perfect i.e. inflection of the past participle: finishing a sentence (with a picture) (Q 5)
- 6 • Position of two verbal elements in subordinate clauses (verb cluster) ...*ob er hät zalt/zalt hät* "if he has paid" and ...*ob er will hürate/ob er hürate will* "if he

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<sup>18</sup> The entire first questionnaire is available in German at the authors' address. See also our sites:  
<http://www.research-projects.unizh.ch/phil/unit64100/area477/p1794.htm>  
<http://www.unizh.ch/ds/content/seminar/forschung/projekt5.html>.

wants to get married”: multiple choice (Q 9 and Q 19)

7 • Doubling of the indefinite article: multiple choice (Q 10)

8 • Marking of copredicative adjectives and past participles: multiple choice (Q 12 and Q 17)

9 • Expletive *es* ‘it’: *Do wird’s gwärched*: multiple choice (Q 13)

10 • Preposition + article: *an der*: multiple choice (Q 15)

11 • Dropping of 1st person singular pronoun: multiple choice (Q 15)

12 • Pronominal adverbs: multiple choice (Q 16) (see Jürg Fleischer in this volume)

13 • Zero vs. pronominal partitive object: multiple choice (Q 18)

It is one of the basic tasks of dialectological research to provide information on the areal distribution of linguistic phenomena, i.e. in our case the distribution of syntactical phenomena. Therefore, we are deeply convinced that, as a general principle, all phenomena indicating geographical distribution deserve a thorough documentation. The temporal and economic limitations of such a research project, however, make it necessary to concentrate on a restricted number of items. Our choice is based upon the following criteria.

First of all, we decided to investigate those phenomena that we had known very little about until now, whether geographically or functionally, such as the marking of the copredicative function (cf. above nr. 8), and the impersonal passive construction (nr. 9). On the basis of our first findings concerning the areal distribution and the grammatical range of these phenomena, further investigations can be made concerning the functional details.<sup>19</sup>

Secondly, we also include better known phenomena, of which the areal distribution is unknown or not precisely known, such as the purposive infinitival clause (1) or article doubling (7). Moreover, there are phenomena included in our investigation that are obtaining much attention in the current theoretical discussion, e.g. pronoun dropping (11) and verb raising (6). Referring to this, we

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<sup>19</sup> As for the copredicative marking cf. Glaser (in print), Bucheli (to appear).



try to provide further data on the distribution of the phenomena within the Swiss German area.

Finally, we include constructions especially interesting in relation to a typological or comparative view, for example the prepositional dative marking (2). Basically, we concentrate on phenomena that we assume to be geographically distributed throughout the Swiss German area or at least along a syntactic borderline in close vicinity to Switzerland. As can be seen in the above list, the first questionnaire already covers thirteen quite different types of syntactic phenomena.

Different theoretical and practical reasons caused us to choose these phenomena from the multitude of known variants in our area of investigation.<sup>20</sup> First of all, we required solid information about the phenomenon and its variation, i.e. a good sentence, mostly overheard or picked out of grammars. Then, we had to create an everyday context, i.e. a little story, preceding this sentence in the questionnaire (see below sections 5.1. - 5.3. for the different question types). In the case of multiple choice questions and completion questions, the vocabulary of the given sentences had to be non-specialised, i.e. known in the whole Swiss German area. Moreover, the variants we assigned to the multiple choice questions should cover all the empirical possibilities (see below section 5.3.).

In consideration of the final analysis of the data, we also preferred phenomena with little variation or at least we tried to split up the problems in parts with less variation (except 1., the purposive clause). This strategy provides us with the possibility to test our written method and our question types mostly with controllable phenomena displaying few variants. In respect to the purposive clause, however, we also attempted to manage a phenomenon that has a lot of variation. In some cases (2, 12), we wanted to provide material for ongoing doctoral theses about the respective phenomena as soon as possible. As a result, there is a lot of practical motivation for the selection of the phenomena in the first

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<sup>20</sup> For a first overview on the typical syntactic phenomena of German-speaking Switzerland cf. Glaser (in print).

questionnaire. Moreover, we tried to cover as many different types as possible (verbal and nominal phrases, pronominal problems, serialization and doubling, morphosyntactic phenomena) in order to quickly evaluate our questioning methods and to get first results that would allow us to investigate related phenomena in future questionnaires employing the appropriate question type.

Additional information on the same and other phenomena will be asked for in the following questionnaires; e.g. verb-3-cluster, 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronominal drop and definite article doubling will be investigated in the second questionnaire.

## 5 ▪ QUESTION TYPES USED IN THE FIRST QUESTIONNAIRE

As the Swiss German Dialect is restricted to oral use, it seems that a written informant consultation demands the impossible: in a writing situation, a dialect speaker has to give information about his spoken language. Our project attempts to manage this challenge by means of two strategies: creating a discourse situation by presenting a small text before each question and using three types of questions.

As for the first, the informant should feel that he is in a natural dialogue situation with the help of a little story. For example, in (8) below, the story takes place at the railway station, in (9) a politician says something to the press and in (10) someone makes a telephone call. It must be mentioned that in German-speaking Switzerland these represent typical dialect situations since everyone speaks dialect. Even professors and bank managers speak together in dialect, in contrast to in Germany or France.

Our practical observations confirm that these little stories work very well and seem to be fun, as some informants' comments prove. Only one person made a criticism: that the situation in (8) could also mean that he has to speak to someone from outside his village or even to a stranger and must switch into another dialect or into standard German. This is true and will be accounted for in the second questionnaire.

As for the second, the use of three different types of questions allows us to have different degrees of control over the elicited data and at last even of the informant's reliability and certainty. The problem is how to make the informant give exactly the syntactic construction we are looking for.

We use the following question types: translations, completion and multiple choice. The experience with the first investigation show us that every type of question has its advantages and its disadvantages. They will be explained in the following subsections.

### 5.1 ▪ *The translation*

In a translation question, the informant is simply asked to translate a sentence from standard German into dialect. In example (8) a purposive clause is asked for<sup>21</sup>:

(8) Question 1: You have to buy a ticket at the railway station, but there is no ticket counter. You realize that you don't have enough change to buy a ticket at the machine. You ask a person for change:

*Translate the following sentence in your dialect and write it down as you would say it:*

Entschuldigung, ich habe zu wenig Kleingeld, um ein Billett zu lösen

*sorry I have too little change Conj a ticket to buy*

'Sorry, I have too little change to buy a ticket'

(8a) Entschuldigetzi, i ha zwenig Münz zom e Billet löse  
*sorry I havetoo\_little change Conj a ticket buy*  
 (St. Gallen SG)

.....  
<sup>21</sup> For this paper, the Standard German indications in the questions are translated into English, sentences remaining in German or Swiss German dialect receive an English gloss, the informants' answers are rendered in other characters.

Other solutions:

(8b) Entschuldigung, i ha zweni Münz **für** nes Billiet **z'**löse  
*sorry I have too\_little change Conj a ticket to\_buy*  
(Steffisburg BE)

(8c) Entschuldigung, ich ha zwenig Münz **um** es Billet **z'**chaufe  
*sorry I have too\_little change Conj a ticket to\_buy*  
(Zürich ZH)

Not intended solutions:

(8d) Entschuldigetsi i ha kei Münz **und** sött ä Billet poschtä  
*sorry I have no change and should a ticket buy*  
(Steffisburg BE)

(8e) Äxgüsi, ich ha zwenig Münz **für** es Billet  
*sorry I have too\_little change Prep a ticket*  
(Birmenstorf AG)

The sentence 'Entschuldigung, ich habe zu wenig Kleingeld, um ein Billet zu lösen' is rendered by an informant from the eastern area as expected in (8a) with the conjunction *zom* and in (8b) by an informant from the western area with *für* and an infinitive particle *z*. The variant in (8c) follows the standard German model what shows that either this informant is not able to answer in dialect i.e. he copied the standard German conjunction, or that the standard German conjunction *um* is also a strategy in dialect. This has to be investigated further.

The answer given in (8d), a coordination of two sentences with *und* 'and' is not intended but it shows that coordination can manage the meaning of a purposive clause. In total, 108 informants provided such a coordination, 72 of them are better educated persons. In particular, teachers or in dialectology interested persons, having read in some prescriptive grammars that this is the preferred dialect strategy, tended to reply with such a coordination.

In (8e), the informant has translated a prepositional phrase instead of a purposive clause. This also accounts for the fact that this short form is a possible solution in speech but was not intended.

If informants give constantly standard German answers like (8c) or defective solutions like (8e), they obviously don't respond in the intended manner to our written questionnaire.

It's the translation questions that provide the least influenced and most spontaneous form of any indirect question type. However, translation carries the danger that too many unintended variants appear. Even if these unintended variants inspire the linguist to conduct further research, all these useless answers, which come up to 10-15% of the whole, clearly show the disadvantage of translation: the control over the elicitation is minimal because the informant has too much freedom in answering. Therefore, we use also other elicitation strategies to investigate. The results of the translation can serve to supervise the results of completion or multiple choice questions asking for the same phenomena. Therefore, in the first questionnaire, we asked for the purposive clause with all three question types and for the pronominal dative marking with translation and multiple choice. In any case, the idea of having about 10 informants at one location turns out to be a good one: if one informant fails to give the expected answer, another will provide it.

To sum up, by combining the quantity of answers with the different question types, we will compensate for the disadvantages of some question types and finally get a reliable picture.

### 5.2 ▪ *Sentence completion*

The second question type, finishing a sentence (9), is expected to determine the range of answers to a higher degree than a translation: as in (9a), we supply a blank for the informant to fill in with a purposive clause using a given verb. As a result, a construction with *zom* ('to\_the') appears:

(9) Question 6: A politician suffers from insomnia. She says to the press:  
*Complete the sentence; it should explain why the politician needs pills*  
*(einschlafen 'to get to sleep')*:

(9a) Wüsset si, *jetzt* bruuch ich *sogar* Tablette zom iischloofe  
*know you now need I even pills* Conj *get\_to\_sleep:Inf*  
'I need pills/medicine even to get to sleep'  
(St. Gallen SG)

Other solutions:

(9b) um chönne izschlofe  
Conj *can:Inf* *get\_to\_sleep<to>*  
(St. Gallen SG)

(9c) dass i cha schlafe  
Conj *I can sleep*  
(Steffisburg BE)

(9d) Schlaftablette  
*tranquilizer*  
(St. Gallen SG)

In (9b), the standard German variant *um ... zu* appears although it was avoided in the formulation of the situational setting, and in (9c) the informant formulated a subordinated sentence with the conjunction *dass* 'that' and the conjugated verb *cha* 'can'. (9d) shows that this informant didn't understand the question because he just replaces *Tablette* by *Schlaftablette* 'sleeping pills = tranquilizer'. This person will perhaps be canceled from the informants list, if the same problem occurs with other questions.

There are only a very few people who don't understand this question type at all. However, some 8% of the informants transformed the completion questions into pure translation questions by recopying the beginning of the sentence we gave.

To summarize, we observe that this question type has to struggle with fewer but exactly the same kinds of problems as the translation.

### 5.3 ▪ The multiple choice question

The multiple choice question (10) provides a range of dialect patterns for one phenomenon out of which the informant can select a single or several options. In addition, the informant has to decide which variant is the most natural form for him.

(10) Question 11: After a busy day you make yourself comfortable on the couch because you want to read a good book. But the phone rings. It's your mother, who wants you to come over. You answer:

*Which of the following sentences can you say in your dialect ("yes"), which ones are impossible ("no")?*

yes no

- 1)   Aber jetzt bin i grad aneghocket **für** es Buechz läse.  
*but now am I just sit\_down.PstPart Conja book to read*  
'But I have just sat down in order to read a book.'
- 2)   Aber jetzt bin i grad aneghocket **für** es Buech läse.
- 3)   Aber jetzt bin i grad aneghocket es Buech **z** läse.
- 4)   Aber jetzt bin i grad aneghocket **zum** es Buech läse.
- 5)   Aber jetzt bin i grad aneghocket **zum** es Buech **z** läse.
- 6)   Aber jetzt bin i grad aneghocket **um** es Buech **z** läse.
- 7)   Aber jetzt bin i grad aneghocket **für zum** es Buech **z** läse.
- 8)   Aber jetzt bin i grad aneghocket **für zum** es Buech läse.

*Which of the above sentences seems the most natural to you?*

Nr. 4

*Would you say the sentence in another form that is not given above?*

yes  no

*If "yes": Please write down the sentence in the way you would say it:*

\_\_\_\_\_ **abgsesse** 'sit\_down.PstPart' (Zürich ZH)

The multiple choice question eliminates the problem of unintended variants because the informant has only a limited choice between several given sentences. This question type also has the advantage that more than one construction can be

selected, which accounts better for local microvariation, if there is any.

The given sentences, however, can never render every informant's exact pronunciation. As a matter of fact, the informant has to think in more abstract categories.

As a special proceeding, for the very differently speaking Wallis (Valais), the suggested dialect sentences were written down in Highest Alemannian, i.e. in an approximative form to the local dialect, which has been provided to us by a contact person from Agarn.

For all informants other than those in the Wallis, the suggested dialect sentences were noted in the same kind of a 'neutral' dialect of High Alemannian. In other words, we tried to construct the sentences in such a way as to contain only pan-high-alemannic expressions. Words which are restricted to one region were avoided. This comparatively 'neutral' form, however, is based on the eastern variant of Swiss German dialects (to which also Zurich belongs), as it is impossible to construct completely 'neutral' sentences. Although the suggested dialect variants are not identical to the actual dialect of Zurich, some informants, especially in the western area of the research zone, considered it to be so, as their comments showed us. This 'ideological' or 'mentality' problem also had to be accounted for in the preparation of the second questionnaire, which will soon be distributed. Much to our surprise, the rest of Switzerland managed to deal very well with the 'neutral' dialect sentences. Therefore, we never had any problem making those informants judge the multiple choice sentences appropriately. An adaptation of the suggested sentences for the western area, as for the Wallis, seems to be the only solution to this problem as words and their pronunciation seem to be essential for those dialect speakers.

In total, some 10 % of the informants accepted the opportunity to write down the exact spelling of words at the bottom of such a multiple choice question, on a line. Another 25 % of the informants refused to accept even one of the given sentences because of their different pronunciation of the words, thus noting only their (single) solution on the line offered at the bottom of the question. In such cases, the written sentences follow in structure exactly the 'models' we suggested.



In fact, the informant changes the multiple choice question into a translation question. Although such an answer doesn't account for coexistent variation, if there is any, we handle it as if it were marked in the multiple choice and at the same time as the most natural variant. As long as not more than 25 % of the informants note their answers in such a way, we hope that this will not influence the results too greatly and especially the registration of the most natural form. We have to be aware of these factors.

To summarize, as a consequence of the first questionnaire, in order to satisfy the need for exact spellings, we will also provide a local dialect variant (Berndeutsch) to the speakers in western Alemannian speaking Switzerland as we have done for the Wallis. In addition, we will always ask the informants to write down their own solution at the bottom of each multiple choice question.

#### 5.4 ▪ *Twice filled-in questionnaires*

Due to an error in the distribution of the questionnaire, three informants, aged 92, 79 and 61 and living at different places, filled in the same first questionnaire two times, which provides again material for the evaluation of the written questionnaire method. The answers to the multiple choice questions differ rarely: deviations are found only sporadically and concern only the acceptance but never the preference for a suggested variant. Translation questions, however, show more deviations. Surprisingly, on the completion questions no deviations are observed. Thus, we conclude that multiple choice questions remain the favored method in our investigations.

There are some phenomena that can be elicited successfully only with a specific question type. I will treat some examples in the following.

It is certain that regarding the indefinite article doubling, a multiple choice question (12) provides the best results since in a translation or completion question, a large number of informants would follow the standard German construction (12.3) which, in fact, appears in dialect, but very rarely.

(12) Question 10: Bruno knows a nice young girl who he could imagine as wife of his son, who is still a bachelor. Bruno says:

*Which of the following sentences can you say in your dialect ("yes"), which ones are impossible ("no")?*

yes no

12.1)   D Susi wär e ganz e liebi Frau für de Markus!  
*the Susi would\_be Art really Art lovely wife for the Markus*  
 'Susi would be a really lovely wife for Markus.'

12.2)   D Susi wär ganz e liebi Frau für de Markus!

12.3)   D Susi wär e ganz liebi Frau für de Markus!

*Which of the above sentences seems the most natural to you?*

Nr. 2

*Would you say the sentence in another form that is not given above?*

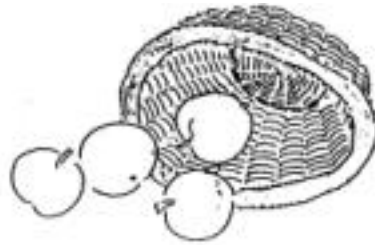
yes  no

*If "yes": Please write down the sentence in the way you would say it:*

\_\_\_\_\_ ä Markus 'the Markus' \_\_\_\_\_ (Steffisburg BE)

Regarding the inflected past participle, elicitation proved to be difficult. As Fuchs 1990 observed in her work on the predicative adjective inflection<sup>22</sup> in the Highest Alemannic dialects (Höchstalemannisch), for a resultative meaning, the past participle appears with an adjectival inflection ending, in perfect and past meaning without. This distinction is found especially in the area of Wallis. I succeeded in eliciting this distinction in direct inquiries in Gressoney and Issime<sup>23</sup> with the help of pictures showing a stative situation and not a process.

Therefore, we constructed a completion question in the first questionnaire (13) and included a picture of an empty basket that has fallen down in order to help to elicit the inflected resultative form of the past participle of any verb meaning 'fallen'.



(13) Question 5: What happened to the basket in the picture?  
(Was ist los mit dem Korb im Bild?)

*Complete the sentence:*

(13a) Dä Chorb isch umghitta (Matten St. Stephan BE: old person)  
*this basket is fallen.PstPart.msg*

(13b) other solution: leerä (Visp VS: young person)  
*empty.msg*

(13c) 'passive construction': ischt ubertutz ggaange (Zermatt VS)  
*is rolled.Adj go.PstPart*

.....  
<sup>22</sup> See also map 256 and the remarks p. 257 in SDS III which show that the distribution of the predicative adjective inflection is restricted to the Highest Alemannic zone.

<sup>23</sup> An excursion in summer 2000 led the project's researchers and some students to these (still) Highest Alemannic speaking places. They are located in Valle d'Aosta, Italy, close to the Swiss border.

Most of the informants followed our intention and noted a past participle. There were very few persons who gave adjectives, as in (13b). Nobody gave nonsense responses like "big" or "black". But, concerning this phenomenon, the intended resultative inflected form of the past participle (13a) did occasionally appear, as did some inflected adjectives (13b). Thus, we conclude that we will have to improve the context and choose another verb. In the second questionnaire, we will ask again for this phenomenon, perhaps using multiple choice.

Besides, (13c) shows that unintended answers can provide new constructions. One person from Zermatt in the Wallis noted an equivalent construction that looks like an 'unknown' pseudo-passive form, with the conjugated verb *isch* 'is' and the past participle *ggange* 'gone'. This proves again that the decision to question 10 persons in one community was a good one. A question on the passive in the second questionnaire will show us if such constructions are productive or if we just found a fixed or isolated expression.<sup>24</sup>

Another area of investigation is the so-called 'verb doubling' (see Lötscher 1993) *ich gang go* 'I go go', also so-called 'infinitive particle' *go*. In the first questionnaire, it is asked for by a completion question (14). This method was chosen firstly to elicit the most spontaneous form. Secondly, it influences the informant less than translation from standard German, which doesn't have such an infinitive particle. Thirdly, as the particle has several forms (*go, ga, gi, gu*) in the different dialects, the completion question helps us in the sense that we don't have to select one form in writing it, as we would have to in a multiple choice question.

.....  
<sup>24</sup> In Gressoney and Issime in the Valle d'Aosta (Italy), such passive constructions were found to be productive: *isch verchaufts gangu* 'has been sold', *isch gschossus gangu* 'has been shot'. If this pattern is due to Italian influence or an old Highest Alemannic strategy can't be decided yet. Szadrowsky (1930: 114) mentions that a passive with *gaan* 'go' must have existed because he has found such a construction in a historical document (Davoser Landbuch) of the 16th century.

(14) Question 4: You call your best friend to tell her the latest news. Her son answers. You tell him that you would like to speak to his mother. He replies:

*Complete the sentence; it should give information about where your best friend is (einkaufen 'shopping'):*

(14a) Oh, si ischnid da, si isch go poschte **(ggange)**  
*oh she is not here she is Inf.Part shopping.Inf go.PstPart*  
'Oh, she is not here, she is off shopping.'  
(Zürich ZH)

In this special absentive construction, the infinitive particle *go* is supposed to be obligatory in the whole Swiss German area and the verb of motion's past participle *ggange* 'gone' is not needed. We can now test this supposition.<sup>25</sup> Further investigations of the infinitive particle *go* in facultative contexts are planned.

### III CONCLUSION

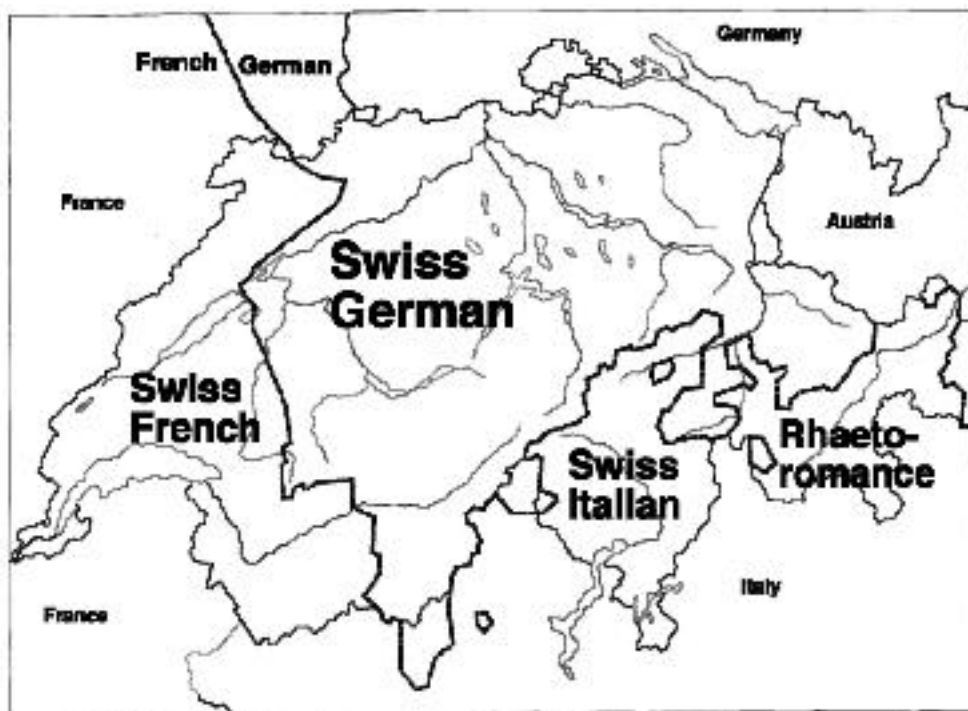
Regarding the quantitative participation of the informants and the high quality of the answers, there is no doubt that our first investigation with a written questionnaire has been a success. We found on the one hand that written elicitation has the advantage of a small expense of money and time, as well as of a large pool of data. On the other hand, the written elicitation carries along with it some problems which we hope to manage through the use of different questionnaire techniques. Both written and oral question types asking for linguistic structures carry problems (for direct oral elicitation technique see Leonie Cornips in this volume) of which the investigator has to be aware.

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<sup>25</sup> Contrary to Groot (2000: 718) we consider the construction in (14a) to be the Swiss German absentive because of the typical information on absence. The construction differs from the Standard German one in the obligatory use of the particle *go* which is probably etymologically related to the verb *gaa* 'to go', cf. Lötcher (1993).

First try-outs with automatically generated maps using the material of our first investigation show in some cases a geographical distribution, and certain border lines can be identified. In other cases, we have found variation in several constructions throughout the area.

In the case of the infinitival purposive clause, we have found a geographical distribution of the complementizers: *zum* in the eastern part and *für...z* in the western part. In a transition zone in between, we find variations and contaminations (*für zum*) of the two types. In contrast, the article doubling is found all over the Swiss German speaking area in variation with the other possibilities given. These results encourage us to continue our investigation with the written questionnaire technique.

PICTURE 2 ▪ *Swiss map*



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