

Numeral Gender in Bernese German

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The atlas of German-speaking Switzerland (SDS) was published between 1962 and 1997, containing more than 1500 dialect maps (cf. Baumgartner et al. 1962-1997). Among other things, it contains data from 1944 on the greater area of Bern where mainly NORMs have been taken into account. Since then, these particular regional varieties have not been examined in its entirety anymore.

In my PhD project, I collect new data for Bern and its greater area according to selected variables already surveyed in the SDS, and compare them to the original data. My main focus is on language change and its underlying reason.

The data in the SDS show a trichotomy in numeral gender (feminine, masculine, neuter) for the greater area of Bern but only for the numeral *zwoi* (engl. *two*): e.g. *zwe Manne (m.)*, *zwo Froue (f.)*, *zwoi Ching (n.)* (engl. *two men, two women, two children*). This trichotomy originates in the Old-High-German period and is still documented in the 20th century in the Alemannic dialects of German-speaking Switzerland, but has been lost in return in the Standard German (cf. Christen et al. 2012).

My contemporary data show that only the oldest generation (60+) is able to produce the trichotomy spontaneously, whereas the youngest generation (16-35) is not even aware of the trichotomy anymore. Interestingly, the middle generation (35-60) has to be divided into three groups:

1. Speakers, who still produce the trichotomy spontaneously
2. Speakers, who are aware of the trichotomy but – generally – do not produce it
3. Speakers, who are not aware of the trichotomy anymore

The SDS clearly documents stability in this trichotomy, the contemporary data collection, however, shows a decline in variation and therefore evidences language change in progress.