Phonetic stability across time

Linguistic enclaves in Switzerland

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Preliminary facts on the Swiss ling. situation

4 languages & diglossia

- 4 language confined to more or less firm areas

- Diglossia in German-speaking Switzerland

- Swiss German (dialect) used as vernacular by all people

- Variation predominantly on the horizontal axis and not vertical axis

Fig. 1: The linguistic situation in Switzerland (cf. BFS 2000)

1. The genesis of *Sprachinseln* in CH
In medieval times

Walserwanderungen

- 12th–14th centuries

- Settlers from the canton of Valais emigrate to various places

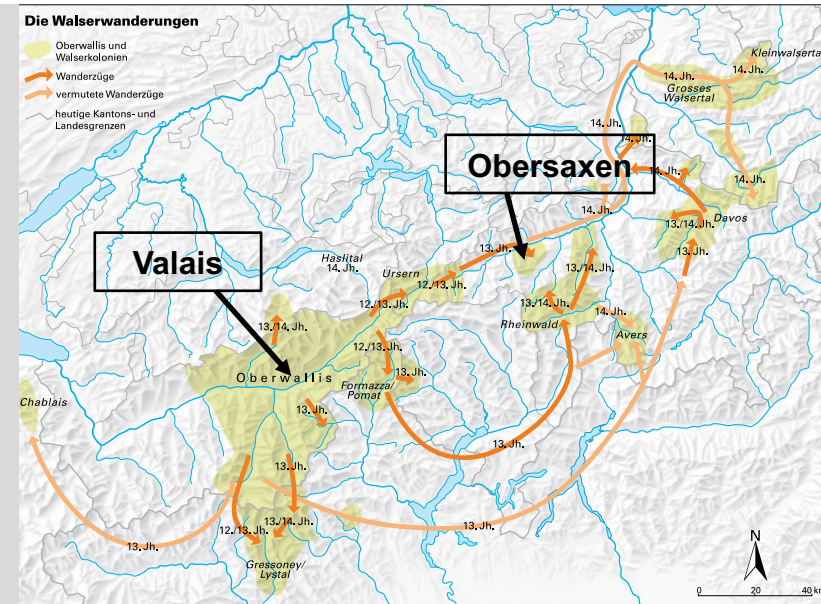- Many settlements in the Romansh-speaking canton of Grisons

Fig. 2: The *Walserwanderungen* (cf. Waibel 2013)

1. The genesis of *Sprachinseln* in CH

In recent times

Surrounding language: Romansh

- Late 19th century: pressure of surrounding language increases

- From 1920 onwards: Romansh looses prestige, speakers become bilingual

- From 1950 onwards: Obersaxen becomes a popular winter-sport resort

Dialect island

- Obersaxen was re-integrated into the German dialect speaking area during the 20th century

! Sociolinguistic changes of the 20th century imply dialect contact

1. The genesis of *Sprachinseln* in CH Research

Sprachatlas der deutschen Schweiz

- Most-recent large scale description

- Based on data elicited in face-to-face-interviews

- Representative of the *Sprachstand* of the first half of the 20th century
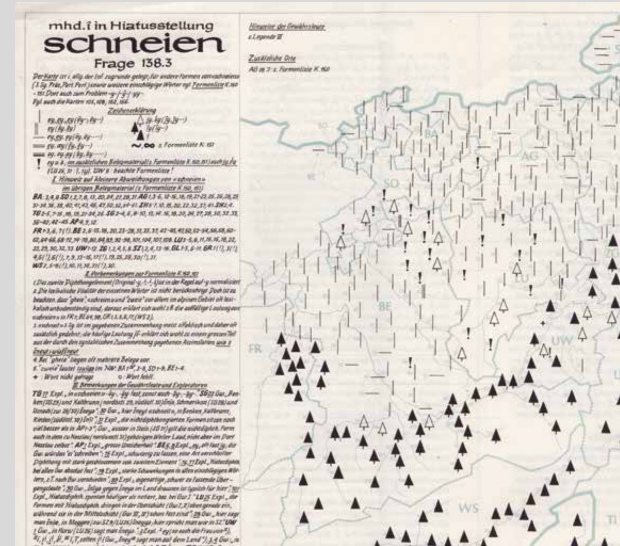

Fig. 3: Example from the *Sprachatlas der deutschen Schweiz* (taken from Schaller/Schiesser 2017: 58)

2. Aims and hypothesis

Aims

1. Examine changes that have taken place in the past 60 years (since the Swiss German dialect atlas)

2. Study how similar the two varieties (Obersaxen and Valais) are

Hypothesis

In line with previous research (cf. Christen 1988, s. also Glaser 2014) we expect

- Relative stability on the phon. level

- Less stability in morphology and syntax

- Substantial change for lexical features

3. Methods

Participants & materials

Participants

- 305 speakers of Swiss German from Valais and Obersaxen

- Mean age = 36.8 (median age = 33)

- 60.5% female and 39.1% male

Materials

- 10 variables based on:

- **Comparability**: variables are featured in the Swiss German dialect atlas

- **Typicality**: variables are most typical to the southernmost Swiss dialects (including Valais and Obersaxen) (cf. e.g. Hotzenköcherle 1984, 1986 [1944])

3. Methods

Materials

N°	Variable	Standard German	Ex. Of variants	Type
1	Unrounding of MHG *u, ü*	*Rücken* 'back'	*Rügg, Rigg*	**phon.**
2	Palatalisation of MHG /s/ (initially)	*sie* 'they'	*sii, schii*	**phon.**
3	Palatalisation of MHG /s/ (word-final)	*uns* 'us'	*isch, insch*	**phon.**
4	MHG *nk*; Staub's Law	*trinken* 'to drink'	*triichu, triiche*	**phon.**
5	MHG *ns*; Staub's Law	*uns* 'us'	*isch, insch*	**phon.**

Tab. 1: Variables tested (MHG = Middle High German; OHD = Old High German)

N°	Variable	Standard German	Ex. Of variants	Type
6	Prefixation (MHG *be-*)	*ich bekomme* 'I receive'	*verchume, b(e)rchume, überchume*	**morph.**
7	Past participle circumfix	*wir haben gebastelt* 'we have tinkered'	*gibaschtlu, baschtlet*	**morph.**
8	Positioning of AUX and PTCP of 'to be' in subord. cl.	*, … wir … gewesen sind* 'we have been'	*bin gsii, gsii bin*	**synt.**
9	Positioning of syntagmas with *lassen* 'to let'	*stehen lassen* 'to let stay'	*laa staa, staa laa*	**synt.**
10	OHG *anko*, MHG *buter, puter*	*Butter* 'butter'	*Aichu, Butter, Britschi*	**lexic.**

3. Methods

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3. Methods

Procedures & analysis

Procedures

- Online questionnaire (*Google Forms*)

- Elicitation via different tasks:

    – Translation from Standard German

    – Pictures + written options

    – Sentence completion tasks

    – Judgment tasks

- Questions on social background

Analysis

- Statistical analysis using *R*:

    – Logistic regressions

    – Pearson's chi-squared tests

- Visualisation via *ggplot2*

- Comparison to the distributions featured in the Swiss dialect atlas

4. Results
Phonetic level

Variable 1

- <u>Variable</u>: Unroundig of MHG. *u*, *ü*

- <u>Standard German</u>: *Rücken* 'back'

- <u>Elicitation</u>: picture + written options

- <u>Variant SDS (Obersaxen)</u>: *rigg*
  (unrounded)

- <u>Variant SDS (Valais)</u>: *rigg*
  (unrounded)

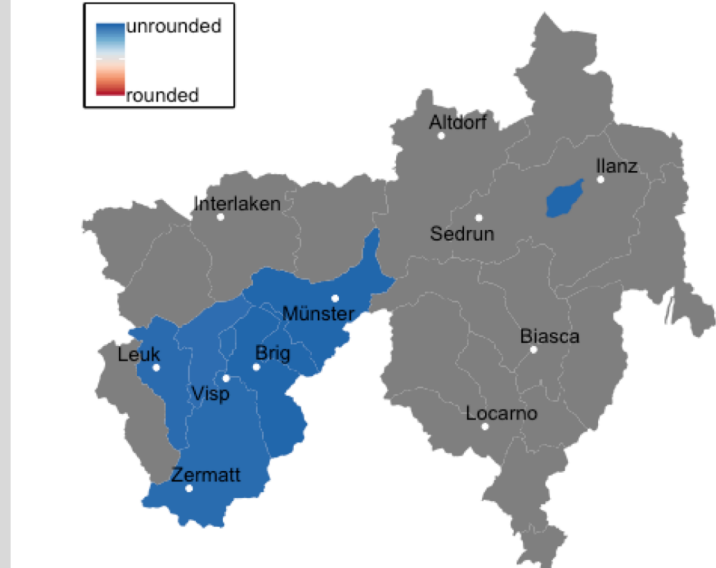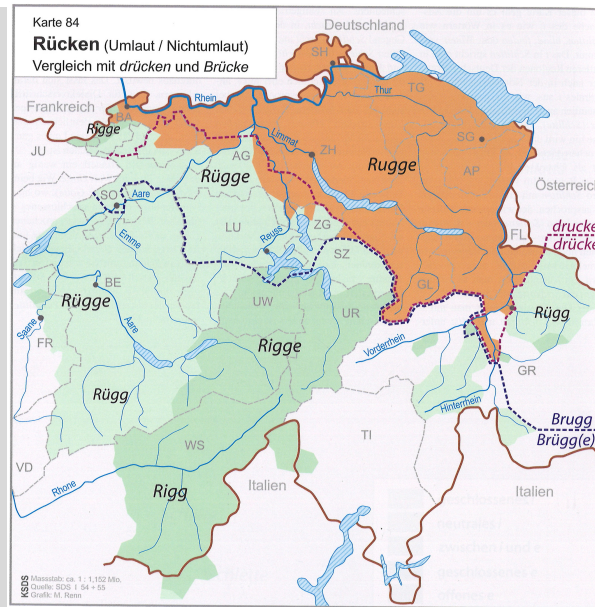Fig. 4: Unrounding of *u*, *ü* in *Rücken*

4. Results

Phonetic level

Fig. 4a: Unrounding of *u*, *ü* in *Rücken* in the dialect atlas (SDS I, 54–55)

Fig. 4: Unrounding of *u*, *ü* in *Rücken*

4. Results
Phonetic level

Variable 2/3

- <u>Variable</u>: Palatalisation of MHG /s/

- <u>Standard German</u>: *sie* 'they' / *uns* 'us'

- <u>Elicitation</u>: translation

- <u>Variant SDS (Obersaxen)</u>: *schii, insch* (palatalised)

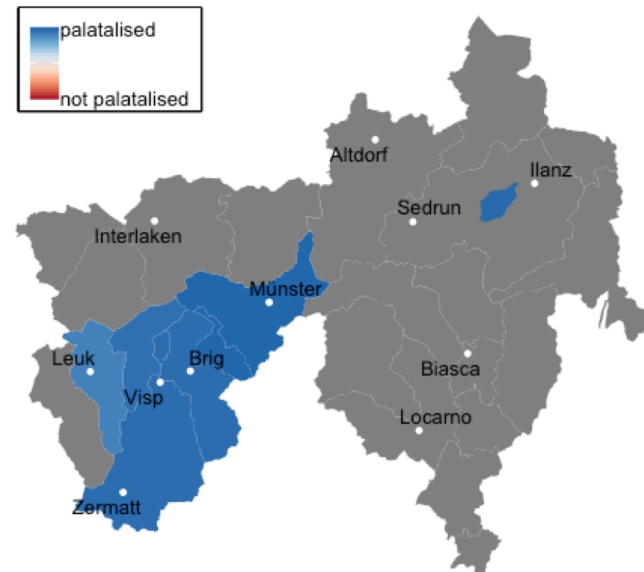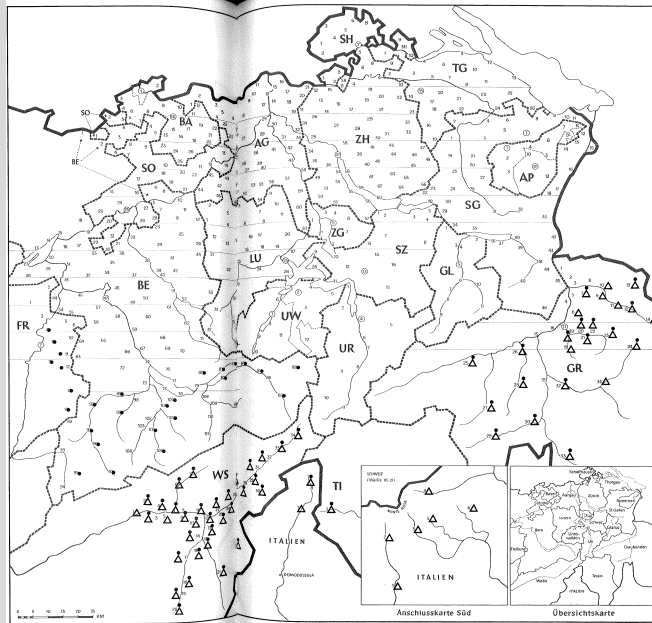- <u>Variant SDS (Valais)</u>: *schii, isch, insch* (palatalised)

Fig. 5: Palatalisation of MHG /s/

4. Results

Phonetic level

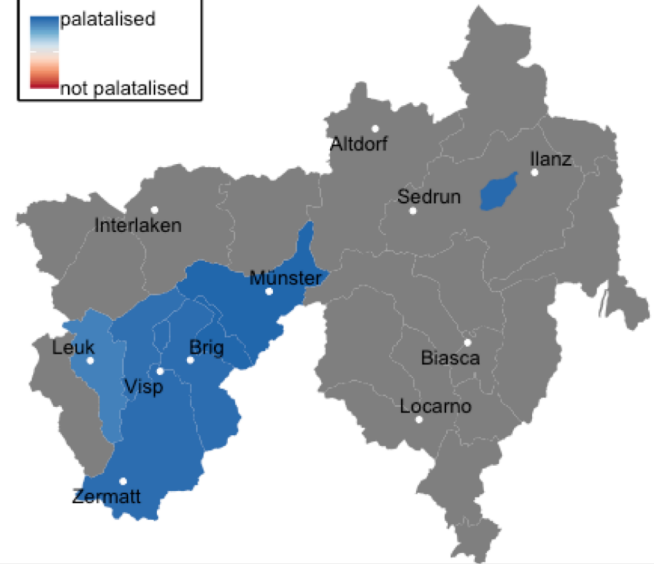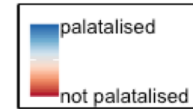Map 5a: Palatalisation of MHG /s/ in the dialect atlas (SDS II, 144)

Fig. 5: Palatalisation of MHG /s/

4. Results
Morphological level

Variable 6

- <u>Variable</u>: Prefixation (MHG *be*-)

- <u>Standard German</u>: *ich bekomme*
  'I receive'

- <u>Elicitation</u>: judgment task

- <u>Variant SDS (Obersaxen)</u>: *verchume*

- <u>Variant SDS (Valais)</u>: b*(e)rchume*,
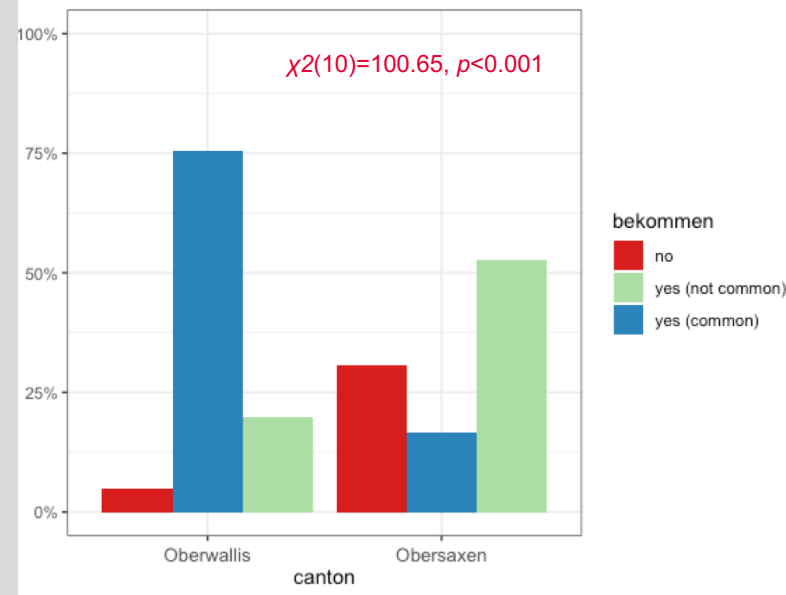 *verchume, kriege*

$\chi2(10)=100.65$, *p*<0.001

bekommen
- no
- yes (not common)
- yes (common)

Fig. 6: Prefixation (MHG *be*-) in *bekommen*

4. Results

Morphological level

Variable 6

- <u>Variable</u>: Prefixation (MHG *be-*)

- <u>Standard German</u>: *ich bekomme*
  'I receive'

- <u>Elicitation</u>: judgment task

- <u>Variant SDS (Obersaxen)</u>: *verchume*

- <u>Variant SDS (Valais)</u>: *b(e)rchume,
  verchume, kriege*
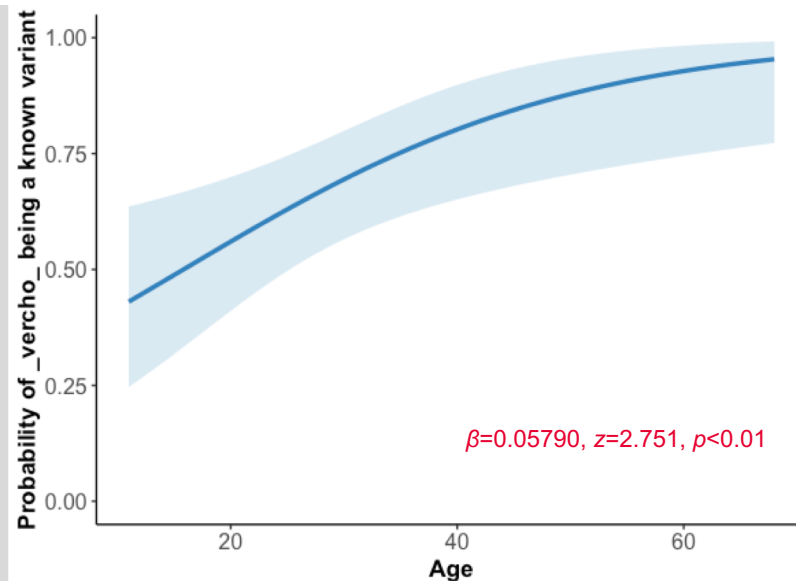

β=0.05790, z=2.751, p<0.01

Fig. 7: Probability of *vercho* being a known Variant in Obersaxen according to age
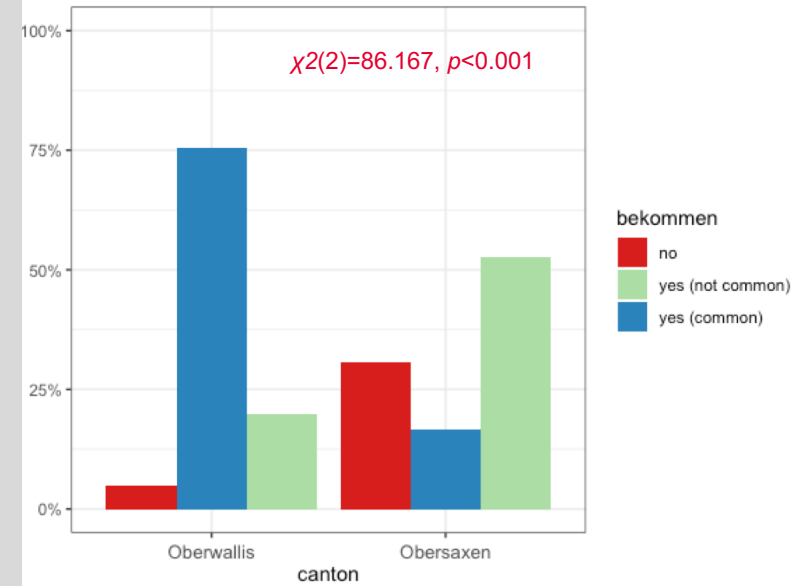
4. Results

Morphological level

Fig. 6a: Prefixation (MHG *be-*) in *bekommen* in the dialect atlas (SDS V, 214)

$\chi 2(2)=86.167$, $p<0.001$

Fig. 6: Prefixation (MHG *be-*) in *bekommen*

4. Results
Syntactic level

Variable 8

- <u>Variable</u>: Positioning of AUX and PTCP of 'to be' in subord. cl

- <u>Standard German</u>: *, … wir … gewesen sind* 'we have been'

- <u>Elicitation</u>: translation

- <u>Variant SDS (Obersaxen)</u>: *bii gsii* (AUX–PTCP)

- <u>Variant SDS (Valais)</u>: *bii gsii* (AUX–PTCP)

$\chi2(1)=119.33, p<0.001$

bii gsii

gsii bii

Altdorf
Ilanz
Interlaken
Sedrun
Münster
Leuk
Brig
Biasca
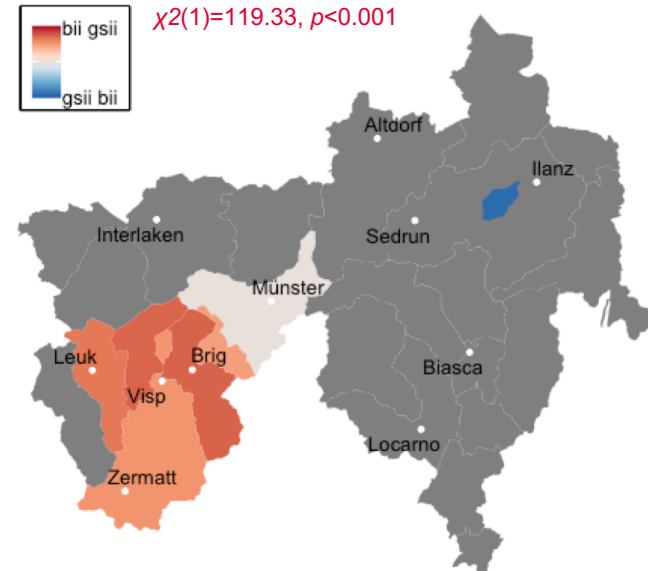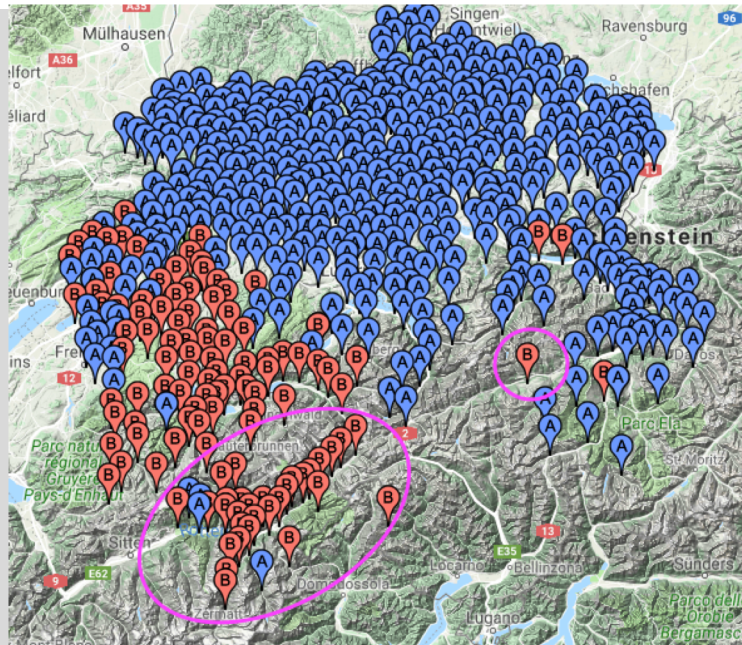Visp
Locarno
Zermatt

Fig 8: Positioning of AUX and PTCP of 'to be' in subord. cl

4. Results

Syntactic level

RED = *bii gsii*
BLUE = *gsii bii*

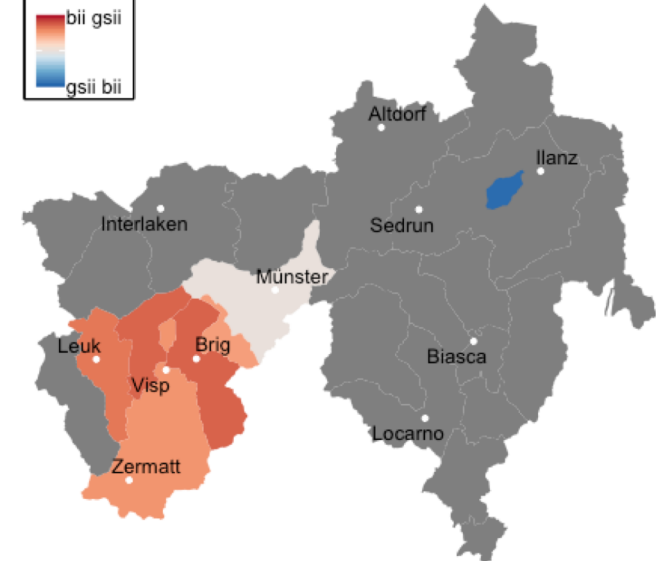Map. 8a: Positioning of AUX and PTCP of 'to be' in subord. cl. in the dialect atlas (SDS III, 261)
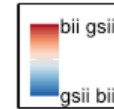

Fig. 8: Positioning of AUX and PTCP of 'to be' in subord. cl.

4. Results
Lexical level

Variable 10

- <u>Variable</u>: OHG *anko*, MHG *buter, puter*

- <u>Standard German</u>: *Butter* 'butter'

- <u>Elicitation</u>: picture + written options

- <u>Variant SDS (Obersaxen)</u>: *Britschi*

- <u>Variant SDS (Valais)</u>: *Butter*, *Aichen*

Fig. 9: OHG *anko*, MHG *buter, puter*

4. Results

Lexical level

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- <u>Variable</u>: OHG *anko*, MHG *buter, puter*

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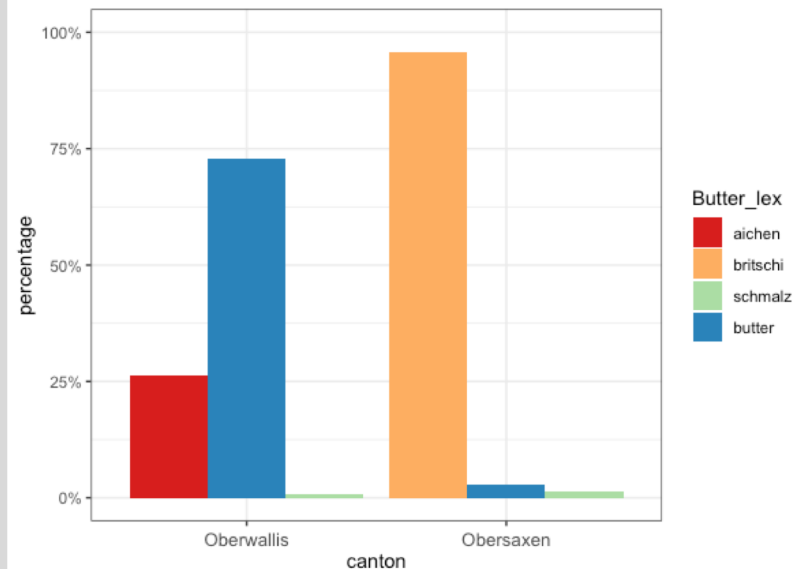
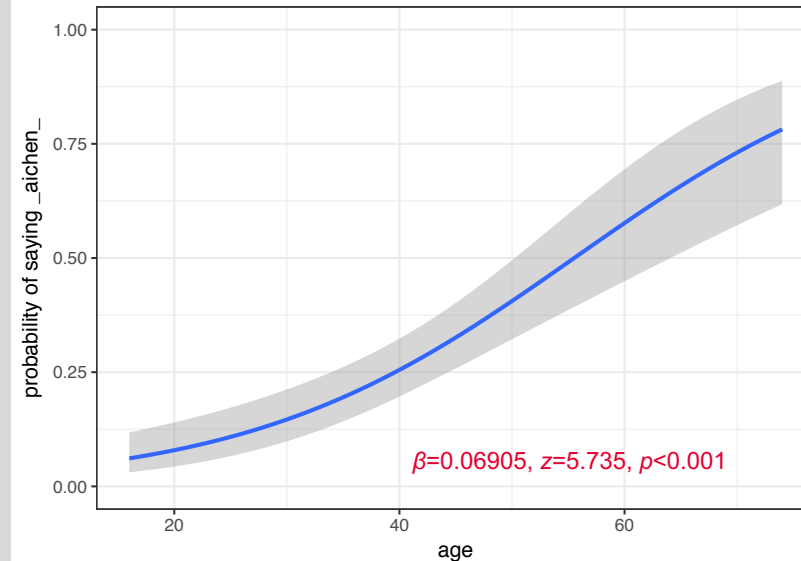- <u>Variant SDS (Valais)</u>: *Butter*, *Aichen*

Fig. 10: Probability of saying *Aichen* according to age in Valais

β=0.06905, z=5.735, p<0.001

4. Results

Lexical level

Fig. 9a: OHG *anko*, MHG *buter, puter* in the dialect atlas (SDS V, 179)

Fig. 9: OHG *anko*, MHG *buter, puter*

5. Discussion and conclusion

Frequency

- Frequency of occurrence of phonetic variables in the stream of speech is higher than individual morphosyntactic and lexical ones

- Requires a substantial amount of effort in order to accommodate

Identity

- Phonetic features have come to serve as distinct markers of identity

- Christen (1988: 63): „[…] the information which enables us to localize a speaker within Switzerland is conveyed most clearly by means of morphology and phonetics/ phonology"

5. Discussion and conclusion

- Proof-of-concept needing more empirical studies

- Elicited written data might not capture some current changes

- Validity of the results will be assessed by interview data

- Placing the linguistic changes observed in a broader theoretical framework of language contact → challenging the methodological and theoretical distinction between dialect and language contact

Thank you
for your attention