

Elsässisch and Baseldytsch

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Linguists classify the dialects spoken in most of Alsace as Alemannic, the same group to which the dialects of German-speaking Switzerland, Baden and Swabia belong. Only the far north of Alsace, around Wissembourg, and the German-speaking parts of Lorraine speak Franconian dialects.¹ Within Switzerland, Baseldytsch occupies a special position because it is one of the few Low Alemannic varieties on Swiss soil. Most Swiss German dialects are High Alemannic, which distinguishes them by features such as the pronunciation of an initial *k* as a guttural *ch*: a speaker from Zurich says *Chind* for "child", while a speaker from Basel says *Kind*, just as most Alsatians do.² This shared feature places the speech of Basel closer to that of the Alsatian Sundgau and the Markgräflerland than to that of most other Swiss cities.

For the people of the border region, this proximity has practical consequences. An elderly farmer from the Sundgau, a market trader from Lörrach and a pensioner from Kleinbasel can still converse in their respective dialects with little difficulty. Before the Second World War, this regional dialect continuum formed the everyday basis of cross-border life. The Alsatian vocabulary contains French borrowings, such as *Merci* or *Trottoir*, which Baseldytsch also uses, a reminder that the city absorbed French influences in its own speech.³ Literature in dialect, theatre and the carnival traditions also link the two sides. The Alsatian dialect theatre and the cabaret tradition associated with figures such as Germain Muller in Strasbourg found an echo in Basel, where the satirical verses of the Fasnacht are performed in Baseldytsch.⁴

1 Notes

1. On the classification of the Alsatian dialects (Low Alemannic in most of Alsace, High Alemannic in the southern Sundgau, Rhine Franconian in the north) and of the dialect of Basel as Low Alemannic, see the

standard dialectological literature, e.g. the Sprachatlas der deutschen Schweiz and the Atlas linguistique et ethnographique de l'Alsace. To be verified. ↩

2. On the treatment of initial k in Baseldytsch (Kind) compared with the High Alemannic dialects of Switzerland (Chind), see the previous chapter of this book and the dialectological literature cited there. ↩
3. On French loanwords in Alsatian and in Baseldytsch (e.g. Trottoir, Merci, Billet), see the dialect dictionaries of Basel and Alsace, e.g. Suter, Baseldeutsch-Wörterbuch. To be verified. ↩
4. On Alsatian dialect theatre and cabaret, including the cabaret "Barabli" of Germain Muller in Strasbourg, see the literature on Alsatian culture. To be verified. ↩

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