

ETHNORECONSTRUCTION A STRATEGY
FOR SPEAKING A SECOND LANGUAGE

Erica F McClure and Malcolm M McClure
University of Illinois at Urbana

By analogy with such terms as ethnobotany, ethnozoology, etc , we have coined the term ethnoreconstruction to refer to a strategy by which a speaker of one code attempts to speak a related code by systematically transforming the elements in the former Since these transformational rules are not normally formulated consciously, much less scientifically, their use frequently produces erroneous forms A well known product of this phenomenon is the hyperurbanism, a form produced when a speaker overgeneralizes a "correction" of a dialect form in attempting to produce standard urban forms The hyperurbanism has been studied extensively (e g Bloomfield 1933 302, 309, 330, 449, 499, Hockett 1958 436, Hall 1964 324, 326, 361-2, 467, Sturtevant 1965 79, King 1969 68-71, 92, Trager 1972 113, Lehmann 1973 227, etc) while ethnoreconstruction, the broader topic under which it is subsumed, has never been dealt with explicitly

In 1969-1970 we carried out an extensive research program in Vingard, a small multiethnic Transylvanian peasant village, whose inhabitants include Romanians, Siebenbürgen Saxons, Gypsies, and a few Hungarians (see E McClure 1972, M McClure 1973) In studying the German spoken by the Saxons, we discovered that they make extensive use of ethnoreconstruction¹ In the following pages we will discuss ethnoreconstruction in Vingard² considering both the background for its use as well as the rules² governing it, and its consequences with respect to the characterization of Vingard German

The Siebenbürgen Saxon migration from the middle Rhine basin to Transylvania took place between 1150 and 1250 A D under the aegis of the Hungarian kings The Saxons have not, however, been isolated from the Germanic world Contact with Germany and Standard German was continuous from the inception of the migration, although it increased greatly after the Reformation (Klein and Schmidt 1961 5) In spite of this the Saxons' first language has remained essentially Rhine Franconian in structure (see M McClure 1973) Consequently, Saxon and Standard German are quite dissimilar in phonology (if not in syntax) and are not mutually intelligible without a relatively long period of adjustment

Today in spite of the fact that Transylvania is behind the Iron Curtain, the Saxons maintain close ties with West Germany. Many of them have relatives there³ whom they have visited or who have visited Vingard. Correspondence with relatives resident in Germany is quite frequent. The medium for⁴ such correspondence is German, as Saxon is an unwritten language⁴. German is frequently the spoken medium on visits as well since many Saxons resident in Germany have forgotten Saxon and of those who have not many have spouses and children who are German born and know no Saxon.

Even excluding contacts with Germany, Saxons receive considerable exposure to German. In Vingard, for Saxon pupils, German is by law the medium of instruction for the first four elementary school grades⁵. Those wishing to continue in a German school have an opportunity to do so through high school by attending a school in a town 30 kilometers distant. German movies appear at the local community center (with Romanian subtitles) and German programs are frequently broadcast on both radio and television. Books, magazines, and newspapers printed both in Romanian and German are readily available by subscription, at the village general store and at the village library. The services at the Saxon Lutheran church are conducted in German and those at the multiethnic fundamentalist meeting are in Romanian and German. Finally, as each Saxon village and town has its own dialect and since many of these dialects are not mutually intelligible, German provides an accepted medium of communication among Saxons from different villages or towns.

Nevertheless, despite the frequent occasion for its use, Vingard Saxons do not speak German well. Moreover, it appears that the postwar generation has a markedly poorer grasp of German than earlier ones (E. McClure 1972). This decline appears to be related to the fact that most Saxon young people see their future not in the village with its narrowly circumscribed economic, social, and cultural possibilities, but in the rapidly growing urban industrial centers. To improve his lot the Saxon must attend a trade school, technical institute or university. There, Romanian will be not only the medium of instruction, but also the language for almost all of his social contacts. As there are only 150,000 Saxons in a total population of 20 million and since Saxons have not chosen to congregate in a given field of endeavor, almost all the Saxon's colleagues in school and later on the job will be non-Saxons. Since the majority of new housing is assigned, it is not possible for new Saxon neighborhoods to develop in the expanding cities. Nor do today's Saxons have the opportunity to renew

community ties through participation in church activities, for the Communist government's attempt to discourage participation in organized religion has met with considerable success, especially among young people.⁶ With neither church, residence, nor job to serve as a focus, Saxon community solidarity has weakened considerably. Saxon young people increasingly identify with the broader Romanian community. Concomitantly we find that the younger generation tends to have a better command of Romanian than the older generation. Thus, it appears that Romanian may be coming to have the function of a standard language whose mastery conveys prestige by allowing an individual to express himself appropriately in a wide range of situations. German formerly fulfilled this function for the Vingard Saxons. It was the language of Kultur and its use stressed the Saxons' ties with the wider Germanic community. Saxon was the home language and Romanian simply a tool whose mastery needed only be sufficient for basic communication, since contact with Romanians was primarily in the market. Today since the young people are less interested in affirming ties with a wider Germanic community,⁷ the importance of German in that respect is less. Even ties with the Saxon community are losing their importance, and we find that Saxon too is spoken less well by the postwar than by the prewar generation, although it remains their first language. Romanian, on the other hand, is necessary for communication with the wider community and in the light of growing interest in this national community and waning interest in the Germanic world, it is only reasonable that Romanian is supplanting German for the Saxon young people as the language of Kultur. However, the change in status of the languages is not yet complete. While it appears that Saxon and German are dying languages among the Saxons (the postwar Communist reorganization of the country thereby accomplishing what 800 years of contact could not), they are certainly not dead yet. The Saxon today still does speak Saxon and the contacts with German described above suffice to build and maintain a passive knowledge. The fact that German must occasionally be spoken as well makes resort to ethnoreconstruction a logical strategy.

Ethnoreconstruction is possible in this case because the gross morpho-syntax of Vingard Saxon is remarkably similar to that of German. In general morpheme-by-morpheme translation is possible between the two languages, e.g.

ix ^y hun də	fusə	gəzən	9
ich habe den	Fuchs	gesehen	
I	have the-acc	fox-acc	seen

Moreover, most Saxon words may be translated by German words of obvious etymological relation. Thus, Saxons are able to view most

Saxon sentences as basically identical to German sentences. To Saxon one need then only apply a few simple syntactic transformations and a number of more complex phonological shifts (the rules of historical descent of Vingard Saxon consonants from West Germanic are fairly straightforward, but the rules of vowel descent are both complex and obscured by loans¹⁰) to produce German sentences. In the following section we shall describe ethnoconstruction only as applied to phonology since the great similarity between Saxon and German syntax makes syntactic ethnoconstruction trivial.

Presumably Saxons derive such phonological rules by direct comparison of German and Saxon vocabulary. We performed such a comparison for over 500 items of vocabulary (from the lexicon of M McClure 1973) and extracted a number of correspondences. We then compared these results with informant errors in the German anatomical terms gathered by E McClure (approximately 400 terms were collected from 33 informants ranging in age from 8 to 62 in German, Saxon, and Romanian--see E McClure 1972). Evidently the Saxons do not employ a purely statistical weighting of correspondences in terms of lexical frequency as we did, but rather a more complex weighting, presumably in terms of salience of words, analogies, and the like, which will vary from person to person. A further factor is that some individuals are more adept at ethnoconstruction than others. Such individuals will observe (subconsciously perhaps) more minor environments than others. It is impossible to rate informants for excellence of ethnoconstruction since a correctly reconstructed word will generally be identical to the desired German word in which case it could have been memorized rather than reconstructed. It seems that some words are partially memorized and partially reconstructed. An example is Sax awəsəlt 'shoulder', which is given as Ger *Ase₁lt¹², *Achse₁lt, *Ase₁, and Achse₁. We would like to suggest that *Ase₁lt is the basic ethnoconstructed form, Achse₁ is the fully memorized form, and *Ase₁ and *Achse₁lt are partially memorized and partially ethnoconstructed¹³.

The general rules of Saxon → German ethnoconstruction are the following:

1. Retain the Saxon consonants

But note that Sax kt, gd, ɲt, ɲd correspond to Ger t, d, nt, nd after velar vowels, that Sax t^y, d^y, n^y may correspond to Ger t, d, n or to Ger k, g, ng after palatal vowels, that Sax s may correspond to Ger ss or chs, that Sax final lt may correspond to Ger final l or lt, etc.

- 2 Insert vowels according to the following correspondences
- | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----|-----------------|---|------|-------|-----|---|-------|---|----|------|
| Sax | a ¹⁴ | ā | aw | ey/ay | æ/e | ē | ey(ə) | ə | əw | əy |
| Ger | ɪ/a | ā | au/u | eɪ | e | ē | e/ē | e | au | eɪ/e |
- Sax
- | | | | | | | |
|---|---------|---|---|---|----|------------------|
| ɪ | ɥwə/ɥwa | ɔ | ō | u | wə | yə ¹⁵ |
|---|---------|---|---|---|----|------------------|
- Ger
- | | | | | | | |
|------|---|---|-----|---|---|---|
| i/ie | a | a | a/ā | u | o | i |
|------|---|---|-----|---|---|---|
- 3 Add -e or -en optionally to monosyllables ending in consonants¹⁶

In the following examples of the operation of the above rules only those forms predicted which actually occur are listed. If the correct form cannot be ethnoreconstructed it is not listed.

ɥwəsəlt ↔ *Aselt 'shoulder', ōdər ↔ Ader 'blood vessel', ɔrm ↔ Arm 'arm', ɥwərš ↔ Arsch 'ass', əwx ↔ *Auch/*Aug/Auge 'eye' (the underlying Saxon form is əwg), əwxbrəd ↔ *Auchbrad/*Auchbraden/*Auchbraten/*Augebroden/*Augenbrad/*Augenbraden/*Augenbrod/*Augenbroden 'eyebrow', bək ↔ *Back/Backe/*Backen 'cheek', blōs ↔ *Blas/Blase 'bladder', blawt ↔ Blut 'blood', burik ↔ *Burick 'navel', darm ↔ Darm/*Darme 'intestine', eyləbɪd^yən ↔ *Ellenbiegen/*Ellenbieden 'elbow', fəwst ↔ Faust 'fist', fəyəl ↔ Fell 'skin', feyərš ↔ *Fersch 'heel', fan^yər ↔ Finger 'finger', fləwər ↔ *Flauer 'shinbone', fləyš ↔ Fleisch 'meat', gawm ↔ *Gaum/*Gaume/Gaumen 'roof of mouth', gəbas ↔ Gebiss 'teeth and gums', gəhɪr ↔ Gehirr 'brain', gəlɪŋk ↔ *Gelink 'joint', gəzɪx^yt ↔ Gesicht 'face', hor ↔ Haar 'hair', hōltš ↔ Hals 'neck', hōnt ↔ Hand 'hand and arm', hyəkt ↔ Haut¹⁷ 'skin', hwəfən ↔ *Hofen 'hips, kan ↔ Kinn/*Kann 'chin', kna ↔ *Knaa, knar ↔ *Knar 'knee', knaršəl ↔ *Knarschel/*Knarschel 'cartilage', knəwx ↔ *Knoch/*Knoche¹⁸ 'bone', knax^yəl ↔ *Knichel/*Knachel/*Knächel 'ankle bone', 'knuckle', lyəp ↔ *Lipp/Lippe 'lip', laŋ ↔ *Lange 'lung', məwəd^yən ↔ Magen 'stomach', mōndəl ↔ Mandel 'tonsil', məwərk ↔ Mark 'marrow', plač ↔ *Plitsch/*Platsch/*Plitsche/*Platsche 'palm', rap ↔ Rippe/*Ripp/*Rapp 'rib', rak ↔ *Rück/*Rücke/Rücken 'back', malts ↔ *Malz/*Malze/Milz/*Milze 'spleen', nəkən ↔ Nacken/*Nacke 'nape of neck', n^yəwəd^yəl ↔ Nagel 'nail', nəwəs ↔ *Nas/Nase 'nose', nar^yən ↔ *Nahren 'kidneys', šlōf ↔ *Schlaf 'temple', šlōm ↔ *Schlāmen 'membrane', šlar^y ↔ *Schlang 'gullet', švōnts ↔ Schwanz 'tail', zə^yt ↔ Seite 'side', zan ↔ Sinn 'mind', vəwərts ↔ *Warz/Warze 'wart', tseyən ↔ *Zehn/*Zehne 'toe'

Vingard natives attempting to speak standard German are not, of course, the only users of ethno-reconstruction. Some further examples are

When an American English speaker observes that the British use broad a in many cases where he uses æ (e.g. glass, grass, pass) and substitutes broad a for æ in all environments in order to give his speech more "class", he is employing ethno-reconstruction. Those words in which real British English has æ and his version of British English has broad a (e.g. crass, lass, bass) are incorrect ethno-reconstructions or hyperurbanisms (Pyles 1971: 262).

In Tzeltal and Tzotzil (two closely related Mayan languages spoken in Mexico), Proto-Mayan *ə has been eliminated and merged with o in Tzotzil and with a in Tzeltal. When speakers of the two languages meet to engage in trade, it is considered polite for each group to speak the other's language. One aspect of this is that the Tzeltal speaker replaces a by o in all environments while the Tzotzil speaker replaces o by a (Brent Berlin, personal communication²⁶).

Ethno-reconstruction can be a totally individual process. One American scholar (a Romance philologist) in Romania whose Romanian was rated excellent by Romanians stated that he used Latin vocabulary with Romanian sound changes and Italian syntax.

It may be that ethno-reconstruction is also connected with historical sound change. The current view of the geographical spread of a sound change is that the rules governing the sound change will tend to become more generalized as they move farther from the point of origin (e.g. Becker 1967, Harms 1967: 173, Bach and Harms 1972, Vennemann 1972). In discussions of transformational phonology, generalization of rules is usually seen as resulting from incorrect learning of the language in question by children. In discussions of the geographical spread of phonological rules there seems to be a covert assumption that the process is the same. We would like to point out that it is generally (linguistic) adults who attempt to speak dialects other than their own. This fact fits in well with the assumption that the language-learning mechanism of adults is significantly impaired compared with that of children. Presumably children of language A speakers if exposed to language B directly would learn it without significantly more changes than would children of language B speakers--it is the adult speakers of language A who will typically learn B incorrectly (via ethno-reconstruction if A

and B are closely related, or with substratum effects if they are not) producing B'. Their children will then learn B' competently, presumably smoothing out irregularities and inconsistencies to derive B''. In the normal course of events, over the generations, B'' would become indistinguishable from B, but if a social shift should bring speakers of B'' into prominence (either in social status or numbers) presumably B would shift towards B'', while if communication between speakers of B and B'' were cut off (by migration or social change), B and B'' would both be freed to develop independently, as did Italian and French.

We have seen that ethnoreconstruction is a strategy used by such disparate groups as Saxon peasants attempting German, Yugoslav diplomats attempting Russian, Tzeltal traders attempting Tzotzil, and American scholars attempting Romanian. In all such cases we find someone who (1) needs to speak a language systematically related to a more familiar language and (2) has had enough exposure to the target language to form an idea of the correspondences between the two. In all these cases we find use of the better-known language as an underlying structure to which various rules can be applied to derive a version of the target language which the user hopes will be understandable. We have also found that different individuals will derive different systems of rules depending on their various degrees of exposure to the target language and their general ability at forming such rules, and that words may be partly learned and partly derived.

The individualistic nature of ethnoreconstruction together with the facts that other sources of errors in the target language exist and that well-executed ethnoreconstructions are indistinguishable from correctly learned target language forms make this subject an especially difficult one to research precisely.

Notes

¹ Although a few people in the village felt that no Saxon was a truly competent speaker of German and that the younger the individual the more imperfect his grasp of German, a more frequently held view was that as the Vingard Saxons learned German first in the schools they spoke it better than the Germans. This view may account for the fact that although it was apparent to us that ethnoreconstruction was being used we were not only unable to obtain an explicit statement of the rules being followed, but were also unable to obtain acknowledgement of the strategy, for to admit the strategy would be to acknowledge an

imperfect grasp of German. However, since even those who commented on their own imperfect knowledge of German also denied the use of ethnoconstruction, recognition of its use may simply entail a type or degree of metalinguistic awareness that our informants lacked.

² The term "rule" here refers to accounting rule. No claim is made for the cognitive reality of the rules as presented here, although such a claim is made for the strategy of ethnoconstruction as a whole.

³ At the end both of World War II and of the period of forced labor thereafter involving the Saxon population, many Saxons were repatriated to Germany instead of Romania and have remained there, see Hartl 1958.

⁴ There is a small body of literature in Hermanstadt Saxon (Hermanstadt or Sibiu is the second largest city in Transylvania and is a cultural center for the Saxons). However in general, Saxon is considered unsuitable for written communication.

⁵ In practice, both because of the pupils' lack of familiarity with German and the inadequate preparation of the teachers in its didactic use, the preponderance of instruction is in Saxon.

⁶ Until recently all Saxons were practicing Lutherans, and the Lutheran Church played a prominent role in the Saxon community. Today few young people attend religious services, and many of their elders have turned to a fundamentalist sect whose congregations are multiethnic.

⁷ Germany's WWII defeat and its consequences for the Saxons (including loss of land, forced labor in Russia, etc.), who were considered guilty by association, supplemented the new economic situation introduced by Communism in providing impetus to a change in self identity within the Saxon community.

⁸ Saxon to German translation works better than German to Saxon because German has a number of constructions which are not permissible in Saxon.

⁹ When more auxiliary verbs are added this direct correspondence breaks down, e.g.

ix ^y	hun	də	fusə	kæənə	zān
I	have	the-acc	fox-acc	been-able	to-see
ich	habe	den	Fuchs	sehen	können
I	have	the-acc	fox	to-see	been-able

¹⁰ In the reverse of ethnoreconstruction, German loan words in Saxon are normally altered to conform to the general pattern of historical descent. Since consonantal descent is relatively transparent, consonants in loans do not distort the pattern of correspondences visible. Vowels, however, are changed in non-historical patterns in borrowing and obscure the historical patterns for those who are unable to sort loans from native words (see M. McClure 1973: 150-154).

¹¹ There is considerable room for variation in individual ability to reconstruct the vowels, for example, *-aɪt/aɪd* usually corresponds to *-unt/und*.

¹² The symbol * is used in this paper to indicate actually-occurring forms which are not correct in the language which the informant is attempting to speak.

¹³ The regular historical shift, WGmc *hs > s, together with the addition of -t to final -el syllables, makes this an especially difficult word.

¹⁴ In general vocabulary Sax a corresponds to Ger e and u more frequently than to Ger a, but e and u are not used for a in ethnoreconstruction except as in footnote 11.

¹⁵ In historical fact, yə almost never corresponds to i, but rather to almost every other vowel. We suspect that this substitution is resorted to due to phonetic similarity and the absence of any clear criterion of choice.

¹⁶ Saxon has a number of words of the structure $C_0V_1C_1en$ which are treated as $C_0V_1C_1$ for this rule although more accuracy would be achieved by simply using -en. This rule evidently needs to be further constrained since it predicts more variation than actually occurs.

- 17 Although $y\epsilon$ corresponds to many vowels and is usually ethno-reconstructed as i , the kt cluster indicates that the German vowel must be au
- 18 Although æw usually corresponds to au (18 times vs 4 times for o), Ger au regularly corresponds to $y\epsilon$ before velars, so *Knauch would correspond to * $kny\text{æ}x$. This word may also be partly memorized
- 19 Evidently the vowel is memorized while the ending is ethno-reconstructed
- 20 Berlin did not study the matter specifically and wishes to emphasize that the above is his personal impression only

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