

WRITING WITHOUT A STANDARD: (ORTHO)GRAPHIC PRACTICES IN SWISS GERMAN

Darlan Xavier Nascimento

*Workshop Variation and Idiosyncrasy in Germanic and Romance
Munich, July 22nd, 2026*



Language situation in Switzerland

- ◆ Four official languages: German, French, Italian, and Romansh.

Language situation in Switzerland

- ◆ Four official languages: German, French, Italian, and Romansh.
- ◆ Diglossia in German-speaking Switzerland (Ferguson, 1952)

Language situation in Switzerland

- ◆ Four official languages: German, French, Italian, and Romansh.
- ◆ Diglossia in German-speaking Switzerland (Ferguson, 1952)
 - ◆ high variety (Swiss Standard German, *Schweizer Hochdeutsch*)
 - ◆ formal or institutional contexts, education, national government

Language situation in Switzerland

- ◆ Four official languages: German, French, Italian, and Romansh.

- ◆ Diglossia in German-speaking Switzerland (Ferguson, 1952)
 - ◆ high variety (Swiss Standard German, *Schweizer Hochdeutsch*)
 - ◆ formal or institutional contexts, education, national government
 - ◆ low variety (Swiss German, *Schweizerdeutsch*)
 - ◆ daily life, family, workplace, local government

Language situation in Switzerland

- ◇ Four official languages: German, French, Italian, and Romansh.
- ◇ Diglossia in German-speaking Switzerland (Ferguson, 1952)
 - ◇ high variety (Swiss Standard German, *Schweizer Hochdeutsch*)
 - ◇ formal or institutional contexts, education, national government
 - ◇ low variety (Swiss German, *Schweizerdeutsch*)
 - ◇ daily life, family, workplace, local government
- ◇ Medial diglossia (e.g. Ramseier, 1988; Wüst, 1993)
 - ◇ written vs. spoken language

**FRIEHNER ISCH S INTERNET D
FLUCHT VOR DR REALITÄT GSY.**



**HÜT ISCH D REALITÄT D FLUCHT
VOREM INTERENT.**

Today, reality is an escape
from the internet.

**POV: DU BISCH IN DE 2000ER
JOOR E KIND GSI:**



The collage features a variety of items from the early 2000s: a group of Furby toys, a guitar, two mobile phones, a bookshelf, a Nintendo DS, a board game, a row of Pokémon cards, a collection of Pokémon candy, a Pokémon card featuring Pikachu, and the Pokémon logo with the 'niji' text.

POV: You were a kid in the 2000s.



Back then, the internet was
an escape from reality.

Today, reality is an escape
from the internet.



POV: You were a kid in the 2000s.

A corpus of memes in Swiss German

- 482 memes collected in 2023 and 2024
- Around 5,000 tokens
- Normalization layer with version in Standard German

A corpus of memes in Swiss German

- 482 memes collected in 2023 and 2024
- Around 5,000 tokens
- Normalization layer with version in Standard German
- 50 most frequent tokens in Standard German
 - 110 graphic forms in Swiss German

A corpus of memes in Swiss German

Standard German	Swiss German
das	d', das, s, s', wo
die	d, d', die, wo
ein	ä, en, es, ih
eine	ä, e, eint, einti
nicht	ned, nid, nit, nöd
hast	häsch, hesch, hettsch

A corpus of memes in Swiss German

- Lexical similarity index
 - 44.1% identical
 - 53.4% of tokens with a difference $> 0\%$ and $< 100\%$
 - 2.5% completely different

A corpus of memes in Swiss German

- Lexical similarity index
 - 44.1% identical
 - 53.4% of tokens with a difference > 0% and < 100%
 - 2.5% completely different

		Standard > Swiss
Deletion	42.04%	Augen > Auge Geschäft > Gschäft noch > no
Vowel change	37.07%	alle > alli Schweiz > Schwiiz Ausländer > Usländer
Consonant change	13.78%	Kinder > Chinder beste > beschte ist > isch

Research question

- ◇ Given that there are no official orthographic rules for Swiss German, which contributes to variation in spelling, **what motivates a speaker/writer to use a particular form when writing?**

Methodology

- ◇ 28 interviews in three stages
 - ◇ Sociodemographic and metalinguistic questionnaire
 - ◇ Experiment 1: data elicitation through image description (written and spoken)
 - ◇ Experiment 2: “correction” of social media comments



“Correction” of social media comments

- ◇ 189 tokens
- ◇ Fisher’s exact test to check the following hypothesis:
 - ◇ Is there an association between the graphic variant used by the participant and his/her region of origin?

“Correction” of social media comments

- ◇ 189 tokens
- ◇ Fisher’s exact test to check the following hypothesis:
 - ◇ Is there an association between the graphic variant used by the participant and his/her region of origin?
- ◇ 48 tokens with a p-value < 0.05
- ◇ After Holm correction, five tokens with a p-value < 0.05
 - ◇ *uns, ja, mal, nicht, warten*

“Correction” of social media comments

- ◇ Müemer eus alles la gfalle? (Zürich)
- ◇ Müemer eus alles lah gfalle? (Zürich)
- ◇ Müemer eus alles la gfalle? (Zürich)

- ◇ Müemer öis alles la gfalle? (Zürich-Aargau)
- ◇ Mömmer öis alles lo gfalle loh? (Luzern)

- ◇ Müesse mer üs alles lo gfaue? (Solothurn)
- ◇ Müemer üs alles loh gfalle? (Appenzell)

“Correction” of social media comments

- ◇ scho mol ghört be schwiizerdütsch gits kei rächtschribig?
(Luzern)
- ◇ scho mol ghört bi CH dütsch gits kei rechtschribig?
(Solothurn)
- ◇ scho mal gört bi CH dütsch gits kei rechtschribig? (Zürich)
- ◇ scho mau ghört by Schwyzerdütsch git kei Rächtschrybig?
(Bern)
- ◇ scho mau kört bi CH dütsch gits kei rächtsschriibig? (Bern)

“Correction” of social media comments

- ◇ sorry dass mer nöd de roti teppich usleget (Zürich)
- ◇ sorry dass mir nöd de rot teppich usfahrend (St. Gallen)
- ◇ sorry dass mer nöd de rot teppich usfahred (Zürich)

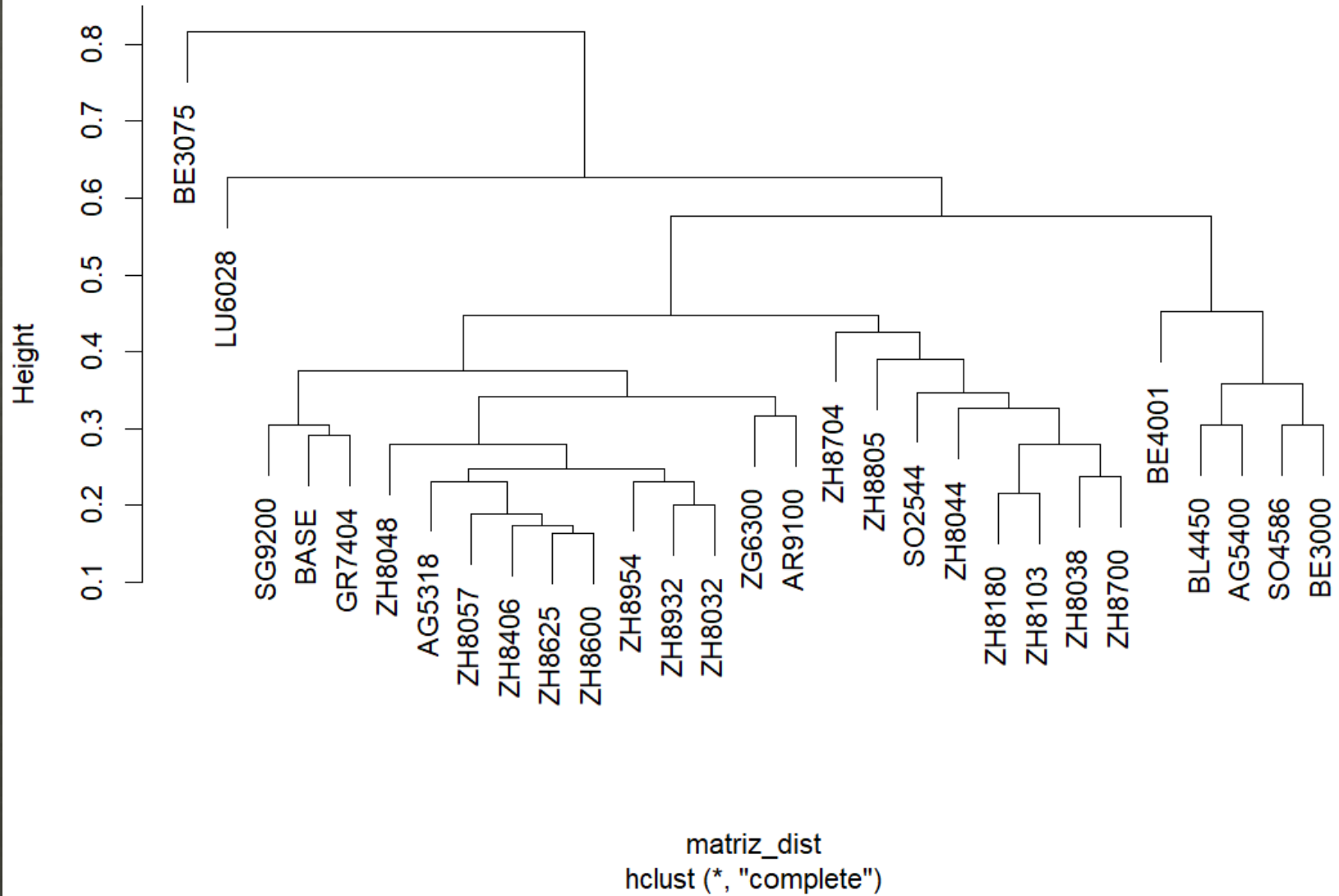
- ◇ sorry dass mer nid dr rot Teppich usfahre (Solothurn)
- ◇ sorry dass mer nid der rot teppich usfahre (Basel-Landschaft)

- ◇ sorry dass mer nit de rot teppich usfahrend (Graubünden-Zürich)

“Correction” of social media comments

- ◇ 189 tokens
- ◇ Hierarchical clusterization

Cluster Dendrogram



- ◆ Origin might be a predictor for some words.
 - ◆ However, not all speakers of the same dialect use the same written forms.

- ◆ Next step: comparison of oral and written production.

REFERENCES

- ♦ FERGUSON, Charles Albert. Diglossia. **Word**, v. 15, p. 325-340, 1959.
- ♦ RAMSEIER, Markus. Mundart und Standardsprache im Radio der deutschen und rätoromanischen Schweiz. **Sprachformgebrauch, Sprach- und Sprechstil im Vergleich**. Aarau: Sauerländer, 1988.
- ♦ WÜST, Jakob. La Suisse alémanique: un cas type de diglossie? **Bulletin CILA**, n. 58, p. 169-178, 1993.