THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT IN WATERLOO, ONTARIO

WORK IN PROGRESS

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OUTLINE

• Some background
  • Ebytown
  • Canada’s Kaiserstadt
  • Kitchener-Waterloo

• The project
  • community
  • research ethics
  • interviews
  • transcription
  • corpus 0.1
  • Germans of Waterloo Region
  • corpus 1.0

• Preliminary results
  • the why, the how, and the what
Ebytown—Canada’s Kaiserstadt—Kitchener-Waterloo

- 1784 Haldimand Tract
- 1805 **German Tract**
- 1816 Waterloo Township
- 1827 Galt
- 1833 **Berlin**
- 1853 Waterloo County
- 1916 Kitchener
- 1973 Cambridge
- 1973 **Region of Waterloo**
Ebytown—Canada’s Kaiserstadt—Kitchener-Waterloo

Canada

- 400,000 GS immigrants 1945-1994 (of these 5% each A and CH)
- 2006: 3,179,425 of German ethnic origin in Canada
- 19% of skilled arrivals in 1953-63 ➔ focus of the Oral History Project

Kitchener Metropolitan Census Area

- 2011 census: 3.34% (16,515) German as L1 (RoW Census Bulletin)
- 2001 census: 19,420 L1 > 4,600 speak at home (RoW Stats Profile)

  1981 — 22.0%
  1951 — 45.2%
  1911 — 70.0%
  1871 — 73.0%
THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

• early 2013: community initiative: a book about German immigrants
  • WCGS connections with Ger-Can Business & Professional Association and German clubs
  • small group of active community members

• spring 2013: brain-storming meeting of community members and researchers

• summer 2013: research ethics application
  • planning of recruitment, data gathering and storage, data processing and dissemination
  • video-recorded interviews, interview transcriptions, some artefacts
  • permission for book publication, research corpus
The Oral History Project

- Interviews took place from October 2013 to January 2015
- Recruitment through connections, email lists, flyers, local radio and TV
- 111 video-recorded interviews = 124 hours recorded
- 126 interviewees; 15 interviews with couples or pairs; age range: 28 to 94; average age: 67
- 23 students, staff, and profs as interviewers
- Biographical narrative interviews in English and/or German
- Topics: childhood, education, work, migration, language biography, cultural life, stories
- Generally a very positive experience for both the interviewees and the interviewers

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THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

• started in October 2014: basic verbatim CHAT transcription
• corpus 0.1
  • about 1.3 million words
• searchable by contributors to the book
• transcripts not de-identified
• annotated with comments, explanations, codes for content analysis categories

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THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

- planning phase and interview phase completed
- transcription phase to be completed this month (33 transcribers and 2 transcription companies)
- proof-reading, CLAN conversion, content analysis coding well underway (14 RAs until now)
- book project just started: *Germans of Waterloo Region*; 20 to 25 authors telling the story and stories of this large heterogeneous group of immigrants
- research corpus compilation to start in October (corpus 1.0)

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PRELIMINARY RESULTS

- Many interviewees arrived from Austria, Czechoslovakia, the two German states, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia in the 1950s/60s. Some were born in Canada and talked about their parents.
  - Third Reich as pre-text, Canadian immigration policies (from 1946/47 immigration of displaced persons, 1950 Germans were taken off the ‘enemy aliens’ list); post-war expulsions and socio-economic situation in the two German states)

- Many interviewees had considerable professional or business success, communicate well in English, identify as Canadians
  - successful integration and acculturation often in the first generation
PRELIMINARY RESULTS

• Although many came from German language islands, language shift happened in 1.5 / 2 generations (interviews in English, children are hesitant to speak German, grand-children do not speak German)
  ➔ NA language shift phenomena even for GS immigrants from old language islands with stable social bilingualism (Transylvania, Danube Swabia)

• We have had interviews with other GS immigrant groups in other projects, but did not have any participants this time (e.g. Mennonite, Swiss).
  ➔ heterogeneous group of German speakers, some suspicions deeply rooted in historical, political experiences (hiding German identity)

• Group of interviewees reflects the aging community
  ➔ migration patterns changed after the 1960s; Germany as an imagined community of the 1950s
REFLECTIONS

• difficult start to the community-university project due to diverse expectations
• eventually we got 3 times as many interviewees as originally planned
• interviews successful for both interviewees and interviewers
• large, long-term project that requires considerable commitment and funding
• student participation in large research project a great part of their graduate experience
Danke

Thank you

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