

Michael Zimmer's Diary

Linguistic Observations on a Journal from the Civil War

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The topic of the following paper is the language of an unpublished, handwritten journal of Michael Zimmer, who emigrated to the United States from Germany in 1846 and settled in Burlington, Wisconsin, around 1856. The journal, Zimmer's personal diary, records his experiences in the Mexican-American War and in the American Civil War and was bequeathed to the Wisconsin State Historical Society in 1974 by his granddaughter, Edna Zimmer (†1979). It is not known whether the manuscript has, since then, been evaluated for historical or other reasons or whether it had been published in full or in part. In 1993, when the diary was discovered by accident in the course of archive studies on family papers in the State Historical Society, nothing was known of it, apart from a one-page summary of its contents written in English by Richard Bazillion in 1978. The same was true of the comprehensive search on the Internet which was subsequently conducted. Obviously, Michael Zimmer's wartime journal is practically unknown.

The discussion below will cover the following points: The first section concerns the author of the journal, including biographical and special linguistic-biographical aspects. This is followed by an examination of his local dialect, orthographic conventions and English, and the influence these bore on his writing. The concluding section contextualizes the findings within the greater framework of historical linguistics and outlines some approaches for further research.

'Observations' on the written language of German emigrants based on the wartime journal of Michael Zimmer are promised in the title of this paper. Yet any linguistic analysis of a text which neglects socio-historical and biographical contextualization is akin to a physician's diagnosis of a wound without having seen the entire body. Both result in an incomplete understanding of the situation. At the beginning of this enquiry, Andrea Weber, a graduate student at the University of Münster, and I merely had the texts, as well as the Bazillion summary and some sketchy information provided by Edna Zimmer about her grandfather. Weber discovered much more about Zimmer through extensive Internet research conducted from Germany. The assistance of the archive in the United States was exemplary in this, providing a fine example of transatlantic academic cooperation. We are naturally very grateful to the State Historical Society in Madison and their archive, the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, the University Archives and the Area research Center at the University of Wisconsin (Parkside), the local archive of the Burlington Historical Society and the Tazewell County Historical and Genealogical Society in Pekin. On the basis of the data collected in the United States and augmented by data collected in German archives, a clearer picture of Michael Zimmer and his life emerges. The following discussion will in the main confine itself to factors specifically related to linguistic aspects of Zimmer's biography.

Georg Michael Zimmer was born the son of an old and respected innkeeper family in Kandel, a small town which at the time belonged to Bavaria, in southeastern *Vorderpfalz* near Karlsruhe. He emigrated to the United States at the end of 1846, and one can only speculate on the reasons

for his doing so. Upon arriving in Philadelphia, Zimmer was employed for a time as a baker, rather than following his own profession of carpentry. After fighting in the Mexican-American War, he resettled in Pekin, Illinois, where he became a hotelkeeper. Here, in 1848, he married Katherine Rosini, a German immigrant from Baden. He and Katherine had five children. In the mid-1850s they moved to Burlington, Wisconsin. From 1861 to 1864, Zimmer served in the Civil War as a sergeant in Wisconsin's Ninth Infantry Regiment -- which went from a purely German regiment to one of mixed composition in the course of the war. In 1870, Zimmer became a naturalized American citizen in Burlington, where, in 1896, he died at the age of seventy-two.

Sociologically speaking, Zimmer seems representative of the middle class. When he emigrated, he was not without means and, being a craftsman, he was able to build a good life for himself in his new country. Sociolinguistically, in all probability he is one of those whose spoken language is characterized by a strong German dialect and by a partial knowledge of English gained naturally in an uninstructed acquisition. His written language spans the spectrum from L1 (primary dialect) to L2 (nineteenth-century written German as a second language and more or less as taught in elementary schools) to L3 (the English to which he was exposed as an immigrant -- and certainly as a hotelkeeper -- in his new environment in the United States). Such a 'triangulation' of linguistic circumstances led to a certain style of writing. It makes a distinctive mark on the language found in Zimmer's wartime journal. What follows is a description of the influences of these elements in terms of grapheme analysis. The overriding question here is: What profile can be gleaned from Zimmer's personal 'orthography' and how can this profile be explained?

Naturally, one must begin with the first language Zimmer learned as a child, the Kandel dialect of *Vorderpfalz*, which is now in Rhineland-Palatinate. An elucidation on various isoglosses of the region is not necessary here. What is important, however, is a catalog of those phonetic characteristics which could have been present in Zimmer's written German. If Zimmer, who certainly spoke dialect, also wrote in that dialect, what would it have looked like? Fortunately, it is possible to examine a transcription of Kandel dialect of the time. In 1880, Heinrich Liebel, a teacher native to Kandel, translated forty phrases that were used by Georg Wenker in the 1880s to discover the regional varieties of German for the *Deutscher Sprachatlas* ('*Wenker-Sätze*'). A copy of the original questionnaire which is still very legible can be found in the *Deutscher Sprachatlas* Archives. Some of the sentences are documented here in a literary transcription of the dialect:

1. Im Winder fliegen die druckene **Blett/dder** in de Luft rum.
4. der gut alt Mann isch mit'm Gaul durch's Eis **gebroche** unn in's kalt Wasser g'falle.
5. Er **isch** vor vier odder sechs Woche **gschtorwe**.
6. daß **Feier** war ze schtark, die Kuche sinn jo unne ganz schwarz gebrennt.
8. d'**Fü/iß** dhun mer weh, ich glab, ich häbb se durchgeloffe.
16. du **bischt** no nit groß genunk, fer e Flasch **Wei** auszedrinke, du **muscht erscht** no e bissel wachse unn **greßer werre**.
26. Hinner unserm Haus schdehn drei schöne **Apfelbamle** mit rode Epfelich.

Above are some dialectal phonetic characteristics (emboldened) which could have appeared in Zimmer's written language. Conspicuously, however, only certain characteristics are apparent while others are entirely absent. For example, the rhotacism in the verb *werre* (16) for *werden* is just as unimaginable in written form as the use of West Germanic fricative /v/ for the High-German /b/ in *gschtorwe* (5) or the Alemannic-Upper German use of the palatal /sch/ sound in *isch* for *ist* (5) or *ersch* for *erst* (16). Dialect markers such as these and a host of others like them cannot be found in Zimmer's text, even as possible mistakes. Obviously, they are so conspicuous in the writer's own monitoring of his language that they are entirely absent. The intended written language found in the wartime journal is contemporary nineteenth-century High German.

However, the words *Blätter* (1) and *Füße* (8) require special attention. On the basis of the translation of the original dialect provided by the schoolteacher, they illustrate a typical potential for mistakes which speakers from the Palatinate inevitably had when writing High German. (Even with regard to speaking High German, one remembers former Chancellor Helmut Kohl from Ludwigshafen and his pronunciation of *begleitet*: it sounds like *bekleidet*. Also worth mentioning are interlinear corrections in the cases of *Blätter/Blädder* and *Füß/Fiß*.) Uncertainty in the case of *d/t* (in initial and medial position) is part of the phonological context of the 'Binnenhochdeutsche Konsonantenschwächung' (consonant weakening). This also occurs with *b/p* and *g/k*. In written language, this pronounced uncertainty can have one of two effects. On the one hand, 'dialectal markers' are present in such a way that dialectal voiced variants occur instead of High-German voiceless plosives. On the other hand, instances of so-called 'hypercorrections' can be the indirect effect of dialectal basis where the writer has learned that lenition can often lead to mistakes in High German (*Blädder - Blätter*). This rule is then 'over-generalized' to the extent that voiceless variants are used where voiced ones would be correct in High German. The following short list illustrates typical examples of this found in the wartime journal:

DIALECTAL MARKINGS		HYPERCORRECTION	
<i>g</i> for <i>k</i>	Dungel, glar, Gwathier, Gwinze	<i>k</i> for <i>g</i>	beknügen, klohreisch, bekleiten, zukleich, Klied, Klück, klaube, schmuckley, Uhnklück, verknügt, dekratiert
<i>b</i> for <i>p</i>	Barathe, brachtfuller, Bonthon, Bosizion, bossen, brächtiger, Braery, Breifet, Bulfer, Exbetiziohn, strabazien, Diboth	<i>p</i> for <i>b</i>	hüpsch, Plängert, Plitz, Patarien
<i>d</i> for <i>t</i>	bedeudent, bereidethen, ermadet, erwardeten, schüden, späder, thaden, theilde, Verheuradet, weider	<i>t</i> for <i>d</i>	antere, beföhrtern, beithen, erwüterten, fortwährenten, freuthe, loswerthen, niterlegen, stundthe, treuäckich etc.

What is evident here in the case of consonants is also true of vowels. Zimmer's language here, too, contains elements of uncertainty in interference areas. This can be seen in the following table concerned with rounding and unrounding:

DIALECTAL MARKINGS		HYPERCORRECTION	
<i>i</i> for <i>ü</i>	enzindet, natirlich, Fliegel, zertrimmert	<i>ü</i> for <i>i</i>	erwüterten, fühl, fühleicht, fürtel, gebürchige, geschückt, Krüppe, rüfen, sützen, augenblicklich, besützt, Gwünze etc.
<i>e/ä</i> for <i>ö</i>	zersterten, zweistöckig	<i>ö</i> for <i>e</i>	schmöcken, gehöfdet, gewöckt, höftiger, verzöhrt, Gewöhr
<i>ei</i> for <i>eu</i>	erbeideten, geschleiert Leitnant, Leithen, reime erfreithe, Freide, Neinthe, schleinichst	<i>eu</i> for <i>ei</i>	verheuradet

In a specific, qualitative analysis conducted by Weber of extensive passages, evidence could be found which pointed to a clear favoring of hypercorrection. This is true of both consonantal and vowel characteristics cited above. In contrast, dialectal markings occur to a much lesser extent, apart from the rounding *eu-ei*.

When these findings are then translated into a pragmatically oriented methodology, it is possible to say that Zimmer observed the following basic rules when writing in his journal:

- (1) Write in High German.
- (2) Do not write like you speak.
- (3) When in doubt, choose the variant that does not sound like dialect.

How the rules listed above work together to influence the writing of just one word can be demonstrated using the example of the High-German word *Teppich* in the following text (p 162):

... sie nahmen von ihren Mästers mit was sie erwischen konnten haubzöglich Kostbahrkeiten Gold und Sillwer warn feine **Töpige** Comfards Federbethen und vom feinsten Leinenzeig ...

The word for *Teppich* in the Palatinate dialect is *Deppich/Debbich*. Zimmer is aware of the potential problems associated with *d/t* and *b/p*, so he chose the Standard German fortes instead of the dialectal lenes. He also undoes the frequent unrounding, with *e* becoming *ö*. Finally, the final fricative which often occurs in dialect is transformed into High German, creating *töpig*, a word form which bears little resemblance with the real High-German word *Teppich*.

Regarding the second element in the triangulation of Zimmer's written language, his orthography is also characterized by standard German conventions which came into existence primarily as a result of Johann Christoph Adelung's proposals at the beginning of the nineteenth century. These practices were not only observed by many authors, but also in schools and publishing houses. Accents of the contemporary custom can be seen in Zimmer's writing. Three points are singled out for discussion here:

a) *The use of th and t*

Zimmer's journal was written long before the final standardization of *th*- and *t*-use which did not occur until the massive restriction of *th*-use in 1901. For this reason, the uncustomary and very prevalent use of *th* in all possible positions of a word can be very easily explained to today's readers. Yet Zimmer is frequently uncertain here, given the arbitrary nature of its use in the nineteenth century. He shows many variations in a number of instances (*konnthe* - *konnte*, *abhielth* - *abhielt* etc.). The extent to which the *th*-rule was formative can be appreciated in that words transferred from English are written with *th* without regard for the different English sound (*duthy*, for example).

b) *The use of lower-case y and i*

Despite very widespread opposition, *y* was replaced by *i* in the first half of the nineteenth century. Particularly in the case of monosyllabic words with the digraph *ey* and in month names, there were calls to retain the old written forms with *y*. Zimmer retains the traditional spelling (*bey*, *zwey*, *frey*, *May*, *Juny*, *Juley* etc.), though he does vary his spelling of words having two syllables (*beynah* and *beinah*, *seythe* and *seitthe* etc.).

c) *Marking vowel length*

Given the very complicated rules in this area, even to the present day, Zimmer's uncertainty here is not surprising. Without going into great detail, two observations are worth noting. In the marking of long vowels, the predominant problem is when to use the postvocalic *h*. Here, Zimmer shows a tendency to include an *h* where not necessary according to today's norms. In approximately 85 per cent of the 'mistakes', there is a superfluous *h* (*nahmens*, *kauhm*, *Ahtmen* etc.); in fifteen per cent of the 'mistakes', the *h* is missing (*ongefär*, *gescha* etc.).

The findings are similar with regard to the marking of short vowels. Here, too, the number of mistakes caused by the use of a doubled consonant outnumbers those caused by the lack of one in Zimmer's writing at a ratio of 58 (*dasellbe*, *Zällt*, *stannt*, *stadtdt* etc) to 42 (*schlumer*, *einstelten* etc.).

From this last point, it is possible to discern a fourth, and personal, rule which Zimmer observed when writing:

- (4) When in doubt, it is better to over-use markings for long and short vowels than to under-use them.

The description provided so far of Zimmer's written language is the same or very similar to that which could be given of the language of other nineteenth-century West Central Germans. Yet Zimmer's exposure to 'American English' adds another factor to the equation which influences his writing in a characteristic way.

Before going into the writing of English lexemes in greater detail, some general observations must be made about the amount and structure of such types of transference and interference. The wartime journal contains a few short English quotations. We find, for example:

"... der erste Steuermann erschien mit einer Latern und Rif mit donerter Stimme all Händs ober an di seyt ..." (1847, S.3);

"... ich spanthe meinen Karabiner und rief hu is där ..." (1847, S.7);

"Den 7then hatten wier grose Raewiu vor dem General Mayjor Schofield, es waren 3 Diwisionen aufgestellt, als der General mit seinem Stab an uns vorüber Rütt, sagte er zu seinem Stab ganz lauth this is a splaenditt Body of Men, das heißt das ist ein schöner Körper von Leiten." (1863, S.97)

The example throws light on the passive English skills of Zimmer, who had presumably acquired only a rudimentary knowledge of English. Throughout the entire journal there are neither long passages nor even entire sentences in English, though a great many individual lexical items of English origin can be found. They come from both the appellative vocabulary as well as the vocabulary of proper names. Elements of this vocabulary, toponyms and anthroponyms, have a particular meaning in any wartime journal as they act as guarantors of authenticity and credibility, much in the same fashion as the inclusion of dates. Zimmer took great care to be accurate, particularly when writing on the transportation of troops, marches, and the like (for which place names play an important part), and he was just as careful when documenting changes in personnel, promotions and similar changes in the troops. On 17 September 1862, he writes:

... wier kamen durch Ians thaun Chapelhill und antere kleine fläcken wofon ich die Nahmen nicht erfaren konte jedoch erfur ich deß Abents, daß ein Städtgen Bräry du Chine hies, wier waren zwischen Intepintens und Sexington ... (1862 S.50)

As the above example shows, a lack of knowledge of specifically English norms in phoneme-grapheme relationships frequently leads to the construction of curious combinations. In addition to the writing style he brought with him from Germany, Zimmer had two other points of reference when writing English phrases: firstly, an idea of the graphic appearance of words, and secondly, an idea of how words sound.

Regarding the first point, the graphic appearance of words can be so fixed in the mind that they correspond to the actual Anglo-American written forms. Examples include *Arms*, *North*, *Cars*, *Union*, *County* and *Hunter*, as well as *Burlington*, *Kansas*, *Greenfield* and *Arkadelphia*. With regard to appellatives, it is only the use of capital letters that bears resemblance to German writing conventions. Zimmer comes closer to the actual English form in words such as *Tälegraf*, *Cräckers*, *neinth*, and *Duthy*, as well as *Rasine*, *Vorth Gübsen*, *Little Rack*, *Millwauky*, and *Laewenworth*.

In writing words down according to how they sound, he attempts to substitute English sound combinations with German letter combinations. It is not surprising that such forms are, by far,

most prevalent in the writing of someone like Zimmer with such a rudimentary knowledge of English. The following list illustrates some random examples (with the correct English orthography provided in parentheses):

Appellatives:

Pämähster, Pämäster, Paemaster (paymaster)
 Diwischen (division)
 Fänz (fence)
 Stimboth (steamboat)
 Hätquater (head-quater)
 Plängert, Blänckert (blanket)
 Rällroth Stäschen (railroad station)
 Distscharscht (discharged)
 Tschänsch (change)
Sietisins (citizens)
 Backs (box)
 Flaecks (flags)
 Träßparathe (dress-parade)
 Raewuy (review)
 Aminischen (ammunition)
 Nücker, Necker ('nigger')
 Sisäsich (secessionist)

Toponyms:

Gwinze, Gwinzy, Gwünze (Quincy, IL)
Saendlouis (St. Louis, MI)
Forseid (Forsyth, MO)
Ketzwill (Cassville, MO)
Weid Raewer (White River, AR)
Boston Mauntens (Boston Nountains, AR)
Peint Ploff, Pheint Ploff (Pine Bluff, AR)
Hambold (Humboldt, KS)
 Vorth Skoth, Vorth Skooth (Fort Scott, KS)

When examining how place names were written, it becomes obvious that, for Zimmer with his poor English, the authenticity of his documentary act does not mean reproducing English letter combinations exactly. Yet by providing 'phonetic reconstructions', he certainly enables some comprehensibility, for example, when reading aloud.

The findings above, therefore, allow for an expansion of the list of pragmatic rules Zimmer observed when writing in his wartime journal:

- (5) Do not be afraid to use English words.
- (6) When you cannot see how the word is spelled, write according to how it sounds.
- (7) Write phonetically in such a way that it sounds English when you read it aloud.

In conclusion, reference is made above to the linguistic scholar, Johann Christoph Adelung, and to the fact that his orthographic proposals became guidelines in German schools in the first half of the nineteenth century. A generation after Adelung's death in 1806, Michael Zimmer may very well have learned to write in the Palatinate according to his ideas. In 1788, Adelung had formed an overriding principle for writing:

Schreib das Deutsche und was als Deutsch betrachtet wird, mit den eingeführten Schriftzeichen, so wie du sprichst, der allgemeinen besten Aussprache gemäß, mit Beobachtung der erweislichen nächsten Abstammung und, wo diese aufhöret, des allgemeinen Gebrauches. (Johann Christoph Adelung: *Vollständige Anweisung zur Deutschen Orthographie, nebst einem kleinen Wörterbuche für die Aussprache, Orthographie, Biegung und Ableitung*. Leipzig: Weygand 1788. Repr. Hildesheim/ New York: Olms 1978, 17.)

To what extent does Zimmer's writing observe the general principle? A review of the seven rules listed above reveals that altogether different principles were at work here. It would have been

impossible for Zimmer to write German as he spoke it because his spoken language did not correspond to the standard -- that is, favored -- pronunciation. This reveals an overriding contradiction in Adelung's principles for writing: dialectal orientation makes his principle inaccessible, even chimerical, to the majority of nineteenth-century speakers. Naturally, Zimmer writes differently to how he speaks, precisely because he wants his writing to approach the standard, favored pronunciation. As the discussion above demonstrates, this has the effect of causing him to overshoot the mark, as it were, evidenced by instances of hypercorrection and overregulation.

Paradoxically, Zimmer does observe the first part of Adelung's principle when he reproduces English lexemes. Indeed, this is executed in such a way that English -- and what he believes to be English, -- is written intentionally in 'Latin script'. Moreover, his way of writing English words according to how they sound is very much related to the way in which Zimmer himself would read them aloud from his work.

The discussion above has been purely concerned with grapheme analysis, but by no means could an interest in Michael Zimmer's writing be restricted to the study of the history of written language. His journal provides a wealth of other research opportunities, and not only for linguists. For example, it would be very interesting to conduct more detailed research on the stylistics Zimmer employed when writing on the reality of the war, particularly the battles and their horrifying consequences. A contrastive study of such metaphor in this regard -- by comparing Zimmer's journal with other wartime journals of his contemporaries -- could produce very interesting cultural analyses indeed. The necessary precondition for any academic evaluation of Zimmer's journal is, of course, a reprint which is true to the original accompanied by an English translation (where appropriate) and explanatory commentary. It is the ambition of the author of this paper to produce such an edition with Andrea Weber in the next two years.
