

# Sali zämme

your Baseldütsch survival guide



Sergio J. Lievano & Nicole Egger

Baseldütsch by Walter Loeliger

**Sali zämme**  
**your Baseldütsch survival guide**



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by Sergio J. Lievano & Nicole Egger  
Baseldütsch by Walter Loeliger

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Hoi! Et après...Manuel de survie en suisse allemand (for French speakers)

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# **Sali zämme** your Baseldütsch survival guide

## **Hoi** your Swiss German survival guide

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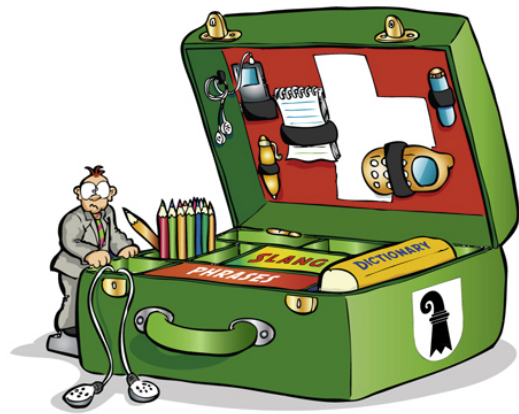
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## Preface



If you want to feel at home in the region of Basel, nothing will speed the process more than becoming acquainted with Baseldütsch. This book provides valuable tools, both for newcomers and for people who have been struggling with this Swiss dialect for a long time.

Swiss German is not one language, but the name given to a group of very different Alemannic dialects. These dialects (their vocabulary, intonation and pronunciation) vary considerably from one neighbourhood to another. It is a spoken language, and there are contradictory spelling systems for the few occasions when it is written. Although the dialects vary in pronunciation and vocabulary, the Swiss usually understand dialects other than

their own.

This book will help you to do that, too. Sharing a language that has so many variations keeps Swiss hearts and souls united.





**Sali zämme - your Baseldütsch survival guide** is based on the modern dialect spoken in Basel and its neighbourhood. Even though Baseldütsch is an oral language, is not standardised, and has many varieties, people from all levels of society in Basel are proud to speak it. Like all Swiss dialects, Baseldütsch has different spelling systems for the few occasions when it is written (see page 18).

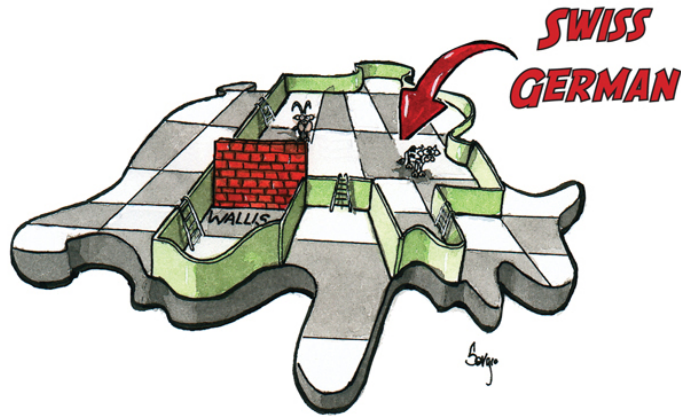


**Part I**

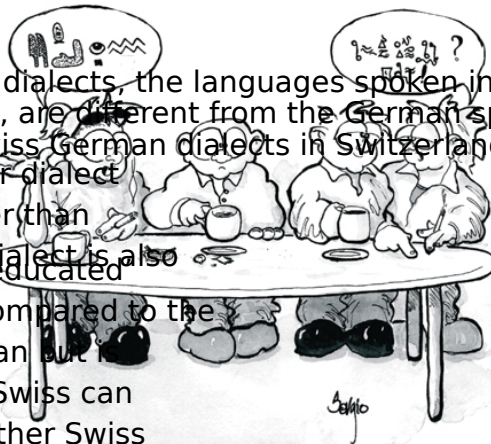


**About  
Baseldütsch and  
Swiss German**

## Introduction to Swiss German

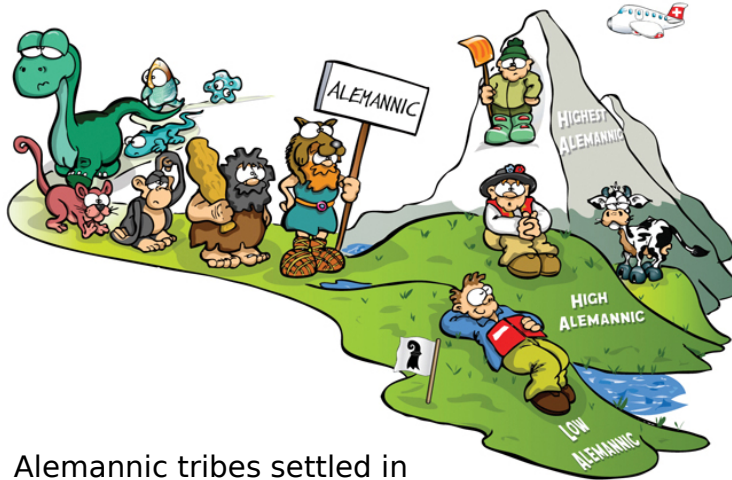


The Swiss German dialects, the languages spoken in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, are different from the German spoken in Germany. The varieties of Swiss German dialects in Switzerland cannot be defined so easily. No particular dialect is considered better than others. Speaking dialect is also not considered uneducated or 'substandard' compared to the written High German, but is spoken proudly. A Swiss can identify where another Swiss grew up simply from the dialect spoken. For a Swiss German speaker, language is much more than a way of communication: it is an integral part of his/her national, regional and even personal identity.





## Brief history of the dialects



Alemannic tribes settled in Switzerland after the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th century. These tribes lived predominantly along the Rhine and in the central and north-eastern regions. From there Alemannic evolved into three major groups: 'Low', 'High' and 'Highest' Alemannic. These are not qualitative terms in any way. These are the geographical terms describing where the dialect is spoken.

The low dialects of the Basel area, the high, though the Swiss majority of regions disappear by the end of the century and that the standard High German of in Switzerland, and the 'Highest' Alemannic found in the remote area of the Wallis. **Baseldütsch** is now the only dialect based on Low Alemannic. Swiss German dialects are still strong and are widespread as a spoken language in practically all situations of daily life.

The radical political events at the beginning of the 20th century and the growth of nationalism helped the Swiss retain their dialects as a form of national identity. During the 1930s many Swiss felt the need to distinguish themselves from the Germans, and speaking their Swiss dialect was a way of expressing Swiss patriotism.

Nevertheless, in modern Switzerland the use and popularity of Swiss German is

steadily increasing.

It continues to gain recognition and popularity, especially among the young, who like hearing it in Swiss popular music or composing written forms of it in their e-mail and SMS messages.

There have been many efforts to agree upon a consolidation of the main dialects into a standard Swiss German that could be written. Rules exist, but the Swiss enjoy their diversity too much to agree on a unified Swiss German.

Likewise you will find different spellings of the same **Baseldütsch** word in local

newspapers and ads.



### **The Swiss German code**

Although it is not well documented, it has been said on many occasions that throughout history, Swiss German dialects were sometimes used as a 'secret coding system' by people and institutions dealing directly or indirectly in political affairs.

## The use of High German in Switzerland



Switzerland has what is defined as '**diglossia**': a situation of a society with two languages closely related and functionally complementary. Swiss German is the spoken language and High German, called '**Schriftdeutsch**' in Switzerland, is the official written language. High German is widely used in the written and spoken media, at schools, and also in official, social, political or religious events where French-speaking Swiss, Italian-speaking Swiss and other non Swiss-German speakers might be present. Swiss German, on the other hand, is spoken every day in informal situations while shopping or socializing with friends and family. High German is used in official media and High German is their kindergarten language. Swiss government speakers government institutions speak High German which does not always make it easy for them to communicate in it.

## High German and Baseldütsch

### GERMAN FOR BEGINNERS

ARME KÄIB!

NIEMETS HET EM ÖPPIS VOM BASELDÜTSCH VERZELLT ...



*Translation: Poor chap! No one told him about 'Baseldütsch'..*

The intonation of **Baseldütsch** gives emphasis to the first syllable and pitch is more melodious than in High German. The prime characteristic of most Swiss dialects is the deep-throated, guttural **'ch'**. This is far less prominent in Baseldütsch. For example Baseldütsch uses the same word as the often quoted **Chuchichäschtli** (small kitchen cupboard) but it is pronounced as **Kuchikäschtli**.

In Baseldütsch you use the diminutive in nouns as often as possible by placing the ending **'-li'** onto it. For example **Gipfeli** (croissant), **Drämmli** (tram), **Schätzli**

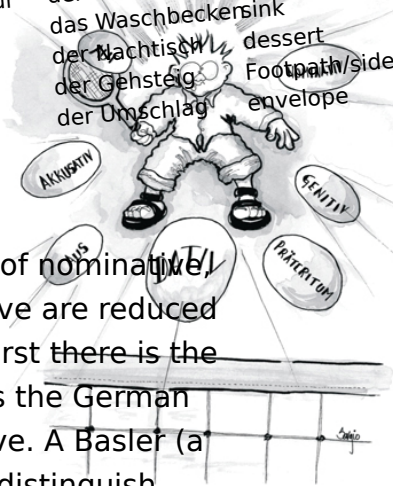
(sweetheart), **Zolli** (zoo), **Kätzli** (little cat), etc.

Baseldütsch is also very receptive to the influences of foreign languages, in particular French. Due to its geographical and cultural proximity to France, Baseldütsch has acquired a lot of French vocabulary, as opposed to how

foreign words are 'Germanized' in Germany or Austria and most other Swiss dialects.

The following table shows some examples of French influences on Baseldütsch:

Baseldütsch	French	High German	English
meersi	merci	danke	thank you
s Welo	le velo	das Fahrrad	bicycle
dr Guafföör	le coiffeur	der Frisör	hairdresser
s Pule	le poulet	das Hähnchen	chicken
s Schminnee	la cheminée	der Kamin	fireplace
s Spidaal	l'hôpital	das Krankenhaus	hospital
dr Kondüggstöör	le conducteur	der Schaffner	train conductor
s Lawaboo	le lavabo	das Waschbeckersink	sink
s Desseer	le dessert	der Nachtisch	dessert
s Drottuaar	le trottoir	der Gehsteig	Footpath/sidewalk
s Guweer	le couvert	der Umschlag	envelope



The four High German cases of nominative, accusative, dative and genitive are reduced in Baseldütsch to only two: First there is the 'common case', which covers the German accusative and the nominative. A Basler (a person from Basel) does not distinguish between them and asks in both cases **Wär** (who): **Wär isch do?** **Wär hesch gseh?** (Who is here? Whom did you see?). Then there is the 'dative case', which does likewise for the dative and the genitive. (See the Pronouns and articles section page 132.)