Involvement with plurilingual and plurilectal communities, which may or may not be shorter or longer phases of language shift in progress, leads one to question an entire range of metaphors and seemingly self-evident concepts at the center of linguistics. Among these one might mention the very notion of “a language” as a self-contained and presumably homogeneous system of rules, a code “où tout se tient,” the concept of a “native speaker” together with “native speaker competence” around which so much revolves in axiomatic models of linguistic description and explication. Dialectologists and those who work on the diachronic dimension of language have long been aware of the difficulties involved in trying to establish firm categories and boundaries in time and in synchronic structure to distinguish between one language (variety) and another or between adjacent diachronic “états de langue.” Most boundaries of this kind turn out to be shifting and interpenetrable, and the same applies to the dividing lines between language (variety) internal structural categories.

A moment’s reflection suffices to convince one that things could indeed not be different, otherwise languages would be unchanging and in principle unchangeable expressions of unchanging semantic content, incapable of adapting to shifting realities, communicational needs, and innovations. Nevertheless, the homogeneous rule-governed code metaphor seems to be not merely a theoretical fiction but an important psychological and social need, which contributes to the way in which speakers orient and define themselves, their community, their ethnicity, even their individual and group sense of identity, and it has a homogenizing, sharpening, and “focusing” (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, 1985) feedback effect on languages and their communicational efficiency. However, in order to account for the way language actually functions (and changes) in plurilingual communities we need to set alongside the code metaphor an equally relevant metaphor, which, together with its initiator J. J. Gumperz (for a recent brief account of the term’s implications see Gumperz, 1990:33–4) we call the repertoire view of language. This perspective turns out to be no less relevant for variety identification, functioning, and change in allegedly monolingual communities.

We can begin by observing that no language is completely homogeneous or monosystemic (as was already obvious to Schuchardt (1884: 1ff.)), and that coexisting subsystems sometimes conflict with each other, imposing on speakers the necessity to choose. If many speakers habitually make the same choice in a particular instance and situation, this leads to the elimination or marginalization of the unsuccessful alternative(s), that is, to change. The degree of arbitrariness inevitable in such developments (if we compare one instance with another) restores a modicum of heterogeneity to a balance disturbed in the direction of homogeneity by each individual instance in which Systemzwang (that is, the analogical force of one partial subsystem upon another) prevails. Hence a minor process which at one time produced singular and plural pairs in English of the type *wife*: *wives*, *leaf*: *leaves*, *leads*, under the “invariable singular stem” analogy of the type *dove*: *doves*, *price*: *prices*, *prize*: *prizes*, to the heterogeneity introduced by *staff*: *staves*/*staffs*; *stave*: *staves*; *roof*: *roofs*/*rooves* and the like. Once heterogeneity of this kind arises in a language there is no way of predicting what its ultimate semantic fate may be. All kinds of unsatisfied needs or emerging potential for distinctiveness in the content may be lurking in the wings, waiting to latch on to any spare capacity which chance
developments or reassessment of existing possibilities may throw up on the expression side of the linguistic repertoire. The following list is an attempt to illustrate the kinds of distinctiveness to which perceptible differences in the expression resources of a linguistic repertoire may in principle correspond. (It is important to remember that the “same” item of difference in linguistic substance (e.g., in the phonetics) may have quite diverse functions from one language community to another.)

**No discernible semantic distinctiveness**

1 No semantic distinctiveness of any kind is perceptible (an extreme case), even where general structural considerations provide a framework, as in English *either*, in which the stressed vowel shows free variation (*/-iː-/ or /-ər-/*) at the lexical level, even though at the phonological level distinctiveness is present; likewise in *neither*. Note that the free variation applies even within many idiolects (including the writer’s), though caution suggests that in the absence of pertinent statistics it might be wiser to speak of “apparent free variation.”

For reasons which will become apparent we will postpone discussion of categories 2 and 3 until after presentation of category 4, which follows.

**Distinctiveness in basic semantics**

4 The other extreme case is one in which a differentiation in *basic semantics* is triggered by distinctiveness on the expression side. This seems to be a much more frequent outcome of change in expression substance than the seemingly total absence of semantic consequences illustrated in 1. The semantics involved may be located in the lexis, the morphology, or elsewhere, as the following examples will illustrate. (a) The *lexical* opposition between “staff”¹ and “staff”² on the one hand and the new singular “stave,” a back-formation from the form “staves,” plural of “staff”¹. (b) The semantic divergence between “staff”¹ and “staff”² henceforth marked by the availability of the form “staves” (with register distinction) alongside “staffs” as an alternative plural of “staff,”¹ but not for “staff”² (e.g., “military staff,” “school staff”). (c) The (morphological) refunctioning of umlaut as the (sole) signal of plurality in, for example, English *foot/feet*, umlaut being in origin a chance consequence of vowel harmony. This is of course a classic case. Less well known, but perhaps more remarkable, is the reallocation of the diminutive suffixes (earlier: *infixes*) –*in* and –*it* in the Italian dialect of Ascona to the singular/plural distinction, after it had disappeared from most substantives as a result of the loss of final vowels, hence e.g. *uśelin* – Lt. *uccell(in)o*, “(little) bird,” *úśelit* –Lt. *uccell(ett)i*, “(little) birds.” To allow ourselves once more a thoroughly anthropomorphic comparison, our examples under (c) are powerfully suggestive of acts of piracy by a heavyweight linguistic substructure (number), faced with a loss of territory, to make good its losses at the expense of any lightweight phenomena (phonetic assimilation without a semantic function, near–synonymous diminutive formations) unfortunate enough to come its way. It is one of our aims to contribute, however modestly, to the demystification of such seemingly humanoid behavior on the part of language as a communication system most often described as code–like (hence prompting static images).

The remaining types of potentially distinctive differences in linguistic substance we may notionally situate between the two extremes illustrated by 1 (no discernible semantic distinctiveness) and 4 (distinctiveness in basic semantics): Category 2 involves a distinctive marking of one or more speakers or groups of speakers, category 3 affords sociosemantic distinctiveness of a *diatypic ("stylistic")* nature for the community as a whole.

**Identificational distinctiveness between speakers and groups**

2 Distinctiveness of this kind performs an *identificational* function in respect of (a) single speakers not constituting a communicational network (lispings, Churchillian sibilants in English, *idiolectal* selection (or an atypical frequency) of lexical items, for instance), (b) families, and (c) larger groups of speakers on a primarily *territorial* basis (*dialects, regional accents*), or on a social or ethnic basis (*sociolects, social or ethnic accents*).

**Sociosemantic distinctiveness**

3 This category of distinctiveness shares the social aspect of differentiation with the sociolectal
marking mentioned in 2 above, but it serves the community as a whole, not merely some part of it, to mark (and in part to define or constitute) situational categories of cultural relevance ("domains") through the selection of appropriate language varieties (registers, diatypes). These are conventional, but susceptible to gradual change by negotiation rather than static. Shifting conventions and individual or group nonconformism in the use of the du/Sie dichotomy in German provide an example of the principle involved. For a discussion of "diatypic" distinctiveness and the means by which it is typically realized see Denison, 1968.

The greatest advantage of the linguistic metaphors which give us the "deep/surface" dichotomy and the "expression/content" dichotomy is that they provide us with an insight into the dynamic (thus, ultimately, also diachronic) instability of the relationships between the two levels. This means that in any repertoire the function of linguistic substance and structure can slip, slide, jump, not only from item to item of the "content" within each of our four categories, but also from category to category. To some extent the ultimate explanations and detailed mechanisms of such processes are as yet lacking, but there can be little doubt that changing degrees of heterogeneity of linguistic substance have a triggering effect on both basic semantic and sociosemantic developments. In both types of change the destinies and changing needs of linguistic communities, involving different degrees of exposure to and contact with other communities (that is, speakers), are crucial. Therefore investigation of language change must remain incomplete so long as the study of system–internal forces is not supplemented by the consideration of speakers, that is, by sociolinguistic study in the widest sense (as Labov, for example, 1966, was perhaps the first fully to appreciate and embark upon).

For this writer too, a sociolinguistic approach to language and change in language involves constantly re-establishing in the mind the connection between language and speakers via language in use. This can be achieved by observations ranging from the global to the idiolectal. For practical purposes there are some obvious advantages in having available a relatively self–contained linguistic community of a size – say 500 speakers maximum – which makes individual acquaintance with a fair proportion of the total population feasible, given a generous observational time–scale (of decades rather than hours or days). A kind destiny provided the writer with just such an opportunity when he was introduced in 1962 to the village of Sauris, (then) a trilingual community, in the Carnian Alps of Friuli, northeast Italy. The visits and sojourns which ensued led to a series of papers published in various contexts, some to be drawn on in the following pages, but more important, they contributed to the views on language in general of this author to an extent not foreseeable at the outset, given the small size and apparent atypi–cality of the community. Now that (for various reasons) a stocktaking and codificational phase has been embarked upon (a dictionary of Sauris German is in preparation), it is perhaps appropriate to attempt to make these views more explicit.

First of all it will be necessary to sketch out briefly the relevant facts and assumptions concerning the Sauris linguistic community. From a combination of linguistic and (scant) documentary evidence (see Lessiak, 1959; Lorenzoni, 1938; Kranzmayer, 1956,1960,1981; Hornung, 1960,1964,1972,1984; Denison, 1990) it is fairly certain that Sauris represents a late thirteenth–century migration of a small group of speakers of S Bavarian German dialect(s) from the area of the easternmost Tirolean and/or the westernmost Carinthian Lesach (roughly, the vicinity of Upper and Lower Tilliach, Kartitsch, Maria Luggau) to the uppermost basin – until then devoid of year–round human habitation – of the Lumiei, a northern tributary of the Tagliamento, which it enters after a precipitous descent through a narrow gorge, at Ampezzo Carnico. For almost seven centuries, from the establishment of the Sauris enclave until the completion of the road link with Ampezzo in the middle of the present century, contacts with the surrounding Friulian–speaking region and the wider (Veneto–speaking, then Italian–speaking) network remained extremely laborious and hazardous. The same held good, to an even greater degree, of traffic over the high mountain mule–track passes to the north with Carinthia and Tirol and the wider German–speaking world beyond. It was not until the end of the last century that men from Sauris joined the swelling seasonal migrations from Carnia northwards in pursuit of work opportunities.

Nevertheless, some trade and traffic with the nearest Romance vicinity was necessary from the earliest times. Sauris German has integrated Friulian loan material of all periods which reflects these contacts, and there is evidence in family names and vulgo names (traditional house names) of a relatively small but constant immigration into the community from the Carnian environs. Administrative records (of land and property ownership and transactions, for example), after the Latin of the earliest documents, were already in (Veneto–) Italian in the early eighteenth century (and probably much earlier, though a
fire in the parish archives destroyed earlier records). By the early 1960s virtually all Sauris– born adults were orally trilingual (more precisely, triglossic) in Sauris German, Friulian, and Italian, and literate in Italian (see Denison, 1971, for details). Alongside Sauris German, the functions of which were restricted almost entirely to village–internal communication, Friulian and Italian had well–established community–internal functions in addition to their use in external transactions. Italian was and is the language of obligatory school education and of the more recently established kindergarten; it had replaced German (until relatively recently alongside Latin) in the church by the beginning of the present century, when a tradition of appointing priests from Sauris or from the related German linguistic island of Sappada (Pladen) came to an end. Friulian was in oral use in Sauris earlier than Italian, and showed signs of ousting Sauris German from some sections of the parish and the community (Denison, 1971:168ff.) before it in turn began to lose ground rapidly to Italian.

Thirty years ago parents (and other adults) in Sauris were beginning to conform to a general, now global trend to acculturate their children from birth (to the best of their ability) to the mainstream culture via the mainstream language (variety). This took place at the expense of the non–mainstream elements in the linguistic (and, less obviously, cultural) heritage hitherto transmitted from generation to generation. In Sauris the present outcome is that active triglossia has become rare among those under thirty years of age, having been replaced (apart from some passive competence in Sauris German and/or – less commonly – Friulian) by Italian monoglossia for all practical purposes. Active triglossic competence is now best represented by those over 70, and a not inconsiderable amount of idiomatic, syntactical, and lexical structure characteristic of the Sauris German strand of the repertoire is best conserved by a surviving handful of octogenarians. It is not the universal phenomenon of linguistic change and renewal which is remarkable here, but the acceleration marking the approaching end of a process of language shift initiated more than seven centuries ago. The interest for linguistics and socio–linguistics of such processes has been documented by publications such as Dressler and Wodak–Leodolter, 1977; Denison, 1977, 1980, 1992a; Dorian, 1981, 1988; Denison and Tragut, 1990, involving the use of anthropomorphic metaphors like “language death” (see chapters 15 and 16).

From what has been said above it might be assumed that the S Bavarian linguistic repertoire the first settlers brought with them was rather homogeneous and lacking in evidence of (earlier) wider geographical contacts and social networks. The contrary is true. Comparison of Sauris German with historically closely related dialects, two of them represented by the “sister” linguistic islands of Sappada/Pladen (see Hornung, 1972) and Zarz–Deutsch Rut in Slovenia (see Lessiak, 1959; Kranzmayer and Lessiak, 1983), the latter extinct since World War II, and with the variety of SE German in use for wider communication at the time of migration in the thirteenth century, reveals a surprising amount of (already well–integrated) heterogeneity in the German of the earliest settlers, despite their point of departure, a rural Alpine area remote from the urban centers of the time. It does not suggest a static, uniform state of affairs with regard to language.

In the thirteenth century much of the spatial and historical diversification which characterized the local dialects and distinguished M(iddle) H(igh) G(erman) from E(ary) N(ew) H(igh) G(erman) forms was still in progress or had only recently been completed. There were S German, Bavarian, S Bavarian and local vowel changes, together with an adjustment to the S Bavarian velar plosive series, which left it (unlike more northerly German varieties) with a symmetrical plosive structure (voiced, voiceless, voiceless affricated: /g/, /k/, /kx/) in the velar area as well as in the more forward articulation areas (/d/, /t/, /ts/; /b/, /p/, /pf/). Lexis, morphology, syntax, semantics, and idiom were of course also no less fluid at that period than at any other time. Linguistic influence from other varieties of German, Western Romance (Old French), the Romance south, and to a lesser extent from the Slavic east, made itself felt, and this can be most conveniently exemplified by lexical and morphological loans, since these are often phonetically marked as such (in a historical sense, for the linguist, though not for present–day speakers; for details see Denison, 1992a).

The following items were in all likelihood imported into pre–Saurian German from more prestigious varieties of wider currency, in particular from a S German trading and administrative variety based on urban speech, ultimately derived mainly from Vienna, but also from the language of the church and the military: [ˈʃtɔ̃vʃtʃ] – “Geellschaft,” “society, company”; [ˈʊntsɔlɪç] – etym. “ungselig” (etym. “asocial”), “lean, gaunt”; [ˈʃtʃærtʃ] – “Pate,” “godparent”; [ˈʃmərn] – “schlagen” (Viehn. “schmieren”), “to hit, to beat” (alongside “native” [ˈʃmərnbəm] – “schmieren, einfetten,” “to grease”; [ˈdraksln] – “zu Bodenwerfen” (Ringkampf), “to throw in wrestling” (alongside “native” [ˈdraʃln] – “drecheln, to use a lathe”);
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Slovene Vidén); furthermore, probably the verbs *t∫u:dln* – “to drizzle” and *t∫u:trn* – “to go German (and, in general, older German) name Weiden for Udine, capital of Friuli Province in NE Italy (<*jug* – with its derivative *juzn* – “south, southerly, midday” as *jauzn*, [baidn] – the Sauris draught animal,” *kai∫e* – “shack,” *klit∫* – “compartment, usually in cellar or stall, for potatoes or also gave it more mundane register connotations (sociosemantic shift, our category 3), but this seems otherwise have marginally assumed, had it not been ousted. Net semantic difference: zero (our category 1). [gai\]t\]c\] – “ta
tertainers, with Bavarian in general a small number of Slavonic lexical loans, mainly from contacts with early Wider network German was in MHG and ENHG times (as it is today) clearly a source not only of higher register linguistic imports, but also of slangy metaphorical usage for rural communities. Thus pre-Saurian German imported *[pfiffig] – “cheeky, smart,” [kha\]iln\] – “to punch, beat up,” *[khit\]sl\]c\] – “oversensitive,” [kha\]îçe\] – “jail,” [mi\]a\]rn\] – “to hit” (see above), *[pinan\] – “spinnen,” “to spin,” also “to act in a crazy fashion.” Loans from other outside sources also contributed to this sociosemantic reservoir of “slangy” terms (see e.g., [pukl] and [tuan] below), but there are similar instances in which we have no formal grounds for deciding whether the metaphor is local, universal, or loaned: [dran] – “(Korn)dreschen, (einen Menschen) dreschen,” “to trash (corn, a person),” [miltsn] – “(lit. die Milz eines Menschen) drücken,” “to squeeze (lit. someone’s spleen).”

We may nevertheless point to the general effect of imported forms in Sauris German, which is that of a relatively high frequency of terms without direct motivation in the rest of the lexis. *[khit\]sl\]c\] for instance, ties up elsewhere in German with the verb *kitze\]ln* – “to tickle,” but the Sauris verb is *[gu:tsln\], from which *[khit\]sl\]c\] is clearly not directly derived. Likewise, *[kha\]îçe\] – “jail” suggests the verb *keuchen, keichen* “to pant for lack of air in the lungs,” which does not occur in Saurian German (the local verb being *[ho\]katsn\]); [kha\]îln\] – “to punch, beat up” is a metaphorical derivation of *keil* – “wedge,” which does not occur in Sauris German (where the corresponding substantive is *[belke]* (<MHG *wegge*) – “wedge”), *[beibar] – “Weber,” “weaver” lacks in Sauris German the etymologically corresponding verb (“weben” in standard German, “to weave”), this activity being expressed by the form *[b\]ûrkhn\] (in Sauris di Sopra and Velt *[b\]ôrkhn\]), corresponding etymologically to standard German “wirken” (and similarly in Pladen/Sappada and elsewhere in S Bavarian). This lack of internal motivation thus applies to outside lexis from closely related (i.e., in this case, German) sources as well as to loan material from “foreign” varieties, though these latter cases are of course potentially much more marked in their linguistic substance.

Turning now to these pre-Saurian imports from “foreign” varieties, we note that Sauris German shares with Bavarian in general a small number of Slavonic lexical loans, mainly from contacts with early Slovene beginning as far back as the eighth century. Examples (see Kranzmayer, 1956, Hornung, 1964) are *[jauzn\] – “midday meal,” *[de:tsn\] – “pair of shafts for cart or sleigh,” *[kho\]ômat\] – “collar for draught animal,” *[kai\]îfe\] – “shack,” *[klit∫\] – “compartment, usually in cellar or stall, for potatoes or similar,” *[f\]a\]n\] in *[cabint\] – “warm wind in winter” – a later and more local loan from the same stem *[j\]ug* – with its derivative *[j\]ozn* – “south, southerly, midday” as *[jauzn\] above, *[baidn\] – the Sauris German (and, in general, older German) name Weiden for Udine, capital of Friuli Province in NE Italy (<Slovene Viden); furthermore, probably the verbs *[t\]u:dln\] – “to drizzle” and *[t\]u:trn\] – “to go

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Relatively little of the Western Romance (Old French) influence on medieval German worked its way through to the southeastern limits of the German-speaking area prior to the settlement of the linguistic islands (including Sauris). We have already mentioned the suffix \[-a/-\] (of Old French origin) \[-a/-\] – “to purge, to squeeze out liquid from cheese,” alternative form \[-a/-\] < Friul.). The double suffix \[-a/-\] < Old French –erie and the Old French suffix –ley – originally the word ley < Latin legem (see Kluge s.v. –lei) “sort, kind” borrowed by Sauris German in the forms –la, –las, –na, –nas. Of these, the first two retained suffixal stress in German, thereby introducing a new prosodic stress scheme into the language for the first time, German having shifted the stress of earlier loans forward where necessary, to conform to the traditional Germanic stress pattern. Here again, it is strange that such a significant change was effected, even though the small number of lexical items involved with the suffixes and the rather low frequency of occurrence of the original items would not have led one to predict their potential for structural change.

To begin with the suffix which was of least consequence: The Sauris equivalent of standard German –lei was, in Sauris as elsewhere, relevant to only a very few lexical items, e.g., \[^o\] – “keinerelei,” “no kind of,” \[^o\] – “allerlei,” “of every kind”; moreover it was unstressed, which was not only without consequence for the traditional stress structure of Sauris German (main stress on the stem syllable and most of them had fashionable connotations at the time of their entry into MHG round about 1200.

It is rather remarkable in the light of the relatively small number of lexical loans from Western Romance which reached the S Bavarian varieties of German, that at least three morphological loans in Sauris German are of Old French origin, namely the infinitive infix \[-iər\] – borrowed from the Old French infinitive suffix, the double suffix \[-a/-\] < Old French –erie and the Old French suffix –ley – originally the word ley < Latin legem (see Kluge s.v. –lei) “sort, kind” borrowed by Sauris German in the forms –la, –las, –na, –nas. Of these, the first two retained suffixal stress in German, thereby introducing a new prosodic stress scheme into the language for the first time, German having shifted the stress of earlier loans forward where necessary, to conform to the traditional Germanic stress pattern. Here again, it is strange that such a significant change was effected, even though the small number of lexical items involved with the suffixes and the rather low frequency of occurrence of the original items would not have led one to predict their potential for structural change.

However, the double suffix \[-a/-\] – \[-iər\] < Old French –erie, and the verbal infinitive suffix (< German infix) \[-iər\] – both represented new stress models and both became and remained productive in Sauris German. \[-a/-\] added a basic semantic content, a sociosemantic (deprecatory) connotation and a new nuance to the resources for forming deverbal nouns with certain verb-like features (in this case, duration or extension) to the “native” means already used in nominalizations, e.g., \[-a/-\] < \[-iər\] < \[-a/-\] < Old French –erie and the Old French suffix –ley – originally the word ley < Latin legem (see Kluge s.v. –lei) “sort, kind” borrowed by Sauris German in the forms –la, –las, –na, –nas. Of these, the first two retained suffixal stress in German, thereby introducing a new prosodic stress scheme into the language for the first time, German having shifted the stress of earlier loans forward where necessary, to conform to the traditional Germanic stress pattern. Here again, it is strange that such a significant change was effected, even though the small number of lexical items involved with the suffixes and the rather low frequency of occurrence of the original items would not have led one to predict their potential for structural change.

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Together with all the “foreign” loan material hitherto considered, the compound infinitive suffix \[-iər\] – \[-iər\], composed of Old French \[-iər\] + German –en, might even more legitimately have been dealt with under the notion of “wider network German” influence, since it certainly reached the “Pre-Saurians” via intervening German-speaking territory. It is only in this way that we can understand that apparently not a single genuine French verb with its infinitive suffix directly reached the “Pre-Saurians” before their migration.

Of the three Sauris German verbs which can with relative certainty be said to have this French suffix, two have stems from Late Latin \[^r\] – to try,” commoner form \[^r\] < Friul./lt.; and \[^r\] – “to purify, to squeeze out liquid from cheese,” alternative form \[^r\] < Friul.); and the third verb stem is without a doubt German, and is probably an old import from German hunting terminology, now part of general usage in both Sauris and standard German: \[^g\] – “halbieren,” originally perhaps “to split the spoils of the hunt two ways,” now “to halve,” “to share equally between
two persons." In spite of the paucity of items in Sauris German with this Old French stressed form of the Romance infinitive suffix type, it seems to have represented the initial structural breakthrough which set the pattern for the South Romance infinitive suffixes in Sauris German which followed upon the settlement. Ever since, these have provided the chief morphological device for the easy access of this German dialect to Friulian and Italian verbs, whether for sporadic switching or for borrowing and integrating purposes. The suffixes are: [-'e:rn] for S Romance verbs whose infinitive suffixes derive from (Latin) forms in *-ere and *-ere; and [-i:rn] (n.b. not [-iarn]) for *-ire verbs. The use of [-'e:rn] for the *-are conjugation (elsewhere in linguistic island German one finds [-a:rn] for *-are) has interesting implications for the historical phonology of certain Romance dialects in northern Italy and the geography of pre-Saurian contacts with them.

For the sake of completeness it should be mentioned that some verbal loans from S Romance do have the simple German infinitive suffix in -en. For the most part they are of early date (pre-settlement or immediately post-settlement), e.g. [vantsn] - "to be left over" (compare lt. avanzare, Friul. vanzà), or of onomatopoeic origin, like [tsa'jklőpfn] - "to explode" (compare Friul. sclopà, lt. scoppiare), or they are Sauris German verbal formations based on loaned substantives: [tʃainan] - "to have supper," based on [tʃain] - "supper" < cena, rather than directly < cener; or, more recently, [varkhn] - "to run wildly (of cows)" based on the Friul. noun varc - "a stride, leap."

It should come as no surprise to discover that, in addition to the loans from Latin of common Germanic and Old High German age, which are part of the common heritage of any German dialect, Sauris German inherited an uninterrupted supply of specifically N Italian loans beginning with the arrival of Bavarian settlers at what was to become (and remain for many centuries) the linguistic frontier area between the German- and S Romance-speaking worlds, which ran from west to east along the mountain peaks to the south of the Pustertal and the Lesachtal. This very roughly valid observation should not, however, lead us to forget the side valleys, like Kals, which remained partly Ladin-speaking to the north of this line until well after the Pre-Saurians left the Lesachtal for the Lumiei valley, or the Gadertal, a side valley on the south side of the German-speaking Pustertal at Bruneck, which remains Ladin-speaking to the present day and is close to the old homeland of the Pre-Saurians. Nor should we forget German-speaking S Tirol to the south of the main watershed of the Alps, or the smaller German settlements like the 7 and 13 Communes in the Veneto (nor indeed the linguistic islands established only a short time later, like Sauris and Sappada).

The pre-settlement S Romance loans in Sauris German and in related Bavarian dialects were a natural consequence of this borderland situation. The breadth and depth of penetration of the loaned material varied, from the whole upper German area (including German Switzerland) to just one or two local S Bavarian dialects. Some idea of their scope can be gained from the following brief selection (for a fuller account see Denison, 1992a: 147-9): [bʊ'teige] - "shop," [kʃfr] - "camphor," [kʰntr] - "cupsboard," [ko'pe] (compare lt. capo) - "rich miser," [o'țdar] - "notary," [pa'lemt] - "polenta," [pfa'vn] (< favōnius > German Föhln) - "to snow lightly," [votsə] - "face" (pej.), [vilgə] (< vigilia) - "eve of feast," "festivity," [vilg] - "to give to collection during church service," [tsi'gl] - (< stella) - "pail"; only in Sauris, e.g. [gapenst] - (< dispensa) - "church dispensation," [neiŋkə] - "not even," [mi've] - (< Veneto amigo/-a) - "friend," [pfe'asn] - "to crisp-fry (bacon)." There is good reason to consider all or most of these to be pre-settlement loans. Many of them are broadly datable on the basis of phonetic substitution regularities. Hence initial Latin and Romance /f/- is represented in the oldest loans by present Sauris German /v/-, subsequently by /pʃ/- and in later post-settlement loans by /ʃ/-:

Latin /w-/ (> Romance /ve-/ in early loans by present Sauris German /b-/, in subsequent loans by /v-/

When the founding fathers (and mothers) arrived in Sauris in the second half of the thirteenth century, they were hence no strangers to (doubtless direct) contacts with Romance-speaking neighbors. Given the (relative) ease of communication from their old home westwards towards Brixen via the Lesach and Pustertal valleys (for this there is evidence in Sauris children's lore; see Denison, 1990), the move to the upper reaches of the Lumiei must have seemed, before new contacts were built up with Forni di Sopra and Ampezzo Carnico, like an isolation more severe than ever before.

The idea here advanced is that the period immediately following migration was of necessity a phase of relative cultural and social self-reliance and separateness, exactly the kind of conditions under which linguistic consolidation and maximalization of code structures, homogenization of repertoire and rule reorganization can take place. Our thesis is that this was the period when Sauris German had its best
chance of becoming a system linguist's language in its own right. In a sense it was similar to what some creolists have maintained happens when a pidgin becomes a creole. Settlers and their idioclists, though apparently all from the same area, seem not to have formed a single community before. As we shall see, some degree of idiolectal and dialectal diversity has indeed persisted up to the present. However, the most far-reaching consequences ensued, not because of the diversity which migrated, but because of the diversity which was left behind, as I tried to show in Denison, 1986, in respect of the phonology. After a general vowel shift which affected dialects (differentially) but left the prestige variety unchanged, plurilectal and pluriglossic speakers in Austria today, after some seven centuries of preternature by the community as a whole that the shift never took place, have psychosocially relocated the once phonemically distinct points of departure as mere register-conditioned variants.

So once again, as at the outset of the shift, in Austria [ˈaːdn] is more likely to be a prestigious realization of schaden – "to damage," than a dialectal realization of scheidem – "to part, diverge," and [ˈoːdn] is a dialectal or familiar realization of schaden. In Sauris, however, [ˈoːdn] is the only possible realization of /ʃoːdn/ - "to damage," [ˈaːdn] being the only possible realization of /ʃaːdn/ - "to part, diverge." In other words, after the separation from prestige variants there was no way back for Sauris German from phonemic distinctiveness towards sociophones. This is an illustration of the simple truth that "the same" is not the same in language, what makes it different being the different psychosocial situations of different communities and individuals.

At the same time as an independent phonology was consolidating itself (with basic semantic consequences) in Sauris, the community's new independence from embedding in the overall German linguistic environment was reflected in changes within the morphosyntactic structure, facilitated – even prompted – by seemingly chance convergences initially in the morphology. The changes to be illustrated here had their origins in pre-migration times, as comparison with other Bavarian dialects shows, but they were able fully to unfold and achieve "legitimate norm status" only under linguistic island conditions, aided and abetted in due course by convergent influence from Romance.

In standard German, auf(-) and an(-) have, even in their manifold metaphorical extensions, relatively distinct semantics throughout their functions (adverb, verbal – and secondarily nominal – prefix, preposition). As prepositions, they indicate something like (a) "upon" versus (b) "at, by, in contact with the side of." In basilectal Bavarian, however, the semantics of (a) and part of the area of (b) – "in contact with the side of" - appear to be covered by allophones of the preposition auf(-) (the meanings "at, by" being covered by other prepositions like bei, vor, neben), while allophones of an(-) continue in the functions of adverb and prefix.

This situation is to some extent obscured, not only by intrusions from the standard language, but also by the presence of a dialectal allophone of auf, in combination with certain masculine and neuter forms of the definite article, which looks like the corresponding allophone of an. Hence Viennese am Sessel corresponds to standard German auf (de)m Stuhl, an (de)m Stuhl and (for some speakers) also to standard German auf (de)n Stuhl, an (de)n Stuhl. That the synchronically underlying morpheme is Viennese auf is demonstrated by substituting a feminine noun or the indefinite article. No Viennese speaker says "an der ... for standard auf der ... or "[an an ...] for standard auf einem ... or auf einen ...

The probability that an is not (or was not) a basilectal Bavarian preposition is further strengthened by correspondences like Bavarian auf der Wand = standard an der Wand.

Sauris German thus inherited, like the other Bavarian linguistic islands, a set of allophones in this area of preposition plus definite article which was susceptible of further movement, and proceeded to develop and then consolidate a subsystem unique to Sauris, in which the feminine definite article singular selects the prepositional allomorph [aːn] for no directly obvious phonetic reason, as does the plural definite article (all genders) in the accusative. So in addition to [ame] (masc./neut.sincl.dat.) alongside [afn] (masc. sing. acc.) and [afs] – afs ais/af dɔx (neut. acc.), we have [ˈande] (fem. sing. acc.), [ˈandar] (fem. sing. dat.) and [ˈande] (plur. acc. all genders), alongside [afn] (plur. dat. all genders). This integrated morphonological system, in which [aːfde] and [aːfдар] are impossible sequences, leaves the single uncombined basic form [af] unaffected: [af’damdar ‘bi:ze] – "auf deiner Wiese," [af’daina’bize] – "auf deine Wiese," [af’daina ‘bi:zn] – "auf deine Wiesen," [af ‘dainn’bi:zn] – "auf deinen Wiesen." Substitution of [ˈaːn] for [af] would make the last four sequences ungrammatical.

The single Romance morpheme (lt., Friul. su) which covers a similar semantic space to the integrated single morpheme of Sauris German obviously constituted support for the unified semantics (though
not for the allomorphic complexity) in the developing plurilingualism of the community. Romance influence probably played a decisive part later in the now frequent (though not mandatory) use of the definite article in Sauris German together with the possessive adjectives, though here an originally quite unrelated accident of Sauris phonetic development provided material for a contributory semantic reinterpretation.

In the form [af daindar bi:ze] quoted above, it is possible for a plurilingual to re-interpret the second word (actually: “thy + phonetic elision (d) + declensional suffix reflecting the feminine gender of [bi:ze] – “meadow” and its static relationship to the preposition a) as the appropriate dative form of the feminine definite article ([dar]). By an incredible coincidence, all the possessive stem forms end in -r, both of which, before the common declensional suffix –(e)r, insert a transitional -d-; and by another coincidence possessive adjectival stem or declensional endings in -n and -me are homophonous with other bound allomorphs of the definite article paradigm. Therefore [mit daime hÖnte] is reinterpretable as “with thy (the) dog” (compare [mit(t) – “the dog”), [h’inter inzarme ’haOze] as “behind our (the) house” (compare [h’interme ’haOze] – “behind the house,” [h’inter inzardar ’bi:ze] – “behind our (the) meadow” – and similarly with [a’irdar, ’airme] – “your (the),” [i’a:rdar, a:rdar] – “their (the), her (the).” If we now remember that in MHG the use of the definite article before possessive adjectives (as in Italian and Friulian predominantly), though not common, was not unknown, it is not difficult to see how the above syntagmas might be seen as word–order alternatives of Romance–type sequences like [’mi(t)me ‘dain hÖnte] – “with the (thy) dog), it. con il tuo cane (and Friul. correspondingly). In present-day Sauris German both types, [’mi(t)me ‘dain hÖnte] and [’mit daime hÖnte] coexist. The general fieldwork ethic of refraining – so far as possible – from interfering with the object of study has prevented direct questioning of informants as to whether they perceive the presence of a definite article in the second variant or not.

Re–analysis in the opposite direction – the extraction and generalization of a nonexistent preposition from a declined (dative) form of the definite article – certainly took place (or was under way) in Bavarian before the Sauris migration and became a regular element of Sauris German nominal syntax. In Sauris and elsewhere in the area of Bavarian settlement (Carinthia, for instance) the MHG sequence in(dë)me (*in:me > in:) “in the” before masculine and neuter nouns) fell together with the prepositionless dative definite article (masculine and neuter) dëme in a single form (in Sauris: [’ime]); so that a re–analysis of [ar ã ts ime zu:ne gazo:t] – er hat es dem Sohn gesagt – “he said it to the son” as er hat es im Sohn gesagt – “he said it in the son” became possible, and this was generalized (by analogy) to the feminine: Alongside a) [s gëlt star indar kårhçe ge:bm] – “he gave the money in church” we now have b) [s gëlt ãt–ar indar to:xfar ge:bm] – “he gave the money to the daughter.” Here there is no directly etymological justification for the first syllable of [indar] as 3rd pers. sing. def. art. fem., but the derivational ambiguity is again present in the plural – all genders – [in], analyzable both as etym. in and etym. in(dë)n (+* [in] > [in]). In view of the dialectal Bavarian evidence that this development had its origins in pre–Saurian Bavarian, it is possible to see postsettlement Romance influence in Sauris (in the shape of the definite article with a + article in Italian and Friulian) only in the phase of total grammatical institutionalization in Sauris German – whatever the role of Romance may have been in the genesis of Bavarian (see E. and M. Mayerthaler, 1990). But note also the prepositional dative with zu in familiar South German hat er zu mir gesagt (not however with geben) which, compared with hat er mir gesagt, also represents a step in the direction of an analytic case system.

In the period of linguistic consolidation we have been describing, early post–settlement lexical loans from the surrounding Romance area were integrated morphologically, especially in the formation of the plural: [’tsa:re] < Saura (a documented early form of “Saurus”), [p’aurn] < Forn(i) (these are possibly pre–settlement forms), [aarante(n)] “orange(s),” [’ple:re(n)] – “funnel(s)” (< Carnian Friul. plera), [’kaise (n)] – “black slug(s)” (< Carn. Friul. caessa – “snail slug,” fem. of cai – “snail”), [’kle:ve(n)] – “slope(s)” (< Carn. Friul. eleva), [’pa](k)O:dn/pa ]kO:rm] – a house name in Sauris di Sotto, etym. bei des Kursoren – “at the Cursor’s house” (the cursor(e) being in former days the official messenger of the village administration), [’vo:td/’vei e] – “voice(s)” (< Carn. Friul. vouš, analogical umlaut in Sauris German plural, as already in “native” items) – and many more similarly integrated loans.

Nevertheless, homogenization tendencies in Sauris German did not by any means eliminate free variation or idiolectal and dialectal variation in the community. In particular, Sauris di Sopra (with Velt) shows dialectal diversity vis–à-vis the other parts of the community, most clearly in the phonology, e.g., S Sopra [-ö–] versus [-ü–] elsewhere, before [–r + cons.]: [’khörçe] vs [’kårhçe] – “church”, [’börj t
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Not a few of the alternatives quoted are well documented (and in some cases coexist within small communities) in the old homeland of the Sauris settlers. There are also certain narrowly identificatory historical markers of the Sauris population as a whole (idioms of great age and in some cases of extremely restricted distribution in the old homeland, such as [zist/gro:de ıkha:stn/po:0r] – “only a slight dusting of snow has fallen,” lit. “just a cat-track has come” or [d ist net a:lne] – “she is pregnant”, lit. “not alone.”

The above examples should suffice to show how, in natural languages without written codification or standardization, convergence and divergence follow hard on the heels of each other, go hand in hand, or – better are often different facets of the same developments. All takes place inside the heads of speakers who are first and foremost responding to the changing circumstances and communicative requirements of their psychological and social environments. So long as the means available and sufficient to meet these requirements still stemmed in the main from the largely (though, as we have seen, by no means exclusively) German linguistic repertoire of the Sauris community, change took place broadly within the confines of that tradition. As soon as Friulian, and more especially Italian, were subject to precisely such a necessity.

Had “interference” assaulted Sauris German only in its substance, this could perhaps have contained the effects within a differentially affected spectrum of registers, absorbing large amounts of Romance structure and lexis in the “higher” registers and far less in the “lower,” that is, the more locally focused registers (family, farming, etc.). English succeeded in this after 1066 in the face of intense Romance pressure and after a subsequently reversed bilingual transition period. Sauris German succeeded, improbably, for centuries, and Denison (1981, 1992a) quotes texts spontaneously recorded and transcribed which document the huge linguistic distance between the most and least familiar registers and the vast amounts of Romance substance and structure incorporated (plus code-switching) in the most affected variants. However, it seems that in Sauris the point of no return on the road to total language shift has been reached now, when, within the space of just three or four decades, Sauris German has all but surrendered the most crucial of its assets for survival: its function as the variety chiefly selected for the acculturation of preschool children (whose numbers have in any case become so reduced that the biological survival of the community is in doubt).

It is ironic that at precisely the time when competence in Sauris German (in the most rudimentary sense) is threatened, previous diatopic restrictions on its use (for reasons of prestige) no longer inhibit its remaining speakers. It has been introduced on a voluntary experimental basis into school, for instance. Gardner–Chloros, 1991, notes a similar readiness among Alsatan dialect speakers to set aside earlier domain inhibitions at a time when the language is ever less commonly being acquired by today’s children. Sadly, the lifting of domain restrictions here too is almost certainly insufficient to offset the acquisition deficit. The resulting competence deficit leads to a drastically decreased awareness in younger speakers of the broad structural and lexical characteristics of the original “native” strand of their pluriglossic inheritance. If we wished to give a meaning to a term like

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“ethnolinguistic shift,” this might be it.

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