Language

Sayings

From Chris Burkart
Mom had a couple of sayings that she translated for me, as she used to say them in German:

"Might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb" (if I was going to get into trouble, I might as well go for the gusto, because small or big crime, I would be in trouble either way).

"You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's (pig's) ear."

From David Scheid
"Wherever you may be, let your Wind blow free!"

This was reportedly said by my father's maternal grandmother - Don't know the German version - it was said in dialect.

From Vera Beljakova-Miller
I know both sayings, but I learnt them in english schools (not in German school or Russian course), so that means that either they are English sayings or international sayings.

"You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear" I believe comes from Shakespeare. Russians are keen on Shakespeare and adopt many saying from him, then maybe the Germans heard it and translated it - then retranslated it back into english thinking they are Russian or German sayings.

Here we need the input of a language professor.

Words of Endearment, Frustration & Reprimand

From Gary Less
Now that I am on a Schafkopf kick (German card game), it reminded me of the fact that I was called that a number of times by my father whenever I did something dumb or stupid as a kid. There were a number of other names that would slip out on other occasions of this type. For example:

Words of reprimand:

du schlamassel - I never was sure what this meant, the German dictionary says it means "mess"
du schameel (phonetic spelling) - I didn't know what this meant either but it came across as not very

complimentary. I could not find it in the German dictionary. Perhaps someone can define it.

du schafkopf - sheeps head

du kleina schlingel - This was one of my Mom's favorite expressions, it means "you little rascal".

Words of frustration:

I hope I am not offending someone but both Ma and Pa (that is what we called them) had words of frustration when something didn't go their way. The English translation doesn't make much sense.

henne wetter - hen weather

donner wetter - thunder weather

drei tausend - three thousand

On occasion stronger words were used by Pa, but I won't repeat them here for fear of censorship.

Words of endearment:

schatz - darling or treasure

liebling - darling

These words were heard a lot when Pa was talking to Ma, which to me is an indication that they truly loved each other.

Please don't get me wrong, both of my parents were kind loving people that thought the world of their kids. They both immigrated from the Volhynia area and were hard working farmers with six children to raise during the depression years in Nebraska.

Pa's mother died when he was an infant. His father soon remarried and he was raised by a strict and cruel stepmother. It was said that she kept the food locked away in the pantry from the children. The oldest brother was so angry at that lock that he took a knife and cut it away so the smaller children could get proper food to eat. Pa always told us that he would never treat his children the way that his stepmother treated him and he never did. The times we were called a schlamassel or a schlameel, we probably deserved it.

From Valerie Renner Ingram

As we were growing up, German was the language of the house. If a German relative came over to visit, and mom offered them something to eat, and they said no...she would reply (phonetic spelling here) "lek katz im aush" (which meant, go lick a cat's butt). Everyone always laughed at her sense of humor...

As we kids got older and UNDERSTOOD what she was saying, we would think of answers to use against this remark of hers. About 7 years ago, her sister made her first trip to the United States from Germany for a visit. We had just returned from picking up "Aunt Dora" from the airport, and mom was running around trying to make her feel welcome. Aunt Dora knew that none of us grown children spoke alot of German anymore, but that we could easily understand it. Mom asked if I wanted to stay and eat dinner with them, and I replied "No"....her response of "lec katz im aush" followed and Aunt Dora was stunned! Before I could stop myself I had answered "aw...hund's furtze"...(oh, dog's farts).

My poor aunt just about fell out of her chair!....She came over to me and said "NO, no, no,.....my last name is Holtzfurtner...not hund's furtze!!!!" She thought I was trying to pronounce her last name!!!

Kinship Terms

From Roland M. Wagner

As I read old letters in the newspapers I often find that kinship terms were used when addressing or referring to someone; in some cases the translation of these terms is not obvious. In the German colonies in Russia dialect patterns in local terminology sometimes differed from that which is shown in standard German dictionaries today.

Most of the variations in kinship terminology seem to focus on the collateral lines -- aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews.

Standard dictionaries list the following terms for "cousin" -- der Vetter, der Cousin (die Cousine), and die Base. "Uncle" is shown as der Onkel, and "aunt" as die Tante.

However, in my dad's dialect (from Rastadt and Muenchen in the Beresan), he always referred to his uncles as "Vetter" (pronounced like "Fedda"), and aunts as "Base." Cousins were collectively referred to as "Cousine," or individually by gender as "Vetterle" (a male cousin, lit. a "little uncle"), or "Baesle" (a female cousin, lit. a "little aunt").

I am curious if others on this list remember how kinship terms were used in their families. What variations do you recall?

From Don Wolf

The Schwabe community in N. Dak. where I grew up used both Tante and Boss as terms for aunts. My mother always referred to her sisters as my Tantes, but referred to her aunts as Boss. Uncles were Onkel. I do not remember to terms for cousins.

From Valerie Renner Ingram

My father was from Speier, and my mother from Rumania...both of them referred to not only Uncles and Aunts in these terms, but male friends that they had were referred to as "Vetter" Hannes...or whatever his name was, and "Base" Anna....

It was very confusing to us as we were growing up because we never really knew who was REALLY related to us, and who was just a friend of the family!!

From Allyn Brosz

I grew up in Hutchinson County in southeastern South Dakota. My dad's side of the family were all Schwobs (i.e., Swabians) from Bessarabia. My mom's side of the family were all Glueckstalers from Kassel and Neudorf. My

Dad used "Onkel" and "Tante" for his direct aunts and uncles. It seems to me it was always appended at the end of the name, making it one word as in "Jakobonkel" and "Emmatante," rather than Onkel Jakob and Tante Emma. My Dad did also use "Baesle" for his parents' cousins. I remember my Mom using "Vetter" and "Bas" as appellations for her uncles, again appended at the end of their names (e.g., Stefanvetter and Emiliebas).

From Sean McGinnis
The only one of which I am aware is "Wes" used at the end of an woman's name to denote "Aunt." Thus: Annawes was Aunt Anna etc. (Pronouced of course: Annaves). Sounds similar to your "Base" actually.

This would be the Katharinenstadt dialect, if there is such a thing.

From Roland M. Wagner
Don, Valerie, Allyn, and Sean, vielen Dank for sharing what you remember about kinship terms used in your families.

There are some interesting variations that translators should be aware of, esp. involving terms for aunts, uncles, and cousins. "Vetter" can mean either "uncle" or "cousin" (and, as Valerie pointed out, it was even applied to friends in some cases). Aunts were referred to either as "Tante" or "Base" ("Wes" is an obvious variant).

Tim Kloberdanz gives a good overview in his master's thesis, which I am supplementing a bit:

	Standard German	**German-Russian Variants**
Uncle	Onkel	Vetter; Onkel
Aunt	Tante	Base; Wees; Weesja; Dande
Male Cousin	Cousin; Vetter	Halbbruder; Vetterle
Female Cousin	Cousine; Base	Halbschwester; Baesle

Terminology for other relatives (nieces, nephews, siblings, etc.) seems to have been pretty standard in the German colonies, except for affinals (in-laws).

Two of you mentioned an interesting pattern of putting the terms at the end of the name -- "Annawes," "Emmatante," etc. This differs from the way it was done in my family, where terms were always used before the name -- e.g., aunt Magdalena was "Bas Machdlena." Valerie also mentioned that in her family, they had "Vetter Hannes," "Base Anna," etc. Valerie's family came from Speier, and my grandfolks also came from the Beresan colonies, so perhaps that was the predominant pattern in that area.

I recall that it was customary when referring to someone, to put his surname or kin term first, preceded by an article -- e.g., "uncle Ludwig" would be "d' Vedda Ludwig"; my grandfather Adam Wagner was "d' Wachna Adam."

Any other memories about variants in linguistic patterns would be appreciated.