Milroy and Milroy (1985) demonstrate convincingly that social networks can play a role in language change: dense social networks tend to impede language change, while weaker social networks tend to spread or even accelerate change. This model has very rarely been applied to the study of language change in Texas German (TxG). In this paper, we therefore discuss the changing lexicon of New Braunfels German (NBG), the best-studied dialect of TxG, in an effort to determine the role of social networks in this development. We focus specifically on English lexical borrowings in NBG, which have increased steadily: Eikel (1954), based on data collected in the 1930s and 1940s, reports relatively few English loan words, while there are more English loan words in Gilbert (1972), based on data collected in the 1960s, and numerous English loan words in Boas (2009), based on data collected since 2001.

We contend that changing social networks played a crucial role in this increase. When Eikel’s data was collected, NBG speakers participated largely in dense social networks with multiple ties. At the time when Gilbert’s data was collected, their social networks were not as dense, and many of the old multiple ties had vanished. Today, the old social networks have largely dissolved entirely, as speakers of NBG die or leave their homes, thus contributing to the increase in English loanwords in NBG. This proposal is supported by the greater resistance to English loan words in Texas Alsatian, another dialect of TxG. The description of the Texas Alsatian community in Roesch (2012) indicates that speakers of Texas Alsatian have denser social networks with more multiple ties than speakers of NBG, whence this greater resistance to English lexical influence.

Keywords: social networks, language change.