In my paper I will focus on a syntactic phenomenon which is considered typical for Swiss German: the so-called verb doubling construction (cf. Lötscher 1993) which affects the motion verbs gaa ('to go') and choo ('to come') as well as the raising verbs laa ('to let') and afa ('to begin'). In this type of construction, a reduced variant of the verb is repeated before the infinitive, as illustrated in the following example:

(1) [dann] fangt s lis afa schmelze¹

[then] begins the ice begin to melt

' [then] the ice begins to melt'

However, the different verbs differ with respect to their geographic distributions: While the doubling of gaa is obligatory all over German-speaking Switzerland and the doubling of choo in the western part, the two other verbs only show optional doubling which is restricted to western Switzerland (cf. Glaser & Frey 2011). So far there have been a number of theoretical accounts dealing with the explanation primarily of the motion verb construction (cf. Schönenberger & Penner 1995, Brandner & Salzmann 2011), but apart from some smaller surveys (cf. Glaser & Frey 2011), there are still desiderata especially regarding the verbs laa and afa.

As for the diachronic development, Lötscher (1993) mentions two characteristics that favoured the emergence of the verb doubling construction in Swiss German: the increasing word order in verbal complexes with modals (i.e. modals preceding the governed infinitive) and the availability of a phonetically light, i.e. reduced infinitive (as in laa and afa compared to lassen and anfangen). Based on these assumptions, we would expect to find high correlations or even inclusion relations between the mentioned features in synchronic dialect data (e.g. the form afa as a doubling element only occurring in places where it is also used as a reduced infinitive). While Lötscher’s account seems plausible, the relationship of these different factors has never been investigated on a large empirical basis.

In order to provide a comprehensive analysis of verb doubling in Swiss German and its diachronic development I will use data from the “Syntactic Atlas of German-Speaking Switzerland” (SADS, cf. Bucheli & Glaser 2002) as primary database, which will be supplemented by data from older sources like the “Linguistic Atlas of German-speaking Switzerland” (SDS, cf. Hotzenköcherle 1962-1997) or transcriptions of Wenker questionnaires from German-speaking Switzerland. In my empirical analysis I will at first compare the geographic distributions of different doubling verbs and the aforementioned related phenomena taken from the SADS database and check for co-occurrences. As first analyses show, there generally is a high similarity between the geographic patterns of the different phenomena. However, there are still many

¹ As a-fange ('to begin') is a particle verb and the construction in example (1) alternates with [dann] fangt s lis a schmelze, one could argue that not the whole verb is subject to doubling, but only the element -fa. However, afa/afange is generally regarded as a doubling verb in the literature. For a discussion of that matter cf. Andres (2011: 10f.) and Lötscher (1993: 181).
`exceptions`, i.e. places where for example *afa* is used as a doubling element while it doesn't occur as a reduced infinitival form. It will be argued that this can be accounted for if we consider geography as an explanatory factor by not only looking at the survey locations as discrete entities, but rather taking the geographic vicinity into account.

The synchronic analyses of co-occurrence relations between different SADS phenomena will be supplemented by an analysis of the socio-demographic variation. This type of analysis is possible due to the fact that multiple informants at each survey site with varying social backgrounds were included in the SADS survey. Moreover, data from older surveys such as the SDS or recently transcribed Wenker sentences from some 500 locations in German-speaking Switzerland will be included in the analyses in order to shed light on the nature of the verb doubling construction and its diachronic development.

References: