

# 10 Unique and Fun Swiss German Words



Whether you're going to Switzerland to study or just to travel around for a while, this Alpine nation has exciting things to offer students and travelers alike—including some fun and unique slang!

LAURAHARKER

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## 1. Z'Nüni (Second breakfast)

In Switzerland, the average working day runs from 7am – 5pm, which is 10 full hours. To take it down to a more manageable 8 hours, there are two hours of breaks throughout the day. You can't have your [Znüni](#) at any old time – it's meant to be eaten at around 9 a.m: Z= at, [Nüni](#) = nine.

The [Znüni](#) is often seen as a second breakfast, and most people will simply have a strong cup of coffee to wake them up and a small snack to keep them going till lunchtime. One very popular early morning snack for most people in Switzerland is the [Gipfeli](#). This is a Swiss croissant—they taste just like French croissants, but are heavier in texture.

As [Znüni](#) is a uniquely Swiss German slang term, there isn't a German equivalent. However, if you're in Germany and need a break, you'd just use the word Pause (break).

Wo nehmen wir **Z'Nüni**?

(Where are we going for our second breakfast?)

## 2. Merci Vilmal (Thanks a lot)

Switzerland doesn't just have one official language. In fact, it has four—German, French, Italian and Romansh. The majority of Swiss speak German on an everyday basis but the other three languages have had a huge influence on Swiss German. Just take the slang phrase of [merci vilmal](#) (thanks a lot), for example.

As you can see, [merci vilmal](#) is a mix of French and German. The French word for thank you, *merci*, is used alongside [vilmal](#). This [vilmal](#) comes from the German for “a lot,” but you'll probably have seen it spelled as [viel mal](#). That's because viel mal is the *Hochdeutsch* (standard German) version—how you'll see it written in the Duden dictionary. [Vilmal](#) is the Swiss German slang version!

Ich habe es schon, **merci vilmal**!

(I already have it, thanks a lot!)

## 3. Hamburger (A soldier)

In English a hamburger is something you'd order from McDonald's or Burger King. The same is true if you order a hamburger in Germany, but in German a Hamburger can also refer to a person from the city of Hamburg.

Switzerland also uses those two meanings of Hamburger, but it adds in a third meaning as well. When it's used in Swiss German slang, a [Hamburger](#) refers to a soldier who has just completed his or her first year of basic military training.

You don't need to pronounce the Swiss Hamburger any differently than you would if you were using it in Germany. This pronunciation guide shows you how it's done.

Ist er **Hamburger**?

(Has he completed his military training?)

## 4. Abeleere! (Drink up!)

Every country has its own set of words and phrases that are heavily linked to its drinking culture. And Switzerland is certainly no different!

If you're ever in a Swiss bar and someone gives you a shot or a beer and tells you to [abeleere](#), they are telling you to drink up! It's basically the Swiss version of “chug” or “down in one.” The standard German equivalent would be *absacken*.

The word [abeleere](#) sounds like it comes from the verb *ableeren*, which is chiefly used in Bavaria. It means to empty something, and you'd use it in the context of emptying a plate.

**Abeleere!** Wir müssen gehen.

(Drink up! We need to go.)

## 5. Lööli (Loser)

Just like every language has terms that are linked to its drinking culture, each country has slang words that poke fun at people. [Lööli](#) is one Swiss slang term that people use in a lighthearted way to make fun of each other. The closest translation in English is “loser,” and the standard German version would be *Verlierer*.

The word [Lööli](#) actually has a completely different meaning as well—it's the unofficial name for the “L” sticker that learner drivers stick onto their car.

Ach, du **Lööli**!

(Oh, you loser!)

## 6. Ich zäigä wo dä Bartli dä moscht holt (I'll show you who's boss)

Rather than just one single slang word, we've got a whole phrase here! [Ich zäigä wo dä Bartli dä moscht holt](#) is literally translated as “I'll show you where Bartli goes to get the cider.”

But, of course, that isn't really what it means—it's usually translated as “I'll show you who's boss.” This slang phrase is also used in Germany, but there you'd hear it as *Ich zeige dir wo Barthel den Most holt*. You might want to use this phrase at work if someone new starts.

Linguists can't come to an agreement about where this phrase comes from. However, the majority believe that it originated in the 17th century.

## 7. Schmiär (Policeman / Cop)

In the U.S., the main slang term for a policeman is “cop.” Over in Switzerland, their slang word for Polizist (policeman) is [Schmiär](#). This is very different from the German slang word, which is *Bulle*. When you translate that one literally, you get “bull.”

Unlike the German slang word, the Swiss German [Schmiär](#) doesn't mean “bull.” In actual fact, it's derived from the Swiss word [Schmiäri](#). This is the name for the grease that mechanics and engineers use to lubricate machinery.

Er ist seit zwei Jahren **Schmiär**.

(He's been a policeman for two years.)

## 8. Bünzli (Narc / Goody two shoes)

We have lots of slang terms for people who religiously stick to the rules no matter what, such as words like “narc” and “goody two shoes.” The Swiss have a word with a similar meaning—[Bünzli](#).

If you ask a Swiss person to describe a [Bünzli](#), they'll probably say that a [Bünzli](#) has lots of garden gnomes and is constantly peeking out from behind their curtains to see what the neighbors are up to. They're the first people to report any suspicious goings on to the police, no matter how small the issue is!

Again, it's hard to determine where the word originates from, but most people think it's based on the Swiss last name [Bünzli](#). Franz Bünzli, a Swiss MP from the 19th century, is probably the most famous person with the last name.

Mach das nicht, der **Bünzli** von nebenan wird sehen.

(Don't do that, the narc next door will see.)

## 9. Fränkli (A Swiss franc)

When you're out shopping and spending money in Switzerland, you'll probably come across the word [Fränkli](#). This is just a nickname for the Swiss franc.

In standard German, a franc is called a *Franken*. [Fränkli](#) is simply the diminutive version of this word—to make a diminutive in Swiss German, you simply add “-li” to the end of a word. In this case, an umlaut has also been added to the “a.”

I've previously mentioned that Swiss German has many influences from Swiss French and Swiss Italian, and this works in the other direction as well. Many linguists believe that the word [Fränkli](#) has influenced the Swiss Italian nickname for a franc—*franchetto*. That's because “-etto” is added to create diminutives in Swiss Italian.

Darf ich dir ein **Frankli** borgen?

(May I borrow a franc?)

## 10. Im Fass Haa (To Understand)

Do you have everything I've said in the barrel?

Wait, what?!

That's the final Swiss slang phrase: [im Fass haa](#), meaning “to understand.” But it literally translates as “to have in the barrel.”

The standard German version is *im Fass haben*, but this phrase is hardly used in this way in Germany. It's very much a Swiss thing.

**Haa du im Fass?**

(Do you understand?)

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