

Dialect divergence at the state border: the case of Alsatian and German Alemannic*

Peter Auer, Germanistische Linguistik, Universität Freiburg

Abstract: This paper summarizes recent research on the German/French border in the Upper Rhine Region, where the state border cuts across a traditional Alemannic dialect area. It is argued that the present-day divergence of the dialects is due to different repertoire types and different language ideologies in France and Germany, which counteract the positive effects of border permeability. Despite this general tendency for the dialects to diverge at the state border, it is also shown that traditional regional affiliations with and orientations to Alsace continue to impact the speed of dialect levelling on the German side.

1. Introduction

When nationally defined standard language spaces overlay and cross-cut an older dialect continuum (as they do in the case of the western borders of Germany with the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and France¹), these language spaces compete - a competition that can take on different shapes and can be resolved in different ways. The crucial question is: Do speakers construct the state border as more relevant, hence following the standard language model of the modern European nation state, or do they give more weight to the trans-national dialect space? Under the regiment of the modern European nation state, the first (allegiance to the national language) seems unavoidable, but it is less clear whether the older dialect spaces still have (or even regain) relevance today.

Looking back at the last 50 years, it can certainly be observed that the inner-European state borders have become more and more permeable, and indeed next to invisible in the Schengen treaty zone; at the same time, there has been strong political and economic support for the creation of transnational regions. These developments might have led to a reevaluation of transnational dialect zones as indexes of trans-border regional identities, and, on the structural level, one might even hypothesize that the dialects on both sides of the border converge as a consequence of increasing trans-border contacts. However, as will be shown in this article, the reality is different: the national borders increasingly become linguistic borders, i.e. the former continuum of dialect is broken up and the dialects diverge. The impact of the border is due to the fact that the national standard languages exert their power even more today than in the heydays of national ideology and that they entail a sharp division of repertoires and language ideologies.

In this contribution, I will discuss this process with reference to past and on-going research in the *Forschungsstelle Sprachvariation in Südwestdeutschland* (<http://portal.uni-freiburg.de/sdd/fsbw>) of the University of Freiburg. The object of this research is the French-German border in the Upper Rhine area, which today coincides with the river Rhine. The Rhine separates the French region Alsace (nowadays politically fused into the *région Grand Est*) and the German region Baden (part of the former Grand Duchy of Baden, since 1952 fused with Württemberg into the *Land Baden-Württemberg*).

The political and linguistic history of the region west of the Rhine in particular is complex (see

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¹ Cf. Auer (2013) for further references. The southern borders with Austria and Switzerland represent a different situation as the standard language is German on both sides of the border. For the northern Danish/German border, see Fredsted (2016) and Höder (2019).

Huck 2015). Alsace has always been located at the linguistic divide between the Romance and the Germanic-speaking part of Europe, but until the 17th century, it was clearly located on the German-speaking side; indeed, it was one of the centers of Old and Middle High German text production. From the Thirty Years' War onward, however, France increasingly gained control through various successful military campaigns, and integrated Alsace more and more into the French absolutistic state. This led to increasing bilingualism among the educated classes which was enhanced by the French revolution. Nevertheless, the language spoken by the lower classes remained the (mostly Alemannic) Alsatian dialect, which must have been very similar to the dialects spoken on the eastern side of the Rhine over the centuries.² After the defeat of France in the Franco-German war of 1870/71, Alsace (and Lorraine) became German, and (particularly written) standard German started to play a more important role again, without replacing French in official contexts. It can be assumed that written standard German also spread to the lower classes during this time, due to compulsory schooling in German. From 1918 onward, Alsace has been under French sovereignty (with the exception of the years under German occupation from 1940-1944). While French was brutally sanctioned during the German occupation, the pendulum swung into the opposite direction after 1945. In the post-war years, the French government followed a harsh anti-German language policy which led to the almost total elimination of standard German from public life, and in the long run, from the linguistic repertoires of the Alsatians. Today, German is taught in schools as a second language, but the only official language is French, while the dialects (*Elsässischditsch*) are considered one of the regional languages of France.

2. Dialect developments

The dialects on both sides of the Rhine are well-documented. For the pre-war situation, two indirect surveys are available; Wenker's *Sprachatlas des Deutschen Reichs*, for which data in the area were collected around 1895, and a similar questionnaire-based and largely unpublished survey conducted by Friedrich Maurer in 1941-2 in Baden and Alsace. The dialects of conservative speakers were again surveyed directly in the 1950s-70s in the framework of two regional dialect atlas projects (the *Atlas linguistique et ethnographique de l'Alsace* (ALA) and the *Südwestdeutsche Sprachatlas* (SSA)). In 2012-14, a further study was conducted with socially stratified samples of 6-8 speakers per location in 43 villages and small towns on both sides of the Alsatian (French)/German border (see Auer, Breuninger & Pfeiffer 2015, 2017). This study included elicited data (questionnaire answers) as well as spontaneous interview speech. The interviews were conducted in Alsatian and French in Alsace and in regional German in Germany. Interviewees were recruited among (self-declared) speakers of the dialect, born and raised in the location where the interview took place; in Alsace, this excluded French speakers of the 'interior' as well as inhabitants of Alsatian family background in which Alsatian was no longer spoken. On the German side, no competence in the 'traditional' dialects was required to participate in the study, but that any kind of dialect would do.

The dialectological developments are easily summarized. In pre-war times no or very little dialect levelling seems to have occurred among the Alemannic dialects on either side of the Rhine, let alone across the Rhine. The repertoires were diglossic, with German (east of the Rhine) and French and German (west of the Rhine) as the H-varieties and Alemannic as the L-variety.

The dynamics that had produced the then valid dialect patterns in space were two-fold. On the one hand, northern innovations had over a long period moved south; their southern extension is today visible in the numerous isoglosses running in east-west direction as they are shown in the dialect atlases. As Alsace was the more innovative region over centuries (particularly with its cultural and economic center Strasbourg), the innovations often spread further south west of the Rhine than in the

² In a small northern part of Alsace, Franconian dialects are spoken, just as in the corresponding German dialect areas across the state border.

east. In some regions this made the Rhine coincide with the isoglosses. On the other hand, there were some innovations originating from Alsace which moved eastward. These innovations crossed the Rhine but did not proceed far. (Examples for both types of patterning will be discussed below.) Both dynamics led to the general view held in pre-war German dialectology that the Rhine at this time was not a linguistic border (cf. Maurer 1942; Ochs 1939). Only in very exceptional cases did the Rhine divide the area linguistically.³ The recent survey shows that the Alsatian dialects have undergone very little (phonological⁴) changes in post-war times. Some linguistic homogenization seems to have taken place due to the loss of geographically isolated, very narrow-reach features and the spread of the corresponding more wide-spread forms. Since standard German has no place in the repertoire of the speakers, levelling toward the German standard was obviously excluded.⁵ While the Alsatian dialects can therefore be said to be very conservative, there is an on-going process of language shift from Alsatian to French. Even in the border villages investigated, it was not always possible to recruit Alsatian-speaking interviewees in the age group 35 and younger. Hence, Alsatian has by and large remained unchanged but might become obsolescent soon.

On the German side things are quite different. The Alemannic dialects have been subject to massive dialect levelling. As everywhere in southern Germany, the traditional diglossic situation between dialect and standard has become diaglossic, i.e. there is a continuum of forms between dialect and standard (cf. Auer 2005). The dialects are alive, but speakers hardly opt for the traditional forms on this continuum, but resort to regional dialectal or even regional standard ways of speaking; non-regionalized standard German is also mostly avoided. For all the phonological variables investigated in the survey, the questionnaire data documented a more traditional dialect than the spontaneous speech data, which means that, often, the older dialectal forms are still well-known, but much less used. Older speakers are more conservative than younger speakers. All these observations point in the same direction: The dialects are changing, converging towards the (local) standard or at least a regional dialect, which in most cases is closer to the standard than the traditional dialect.

As a consequence, the dialects diverge massively at the state border today. The divergence is due to the conservatism of the Alsatian dialects and the huge influence of standard and standardised (or regiolectal) forms on the dialects on the German side. There is little reason to believe that the process is purely a local one, in which linguistic oppositions are built up at the border that might reflect or symbolize social or political oppositions. Rather, the villages on the German side take part in the general developments typical of the German south, while the entirety of Alsace (not only the border villages) does not.

3. Cognitive representations of the Alemannic dialects/of Alsatian

On the basis of the interviews, it is possible to reconstruct the cognitive representations of the dialects and their role within the repertoires on both sides of the border. They become explicit when the interviewees talk about their perception of the dialects and their relationship to the standards, but sometimes, and more interestingly, they only become accessible when the presupposition underlying that talk is analyzed.

It is noteworthy that despite the very short geographical distance from the state border, quite a few interviewees reported that they had only limited personal experiences with the people, let alone the dialects spoken, on the other side of the Rhine. Particularly among younger Germans, it was not

³ An example seems to have been the vocalization of coda /r/, which has always been almost exceptionless east of the Rhine and almost completely absent in Alsace (cf. Auer et al. 2017). Of course, French has also, for a long time, been the source language of lexical borrowings into Alsatian, which have not entered the dialects on the German side.

⁴ The study mainly deals with phonology, but the limited evidence on grammar suggests that the same holds true here.

⁵ Bothorel-Witz & Huck (2001) mention some minor grammatical changes that might be attributed to standard German influence.

rare to meet interviewees who said they had never heard Alsatian.⁶ In both groups, personal encounters with ‘the Alsations’ or ‘the Germans’ were mostly of a perfunctory kind, often while shopping in supermarkets, less often in restaurants or leisure and entertainment spaces. Only a minority of the interviewees had regular contact with people ‘from the other side’, for instance because of friendship or family ties, work relations, or (sports) club partnerships.⁷

Whether based on personal experiences or not, there was general agreement among the interviewees that the dialects on each side of the border are similar but also different. The Germans usually think that the Alsatian dialects are ‘stronger’ than their own Alemannic dialects (which corresponds well with the facts); some also mentioned French influence and categorized Alsatian as ‘half German, half French’, which is clearly not the case from a linguistic point of view. While none of the Alsatian interviewees reported any difficulties understanding the dialects on the German side, the opposite is not true: Alsatian was reported to be “hard to understand” by some younger German interviewees.

But this is just what our interviewees said when explicitly asked about the dialects; more indirect approaches to the representations of the dialects in the Upper Rhine area suggest that the idea of a common Alemannic dialect spoken on both sides of the border is not shared by the speakers. This becomes clear when methods from folk dialectology are used in order to explore cognitive representations. In a large study on folk dialectological representations of dialects in southwest Germany, Stöckle (2014) asked 218 dialect speakers from 32 German locations in the southern part of the Upper Rhine area to draw a line on a map demarcating the area around their village or town in which “people speak the same”. The map included many geographical details such as rivers and mountains, roads, and also the political border. Stöckle tested the results against the null hypothesis that the inhabitants of each location use geographical distance alone to judge the linguistic similarity between the dialects against his data. The null hypothesis predicts that the results should approximate a circle around the home location of the interviewees. In fact, the cognitive representations of their own dialect looked quite different. Fig. (1) shows one example, i.e. the dialect maps drawn by the informants from Breisach, a small German town directly on the border with France. The circle around the town represents the results expected according to the null hypothesis, i.e. if only geographical distance played a role, with the spatial volume of the average space drawn by the participants in the study. The actual map drawings show that the ethnodialectal orientation of the speakers is exclusively towards the east (Germany), never to the west (France). Nobody thinks that the dialect of Breisach is the same as the border dialects in Alsace.

⁶ Such a lack of direct personal encounters was much less frequently reported by the Alsatian respondents, which may be due to the fact that participants in the study were required to speak Alsatian actively; this may have excluded a certain group of younger interviewees.

⁷ A similar lack of interest in direct contacts was already found 25 years ago in the cities of Freiburg and Colmar by Bister-Broosen (1998).

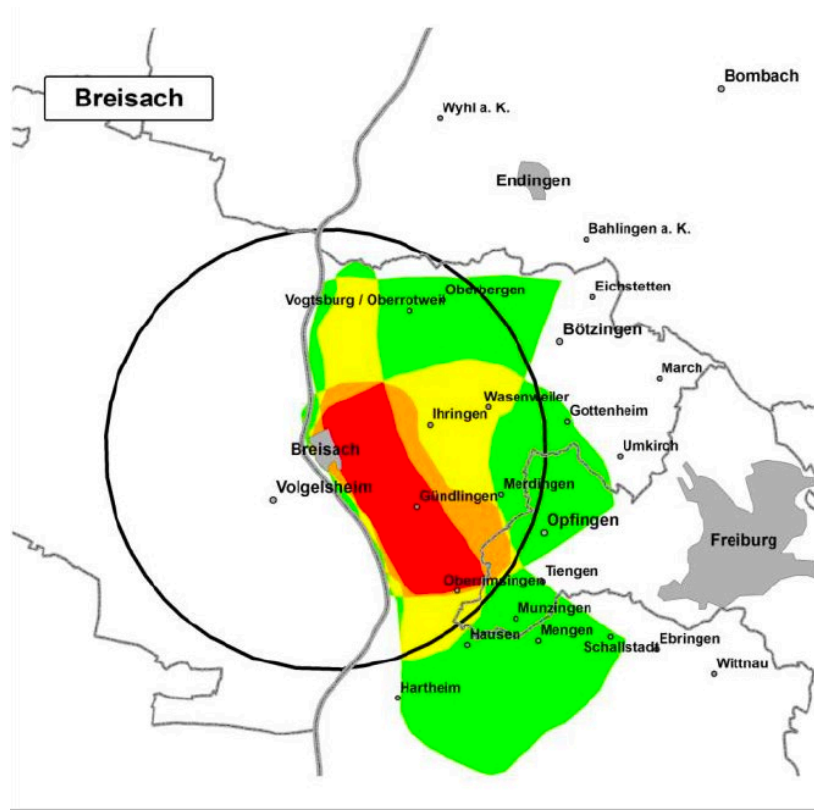


Figure 1 (from Stöckle 2014: 191): Ethnodialectological maps drawn by the interviewees from Breisach in answer to the question ‘Where do people speak like in your home village/town?’ (overlay for eight interviewees, red = maximal overlap, green = minimal overlap). The circle indicates the expected extension of the drawings under the null hypothesis (no other influence than geographical distance).

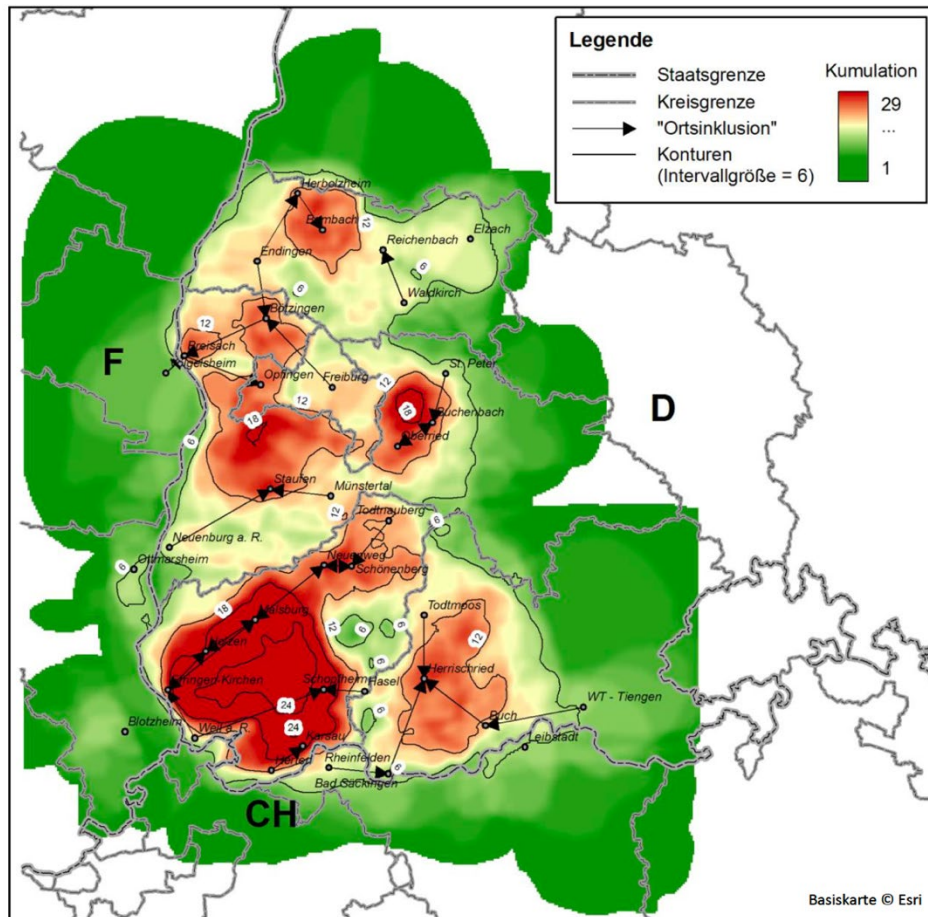


Figure 2 (from Stöckle 2014: 137): Aggregated ethnodialectological maps drawn by the interviewees from 37 locations in southwest Germany in answer to the question ‘Where do people speak like in your home village/town?’ (overlay for eight interviewees, red = maximal overlap, green = minimal overlap). The arrows indicate the direction in which the speakers are oriented. (An arrow from location A to location B means that at least half of the interviewees of location A included location B in their drawing.) The state border is marked by a broken line. Iso-lines indicate an overlay of six or multiples thereof.

Fig. (2) summarizes the results for all locations investigated by Stöckle. The zones of perceived similarity are skewed in overlapping directions, creating ‘condensation zones’ of maximal overlay (dark red). They indicate areas of convergence in which dialect speakers from various neighboring locations believe that their dialects are more or less the same. The important result for our discussion is that none of these zones transgresses the political borders with France (or Switzerland), even though some of them stop exactly before it. Hence, the German dialect speakers share among themselves an ethnodialectological representation of dialect similarity in German Alemannic that allows identifying five or six ethnodialectological spatial clusters, but none of them extend into Alsace.⁸

Another important aspect that indirectly reveals how the political border is also a cognitive linguistic border between the dialects today only concerns Alsatian. Despite the maps they draw, the German interviewees usually said that they considered the Alsatian dialects to be ‘German dialects’. This is not the case of the Alsatian speakers. For them, Alsatian is a language of its own that only resembles Alemannic in Germany. As a consequence, speaking Alsatian to them does not mean

⁸ Unfortunately, similar data are not available for the Alsatian side.

speaking (some kind of) German. In the following extract from an interview, this difference can be inferred from the way in which the interviewee complains about French people from the ‘interior’ of France who overhear him and his family and friends speak Alsatian and think they are Germans. The interviewer’s question why this is annoying for him is answered with many hesitations which indicate that the question is irritating as it taps into common background knowledge (i.e. part of the cognitive linguistic representations shared by Alsatians). Since the interviewer is also Alsatian she can be assumed to share the same language ideology, an ideology that is so firmly entrenched that nobody would think of discussing it:

Extract (1) [1571]⁹

01GP: s gibt euh so euh fäscht e confusion fir màncchi litt zwische s elsässische un s ditsche
there’s uhm like uhm almost a confusion for some people between Alsatian and German

02I: mm un fer dich isch s nit salwe
mhm, and for you that’s not the same

03GP: ah non
oh no

04I: ja
yes?

05GP: non non
no no

06I: wàs isch no de unterschied/ wàs sin
what’s the difference/ what are

07GP: euh s isch doch euh/ s isch üri sprochen
uhm it is after all uhm/ it is our language

08I: mm

09GP: s isch s isch kenn ditsch un mir sin kenn ditsche
it is it is not German and we are not Germans

10I: ((laughs))

11GP: àwwer euh
but uhm

12I: stert s dich wenn dir ebber sait euh dü redsch ditsch
does it annoy you when somebody says uhm you speak German

13GP: ja
yes

14I: ja

15GP: ja

16I: wie wàrum no/ weil s euh
and why then/ because it uhm

17GP: euh pff ich füehl mi frànzesch
uhm pff I feel I’m French

18I: mm

19GP: àwwer euh bon em elsass hànn mir euh e sprochen
but uhm I mean in Alsace we have uhm a language

20I: mm

21GP: un die des isch s elsässische
and this is this is Alsatian

22I: mm

23GP: des isch/ s isch sicher/ s glicht im ditsche àwwer euh

⁹ The transcription of Alsatian follows the system developed at the Département de dialectologie alsacienne et mosellane at Strasbourg University. “/” marks a prosodic (IP) break, the *accent grave* (“à”) stands for /ɔ/. I is the interviewer, GP the interviewee. Since French words are an integral part of Alsatian, they are not specifically marked.

- It is/ surely it is/ it is similar to German but uhm
 24I: mm
 25GP: àwwer mir sin kenn kenn
 but we are not, no
 26I: isch s nit ditsch
 it isn't German
 27GP: m'm ((negating))
 28I: d'accord
 ok.

The interviewee's answer makes it clear that his language ideology is firmly linked to the idea of the nation state: as the Alsatians are not part of Germany, they are not Germans, and hence, their language cannot be German. Language is (de-)limited by nationhood, and nationhood by language. This is very clearly stated in lines 07/09, where the speaker equates 'our language' with 'not the German language', and then again with 'not being German'. The language/nation link is so inextricable that the speaker finds it hard to separate language and national belonging at all: in lines 21-26, he starts to argue on the level of languages and surreptitiously slips to the level of nationalities ('[Alsatian] is similar to German ... but we are not ...' projects 'Germans'). If somebody mistakes his Alsatian for German, he feels annoyed because 'he doesn't feel German' (line 17); there is no difference between language and nationhood but the first uniquely indexes the second.

The German interviewees, on the other hand, often project their language and dialect ideologies on Alsace, which can also lead to misunderstandings. Here, it needs to be stressed that the state border today separates not only two dialect regions, but also two repertoire types, with their own, specific sociolinguistic rules for the use of standard and dialect. In Alsace, French is the dominant and official language and occupies almost all domains; its use is obligatory everywhere apart from family and friendship networks. Alsatian is restricted to informal encounters in the family and friendship domain, but even here, it is only one of the available options and its use almost always implies code-switching into or mixing with French. The only language available for verbal exchanges with strangers and in public is French (or, in case of need and proficiency, English or standard German as school-learned foreign languages). In contrast, a continuum of more or less dialectal or standard ways of speaking is available in southwest Germany; this repertoire is much more flexibly employed. Even in formal situations, and certainly in informal situations with strangers and/or speakers of the standard language, some dialectal features can and usually are used instead of a regionally unmarked standard German. In the family or with friends, particularly of the older generation, a more dialectal way of speaking may be chosen.

The difference between these two scenarios becomes clear: when Germans transfer their own cognitive scenarios of dialect use to Alsace, this can lead to misunderstandings and even mutual resentments. For instance, one of the often reproduced stereotypes among Germans is that the Alsatians "refuse to speak dialect" in personal encounters, which makes communication impossible. Let us look at a story told by one of our German interviewees, which is produced as evidence for this attitude (see also the discussion in Pfeiffer & Auer 2019).

Extract (2): 'Tante Elsa' [1321]¹⁰

- 03 GP1: also SIE het a tante ghet in ((NAME)),
 well she ((=GP2)) had an aunt in ALSATIAN-LOCATION-NAME,
 04 °h und da sin_ma also au mal Anegfahre,
 and we once drove there,

¹⁰ Transcription according to GAT 2 (cf. Selting et al. 2009). GP1 and GP2 are the interviewees, Ex is the interviewer.

((...))

09 Ex1: hm,

10 GP1: un no sin_ma Anegange-

and then we went there

11 no han die (.) han se halt (.) gFROUT-

then they (.) and we asked them-

12 ebe mir suche die un die person uff DITSCH,

well we are looking for that and that person, in German,

13 un im erschte moment han se nit (-) geantwortet uff DITSCH; (-)

and first they didn't (-) answer in German; (-)

14 han se also franZEsisch gsait sie verstehn nix,

and said in French that they do not understand anything,

15 es tut ihne leid es isch_sie verSTEHn nix,

they were sorry it is (.) they do not understand anything,

16 und in dEm moment kommt ihre TANTE ums eck rum,

and right at this moment her aunt comes around the corner,

17 (--)^ohh und äh (--)^o und äh no ham_mr gsait;(--)^ohh and uhm (--)^o and uhm we said;

19 AH da isch jo d ELsa;

ah! there is Elsa;

20 (-) und uff eimol han si DITSCH kennt und han mit uns-

(-) and all of a sudden they knew German and ((talked)) with us

21 ((general laughter, 2 Sec.))

22 GP2: sie WELle als net.

they don't want to.

23 GP1: ja kommt druff A:N;

well it depends;

24 die KENne uns halt au net;

they don't know us after all;

25 und äh man WEISS ja nit wenn_ma auf jemand so zuageht;

and uhm you don't know when you approach somebody;

26 im ERSCHte moment isch ma doch vielleicht a bissl; perPLEX und denkt HALT

amol- (-)

maybe in the first moment you are a little; perplexed and you think- (-)

29 was WELle die und so- (-)

what do they want and so on- (-)

30 aber es war Elgeartig;

but it was strange;

31 sie han alli (.) ELsässisch kennt nochher;

afterwards they all knew Alsatian;

The two interviewees (a couple) tell the interviewer that they once wanted to visit a distant relative (an aunt) living in Alsace. They drove to the place and asked people in the street about the address of the aunt, speaking “German”. Typically, the term ‘German’ is ambiguous in the interviews, as it generally is among Germans: it can refer to standard German (as opposed to the dialect), but it can also refer to the architecture of the German language as a whole, including the dialects. In any case, they were not successful with this language choice: the Alsatians did not answer their question and claimed (in French) not to understand them. When the aunt happened to “turn around the corner”, everything changed: “all of a sudden they knew German” (line 20). This is later paraphrased by the teller, who stated that they were able to speak “Alsatian” (line 31), which shows that in the couple’s view, “Alsatian” is a hyponym of “German”.

The wife explains this, in her view contradictory behavior, as a question of willingness (“they

don't want to", line 22), and, perhaps indirectly, of anti-German resentments. The way in which she presents this explanation suggests that it is part of her stereotypical knowledge about the Alsatians: it comes quickly and without hesitations. Her husband presents a more complex view (lines 23-29) and accounts for what to him is "strange" behavior (line 30) by the possible embarrassment experienced by the village people when approached by strangers in "German". Both express their bewilderment. Underlying this bewilderment is the transfer of the German scenario for dialect use to the French-Alsatian context: for the couple, the dialect can be legitimately chosen (above all in a village!) in public and to communicate with a stranger. As argued above, this is not at all compatible with the Alsatian scenario. Hence, from the Alsatian perspective, the behavior of the Alsatian villagers does not require an explanation at all.

Experiences like those reported in Extract (2) and the subsequent bewilderment to German visitors recur in our data. Some of the respondents found this behavior so irritating that they stopped crossing the border.¹¹

4. Dialect change in the German Upper Rhine area: a matter of attitude?

The previous sections have shown that the state border between Germany and France not only separates the spaces under the regiment of the German and French standard languages. It also separates two repertoires in which the dialects play a very different role, with a diglossic relationship between the Alsatian dialects and standard French on the one side, and a diaglossic repertoire with standard German and Alemannic dialect as the extremes on the other side. The cognitive representations of the dialects on both sides of the river concur in the sense that most speakers share a knowledge of the traditional similarity of the dialects, and their better maintenance in Alsace. But they differ with respect to the language-ideological question of whether the dialects are roofed by standard German and also in the interviewees' view of when it is adequate to speak dialect.

The interviews allowed us to reconstruct the interviewees' opinions on whether and how 'those on the other side' differ from one's own culture and character, and they allow us to evaluate the speakers' knowledge and general orientation towards the other side of the border. Some know more about it and/or have a more positive attitudes than others. This raises the question of whether these opinions and attitudes and the general orientation towards the people and culture on the other side are correlated with the maintenance of the dialect. The question can be asked most fruitfully on the German side where we find a huge amount of dialect levelling. Here, the question is whether the way in which Alsace and its inhabitants are perceived has an impact on levelling. Do Germans with a better knowledge of and a more positive attitude toward Alsace maintain their dialect better, perhaps in order to express a joint, trans-border identity based on the traditionally closely related Alemannic dialects spoken on both sides of the border in the Upper Rhine valley?

Interestingly, the various regions of Germany bordering Alsace in the Upper Rhine area differ with respect to their orientation towards Alsace, which is partly due to historical reasons. Based on a content analysis of the interviews, Pfeiffer (submitted) developed an index of orientation toward Alsace which allows grouping of the survey locations on the German side. The index made use of three dimensions: the interviewees' reports of how well they understand Alsatian, the interviewees' reports on whether they used their own dialect when visiting Alsace, and the interviewees' opinions on how similar Alsatians and Badenians are in terms of culture and character. He was able to identify four sub-regions among the survey locations on the German side of the border; a fifth group of locations was made up of the towns further away from it (cf. Fig. 3).

¹¹ On the representation of the border from the Alsatian interviewees' perspective see Erhart (2019).

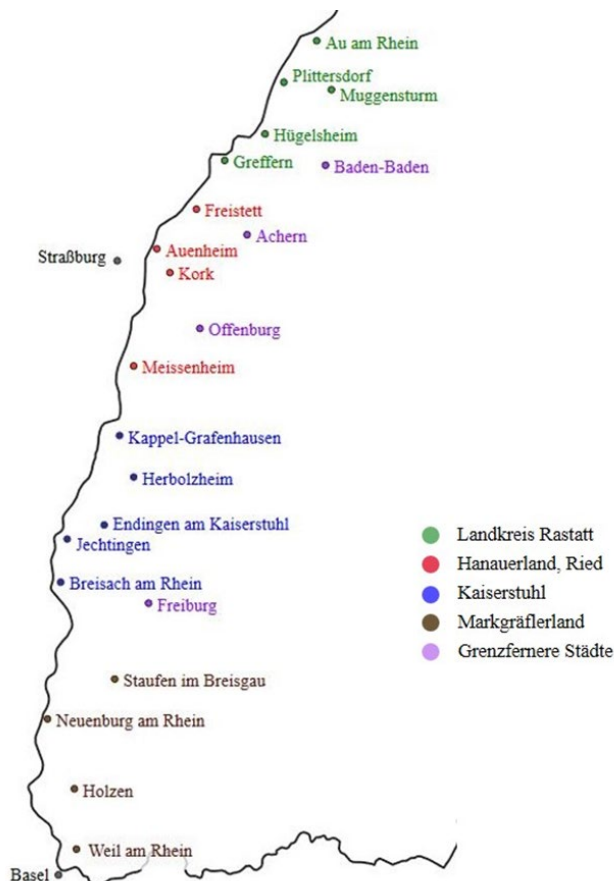


Figure 3 (from Pfeiffer 2019): Subregions according to orientation to Alsace in the German Upper Rhine area.

The index values for each sub-region are summarized in Fig. (4), separately for older (65 and older) and younger (35 or younger) interviewees. The results show, first of all, that age plays a major role: younger speakers are generally less oriented toward Alsace. This correlates well with the observation that younger speakers use less dialect, which means that the linguistic distance between them and the Alsatians (particularly the younger ones) is larger than in the older speakers. However, the sub-regions make a difference as well. The strongest (positive) orientation toward Alsace is found in the *Kaiserstuhl* area (blue) and the *Hanauerland* (red). The people in the *Markgräflerland* (brown) and in the towns away from the border are much more indifferent and/or have a less positive orientation towards Alsace on an average. *Landkreis Rastatt* is in between.

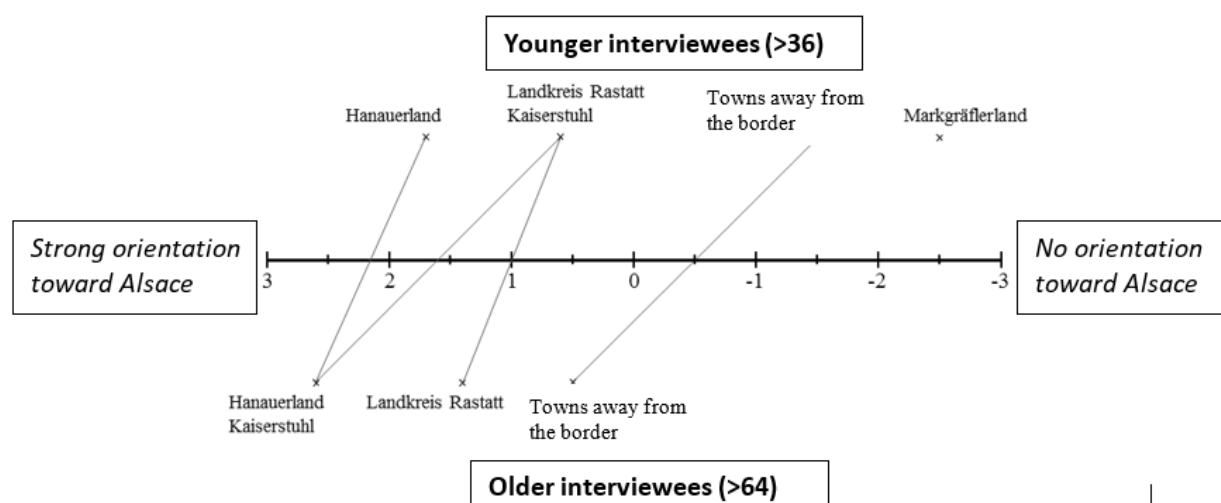


Figure 4 (from Pfeiffer, accepted): Orientation toward Alsace in four German subregions of the Upper Rhine area and in the towns away from the border (no data available for older speakers from *Markgräflerland*).

Does this difference correlate with the linguistic behavior of the speakers? Let us look at one pair of phonological variables which is well suited for investigating this question. In the northern part of the Upper Rhine area, we find two similar processes of lenition. One is the weakening of intervocalic /g/, which is reduced to the fricative /j/ or approximant /w/ or deleted entirely (as in StdG *sagen* ‘to say’, realized as [sajən], [sauə], [sawə] or [sa:n]); the other is the lenition (spirantization) of intervocalic /b/ as in StdG *Nebel* ‘fog’, realized as [ne:vl]. The lenition of /g/ is traditionally found in the northern part of the Upper Rhine valley, down to and including Meissenheim in Germany and Colmar on the French side. The lenition of /b/ traditionally affects the dialects on the German side in the north and down to the *Kaiserstuhl* (including Jechtingen). In Alsace, it reaches southward to Mulhouse (see Breuninger 2016 for details). The traditional isoglosses for the border area are shown in Fig. (5).



Figure 5: Intervocalic lenition of /b/ (blue) and /g/ (red) in the traditional dialects (sources: SSA and ALA).

The two processes, although phonologically comparable, do not show the same geographical dynamics. While the lenition of /g/ is a typical Alsatian (western) feature that crosses the border into German Alemannic only in some parts of the Upper Rhine area and never spreads far into Germany, the lenition of /b/ is a general north-to-south process not associated with Alsace. Both features occur in the sub-regions *Hanauerland* and *Landkreis Rastatt*. According to Pfeiffer's study, the speakers in the *Hanauerland* are more Alsace-oriented than those in the *Landkreis Rastatt* (see Fig. 3). If the way in which Alsace is perceived and evaluated is relevant at all, this western orientation should impact on the lenition of /g/, but not on the lenition of /b/, as only the first is associated with Alsace and its dialects. A quantitative analysis¹² suggests that this is indeed the case. Fig. (6) shows the results for the lenition of intervocalic /b/. The average lenition across all speakers interviewed in the more

¹² A more elaborate statistical treatment as well as two further examples of the impact of different attitudes and orientations taken from the southern part of Alsace can be found in Auer, Pfeiffer, Kaufmann & Breuninger (accepted).

Alsace-oriented *Hanauerland* and the less Alsace-oriented *Landkreis Rastatt* is almost the same, both in spontaneous speech and in the questionnaire answers.¹³ None of the differences are statistically significant.

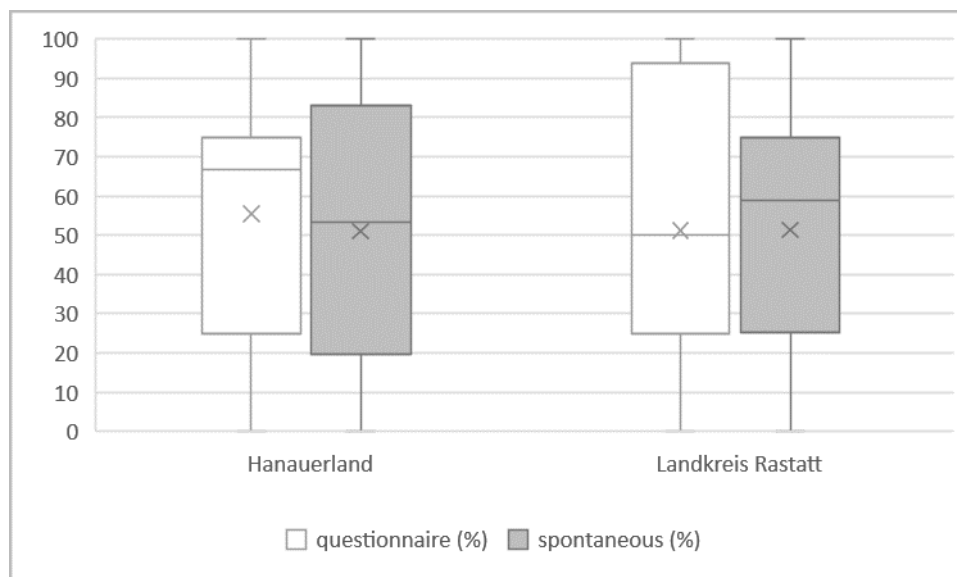


Fig. (6): Lenition of intervocalic /b/ in *Hanauerland* and *Landkreis Rastatt* according to questionnaire answers and in spontaneous speech (percentages averaged over speakers, boxplots with x = average).

The lenition of intervocalic /g/ shows a very different picture. In the questionnaire, the process can only be analyzed in one item (the realization of the verb *sagen* ‘to say’); here, 73% of the respondents in the *Hanauerland* fricativized or deleted the intervocalic /g/, while only 42% of the respondents in the *Landkreis Rastatt* did. In spontaneous speech, the average lenition values are much lower, but the difference is equally substantial and highly significant: 19.3% vs. 4.9% (t-test 2.56 df 55, F-test 7.45, $p < 0.001$). We can conclude that the *Hanauerland* sticks significantly more to the traditional pronunciation which is marginal in Germany, but widespread and typical of the Alsatian dialects, while the lenition of /b/, which is not associated with Alsace, shows no such effect. This supports the assumption that a cognitive-attitudinal (positive) orientation toward Alsace correlates with the maintenance of a more traditional dialect if it is backed up by the Alsatian ‘hinterland’.

5. Conclusions

The results of the various studies reported here support the claim that the nation states continue to have a strong effect on the languages at the borders in Europe. Crossing such a border today rarely means passing border controls and toll bars (since these often do not exist); rather, it means entering the realm of another standard language. Nevertheless, the effect takes place with the same immediacy and abruptness. No longer are there transition zones which soften the transition from one language into the other, as it was the case when traditional trans-border dialects shaded continuously into each other.

Yet the impact of standard French and standard German on the Alemannic dialects has of course been different. While the German standard language is structurally close enough to the Alemannic

¹³ Questionnaire answers were based on the items *bleiben* ‘to stay’, *sieben* ‘seven’, *geschrieben* ‘written’ and *Leber* ‘liver’. In the analysis of spontaneous speech, the high-frequency word *aber* ‘but’ was omitted because it frequently shows phonetic reduction and may be considered an allegro speech phenomena. Based on transcriptions by Julia Breuninger.

dialects to allow compromise forms (i.e. a diagglossic repertoire with many options between standard and dialect), the French standard language does not affect the phonology and grammar of Alsatian in the same way. Rather, it primarily marginalizes this lect by conquering more and more of its domains in an ongoing process of language shift. On the dialect level, these developments lead to linguistic divergence, due to the changes on the German-Alemannic side. These changes are driven by the cognitive representations speakers have of the varieties and languages on both sides of the border, while at the same time, experiences of divergent usage patterns feed the cognitive models according to which dialects and repertoires are delimited by the state border.

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