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German or Not German: That Is the Question! On the Status of the Autochthonous Dialects in East Lorraine (France)

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Abstract: The European language world is characterized by an ideology of monolingualism and national languages. This language-related world view interacts with social debates and definitions about linguistic autonomy, diversity, and variation. For the description of border minorities and their sociolinguistic situation, however, this view reaches its limits. In this article, the conceptual difficulties with a language area that crosses national borders are examined. It deals with the minority in East Lorraine (France) in particular. On the language-historical level, this minority is closely related to the language of its (big) neighbor Germany. At the same time, it looks back on a conflictive history with this country, has never filled a (subordinated) political-administrative unit, and has experienced very little public support. We want to address the questions of how speakers themselves reflect on their linguistic situation and what concepts and argumentative figures they bring up in relation to what (Germanic) variety. To this end, we look at statements from guideline-based interviews. In the paper, we present first observations gained through qualitative content analysis.



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1. Introduction

The prevailing language paradigm in Europe is oriented toward monolingualism and national languages (which in turn are oriented toward nation states) (Giddens 1987; Kamusella 2009, p. 29; Kraus 2008, pp. 89–93). Accordingly, a group of varieties is prototypically recognized as a language if

1. Its standard variety is widespread in a (whole) nation state; and
2. This standard variety is an official language in this state.

Furthermore—in general perception—there is only one (national) language per state and per person and vice versa (i.e., each language is associated with only one state) (Kamusella 2009, p. 30). Nonetheless, forms of multilingualism are also acknowledged. They are seen as either migration-induced, acquired through foreign language teaching or grounded in regional variation (“inner multilingualism”, Löffler 2005). From our view, this mindset—which is reflected in and reinforced by public discourse—makes it difficult for laypersons to conceptualize other types of autochthonous multilingualism and to attribute a status to the varieties involved. This holds true for minority languages and especially for genetically closely related varieties outside the main state.

In this paper, we want to look at a scenario that is often disregarded by the literature on regional and minority languages, which are the Germanic¹ varieties in East Lorraine, France. Historically and structurally, they “can be clearly defined as belonging to the High German group of languages” (Hughes 2000, p. 114). However, due to the area’s

¹ The classification and naming of the autochthonous varieties in East Lorraine prove to be very problematic, which is basically the subject matter of the whole article. For pragmatic reasons, we follow the common grouping under the hyperonym of “Germanic languages”, knowing that this leads to other difficulties: among other things, it hides the fact that the two varieties (Standard German and the dialects in Lorraine) are structurally much more similar to each other than, for example, German and Danish.

complete political and cultural embedding in France, the dialects have long ceased to be (functionally) roofed by Standard German. Nevertheless, they have not developed an own standard variety nor do they fill an (autonomous) political–administrative unit where they could gain a certain validity from. Their language status is therefore unclear.

One aspect of a group of varieties to be acknowledged as language is the subjective assessment by the speakers (Barbour and Stevenson 1998; Coulmas 1985). We want to focus on this subjective perspective of the in-group members, i.e., the autostereotype. Based on statements in guideline-based interviews conducted in East Lorraine, we want to answer the following questions:

- (a) Do the speakers even succeed in expressing their sociolinguistic situation?
- (b) If yes, what status do they attribute to their Lorraine dialects? Are these dialects constructed as varieties of German, or are they regrouped as a language in its own right?
- (c) What categories, arguments, and themes do they bring up?

In the following, we first shortly set out the theoretical frame for our study, which is the subjective perspective on language and language use (Section 2). We then share some considerations about current structures of language repertoires in Europe and their mental conceptualization by laypersons (Section 3). Then, the linguistic situation of East Lorraine in the past and present is outlined (Section 4) and the data as well as the context of their collection are explained (Section 5). Section 6 is the main part of the paper, where we present the very first observations in interview statements by speakers in terms of content.

2. On the Subjective Perspective on Language and Its Use

In our paper, we focus on the subjective perspective on language, i.e., utterances of speakers “who are not professional linguists” (Eichinger 2010, p. 433), i.e., laypeople. Since they do not deal with language as an object in depth, systematically, and with appropriate methods, they have, firstly, a limited inventory of categories and limited possibilities for differentiation (Eichinger 2010, pp. 434, 443). This makes it difficult for the professional linguist to map lay concepts onto disciplinary content. Thus, a kind of “translation process” is needed in the analysis of corresponding statements. Secondly, assessments by laypersons are opinions or attitudes rather than established findings (Eichinger 2010, p. 433). Language attitudes can—in the most consensual meaning—be defined as an individual’s “predispositions to respond to (speakers of) specific languages/speech styles and language situations with a certain type of (language) behavior” (Vandermeeren 2005, p. 1319).² In addition to the evaluative dimension of attitudes, which seems to be of biggest interest in the relevant literature, there is also a cognitive component, which refers to (pseudo-)knowledge, ideas, thoughts and assumptions about the attitude object (as well as a conative component). The cognitive component is the one we deal with in our paper. Attitudes can guide actions, and language assessment and language use influence each other in a reciprocal way. As stated in the introduction, the question of when a dialect becomes a language, for example, is primarily a sociological one (and only secondarily a structural one). Therefore, it is of crucial relevance to deal with speaker judgements. By elaborating argumentative figures in their explanations, one gains insights into how the beliefs about language and language use are structured and which mental constructions speakers have.³ What are these attitudes based on, though? On the one hand, they are based on one’s own experiences—as individual and singular (and thus “subjective”) as they may be. On the other hand, they are fed by circulating opinions, by social debates or—as Eichinger (2010, p. 445, our translation) puts it—by the prevailing “prejudice landscape” in a given community. These circulating

² The different phenomena in the field of the layperson’s perspective (on language) have been defined from different disciplines according to different frameworks and methodologies, which has resulted in lots of different definitions, modelings, and terminology, e.g., attitudes, opinions, beliefs, regard, and folk linguistic knowledge (see, e.g., Busch 2019; Lasagabaster 2004; Niedzielski and Preston 2000). The most common term seems to be “attitude”, with definitions going back to social psychology.

³ Thus, we obviously hold a mental–cognitive modelling of language attitudes. For a plea for a “language attitudes in-interaction” approach, see Liebscher and Dailey-O’Cain (2009).

opinions—on a national or local level—are also referred to as language ideologies. Language ideologies can roughly be summarized as a shared set of ideas, opinions, and attitudes within a given social or cultural group or language community about linguistic practices and discourse (König et al. 2015, p. 498). The study of language ideologies thus puts metalinguistic conceptualizations of a group of speakers and not of individual speakers in the focus. Ideologies are part of a “‘local’ cultural knowledge” (Kroskrity 2000, p. 5), meaning that they are historically deeply rooted, (almost automatically) acquired by being part of a given social or cultural group, to which each set of ideologies is bound. They comprise concepts, norms, and values concerning specific aspects of language and its use and can “profitably [be] conceived as multiple [even divergent] because of the multiplicity of meaningful social divisions” (Kroskrity 2000, p. 12). Furthermore, they “mediate between social structures and forms of talk” (Kroskrity 2000, p. 21), that is, between sociocultural experiences and linguistic resources. They are legitimated and, even more, disseminated within institutional frameworks (Horner and Bradley 2019, p. 298), such as schools or governmental institutions, or by the media. In this way, they reach the individual speaker and influence and shape their attitudes. Community members are thus provided with argumentative figures and thought patterns that they (can) claim for themselves or draw on, when reflecting their linguistic life.

The question that arises is then, what happens if circulating ideologies conflict with the own experiences and actual living conditions of speakers. How do such speakers cope with such contradictions? What if their situation is not covered or even not eligible by the ideologies? Do speakers then manage to describe their situation at all, and can they create a mental construct? Do they still find argumentative figures? Such a problematic situation arises, among others, for members of autochthonous minorities in Europe who do not fit into the common scheme of monolingual national ideologies, i.e., of the identity of language and nation or national territory. In the following section, we first present the monolingual national ideology and its background in more detail. Second, we describe the historical and sociolinguistic reality of German speaking border minorities.

3. Monolingualism and Multilingualism in Europe

3.1. *Their Lay Conceptualization*

The European ideology of monolingualism is based on a factual foundation: In terms of first language acquisition, the majority of language biographies tends to be monolingual. Moreover, not only is there a strong tendency toward the use of a single language but also toward the use of the standard variety (Kamusella 2009, p. 29). Throughout the 18th and 19th century, (more or less) homogenized written languages emerged. It is the existence of such a (written) standard variety which in this day and age is crucial for a group of closely related varieties to be recognized as a language (*Einzelssprache*).⁴ In the course of the 19th century, these standard varieties found their way into the spoken language repertoire of broad sections of the population, mainly through compulsory schooling and supported by the ongoing modernization processes, increased mobility, and radio broadcasting. Since the Second World War, the standard variety has increasingly become the primary spoken language in most countries (Mattheier 1980, p. 172). Consequently, more and more people from 1970 onward acquired the standard variety as their first language and thus only have “monovarietal competence” (monovarietäre Kompetenz, Schmidt 2017, p. 108, cf. also Plewnia 2021).⁵

The ideology of monolingualism is also based on the historical–intellectual background of the time of the formation of the European nation state. At that time—and as a legacy of the French Revolution (Coulmas 1985, p. 41)—national unity was closely related to unity in language. Accordingly, on the one hand, great efforts were made in the existing nation states to spread the national language over the entire national territory;

⁴ See the example of the Netherlands or Dutch, respectively, on which Coulmas states: “By developing a written language standard for the dialects spoken in the Netherlands, it became detached from German in a process of divergence and acquired the status of an independent language, which has become the language of the Dutch nation.” (Coulmas 1985, p. 20, our translation).

⁵ Of course, dialects are still present and familiar also to standard speakers via older generations and less progressive regions.

on the other hand, nationalist movements strove “to end the political disruption of a group of people who saw themselves as a ‘nation’ by a nation state that was yet to be founded” (Schreiner 2006, p. 39, our translation). The central point of reference for this sense of togetherness was typically the (supposedly) common language, which became the decisive anchor in identity formation (Barbour 2004, p. 291). Language minorities were pushed to the margins of society, practically forced to shift languages and sometimes even resettled. Following the logic of unity, the national standard varieties developed and spread simultaneously.

This “monolingual habitus” (Gogolin 1997) leads to a non-representation of multilinguals and multilingualism in society-wide language discourses. It is rather the phenomena concerning the form of language (codification), such as language decay or gender-sensitive language, that are a topic of public interest.⁶ When multilingualism is raised, it is more likely to be in the context of allochthonous languages and their speakers, which have to be integrated, i.e., in the context of migration. Multilingualism is seen as a problem in these cases, and integration is equated with the acquisition (and use) of the national language, as expressed in the relevant laws (and occasionally by politicians) (for Adler and Beyer 2018⁷). Additionally, there is the concept of foreign languages, i.e., the controlled, mostly school-based learning of usually prestigious languages.⁸ As the name suggests, these languages are perceived as foreign rather than belonging to oneself. One thus learns the language from other people who live in a foreign country to eventually use it there.⁹

Very well known as an autochthonous linguistic phenomenon, however, is the concept that can be described as “inner multilingualism” (Löffler 2005). It describes the fact that a language—despite all tendencies toward the standard variety—is not monolithically structured but comprises a repertoire of varieties. This repertoire is composed of standard language, sociolects (e.g., specialized languages, group languages—but often classified as dialects) and other varieties which show partial similarities on a structural level, so that they can be combined into a diasystem (Weinreich 1954). The most prominent of these are the regional dialects, i.e., the diatopic varieties which are spatially bound and are roofed by the standard language of the state in which they are located.

It is basically this inventory of categories ([one] state—[one] language—[many] dialects) that is used when dealing with the mental language world of Europe.

The prototypical concept would then look like in the following description:

- There is a group of varieties A, i.e., a set of closely related varieties, whose standard language (A_0) is recognized as an official language in an autonomous state and is used as the language of instruction in schools there (in line with the congruence of state and language, the roots of state name and glottonyme are typically the same, i.e., Danish is spoken in Denmark, Polish in Poland, German in Germany, etc.). The other varieties of the same group/spoken in this country (A_1 -...) are typologically sufficiently similar to the standard but have a low communicative range both socially and regionally;
- In another state, the same situation now exists with a group of varieties B, which is typologically clearly distinguishable from the group of varieties A;
- In such a case, one would speak of two languages (being foreign to each other) with their respective dialects which are foreign to each other.

⁶ For an overview of the status of the discussion and the different positions on gender-sensitive language in different European countries see, e.g., Ewels and Plewnia (2020) or Manesse and Siouffi (2019).

⁷ A very impressive example is not only the draft law on the German microcensus, which states: “The recording of the language predominantly spoken in the household complements the information on the migration background and is important for assessing various dimensions of integration”. This is also made clear by the positioning of the question in the block with questions on “nationality and length of residence” (cf. Adler 2019).

⁸ For more on the hierarchy on languages and the different prestige of different kinds of multilingualism from a comparative perspective, see Ellis et al. (2010).

⁹ As long as it is not English, which is the global lingua franca.

However, there are also linguistic minorities or regional languages.¹⁰ These are languages that differ from the official language of a state (i.e., are not dialects of the official language(s) of the state) but are neither “foreign” nor a byproduct of (recent) migration. Their speakers are often inferior in number,¹¹ have settled in parts of the state at some point of pre-industrial times, and are economically and politically marginalized (Pusch 2010, pp. 376–77). Different typologies for linguistic minorities can be found in the relevant literature; the one from Eichinger (2006) fits best to our topic. He suggests the distinction of three main types: Firstly, there are the so-called language islands, i.e., “sprinkling of another language in ‘random’ dispersion outside the central distribution area of a language” (Eichinger 2006, p. 2475, our translation). They are the outcomes of migratory movements of a period between the late Middle Ages and the 19th century. The second type is made up of the so-called autochthonous minorities, “whose existence has a historical tradition in the region” (Eichinger 2006, p. 2475, our translation). They draw their “ethnic status and their identity from a pre-nation-state past” (Rindler Schjerve 2004, p. 482) and are either unique to one state or also present as a minority in other states (Pusch 2010, p. 379). Finally, there are the so-called “national minorities” (cf. e.g., Eichinger 2006; Rindler Schjerve 2004) or “border minorities” (cf. e.g., Pusch 2010), which have arisen from territorial divisions and territorial partitions. Just like autochthonous minorities, they have a very long history of settlement; however, they have “a large and adjacent hinterland sharing the same language and culture” (Pusch 2010, p. 380) just across the border.

It is not the case that these minorities have nothing to do with the majority language. On the contrary: Frequently, their knowledge of the majority language (of the state) may even be better than their competence in the minority or regional language (Kraus 2008, p. 103). However, they also speak a language other than the majority language (and build their identity on this). This is therefore a case of (autochthonous) societal and individual multilingualism. In linguistic everyday life, it is intuitively clear to speakers, when, i.e., in which domain, to use what language. Such (or other) usage patterns are acquired together with the language structure. The actual use is therefore uncritical. The conceptualization of this constellation of multilingualism is very challenging though, as it conflicts with the concept of identity of state and language.

Accordingly, uncertainties in the classification of the minority or regional language become apparent when the relevant question is raised. This is illustrated, for instance, by the example of the regional language Low German (Germany). Low German is a regional language according to the German instrument of ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. In terms of language structure and history, Low German’s status as an independent language is more or less undisputed. Focusing on the functional level (domains of use, roofing, etc.), Low German is commonly classified as a dialect (of German). In a representative survey conducted jointly by the Leibniz Institute for the German Language and the Institute for the Low German Language in 2016 (the North Germany Survey 2016; cf. Adler et al. 2018; Adler 2021), respondents were asked whether they thought Low German was more of a language or more of a dialect. In total, 59% of respondents said that Low German was more of a dialect for them, while 39% thought that Low German was more of a language.

It can be assumed that this disagreement, which is basically a sign of helplessness, becomes even more apparent in more detailed, free formulated attitudes, i.e., beyond the decision between the categories “more of a language” or “more of a dialect”, since, in view

¹⁰ While in anglophone and germanophone literature, the term “linguistic minorities” or “minority language” has become established, there are other states (e.g., France—see the article 75-1 of the French constitution) that prefer the term “regional languages”. To cover both usages and naming traditions, the European Charter for regional or minority languages mentions both terms. Just like Walker (2018), we assume that they “were possibly initially seen as two synonyms [. . .] rather than as diverging concepts” (Walker 2018, p. 185). In contrast to this understanding, Germany designated in ratifying the Charter four minority languages (Danish, Frisian, Sorbian, and Romani) and one regional language (Low German) (cf. https://www.coe.int/de/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/148/declarations?p_auth=adpW1NP; Last access date 11 March 2021). Therefore, they implicitly established a distinction. For a further discussion on the terminology (cf. Walker 2018).

¹¹ Rightly, Pusch (2010, p. 377) hints to fact that “the socio-demographic attributes of minority/majority may shift according to the reference space that is taken into account”.

of the prevailing monolingualism ideology, there are no (differentiated) thought patterns, categories or expressions that can be used to grasp this type of multilingualism.

Particularly challenging is the case of border minorities, where, in addition to the question of their relationship to the surrounding majority language, the question of their connection to the group of varieties of the neighboring state arises. With this group of varieties, or rather their speakers, the border minorities share the same language; at the same time, they are separated from them by a state border, a border which is in terms of the concept of the nation state a decisive fact—not (any longer) as a *de facto* border, which restricts freedom of movement and communication, but as a “mental spatial boundar[y]” which “provide[s] a cognitive ordering scheme by which at least the idea of linguistic difference can be oriented” (Auer 2004, p. 166, our translation).

In the case of German, which is of central relevance here, there are a couple of border minorities, namely in Northern Schleswig (Denmark), in East Belgium, in East Lorraine and Alsace (both France), and in South Tyrol (Italy). Having emerged after World War I, these minorities are bordering German-speaking countries.

In Section 3.2, the typical traits of three border minorities are presented, in which the sociolinguistic status is relatively stable in relation to the (German) language.¹²

3.2. German Speaking Border Minorities

In this section, we describe three situations that are similar to East Lorraine in terms of basic characteristics. All three communities—just like East Lorraine—belong historically to the linguistic–geographical continuum of German (or were historically roofed by Standard German), they are demographically outnumbered in their state, they look back on a long history of settlement, and they have come into being through territorial separation, i.e., through border demarcation or border change. They are thus to be classified as German border minorities. On the one hand, they thus have a large hinterland behind them that can support the vitality of their language. On the other hand, the question arises as to what extent they—nowadays—do perceive the state border as a language border after all and see themselves as an independent language community. In the following, the respective history, the political–legal specifics, and the sociolinguistic situation are briefly sketched. The individual characteristics of the three constellations outlined clearly establish a link to the German-speaking area. In contrast, the characteristics in France and especially in East Lorraine are different, so that East Lorraine represents a singular case, insofar as the connection to German is complex.

First, we turn to the German minority in Northern Schleswig in Denmark. In 1920, in accordance with the Treaty of Versailles, a referendum was held to determine the border between Germany and Denmark. Northern Schleswig decided with 75% of the votes in favor of belonging to Denmark. The German minority in Denmark of approximately 15,000 people does not form a geographical unit but lives in several concentrated settlements scattered among the Danish majority population. Legally, the German minority is very well protected by the Copenhagen Declaration, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. In all three documents, the minority is clearly associated with German culture and the German language. Now, what is meant by German language in this specific context? Which varieties are there? In terms of active use (apart from of Danish), there is firstly near-standard German, in a form similar to that found in the neighboring part of Germany (North Germany). It is the official high variety—in oral and especially written form—of the language of literature and instruction, as well as the sacred language. “High German is the only norm, and the written German of the pupils is corrected to this norm” (Pedersen and Wung-Sung 2019, p. 37). Secondly, there is a variety called North Schleswig German, a regional contact variety based on Standard German with Danish interferences (Pedersen and Wung-Sung 2019, p. 29f). This North Schleswig German is the

¹² For a more detailed overview of German in Western and Central Europe, see, e.g., Beyer and Plewnia (2019) or Hogan-Brun (2000).

most common spoken German variety in everyday life of most members of the minority. Both varieties are regarded as realizations of German, *the* language of the German minority in Northern Schleswig.

In East Belgium, there are two German-speaking cantons, namely Eupen and Malmédy. After the First World War, there was also a referendum about the question of affiliation. However, it took place under questionable circumstances: Anyone who was against affiliation to Belgium could sign up by name on a public list, “which was of course extremely risky, as everyone expected retaliation” (Bouillon 2019, p. 50). The number of protesters was correspondingly low, which led to the affiliation to Belgium. In view of the reorganization of the Belgian state in the direction of a federal state in recent decades, the three language communities—the French, the Flemish, and also the German-speaking—were given a certain degree of autonomy. Accordingly, the German-Speaking Community (as it calls itself¹³) has its own parliament, which adopts decrees with legal force in certain departments. German functions as a roof language; it is used in court, as a language of instruction, and so on (cf. Darquennes 2019). Standard German is spoken in all (regional) official situations and at all institutional meetings. In the villages and in private life, the Lower Franconian dialects around Eupen, Riparian dialects in the center around Bütgenbach, and Mosel Franconian in the south are still very much alive, even if they are declining in favor of the standard language (Bouillon 2019, p. 62). The commitment to belonging to the German-speaking area goes so far that in 2014, the Belgian King Philippe ensured that Belgium joined the meeting of the heads of state of the German-speaking countries and invited its members to Belgium for 2016’s meeting. Last but not least, the German-Speaking Community has been represented in the Council for German Orthography since 2006.

South Tyrol went to the Italian state after the First World War, first through occupation and then with the Treaty of Saint-Germain. After the Second World War, many South Tyroleans hoped to return to Austria. However, the request for self-determination submitted by the South Tyroleans in 1946 was rejected by the Allies; instead, a protection agreement between Italy and Austria (the “Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement”, named after the two foreign ministers) was concluded at the Paris Peace Conference. After a number of sometimes violent conflicts at the end of the 1950s, the Second Statute of Autonomy came into force in 1972. Since then, South Tyrol has enjoyed a number of minority rights, including the establishment of German as an official language—at least regionally—on an equal footing with Italian. The schools with German and Italian as the language of instruction are monolingual, and mother-tongue teaching is the rule. Dialect and standard language are essentially distributed in a diglossic way. Standard German, again with its specific regional characteristics, is used in formal speaking situations. South Tyrol also sends a member to the Council for German Orthography.

Now looking at all three minorities together, what can be said? What all three minorities have in common is that (Standard) German is the language of instruction, as the minorities are autonomous enough to organize their own school system or are equipped with corresponding minority rights. They also have the opportunity to (legally) regulate their own language use. This is especially true for the official domains where conventionally the standard variety is used. Thus, Standard German is present, and the connection to this or the *Einzelssprache* German is given. Furthermore, in the case of the German minority in Denmark, there is not much choice between the non-Danish varieties—all of them are relatively close to the standard. From a political point of view, there have also been tensions between the minorities and the states to which they currently belong to and/or little or no tensions with the German-speaking countries. Thus, even if there is a border in between, all three minorities are clearly part of the German diasystem enough to the effect that

¹³ Cf. e.g., http://www.dg.be/en/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-2788/5431_read-34851/ (Last access date 2 February 2021).

uncertainties about status and conceptualization of their varieties (including subsuming their German varieties under the term “German”) could hardly arise.¹⁴

The situation in France and especially in East Lorraine is different. Both minorities in France that border Germany (East Lorraine and Alsace) share the history of the last 150 years, during which there have been several changes in political affiliation. They look back on a tense history with the neighboring state, which is not free of distortions. Moreover, they both stand on the same (insecure) ground in terms of legal protection, and the role of the standard is filled solely by an exoglossic language. In a few things, however, Alsace is doing better than East Lorraine: For example, Alsace was for a long time a political-administrative entity (*région*) with certain powers in cultural matters. Thus, in 1994, an institution (*Office pour la langue et les cultures d’Alsace—OLCA*) was founded with the aim of promoting the regional identity of Alsace including its culture and language. It also has a university with a long tradition (*Université de Strasbourg*), which is home, among others, to the Institute of Alsatian Dialectology (*Département de dialectologie alsacienne et mosellane*). The situation of speakers of continental West Germanic varieties in East Lorraine is even more precarious—and therefore in our focus. The minority in East Lorraine has never filled a political-administrative unit (which could also be used as a scheme of order for a language area on the foil of the nation-state model) and has experienced very little public support. Additionally, its dialects are structurally quite heterogeneous so that when speakers from different corners of the region meet, it is not unusual for them to switch to the majority language (French) in order to communicate with each other. In this specific constellation of multilingualism in an ideologically monolingual nation-state, the question of how the speakers categorize and conceptualize their group of varieties is all the more relevant.

In general, East Lorraine is a region about which little is known (linguistically). While there is some research activity on other border minorities of German in Europe and also in France (i.e., Alsace), East Lorraine is rather below the radar of linguistics.¹⁵ The lack of an urban, intellectual center and the accompanying low level of cultural production (Beyer and Fehlen 2019, p. 106) may be one possible reason for this. In addition, the sharp decline in the number of speakers may make the area seem less productive for research (cf. Ammon 2015, p. 313). However, this is far from being the case. To show this is another concern of this contribution.

4. Past and Present of East Lorraine

Lorraine is a (formerly political) region in Northeastern France, bordering Alsace to the east and Luxembourg and Germany to the north. Like neighboring Alsace, it has been part of the Région Grand-Est since 2016, which is divided into several “departements”. The (Lorraine) German-speaking part lies in the département Moselle. The (historic) Romance-Germanic language border runs right across the département of Moselle (in its present form), dividing it in two: The French-speaking southwest and the (also) German-speaking northeast (cf. Figure 1)—in practice, the whole département is, nowadays, French-speaking, and the speakers of the Germanic varieties have to be bilingual. Turning to the demographic level, the département Moselle has a population of about one million, and about half of its inhabitants live in the traditionally German-speaking area. There are no reliable data on the number of speakers, only estimates. These range between 100,000 and 500,000 speakers (Beyer and Fehlen 2019, p. 109). Overall, it is more of a rural area, although the area in the northwest is a little bit more urban—the largest city there is Thionville/Diedenhofen, with a good 41,000 inhabitants.

¹⁴ Of course there are different positions in this field. For the situation in South Tyrol cf., e.g., Leonardi (2016).

¹⁵ See, for example, the non-mentioning in Harrison and Joubert (2019a) and Hogan-Brun (2000).



Figure 1. Linguistic and administrative subdivision of the departement Moselle (Lorraine/France) © IDS/Cußler-Volz.

East Lorraine (including some neighboring French parts) has experienced four changes in political affiliation over the course of the last 150 years:

- In 1871, France had to concede it to the German Reich;
- At the end of the First World War, the conceded territories became French again;
- In June 1940, the departement Moselle was immediately reattached to the German Reich (100,000 “non-assimilable” Lorraine residents were deported to unoccupied France, some of whom left “voluntarily”);
- At the beginning of 1945, the occupied territories became French again. Since that time, the German dialects constitute a minority in the French diasystem.

In terms of dialect geography, the German-speaking area can be assigned to the West Central German dialect continuum, which can be divided into several smaller dialect areas on the basis of isoglosses. Following the division of the so-called “Rhenish fan” (the most common structuring model for the German dialects), there is a Moselle Franconian and a Rhine Franconian part (diverging with regard to the preservation of the non-shifted plosiv /t/ in the lexemes *das*—“the” (neuter definite article), *was*—“what”, and *es*—“it”) (Drenda 2019, pp. 21–23). The corresponding isogloss runs in a southwesterly direction to the Romance–Germanic language border in Lorraine. It thus has a dividing effect (Moselle Franconian in the west versus Rhine Franconian east also in East Lorraine), but (as it runs from north to south and not from east to west) it also creates a link between the southern dialect areas beyond the state border and the respective northern areas.

In view of the sometimes downright bitter disputes between Germany and France in the past, firstly, and the guiding principle of the linguistic unity of the republic¹⁶, secondly, the Germanic varieties in East Lorraine are only very weakly protected legally. After strong resentment immediately after the Second World War, Germanic varieties have gradually gained some recognition in recent decades—albeit in ambivalent regulations and ordinances, especially with regard to the relationship between local dialects and Standard German. Most of the regulations can be found in the area of school education.

¹⁶ For the history of language policies in France and their link to Republican values, see Harrison and Joubert (2019b).

The so-called Circulaire Savary of 1982 (Circulaire 82–261 “L’enseignement des langues regionales dans les service public d’éducation nationale”), which for the first time refers to *all* regional languages of France (the Loi Deixonne from 1951 only applied to Breton, Basque, Catalan, and Occitan), organizes optional lessons in these languages from kindergarten to university.¹⁷ However, these provisions were implemented in Lorraine only after several years of delay and under pressure from parents and teachers. In 1991, under the name of the “Moselle’s Special Path”, the possibility was created of receiving an introduction to the German language from kindergarten to the fourth grade of primary school via the dialect.

Here, dialects were considered a “natural springboard” (*Académie de Nancy-Metz* 1990, p. 81) for the actual German to be learned (presumably standard German is meant). At the same time, i.e., also in 1991, an optional subject “regional language and culture” was introduced at the Lycée, including the possibility of a voluntary additional examination in the Baccalauréat. This subject was offered for three different dialects (Luxembourgish Franconian, Moselle Franconian, and Rhine Franconian).

It is not least because of this and the accompanying teaching materials that these terms and the generic “Franconian” (*Fränkisch*)¹⁸ have become established to designate the Lorraine dialects. In 1999, France signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, but all attempts at ratification have failed to date. Nevertheless, a preparatory constitutional amendment or addition was made in 2008, which recognizes that regional languages are part of the French cultural heritage. An annex to a 2007 decree on the teaching of regional languages in primary schools explicitly characterizes the regional language for Alsace and Moselle. According to this decree, there are two forms: On the one hand, the (German) dialects, and on the other hand, the German standard language.¹⁹ In a recent “Framework convention for a common strategic vision for the development of educational policies in favour of multilingualism and cross-border education”²⁰ for the territory of the former region Lorraine, German (not further differentiated) figures as the language of the neighbor, i.e., it is exogenized. Since the 2016 territorial reform, the (previously only) *Office pour la langue et les cultures d’Alsace* has officially been responsible for Lorraine as well, which is also signaled by an extension of its name. In practice, however, and, for example, in the self-presentation on the office’s website, the dialects of Moselle are completely ignored. Almost the same responsibility since 2016, but ignoring Moselle, holds true for the aforementioned Institute of Alsatian Dialectology at the University of Strasbourg.

5. Data Description and Method

At the Leibniz Institute for the German Language, data collection (audio) has been carried out since 2017 (and is still ongoing) for the documentation and study of multilingualism in the German-speaking part of Lorraine.²¹ The informants come from the entire area on this side of the language border. The differently shaded fields in Figure 1 symbolize different cantons in the departement of Moselle. This division essentially separates areas with different degrees of urbanization or economic traditions (see, for example, the so-called coal area, where mining was practiced until the end of the 20th century). In view of the known connection between extralinguistic conditions and linguistic development, these cantons also form the basis for subgrouping among informants. The oldest informant is a woman born in 1921, the youngest a man born in 2000. The group is also heterogeneous in terms of language skills. Although the focus was on documenting the Germanic varieties, the entire linguistic situation in East Lorraine was also to be taken into account.

¹⁷ In primary schools, for instance, regional languages were to be taught one to three times a week; in secondary schools (*collèges*), pupils were allowed one lesson on a voluntary basis with a minimum of 15 pupils; in grammar schools (*lycées*), the regional language could be chosen as the first or third foreign language as an option for the baccalauréat (Stroh 1993, p. 71).

¹⁸ For the terms used by the community’s individuals, see Section 6.2.

¹⁹ See <https://www.education.gouv.fr/bo/2008/3/MENE0773513A.htm> (7 April 2020).

²⁰ Available online: https://euregio.lu/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/signature_convention_plurilinguisme_et_transfrontalier_juillet2019.pdf (Last access date 11 March 2021).

²¹ The data are expected to be available via the Archive for Spoken German (Archiv für Gesprochenes Deutsch, AGD) of the Leibniz Institute for the German language (http://agd.ids-mannheim.de/index_en.shtml; Last access date 11 March 2021) from 2022.

Accordingly, some interviews were also conducted with informants who—according to their own statements—have rudimentary speaking competence or only passive comprehension competence but who are connected to the minority language through family history. Currently, the number of persons interviewed is 81. The current volume of data amounts to more than 125 h of audio recordings.

The recording design follows the design of comparable projects in the field of (German) variational linguistics, i.e., taking into account different situational contexts eliciting different varieties and also providing metalinguistic data (cf. Elmentaler et al. 2006). The data thus include dialectal translation tests (a longstanding set of sentences) and reading tests in Standard German (a fable of the Greek poet Aesop) as well as free speech in language biographical, guideline-based interviews with a Standard German-speaking interviewer and in conversations with the interviewee's family and/or friends. This wide range of recording situations allows for different analyses: There is, firstly, the level of language use. For the first three situations, one can analyze, for example, the realized features and thus intralinguistic variation within the language spectrum of the Germanic varieties as well as, for example, variation due to language contact with French. For the first three situations, the language to be spoken was specified by the task in each case—at least in theory. In practice, it became apparent that individual competence in speaking, e.g., Standard German, varied greatly. However, the questions in the interview were always asked in German, so it was clear that speaking should be as close to the Standard as possible. The structural analysis of how close each speaker has come to Standard German is still pending. The table discussions provide insights into the coexistence of Lorraine dialects and French, as shown, for example, in code switching.

Beyond the linguistic–structural aspects, the subjective perspectives and experiences of the informants in the interviews are also of central interest for the project and especially for this paper. Each guideline-based interview can thus be exploited in two ways: On the one hand, it provides evidence of the subjects' speech closest to (Standard) German, and on the other hand, it provides usable material in terms of content, i.e., a wealth of statements containing lay linguistic knowledge and language attitudes.

In what follows, we present preliminary results of our qualitative content analysis of statements of our informants concerning their perspectives on their linguistic situation. By thorough examination of the material, we identified recurrent topics and arguments in their attitudes and different specific attributes to the relevant Germanic varieties, especially concerning the language status.

6. The Speakers' Perspective

6.1. Situation and Perception

As explained in Section 4, the autochthonous dialects spoken in Lorraine are part of the continental West Germanic dialect continuum. From a historical perspective, the situation is clear: The Lorraine dialects are part of the historical German language area, i.e., they are German dialects. The political border between Germany and France is irrelevant. In terms of language structure, the Lorraine dialects are (still) so close to the neighboring German dialects that there can be no question of Lorraine being a language in its own right.

However, the sociolinguistic situation of speakers in Lorraine is fundamentally different from that of the other territories discussed in Section 3.2. While in the areas of the German-speaking minorities in Denmark, Belgium, and Italy, Standard German is anchored as a natural part of the linguistic life of the members of the minority—especially as a language in school and in the media—the Lorraine dialects have lost their connection to the German standard variety. From a sociolinguistic point of view, they are therefore no longer part of the German diasystem. They are functionally roofed by Standard French; all the linguistic domains typically occupied by a standard variety (written communication, official language use, public speaking at formal occasions, etc.) are assigned to French, which is also the literacy language in particular. The Lorraine dialects remain essentially limited to spoken communication in proximity. This is different from the case of Luxem-

bourgish, for example. Historically, the dialects spoken in Luxembourg are also part of the Moselle-Franconian dialect continuum. However, most of their speakers no longer regard them as dialects of German but claim the status of a native language for Luxembourgish (cf. Sieburg and Weimann 2014), despite its great structural proximity to the neighboring Moselle-Franconian dialects. This is possible not least because the areas where it is spoken align with the political borders of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.

The dialects of Lorraine, on the other hand, do not fit seamlessly into the ideology that is firmly anchored in the lay-linguistic discourse, which is based, firstly, on the identity of language and nation or national territory and, secondly, on the genetic link between dialects and functionally assigned standard varieties (cf. Section 1). Both conditions are not met for the dialects of Lorraine. This means that the concrete linguistic situation in which the members of the minority find themselves is not covered by this usual narrative. Thus, the construction of a linguistic identity under the specific conditions of multilingualism in Lorraine represents a particular challenge for their speakers. This difficulty is very clearly reflected in the expressions of the speakers (for a discussion on this topic, see Beyer and Plewnia 2021). On the one hand, it can be seen in the terminological field: The very question of how to name the dialects in Lorraine is answered inconsistently by our informants. Their utterances show terminological ambiguities, and they demonstrate a considerable disagreement not only among themselves but also within the utterances of the same speaker. On the other hand, the difficulty described is evident in the field of the underlying concepts: The concepts reconstructable from the speakers' utterances show considerable conceptual fuzziness both in terms of the construction of Lorraine itself and in terms of its relationship with German, i.e., with neighboring dialects, with Standard German, and with the German language as a whole. All in all, the utterances of the speakers are marked by ambiguities and internal contradictions; not only do the speakers disagree with each other, but many also contradict themselves. The diversity and contradictions of the various statements can be interpreted in such a way that—contrary to what one might expect—there is no elaborate discourse on these issues in the speakers' community. Quite obviously, the speakers do not consult ready-made templates for argumentation but give answers that have not been thought through thoroughly and are not formulated for long. Remarkably, the contradictory statements made by a speaker during an interview do not at any point cause irritation; the interviewees seem to get along quite well with the somewhat unclear situation (see also Beyer and Plewnia 2021).

6.2. *What the Speakers Tell US*

In this section, we present a series of statements by our informants which, in one way or another, seem to us to be typical of the way in which speakers deal with the question of the linguistic status of their dialects. As a starting point, we use the term "German"; our key question is whether or not the Lorraine dialects belong to German from their speakers' point of view. In fact, the answer is ambiguous: On the one hand, the term "German" refers to Germany and to the Standard German located there. German is the language of Germany (and not of France), the language status is undisputed, and language and nation or national territory are congruent here. "German" is thus constructed as an exoglossic variety. (This position is explained in Section 6.2.1) On the other hand, "German" also functions as a self-designation for the Lorraine dialects. "German" is used synonymously—jointly or alternately—with the terms "Platt" or "Dialekt", occasionally also "Mundart" or "Fränkisch"/"francique". Typically, the non-standard character becomes clear, explicitly or through context. Usually, the question of the language status remains implicit. (This position is explained in Section 6.2.2) These two positions logically exclude each other. However, this contradiction is not addressed in any discussion; in the awareness of both the community and the individual speakers, it does not seem to matter.

6.2.1. “German” Refers to Germany

In many interviews, “German” is constructed as the language of Germany. This idea is directly related to the concept of identity of language and nation. From a French perspective, Germany is a foreign country; therefore, German is a foreign language that must be learned as such. We illustrate this approach with statements by our informants on the following three themes: German as a language to be learned (*German Must Be Learnt*), German as a foreign language (*German Is a Foreign Language*), and the conceptual relationship between language and nation (*Language and Nation*). It is noticeable that most of the respondents do not take a clear and unambiguous stand but often relativize or half retract their statements. This behavior is typical for the entire discourse.

German Must Be Learnt

When German is spoken about as the language of the neighbor, one usually means the standard language. Many informants stress that, as competent dialect speakers, they have found it easy to learn German. The dialect is stylized here as a special resource, which to a certain extent represents a locational advantage of the (otherwise economically disadvantaged) region over the French heartland. Comments on the subject of learning German often refer to school classes where German is taught as a foreign language. There are numerous statements of the following type:

(1²²) Platt hat wahrscheinlich geholfen als Schüler, Deutsch zu lernen, schon die Wörter, auch Grammatik. (DE-m2²³)

Platt probably helped as a student to learn German, already the words, also grammar. Often, however, the learning context remains implicit; or at least the learning situation of controlled language acquisition is not explicitly evoked.

(2) Es ist (.) sehr leicht, die deutsche Sprache zu lernen, find ich bald. Deutsch zu lernen, umb/äh/aber bei uns hat, (.) wie soll ich sagen, das Ohr alles gemacht. (SZ-m1)
It is (.) very easy to learn the German language, in my opinion. To learn German, um/uhh/but with us, (.) how shall I put this, the ear has done everything.

If, as the respondent says, “the ear did everything”, and it therefore did not require any special effort to learn German, then the structural distance between the dialects and Standard German cannot be that great. This structural connection between dialect and Standard German is certainly seen. One respondent explains to us:

(3) Die, die Mundart können, beherrschen auch Hochdeutsch ziemlich gut. (BL-w3)
Those who speak dialect also speak High German fairly well.

Dialect and standard are presented here as closely related. Although High German does not play a role in the communicative everyday life of the informants (unless they are teachers, professional speakers, and the like), it is claimed here that it is part of the normal linguistic repertoire of the vast majority of speakers.

German Is a Foreign Language

Often, the term “foreign language” is used, where German is mentioned as the neighbor’s language. This is not surprising and fits into the lay-linguistic world of imagination, according to which languages are clearly distributed across countries. However, most of

²² Since this contribution is about the content of the speakers’ statements (and not about phonetic or morphological features of the dialects), we present, for the purpose of easier readability, the examples in a literary transcription based on the Standard German orthography.

²³ As explained above, the département Moselle comprises different cantons with different socioeconomic conditions. To be able to trace their influence on linguistic behavior and development, the subgrouping of the informants is (amongst others) based on these cantons. The abbreviations of the speakers are a combination of an abbreviation of the canton of origin (in German), sex, and sequential numbering. The abbreviations of the cantons are as follows: DE (Dreiländereck—“border triangle”), NL (Niedland—“country of the Nied”), KG (Kohlengebiet—“coal area”), SL (Saargemünder Land—“country of Sarreguemines”), BL (Bitscher Land—“country of Bitche”), SZ (Salzgau—“salt region”) and SB (Saarburger Land—“country of Sarrebourg”). That means that the example in (1) was uttered by the second male interviewee coming from the border triangle, the example in (2) from the first male informant interviewed from the salt region, etc.

the people involved are not entirely happy with this attribution, either; typically, the term “foreign language” is used in some way either explicitly or relativized by the context:

- (4) Deutsch, also Hochdeutsch, ist für mich doch etwas wie eine Fremdsprache. (BL-m2)
German, by which I mean High German, is something of a foreign language for me.

The first relativization in this example refers to the term “German”, which is specified as “High German”. The second relativization refers to the term “foreign language”: “is more something of a foreign language” is much less than “is a foreign language” would be.

Example (5) offers an explicit relativization; when asked which foreign language should be taught in Lorraine at school, the respondent says:

- (5) Hier sollte man nur Deutsch sowieso/äh/erste Fremdsprache. Also, also sollte/eigentlich keine so richtige Fremdsprache. (BL-m1) Here you should only [teach] German anyway/uh/first foreign language. Well, should/it’s not a real foreign language.

He says that the first foreign language should be German (and not English as in most cases), and he immediately concludes that this is not a “real foreign language” anyway—at least not, one might add, for the children who actually still grow up with the dialect. German, i.e., Standard German, is an exoglossic variety attributed to Germany, but Standard German is not really foreign either.

Language and Nation

For France and French, as well as for Germany and Standard German, the assumption of an identity of language and nation still works reasonably well, although some cracks can be seen. It becomes difficult where this topos of the identity of language and nation clearly contradicts the objective conditions. As far as the Lorraine dialects are concerned, it becomes complicated because Lorraine is not Germany, but the Lorraine dialect is not French either. From this, the informants deduce different things. Partly, the construction of Lorraine (language) is based on the political affiliation to France. Partly, an (Alsatian) Lorraine identity is constructed. Partly, attempts at explanation lead to indissoluble entanglements. In example (6), the topos in question is explicitly addressed:

- (6) Nee, Deutsch ist kein/Plattdeutsch ist (.) eine Sprache des Landes, oder/ich weiß nicht. Jeden/jedes Land hat seine Sprache, ne? (NL-w1) Nah, German is not/Plattdeutsch is (.) a language of the country, or/I don’t know. Every country has its own language, doesn’t it?

At the same time, the aporia into which this approach leads becomes apparent. If “each country has its own language”, what does that mean for Lorraine and the German or Plattdeutsch or Platt spoken there? The answer: “I don’t know.”

This helplessness is widespread among our informants. One way of escaping this problem is to explicitly formulate an own group identity in Lorraine, as is done in example

- (7) Wir sind Lothringer, wir sprechen Platt. [. . .] Wir sind auch keine richtigen Franzosen, wir sind Lothringer. Und auch keine Deutsche. Wir sind Lothringer. (BL-m6)
We are Lorraine, we speak Platt. [...] We are not really French either, we are Lorraine. And we are not German either. We are Lorraine.

Here, “the Lorraine people” are constituted as a group in their own right, who are neither French nor German²⁴ and therefore have, so to speak, a right to their own language. This respondent does not yet go so far as to connect his own language (“we speak Platt”) terminologically with Lorraine. Others do so. When asked about her mother tongue, one respondent answers:

- (8) Die von hier: Lothringisch, Elsass-Lothringisch, die wir heute noch sprechen. (SB-w6)
The one from here: Lorraine, Alsace-Lorraine, which we still speak until today.

²⁴ Auer (2018) reports from Alsace that speakers of Alsatian construct an identity in a similar way that stands between Germany and France, combining the “best of both worlds”.

The mother tongue is the language “from here”, here is Lorraine, and therefore, the language is called “Lorraine”. The speaker then corrects herself to “Alsace-Lorraine”. This is particularly revealing because it makes no sense from a dialectological point of view. In Lorraine, Franconian dialects are spoken; in Alsace, (mostly) Alemannic. This terminology is based on the concept of a political entity “Alsace-Lorraine”, which existed only for the duration of these territories’ membership of the German Reich. Nevertheless, the respondent uses this concept as an anchor point for naming her “language of the country”.²⁵

6.2.2. “German” Refers to Lorraine

The fact that “German” is identified with Germany is one thing. On the other hand, however, the term “German” can also refer to Lorraine. From the way German in Germany is seen as an exoglossic variety, it cannot yet be deduced how the autochthonous Lorraine dialects are conceptualized. The statements made by some of the informants testify to an awareness of an areal linguistic continuum beyond national borders, in which the Lorraine dialects also play their part. We discuss this in *Linguistic Continua*. The Lorraine Platt itself is also called “German” by many speakers, without this being perceived as a contradiction; evidence for this use is provided in *Lorraine Is German*.

Linguistic Continua

It is typical for discourses conducted by linguistic laypersons on linguistic topics that there is a certain basic understanding of linguistic facts and that individual elements of knowledge are present, but that the linguistic concepts based on these elements are usually very fuzzy and not always coherent, without this being perceived as a problem by the discussants. This can also be observed here. Our informants are well aware, firstly, that there are certain differences in space within the Lorraine dialects and that the dialectology has names for them, and secondly, that the dialectal continuum continues beyond national borders. Such a somewhat scalar conception of language can be found, for instance, in example (9):

- (9) Der Platt vom Bitscherland, das ist doch mehr Deutsch. (DE-m2) The Platt from the country of Bitche, that is more German.

In the Country of Bitche, Rhine-Franconian dialects are spoken (cf. Section 4). If this dialect is “more German”—which presumably means that it is closer or more similar to German, i.e., the dialects spoken in Germany (or Standard German?)—then the Moselle-Franconian dialects spoken in Lorraine on the border with Luxembourg are less German—which presumably means that they are less similar to German. Indeed, the respondent explains this a little later as follows:

- (10) Platt und Luxemburger—das ist nicht dieselbe Sprache, hein? Fast dieselbe Sprache, kann man auch sagen. (DE-m2) Platt and Luxembourgish—they are not the same language, are they? You could also say, they are almost the same language.

The Lorraine Platt and Luxembourgish are “not the same language”, but they are obviously so similar that it is necessary to point out that they are not the same language. Additionally, as the respondent qualifies, the two languages are not really far apart either; after all, they are “almost the same language”. This way of speaking is very typical; the test persons avoid clear definitions, correct themselves, relativize. There seems to be a widespread but rather diffuse knowledge about language areas, but there are no stable and elaborated concepts. Obviously, this status question is quite difficult on the one hand, but on the other hand, it is not so relevant to everyday life that one would invest a bigger amount of cognitive effort to clarify it.

Lorraine Is German

²⁵ Just how firmly this topos of the identity of language and nation is anchored is also shown by another example which does not deal with one’s own language. One respondent reports that toward the end of the Second World War, soldiers were quartered in his village with whom he spoke in English; he then specifies: “I thought it was English, but it was American.” (NL-m3) Because they were not English soldiers, but American soldiers.

The term “German” does not only refer to the language of Germany but is also a common self-designation which refers clearly and explicitly to the dialects of Lorraine. This use fundamentally differs from the use described in Section 6.2.1. However, the fact that the term “German” can be used—by one and the same speaker—with such different meanings does not seem to be a problem for the speakers and is not further discussed by them.

The other term that is also commonly used for the self-designation of dialects is “Platt”. However, there are also terminological uncertainties, as shown by example (11):

- (11) Wir reden Platt. Aber wir haben immer gesagt: ‚Wir reden Deutsch.‘ Und ich finde das noch am besten. Das ist trotzdem der beste Begriff. Für mich. Wir reden Deutsch oder wir reden Platt. Jo. Mit Platt, Platt kann ich mich anfreunden. Weil das heißt, es gibt die Hochsprache, Schriftsprache. Und es gibt diese verschiedenen Dialekte; wenn man das jetzt Platt nennt, warum nicht. (BL-m2) We speak Platt. But we have always said: ‘We speak German.’ And I like that the most. That is still the best term. For me. We speak German or we speak Platt. Yeah. I can come to like Platt. Because that means that there is the high language, written language. And there are these different dialects; and if you call that Platt, why wouldn’t you?

It is easy to follow how the respondent works through the question. He starts with the term “Platt”, but at the same time, he admits that he considers “German” to still be the “best term”. After some thought, he then comes back to the term “Platt” (“I can come to like Platt.”) “Platt” apparently has the advantage for him that it allows him to conceive his dialect Platt as an L-variety of a diasystem. The corresponding H-variety is High German, the “written language”. In this paradigm, however, the use of the term “Platt” would not be a signal for the linguistic independence of the Lorraine dialects, but they would be part of German again.

With regard to terminology, our informants take different positions. The respondent, to whom we owe example (12), speaks in favor of “German” and against “Platt”:

- (12) Die sagen immer (.) Platt. Und wir reden kein Platt, wir reden Deutsch. [. . .] Jeder sagt das so, Platt. Aber in Wirklichkeit sprechen wir (.) kein Platt. Und ich rede/ich spreche nur Deutsch, also kein Platt. (lacht) Wenn jemand sagt: ‚Redest du Platt?‘, sage ich ihm: Hm. (.) Passt gar nicht. (lacht) [. . .] Spreche Deutsch, ja. (SL-m5) They always say (.) Platt. And we don’t speak Platt, we speak German. [...] Everybody says that, Platt. But in fact we (.) don’t speak Platt. And I speak/I only speak German, not Platt. (laughs) If someone says: ‘Do you speak Platt?’, I tell him: Hm. (.) Doesn’t fit. (laughs) [...] I speak German, yes.

On the one hand, it is claimed that “Platt” is the more common term—an assessment that many of our respondents contradict. On the other hand, the respondent insists without further explanation that in Lorraine, “in fact”, “Platt” is not spoken, but instead “German”. In any case, we cannot present any example where a speaker uses the propagated term “Franconian” (cf. Section 4).

However, none of this seems to be a real problem for most speakers. There are also statements from which a terminological identity of German and Platt or dialect can be deduced, as examples (13) and (14) show:

- (13) Ja, die Muttersprache war/war Deutsch. Ja, ja. War/war Platt, ne? (SL-m6) Yes, the mother tongue was/was German. Yes, yes. Was/was Platt, wasn’t it?
- (14) Meine Muttersprache ist ein/eindeutig äh/Dialekt und Deutsch. (.) War, also, ist immer noch. (KG-m9) My mother tongue is def/definitely äh/dialect and German. (.) Was, well, it still is.

In the first example, the respondent answers the question about his mother tongue first with “German” and then modifies or specifies this to “Platt”. In the second example, “dialect and German” are even understood as a single unit. References of this kind show that the speakers are well aware of the status of their dialects as L-varieties. However, the

term “German” is also used to refer to the own language. Nevertheless, to what extent such a use also claims an affiliation to German in Germany must remain open.

7. Conclusions

The German-speaking minorities dealt with in this article have in common that they exist (as a result of the changing political entities of a common Central European history) as border minorities on the outskirts of the German-speaking area. The very existence of these minorities refutes the ideology of an identity of language areas and nation states that is still widespread in Europe. However, these minorities differ not inconsiderably in terms of their political–legal status and their sociolinguistic situation; this has consequences for the conception and construction of their respective linguistic and regional identities as well as their positioning toward German.

While the German-speaking minorities in Denmark, Belgium, and Italy enjoy a high degree of protection or autonomy, respectively, which enables them to (legally) regulate their own language use, the situation in France is somewhat more complicated. This is especially true for the part of East Lorraine where the dialects historically belonging to German are under the functional roof of French. In the period after the Second World War, the relationship between France and Germany was very strained. For the speakers of the Germanic varieties in Lorraine, this posed a particular challenge for the construction of their linguistic identity and the categorization of their dialects.

Since 2017, we have carried out new, extensive surveys with speakers of Germanic varieties in East Lorraine. Among other things, we were interested in the ways in which the speakers themselves describe the specific multilingual constellation in which they find themselves. A very mixed picture emerges: On the one hand, the speakers are quite aware that their dialects are in some way related to German in Germany. The term “German” (in dialect “Ditsch”, in Standard German “Deutsch”) is regularly used to refer to their own dialect, the “Platt”. On the other hand, the need to formulate a certain linguistic independence is recognizable. The overall impression that runs through the interviews is the following: The statements of the interviewees are predominantly unclear, they are fuzzy, and they are not free of internal contradictions, so that it is also not possible to create a clear typology of the different positions. Apparently, however, the question of how exactly the Lorraine dialects relate to the other German dialects and to Standard German is not that relevant for the speakers—or at least they lack suitable argumentative figures and thought patterns to draw on. There seem to be no fixed formulations and trained answers that they can—almost automatically—reproduce; the speakers answer imprecisely and contradictorily and relativize their own statements. In any case, it is quite obvious that this linguistic problem does not play a major role in their everyday life.

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Data Availability Statement: The data isare expected to be available via the Archive for Spoken German (Archiv für Gesprochenes Deutsch, AGD) of the Leibniz Institute for the German language (http://agd.ids-mannheim.de/index_en.shtml); Last access date 11 March 2021) from 2022.

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