DIALECTS ACROSS BORDERS

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Edited by

MARKKU FILPPULA
University of Joensuu
JUHANI KLEMOLA
University of Tampere
MARJATTA PALANDER
University of Joensuu
ESA PENTTILÄ
University of Joensuu

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Dialects Across Borders
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THE CONSTRUCTION OF LINGUISTIC BORDERS AND THE LINGUISTIC CONSTRUCTION OF BORDERS

PETER AUER
Universität Freiburg

1. *Introduction*

In the relationship between geographical space, language variation, and the (European) nation-state, space and language appear to be trivially linked; in fact, a whole sub-discipline of linguistics (that of dialectology) construes its professional identity around the assumption that languages vary in geographical space. The link between the nation-state and geographical space appears just as natural — there are no nations without a territory. But unlike dialectologists, political scientists, sociologists and others who have investigated the emergence of the European nation-states have given this link a considerable amount of theoretical reflection (starting with Simmel 1903 [1995]). This suggests that this link — and perhaps that between language and space as well — is not as natural as it may look at first sight. But how are dialectal variation and the nation-state related to each other? Empirically, the question becomes relevant as soon as we look at dialect continua across national borders. I will turn to this in Section 4. However, there may also be a more ideological relationship between the two; after all, the origins of systematic dialect geography go back to the late 19th century, the very same time when nationalist thinking reached a climax in Europe. At first glance, the coincidence seems to be purely coincidental, for dialectology was at the time, and continues to be, interested in (areal, diatopic) diversity; as such, it would hardly seem to be able to contribute to the ideological construction of a geographically bounded nation state. But at a second look, it becomes apparent that early dialectology and the nation-state had some common interests (as will be shown in Section 2).

I will try to develop my arguments using examples from German, not because they uniquely apply to this language area (and the German nation-state), but because the German language area is rich in examples of political (nation state) borders cutting across dialect continua. At least the following types can be distinguished:

- the German standard language (with small differences) may be one or the only standard language used, and dialects of German are spoken, on both sides of the border (as between Switzerland/Germany, Austria/South Tyrol and Austria/Germany);
- a Germanic dialect continuum may be 'roofed' by a structurally relatively distant (exoglossic) standard variety on one side of the border and by standard German on the other (this is, *cum grano salis*, the case of the border between Germany and the Alsace/France); or,
- a Germanic dialect continuum may be roofed by different (endoglossic) Germanic standard varieties, as at the state border between the Netherlands and Germany, but also between Luxembourg and Germany (Letzebuergish is one of the standard languages used in Luxembourg[1]).

2. *Dialectology and the nation-state: ideological connections*

The 19th century saw the triumph of the nation-state, on the one hand, and of the establishment of dialect geography, on the other. In Germany, the link between the two was established in the late 19th century with the foundation of a national dialect atlas (the famous *Sprachatlas des Deutschen Reichs*), which from 1888 on was a state-financed project directly approved of by the government in Berlin. (The literal and metaphorical owner of the atlas was the Prussian ministry of education. With its nationalisation, and following the wish of the ministry, not of its director Georg Wenker, the reach of the atlas was extended to the total territory of the German state.) This raises the question of whether there was a common ideology shared by the nation-state and dialect geography which suggested this kind of cooperation. I would like to suggest that this ideological affinity consisted (among other things) of a (at the time) new and sharpened interest in geographical space in general, and in the boundedness of geographical spaces (i.e. in 'borders') in particular.[2] We know, for example, that Georg Wenker, the founder of the *Sprachatlas*, was determined to detect dialect *borders* at the start of his project; he thought that dialect areas were set off against each other in a clear-cut way (although this expectation was quickly disappointed when he did his first maps of the Rhineland).[3] To the present day, many dialectologists use maps on which

[1] French and German are used as (written) standard languages as well.

[2] There were other points of collaboration which moved into the foreground in the 1920s and 30s; in particular, the atlas was able and wanted to prove that the German "language islands" outside the German-speaking territory were 'rooted' in the dialects spoken in Germany itself.

[3] Contrary to what many textbooks say, it was this geographical interest much more than the theoretical debate around the Neogrammarian idea that phonetic rules have no lexical

dialect areas are delimited against each other like state territories are delimited against each other on political maps.[4] Thus, the standard map of the German dialects which goes back to the *Deutscher Sprachatlas* and has been reproduced again and again, is the one in Figure 1 — this version being taken from Niebaum and Macha (1999: 193).

Dialect boundaries cut the German language area into sections in a complete and exhaustive way, and without internal differentiations, just as in a political map. In reality, of course, dialect spaces are not organised like this.

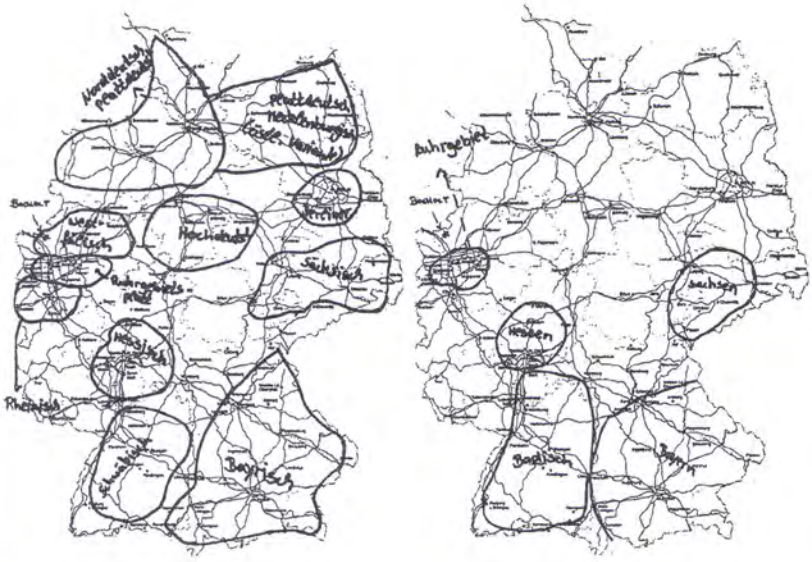
Figure 1: *The German dialects around 1900 (from Niebaum & Macha 1999: 193).*

restrictions (as one may re-formulate their 'exceptionless sound laws') which motivated Wenker; cf. Wenker (1886: 190).

[4] Transition areas came much later.

But even when dialect areas were not treated as sharply delimited from each other, the keen interest in borders was (and partly continues to be) at the heart of dialectological thinking: isoglosses, i.e. dividing lines between single feature realisations in geographical space, are a good example of this. In the classical books on (German) dialectology (such as Bach [1]1934, [3]1969), isoglosses are described as physically real phenomena when they are stable, like contour lines on a geographical map referring to points of equal height. (When they change, they are described like battle lines which recede or advance in a certain territory. While the geographical metaphor suggests perfect isomorphy with some kind of physical reality, the metaphor of the battle lines suggests impermeability and solidity; a battle line which dissolves means defeat.)

It is important to note here that the interest in geographical *space* and the interest in *borders* are not the same. There are ways to think about geographical space which do not focus on boundaries, such as, for instance, the centre/periphery model. Ethnodialectological (folk) representations of dialect space are usually structured according to this latter model, with more or less prototypical core areas and indeterminate outer limits. Some typical folk maps of the dialects of Germany are reproduced as Figures 2 and 3.



Figures 2 and 3: *Folk-dialectological maps of the dialects of Germany, drawn by two informants from Bocholt (from Stegger 2000).*

The designated dialect areas do not cover the area of Germany exhaustively but rather omit certain areas (often in the middle). Frequently, a large city is taken to be the centre of a dialect, as can be seen in Figures 4 and 5, cumulative representations of the Bavarian ethnodialectology as drawn by informants (students) from Dresden (Saxony), and Detmold (in northwest Germany, close to the Dutch border). For both groups of informants, the radiation centre of Bavarian is Munich. The city is included into the Bavarian dialect space by all informants; the borders of folk Bavarian, however, differ quite considerably among these informants.

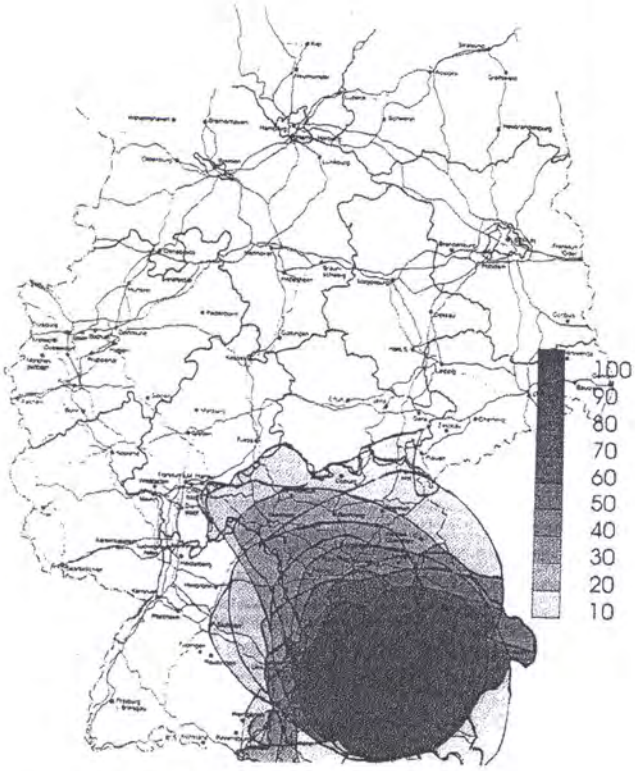


Figure 4: *Ethnodialectological maps of Bavarian, as drawn by 20 informants from Dresden; shadings refer to degrees of overlap (from Stegger 2000).*

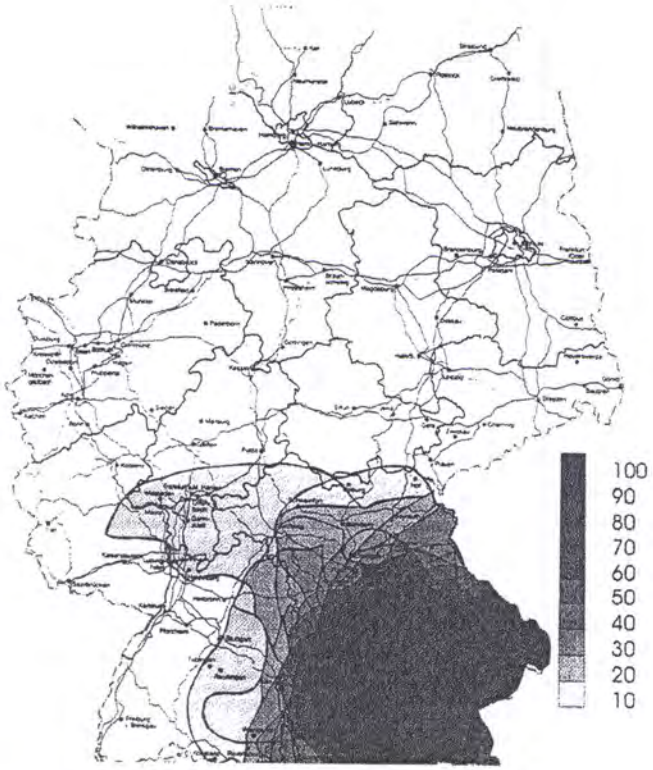


Figure 5: *Ethnodialectological map of Bavarian, as drawn by 20 informants from Bocholt; shadings refer to degrees of overlap (from Stegger 2000).*

Contrary to these folk dialectologists, professional dialect geographers developed a keen interest in spatial boundedness; and the prevalent nationalist discourse all over Europe was equally interested in the borders of the nations (which of course, according to this discourse, ought to be the borders of the states). As an example, one may think of the fixation of Germans and French on the river Rhine as their state border (*Wacht am Rhein*), or of Hofmann von Fallersleben's text for the later German national anthem, the first verse of which lists the boundaries of the German nation (Etsch, Belt, Maas, Memel) in order to claim its unity. As Anderson (1983 [^{2}1991: 19]) points out, this was a new way of looking at state borders: the pre-national "dynastic model" did not imply a kind of sovereignty which was "fully, flatly, and evenly operative over each square centimetre of a legally demarcated territory", but rather, these

"states were defined by centres, borders were porous and indistinct, and sovereignties faded imperceptibly into one another".[5]

But did the borders of the German nation-state coincide with the language border on the dialectological map? A look at Figure 1 makes clear that the fit was far from perfect: on the one hand, there was (and continues to be) at least one non-Germanic enclave within the German language area, i.e. Sorbian; on the other hand, the German dialects partly transgressed the state borders of Germany at 1900 (for instance, into Czechia), partly they included non-German speaking populations (for instance, in East Prussia or the Lorraine). In this sense, the linguistic borders did not lend support to the existing state borders.

However, the argument could be turned around. The misalliance of language and state territory could be used in the framework of nationalist thinking to argue for a 'correction' of the state borders, i.e. an extension of the German state. This argument became more and more popular after the first World War, when Germany lost territory both in the east and in the west, and thus excluded many more speakers of German than it included speakers of other languages in the border areas. The argument was not alien to some of the *Sprachatlas* dialectologists, either. When the 'correction' of the borders became reality in the war, Walther Mitzka, then the director of the *Sprachatlas* and professor at the university of Marburg (and a member of the Nazi party) from 1933 onwards, propagated German settlements in the occupied Slavic territories with the argument that the German dialects would be instrumental in the Germanification of the Slavs who would give up their languages because of the superiority of German ("sprachliche Raumgewinnung"; cf. Mitzka (1941) and (1943/44)).[6] Consequently, the dialect map which Mitzka published in his textbook on dialectology in 1943 is quite different from the traditional one in Figure 1.

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[5] He refers to the house of Habsburg as the prototypical representative of the dynastic idea of the state.

[6] In his yet unpublished PhD thesis on the *Sprachatlas* during the Nazi period, Wilking (1998: 138) comes to the following conclusion: "(Es) besteht kein Zweifel, daß Mitzka mit seinem Beitrag die Absicht hatte, Hitlers außenpolitisches Programm zu legitimieren" ('there can be no doubt that Mitzke intended to legitimize Hitler's foreign policy with his contribution'). But he also points out in a detailed analysis of many sources, that Mitzka's concept of the Germanification of the Slavic east through language was naive compared to reality: the Nazi government and the SS had no intention to assimilate the occupied territories, they rather intended to reduce them to slavery.

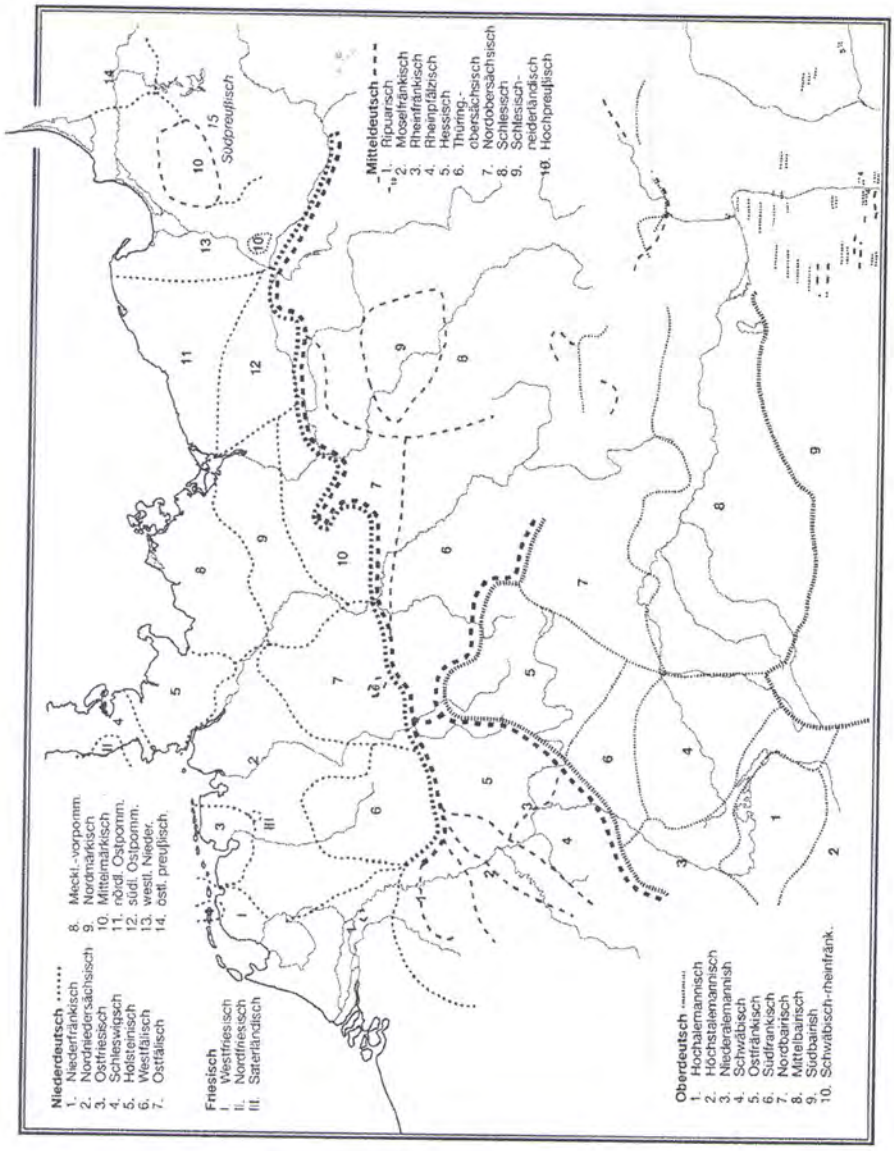

Figure 6: *The German dialects according to Mitzka (1943).*

There are many striking changes: the Dutch language area has now become part of Low German; West Prussia (formerly Slavic: Kashubic) has become incorporated into the German language area; the Slavic areas in the Lausitz (Sorbian) but also in the southern part of East Prussia (Mazurian) have disappeared; language islands are now only found in Hungary but no longer (or at least not in a clear representation) in the Czech Republic and in Slovakia, where an uninterrupted German language area has taken over. The most striking fact on this map is that the German language area is *not* externally bounded — it seems to be potentially expansive in every direction. Very clearly, this war map reflects and ideologically supports the military expansion of Nazi Germany.

By and large, however, the nationalist discourse focused on the national *standard* language, not on the traditional dialects. In summary, it rested on the equation one (standard) language = one nation = one territory = one state. Anderson (1983) has argued that the "imagined community" of a nation depended to an important degree on the codification of a unifying and unified standard variety and on the spread of its acceptance (which must not be equated with mastery) over the totality of the territory associated with the nation by means of a certain technology, i.e. printing. Anderson referred to the spread of a *written* standard variety, but it can be argued that the full penetration of modern society by the nation-state is in an important way linked to the spread of a *spoken* standard as well. This spoken standard was not available as a unifying force in many European nation states before the late 19th century when compulsory schooling was established and brought not only the written but also the spoken language to even the remotest areas of the national territory — and to the speakers of the remotest dialects (cf. Auer, in press).

All this is well known, but it needs to be remembered in the context of a discussion of linguistic divergence at political boundaries. Since the nation-state equated nation, language and territory, it located the standard language in geographical space — it territorialised language.

3. *Towards a theory of space in dialectology*

Space as constitutive of the nationalist discourse of the 19th century has been given a brilliant analysis by Georg Simmel in an essay written in 1903 on the *Soziologie des Raums* ('sociology of space'). In many ways, the arguments he develops for the relationship between the nation-state and space can also be applied to the relationship between geographical space and (national standard) languages. The central point in Simmel's text is that in modern societies (nation-states), the state (and, as we can add, the standard language) becomes

associated with a geographical area in a unique and exclusive way; the area belongs to these institutions, and it is neither possible to think of the institution without a territory[7] nor to imagine two institutions of a kind in the same territory. As a consequence, no more than one nation (and no more than one standard language) can 'occupy' a territory, and no nation (and no standard language) is conceivable without a territory.[8] This view, when applied to the standard language, explains why in the nationalist ideology, the *Hochsprache* 'roofs' the totality of the state-territory; it is no longer a medially (written language) nor a regionally bound variety (such as that of the 'educated people' in the capital, as the standard language was often defined in previous times), but evenly distributed over the area. The state borders thereby become identical with the boundaries of a standard language.

At the heart of Simmel's theory is the idea that space is not a physical phenomenon, but a *mental* one:

> Nicht die Form räumlicher Nähe oder Distanz schafft die besonderen Erscheinungen der Nachbarschaft oder Fremdheit, so unabweislich dies scheinen mag. Vielmehr sind auch dies *rein durch seelische Inhalte erzeugte Tatsachen* [...]. In dem Erfordernis spezifisch seelischer Funktionen für die einzelnen geschichtlichen Raumgestaltungen spiegelt es sich, daß *der Raum überhaupt nur eine Tätigkeit der Seele* ist, nur die menschliche Art, an sich unverbundene Sinnesaffektionen zu einheitlichen Anschauungen zu verbinden. (1995: 133, emphasis P.A.)[9]

And, with reference to borders:

> Wenn dieser Allgemeinbegriff des gegenseitigen Begrenzens von der räumlichen Grenze hergenommen ist, so ist doch, tiefer greifend, dieser letztere nur die Kristallisierung oder Verräumlichung der allein wirklichen seelischen Begrenzungsprozesse. Nicht die Länder [...] begrenzen einander; sondern die Einwohner [...].
> Ist sie ((die Grenze, P.A.)) freilich erst zu einem räumlich-sinnlichen Gebilde geworden, das wir unabhängig von seinem soziologisch-praktischen Sinne in die

[7] One may think of early 20th-century attempts to establish a Yiddish standard language, which were caught in what was considered to be a dilemma of not having a state territory unique to the Jewish nation and a corresponding national standard language.

[8] Of course, the idea never quite tallied with reality; many European nations had or have *de facto* or *de jure* more than one standard variety (Switzerland, Belgium, Ireland, Finland).

[9] 'It is not the form of spatial proximity or distance which creates the specific phenomena of being neighbours or strangers, irrefutable as this may appear. Rather these are also facts which are purely caused by mental contents (...). If we require specific mental functions for the individual formations of space in history, this mirrors the fact that space in general is but an activity of the mind, the human way to combine sensual affections into uniform ideas which as such are separate.'

> Natur einzeichnen, so übt dies starke Rückwirkungen auf das Bewußtsein von dem Verhältnis der Parteien. [...] ((dann)) wird sie zu einer lebendigen Energie [...] (1995: 141).[10]

It is the cognitive-mental act of construing those on the other side of the border as being different from those within one's own social group (nation) that has an impact on language. Note that the application of Simmel's notion of cognitive space, when applied to language, contrasts with the one traditionally accepted in dialectology. Here, we find a long tradition which tries to explain linguistic divergence in space within an interactional frequency model (cf. Auer & Hinskens in press, for a critical appraisal). According to this model, dialects (or languages) diverge when there is little direct contact (*Verkehr*, 'intercourse') between the speakers on each side of the border. Hence, impermeable borders will lead to more divergence than open borders. Frequency of interaction results in the transfer of linguistic elements from one speaker to the next. Saussure speaks of (*aires de*) *contagion* (1974: 283), and Bach, one of the most influential German dialectologists of the 20th century, writes ([3]1969: 80–81):

> [...] so stellen unsere Mda-Grenzen ('Linienbündel') Verkehrsgrenzen dar, die Kernlandschaften aber sind Gebiete verhältnismäßig einheitlichen landschaftlichen Verkehrs [...]. Wenn wir nach den Kräften forschen, die sie ausgeformt haben und zusammenhalten, so finden wir, daß es sich nicht selten um staatliche Organisationsräume des späteren Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit handelt, also um die Territorien, die in einem Zeitalter strenger Gebundenheit und schlechter Verkehrsverhältnisse, vor allem aber mangelnder Freizügigkeit, eine außerordentliche Macht über die Verkehrsbeziehungen der in ihnen lebenden Menschen besaßen.[11]

There are, however, good arguments *against* such an explanation. First of all, there is a methodological issue. The dialect boundaries Bach refers to were

[10] 'Although the common notion of 'mutual limitation' derives from spatial limits, at a deeper level the latter is only the crystallisation or spatialisation of mental processes of limitation which alone are real. It is not the states [...] which limit each other, but the inhabitants [...]. However, as soon as it [the border] has become a spatial-sensual phenomenon which we draw into nature independent of its practical sociological function, it has strong repercussions on the mental representation of the parties' relationship. [...] It then becomes a living energy [...].'

[11] '[...] our dialect boundaries ('bundles of isoglosses') represent borders of intercourse, and the core areas are regions of relatively uniform areal intercourse [...]. If we inquire into the forces which formed them and keep them together we find that they are not seldom the state territories of the late middle ages and of early modern times, i.e. the territories which in times of strict boundedness and poor means of transportation, and above all a lack of freedom of movement, had an enormous power over the communicational relationships between the people inhabiting them.'

described empirically around 1900 when the old territories he refers to had long disappeared, i.e. they had survived these territories and the putatively closed networks (communities of discourse) of their inhabitants. If they are to explain these boundaries, one has to answer the question of how linguistic borders can remain intact over centuries despite the fact that the old communication borders (*Verkehrsgrenzen*) have disappeared, and 'intercourse' between people on both sides of the border is no longer impeded. The obvious answer is that historical political borders may leave their traces in *cultural memory* and the ethnodialectological representations of the population, which in turn may influence their way of speaking. They are *not* a direct function of communicational frequency.

Ethnodialectological representations (cognitive maps) of the language at political borders confirm this view. While they usually follow the centre/periphery model (see above, Figures 2–5), they often switch to the model of bounded, mutually exclusive geographical spaces when it comes to political borders. Evidence for this ideological construction of the political border as a separation line between two linguistic spaces comes from those instances in which a former political border has left its traces in the ethnodialectological map of the speakers although, in fact, there is no linguistic divergence. An example is the dividing line between Low Alemannic (or Lake Constance Alemannic, as this particular area is sometimes called) and Swabian. On ethnodialectological maps drawn by southwest Germans this dividing line usually runs north/south somewhere along the peaks of the Black Forest and turns east south of the 'Swabian Alps' towards Lake Constance. This is also where most of the factual isoglosses run. However, although informants do not agree on the exact dividing line between Swabian and Low Alemannic in general, most of them agree on one small geographical detail: their ethnodialectological borderlines all converge to separate the twin towns of Villingen and Schwenningen (which nowadays form one commune).

Dialectologists' maps of the area do not agree with this at all. Only very few isoglosses separate the two towns — most notably, the one between western /ai/ and eastern /oa/ in some MHG *ei* words (e.g. std. *Ei* 'egg'; cf. Klausmann, Kunze & Schrambke 1993, Map 66). The main isoglosses which dialectologists use in order to separate eastern Swabian from (Lake Constance/Low) Alemannic run east (or west) of *both* Villingen and Schwenningen (cf. Figure 7, and for details, Figure 8).

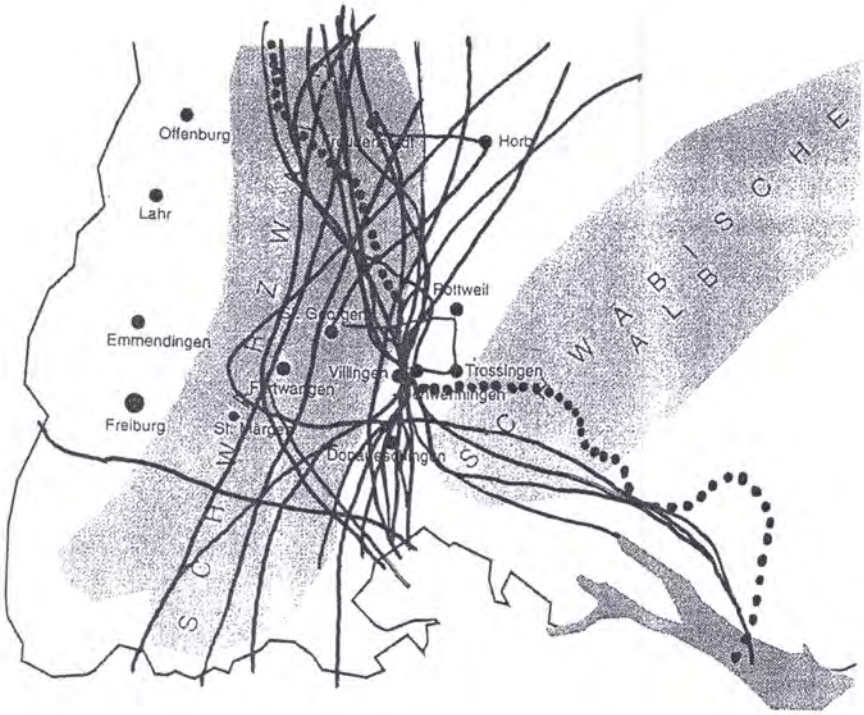

Figure 7: *The Swabian/Low Alemannic part of South-West Germany. Thin black lines represent ethnodialectological representations of the dialect border between Swabian and Low Alemannic as drawn by southwest German informants. Thick black lines represent the most important isoglosses. The blue line represents the former state border between Württemberg and Baden. From Hättich (1999).*

This means that the ethnodialectological consensus does not reflect the objective facts. An explanation is easy to find: until 50 years ago, when the state of Baden-Württemberg was founded by merging the territories of Württemberg (Swabia) and Baden (which had been independent for centuries), the two towns were separated by a political border. Since the regional identities of *Schwaben* (*Württemberger*) and *Badener* continue to be very strong, the two towns are salient ethnogeographical landmarks of the former political division. The general knowledge southwest German informants have about the dialect differences between Swabian and (Low) Alemannic are mapped onto the political territories: the political border leads to the cognitive adjustment of the objective dialectal isoglosses and their displacement in geographical space.

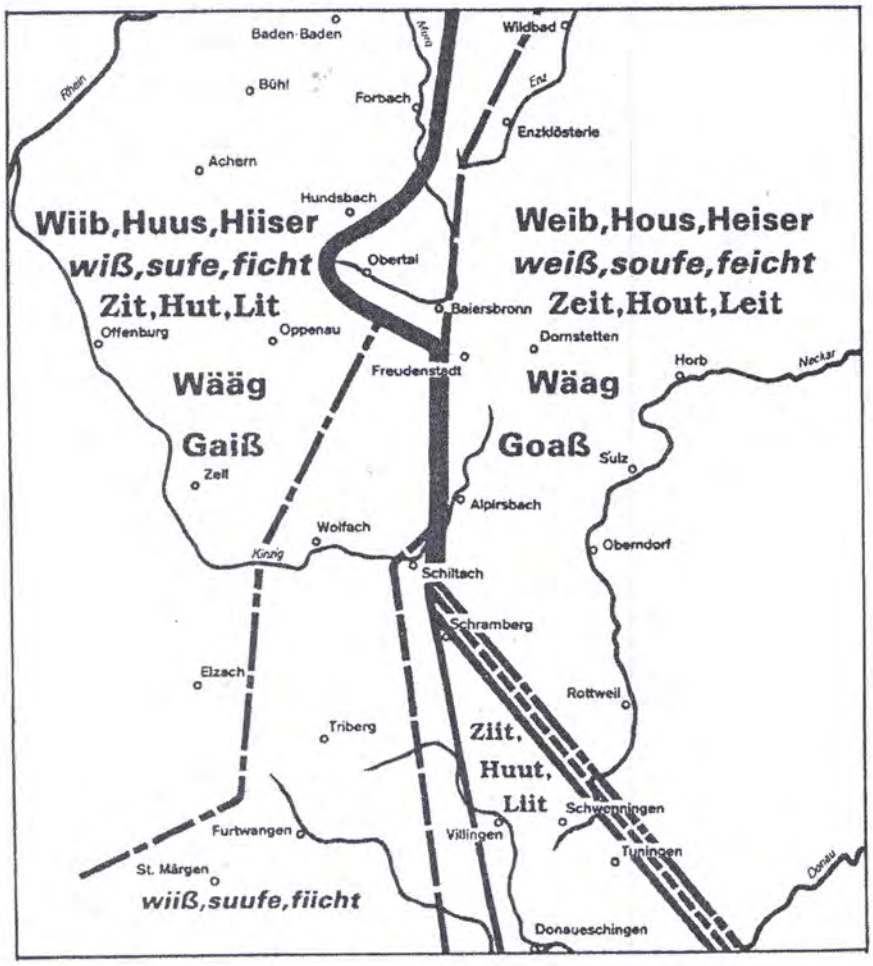

Figure 8: *Isoglosses separating Low Alemannic and Swabian (from Klausmann, Kunze & Schrambke 1993, map 74).*

The same holds true for the former political border between East and West Germany. Most West Germans believe that East and West Germans speak differently, and not rarely is the ethnodialectological space of Upper Saxonian, the vernacular spoken in the southern part of the (former) GDR, expanded to the whole of the country. The most salient East German variety is looked upon as typical for the entire (former) East German state territory (see Figure 9).

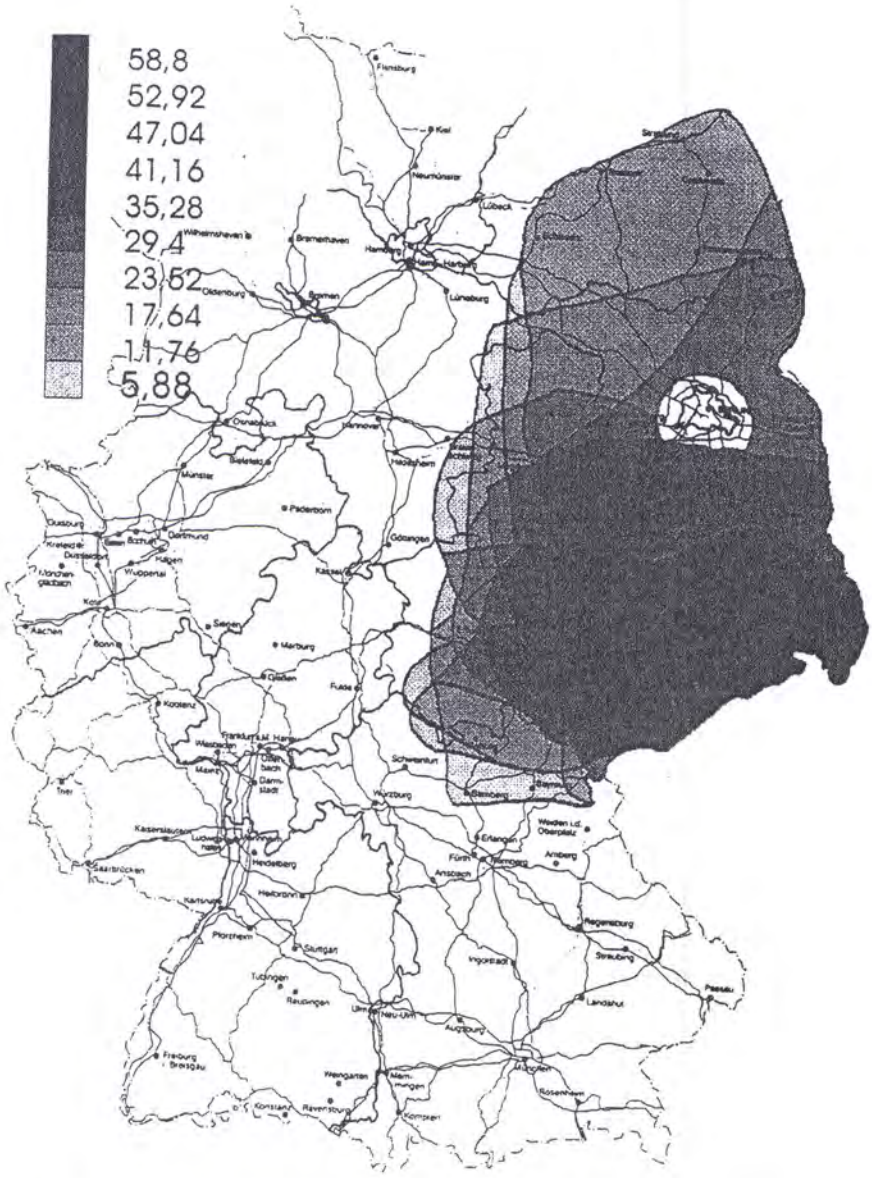

Figure 9: *Ethnodialectological maps of the Upper Saxonian dialect area as drawn by 20 informants from Bocholt (north-west Germany); shadings refer to degrees of overlap (from Stegger 2000).*

While the intercourse model offers no explanation for this divergence of ethnodialectological and dialectological boundaries, Simmel's account of space as a cognitive construct does.

4. *The German state borders and the dialect continua crosscutting it*

In the last section, I have argued that political boundaries are not directly (i.e., as a hindrance of communication) responsible for linguistic (dialect) divergence, but can influence people's cognitive maps to such a degree that an actual or former political border is automatically treated as a dialect boundary as well — even if the dialectological facts contradict this correlation. In this section, I will discuss examples in which there is actual divergence of the dialects spoken on both sides of the border. As outlined in Section 3, the territorialised national standard languages extend their geographical reach exactly to the border of the nation state and roof the dialects up to this spatial limit. From this perspective, it is not the dialects on both sides of the border which cannot surmount it (as the 'intercourse' model suggests); rather, the state borders are *construed* as the insurmountable territorial limits of the national standard varieties because of the ideological equation of one nation = one territory = one standard language.

Let us first look at the western border. The speakers of the adjoining Germanic dialects in the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and France (in Lorraine and, above all, Alsace) dispose of linguistic repertoires which include Dutch, French and Letzebuergish, i.e. the standard languages of the respective nation-states.[12] For the Dutch/German border, there is ample evidence collected by Kremer (1990), Niebaum (1990) and others that the dialects have diverged considerably at the national border over the last 60 years. As one example of many, consider the changes in the word for the bird 'wren' (std. German *Zaunkönig*, std. Dutch *winterkoninkje*) between 1940 and 1975, as shown in Figure 10. It is easy to see on the left-hand map that the usual word, on the German as well as on the Dutch side of the northern part of the border, was *nettelkönning* before the war, a word which neither corresponds to the German nor to the Dutch standard. On the 1975 map, this word has been replaced on the Dutch side almost entirely by the standard Dutch word *winterkoninkje*, while on the German side some dialect speakers still use low German *nettelkönig*, but mostly std. German *Zaunkönig* or its phonologically adapted Low German form (*tuunkönning*) have taken over. As a consequence, there is

[12] The very small German-speaking population in the westernmost part of Belgium will not be considered here.

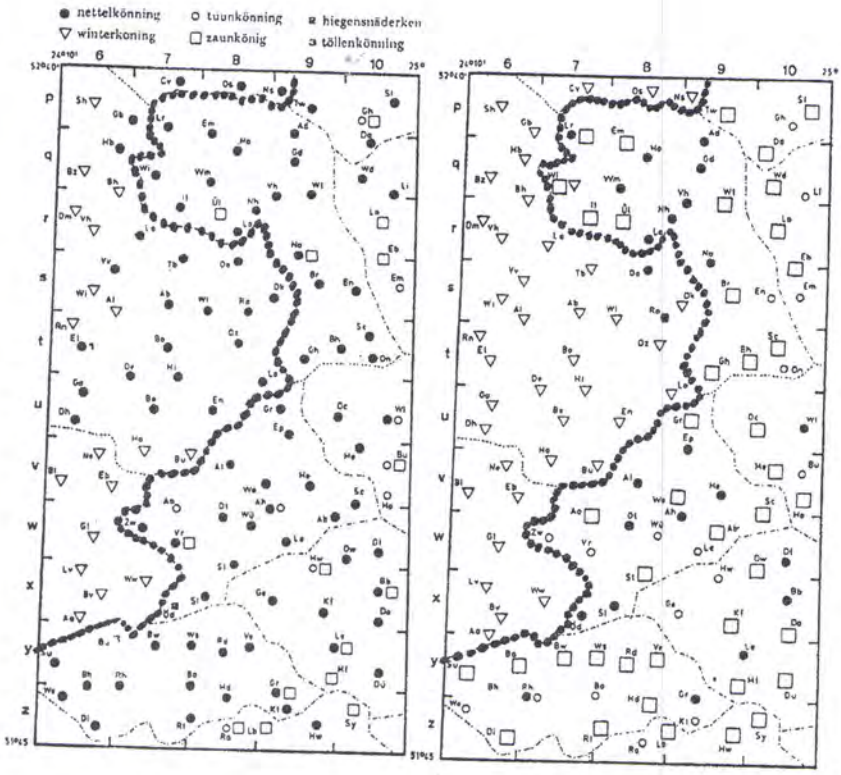

Figure 10: *Word for 'wren' on both sides of the national border between Germany and the Netherlands in the area of Enschede/Rheine (En = Enschede, Bo = Bocholt, Bh = Bentheim, Al = Almelo, We = Wesel): left: 1940, right: 1975 (from Kremer 1990).*

divergence between one western and several eastern forms exactly at the state border. This is but a small example of the larger trend in this area. It agrees with the ethnodialectological representations; informants were asked to list those of the neighbouring villages in which 'the same dialect' was spoken as in their own village (indicated by arrows in the Figure 11). With very few exceptions, the state border turned out to be the ethnodialectological border as well.

There can be no doubt that dialectal divergence at the national border between the Netherlands and Germany is but a side-effect of the much more powerful processes of dialect-to-standard advergence which are in full progress, particularly in the Netherlands, but also in Germany. Auer and Hinskens (1996) tried to capture this development as in Figure 12.

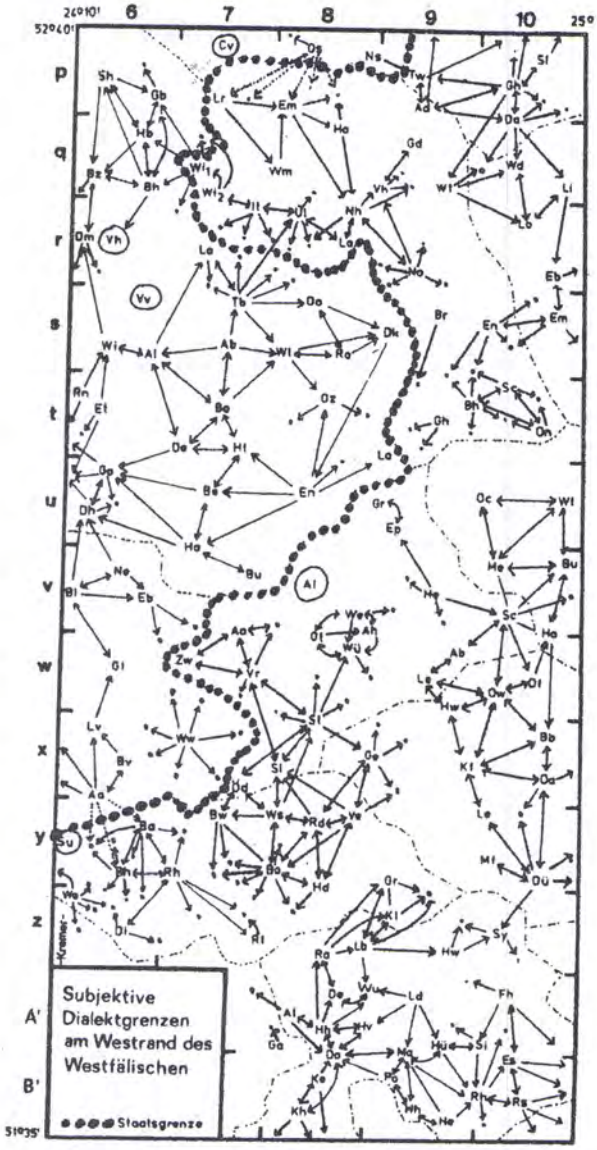

Figure 11: *The ethnodialectological border between Germany and the Netherlands in the Enschede/Rheine area (from Kremer 1984). Arrows indicate those villages in which according to the informant's opinion 'the same' dialect was spoken as in his/her own village.*

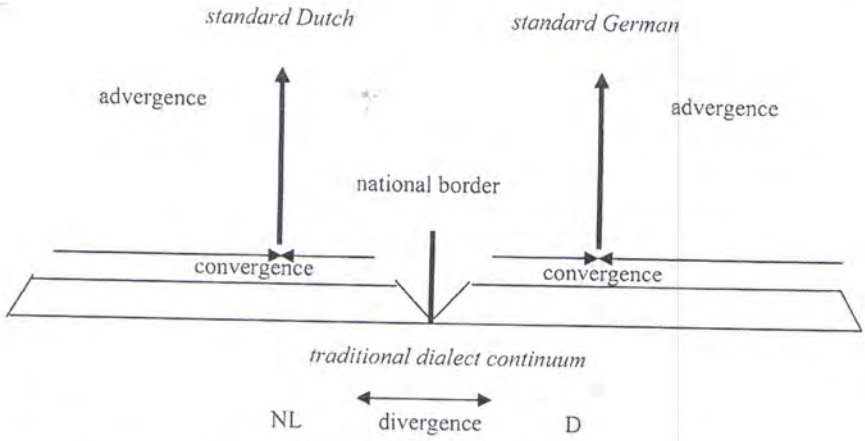

Figure 12: *Dialect divergence at the Dutch/German border as a consequence of dialect/standard advergence; adapted from Auer & Hinskens 1996.*

The former dialect continuum across the national border has given way to dialect boundaries coinciding with a political border, because the traditional dialects are strongly influenced by the respective national standard varieties. In terms of the previous discussion, this can be interpreted as a long-term victory of the standard language discourse of the 19th century which, strangely enough at first sight, has had its strongest impact at a time in which the political border between Germany and the Netherlands has lost most its significance (and certainly no longer impedes communication).

A similar scenario applies to Luxembourg. However, Letzebuergish is a very young standard variety not yet fully supported by writing (for which mainly French and to a lesser degree German are used); it therefore has a lesser impact on the dialects. Nonetheless, convergence of the eastern dialects towards the central variety of Luxembourg city has progressed considerably, and has dissolved the old dialect continuum with the Franconian dialects spoken in Germany at the German/Luxembourg border (cf. Gilles 1999).

The situation at the French/German border is obviously different since French, the standard language almost exclusively used on the French side, is exoglossic to the Alsatian dialects. Therefore, dialect-to-standard advergence can only take place east of the Rhine. On the French side of the border, the strong pressure towards standard French has led to language shift, but also to a high amount of borrowing into Alsatian, not only on the lexical level (cf. Klausmann 2000) but also in grammar and in prosody (cf. Gilles & Schrambke

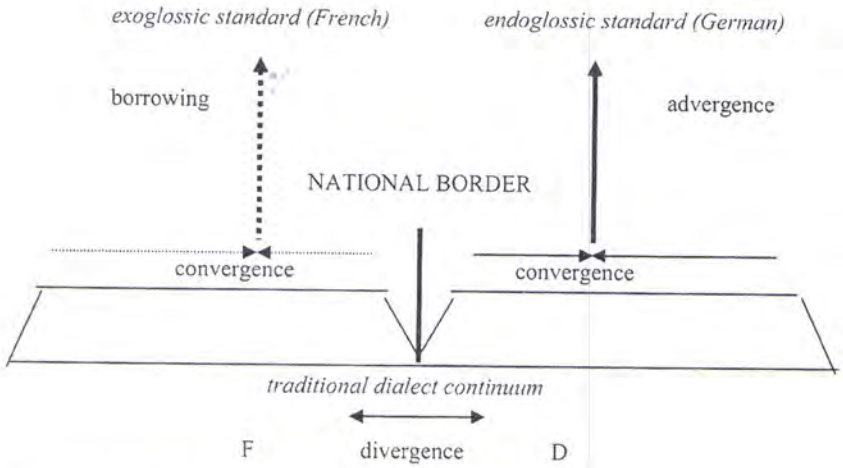

Figure 13: *Dialect divergence at the French (Alsatian)/German border as a consequence of dialect/standard advergence and borrowing.*

2000). The factual divergence of the dialects spoken on both sides of the border is once more accompanied by a strong ethnodialectological divergence. As a recent thesis by Finger (2002) shows, particularly the Alsatians no longer see any resemblance between their language and the Alemannic dialects spoken on the other side of the border. It is mainly the increasing relevance of the standard languages which makes the traditional dialects diverge, together with a strong ethnodialectological feeling of difference (cf. Figure 13).

We now turn to the southern border between Germany and Switzerland and Austria. In these countries, German is the/one national standard variety just as in Germany, i.e. the dialects on each side of the border are roofed by (approximately) the same standard.

The Swiss/German language border has been described in some detail by Schifferle (1990) and Seidelmann (1989). They agree that there is a rapid process of divergence of these traditionally very similar High Alemannic dialects[13] at the state border.[14] Again, one example may suffice to show the

[13] Schifferle and Seidelmann disagree on the age of this divergence; while Seidelmann argues that it goes back to Napoleonic times when the former Habsburg area was divided politically along the river Rhine, Schifferle believes that we are dealing with a 20th century phenomenon. Schifferle stresses the more conservative character of the Swiss dialects and attributes most divergences to northern innovations which were stopped at the border, while Seidelmann points out that the Swiss dialects in the Aargau also undergo changes under the influence of the Zurich dialect. However, these differences do not touch my argument.

type of divergence; it is that of the front vowel systems of High Alemannic (cf. Moulton 1961).

In the area around Waldshut investigated by Schifferle in the early 80s, there is a strikingly consistent difference between a southern (Swiss German) three-level front vowel systems (/e:/ ~ /ɛ:/ ~ /æ:/), and the two-level systems (/e:/ ~ /ɛ/) on the German side of the border. (The difference is salient in words such as northern open [ɛ]*sse* vs. southern extra-open [æ]*sse* 'to eat'.) Schifferle cites a number of older studies (from the 20s and 30s of the 20th century) in

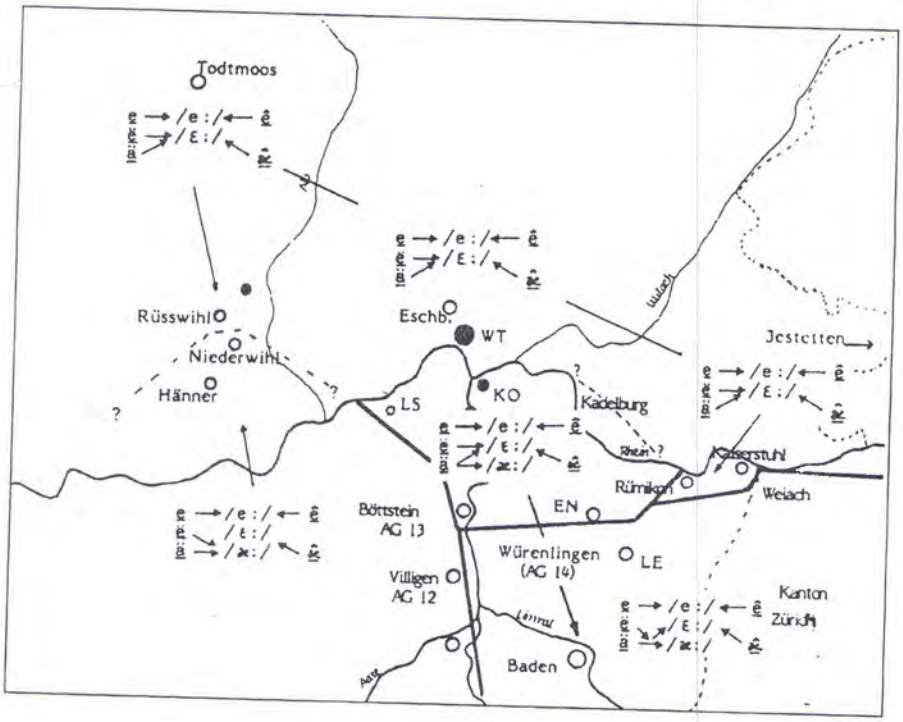

Figure 14: *The front vowel systems north and south of the Swiss/German border (from Schifferle 1990).*

[14] The possible counterargument that, rather than the state border, the river Rhine or Lake Constance might be responsible for this divergence (the political border runs along the river most of the time) does not only fail to explain why divergence only set in in the last century, it is also falsified by the very strong dialect boundary between the town of Constance in Germany and the adjoining town of Kreuzlingen in Switzerland, which are both located south of the river Rhine/Lake Constance.

which a three-level system is still attested for the southernmost part of Germany as well.[15] Some 70 years ago, the dialects on the German side of the border must have started to diverge with respect to this (as many other) variable(s). How can this divergence be explained? Once more, we have to consider the whole repertoire of the speakers, which, in this case (unlike the Alsatian one), includes a German standard variety and traditional dialects both in Switzerland and in Germany; however, in terms of usage domains and in terms of attitudes towards dialect and standard, the German and the Swiss German situation are very different. The use of Swiss Standard German is more or less restricted to reading and writing ('medial diglossia'). The Swiss German dialects are much more widely used and have a much higher prestige than the German dialects of Alemannic. With regard to the national discourse of the standard languages in Europe, Switzerland is an interesting exception; it is the only old nation in Europe for which the equation of one nation = one language never held. Instead, Swiss German identity is very much tied to the Swiss German dialects. The linguistic repertoire structure of German-speaking Switzerland therefore stands in sharp contrast with that of southern Germany where the dialects are no symbols of national collective identity, while the standard language is. What ends at the national border between Germany and Switzerland then is not the reach of standard language, but a certain repertoire type (diaglossia on the German side, medial diglossia on the Swiss side; cf. Auer, in press). This leads to divergence because the dialects are no longer considered to be equivalent; the national border is construed as a language repertoire (and prestige) border. As a consequence, new developments do not cross the border. The type of innovations that reach the border area from the south and from the north (i.e., in Switzerland and in Germany) is also different. In Germany, the standard variety, or a regional dialect which is closer to the standard, is more and more accepted as the unmarked way of speaking, while in Switzerland the more prestigious urban dialects (in our case the Zurich dialect) exert an influence on the border region. As a consequence, vertical convergence in Germany contrasts with horizontal convergence in Switzerland. Schematically:

[15] The data elicitation techniques of the *Südwestdeutscher Sprachatlas*, which were able to dig up the most archaic forms as late as the 1970s, also document this older state of the vowel systems, which Schifferle was no longer able to find in Germany; cf. map II–3.02, *essen*.

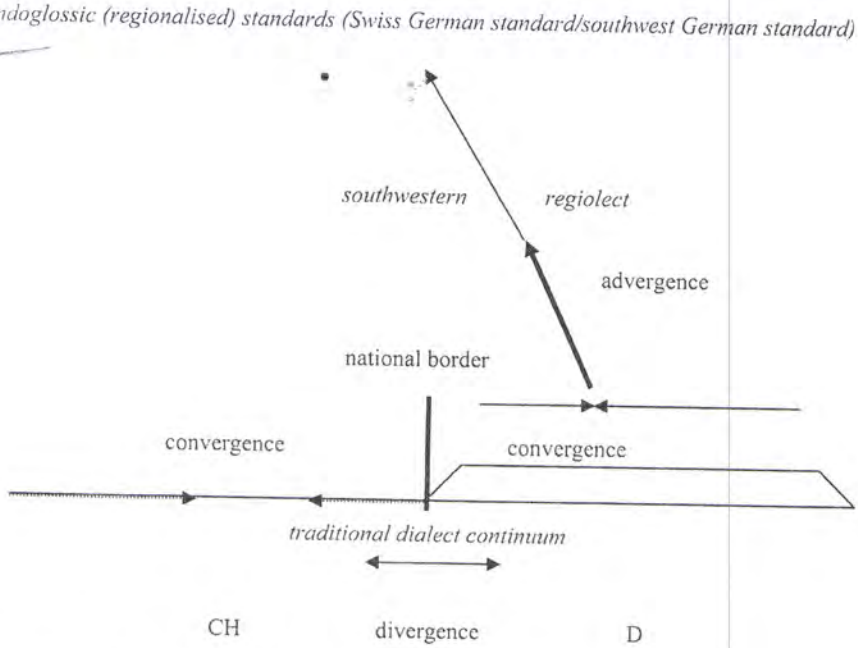

Figure 15: *Dialect divergence at the Swiss/German border as a consequence of dialect/standard advergence and dialect convergence.*

Once more, it is not impeded 'intercourse' across the border which has led to dialect divergence and the dissolution of a former dialect continuum, but rather the ideological construction of the border as the dividing line between two different repertoire types (which both contribute to national identity).

Let us finally turn to the German/Austrian border. Scheuringer (1990) points out that the traditional dialect isoglosses in this area (some of which are shown in Figure 16) run north/south and do not orient themselves to the national border at all. On both sides of the border, very similar dialects of Middle Bavarian used to be spoken. Scheuringer took a closer look at the situation in the border towns of Braunau in Austria and Simbach in Germany. He observed two types of developments. In one group of dialect features traditionally shared by both towns, a gradual process of standardisation has set in on both sides of the border. This process is stronger in Austria than in Bavaria. It applies to basilectal features with a wide geographical distribution such as *han* instead of (otherwise) Bav. *san* = std. *sind* '(we/they) are', or *kemm(t)/kimm(t)* instead of (otherwise) Bav. *kumm(t)* = std. *kommt/komme*

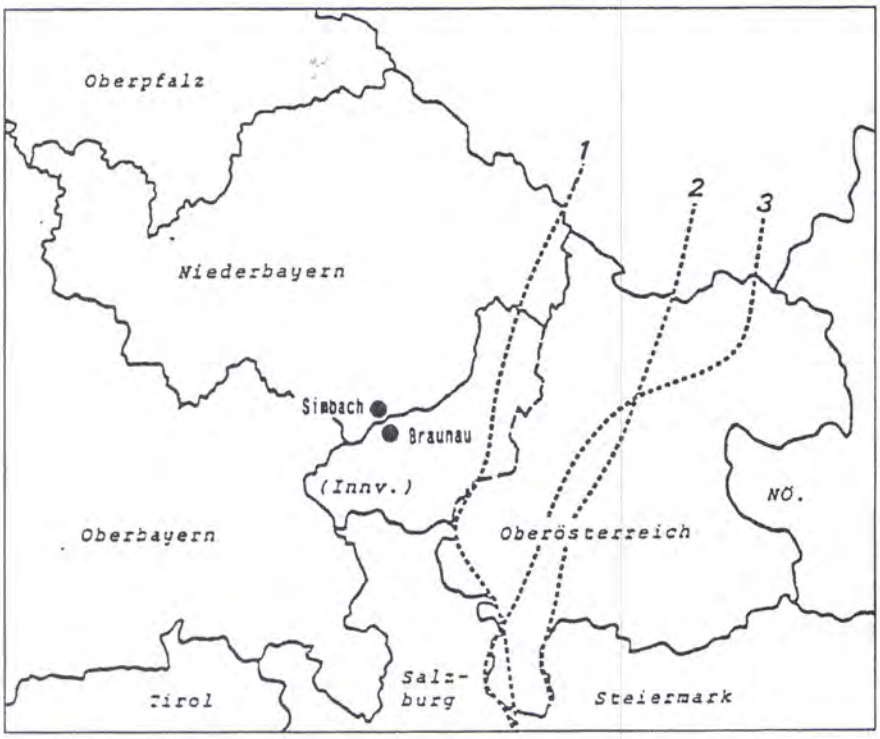

Figure 16: *Traditional isoglosses in the border area between Germany (Lower Bavaria) and Austria (Upper Austria); from Scheuringer (1990). The isoglosses separate the western from the eastern area of Middle Bavarian. 1 = western l-vocalization in syllable coda; 2 = western diphthongs for MHG ô; 3 = western* han *instead of* san *for 1. & 3.Pl.Pres. of* sein *'to be'.*

's/he, I come(s)'. The second development holds for dialect features with a more restricted range, not shared by the two towns traditionally. Here, local realisations are given up in favour of more regiolectal ones. Again the process is more advanced in Austria, but in addition, the target of this regionalisation process is different: while Braunau takes over Vienna features, Simbach in Bavaria assimilates to the Munich regiolect. This applies, for instance, to the various vowel changes conditioned by the vocalisation of /l/ in syllable coda, where a Munich system with unrounded vowels such as in /fu:i/ = std. /fi:l/ 'a lot' contrasts with a Vienna system with rounded and also monophthongised vowels such as in /fy:/ 'a lot', as well as to the realisation of MHG *ei* as in std. *kein* 'no' as /koa/ in the Munich regiolect, but as /kã:/ in the Vienna regiolect.

Compared to the situation in the west or south, divergence is less dramatic. The repertoires on both sides of the border are similarly structured; both are diaglossic (Bellmann 1998; Auer, in press), which means that intermediate forms (regiolects) of speaking between dialect and standard become more and more important. In many ways, they are closer to the standard variety, but they also show features of their own, spreading from the large cities which act as radiation centres for either area. The impact of these cities — Munich and Vienna — stops at the national border. In addition, Braunau has resisted the Vienna regiolect less than Simbach has resisted the Munich regiolect. Schematically:

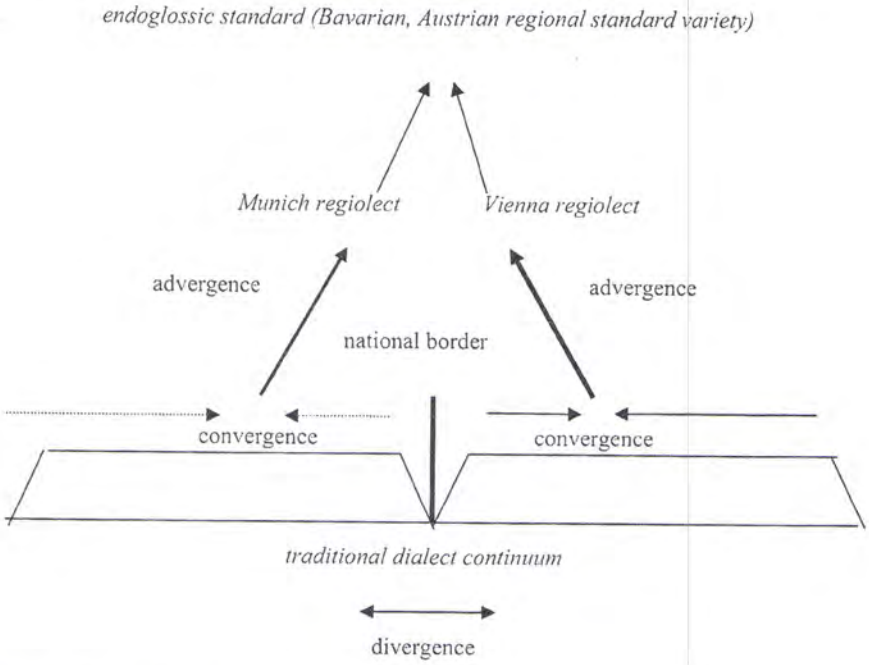

Figure 17: *Dialect divergence at the Austrian/German border as a consequence of dialect/standard advergence.*

5. *Conclusions*

On the basis of a cognitive approach to space in the tradition of Georg Simmel, I have argued in this paper that geopolitical (above all, national) borders should be looked upon as cognitive constructs intimately linked to the "imagined communities" (Andersen) they delimit. These "imagined borders" can nonetheless have a strong impact on the dialect continua which they crosscut. Dialect divergence at the national borders of Germany is therefore not due to impeded communication as suggested in traditional dialectology (*Verkehr*); rather, they are the limits (boundaries) of the reach of the national standard languages or of repertoire types which symbolise, in some way or other, national identities. This divergence can be expected to increase to the degree that (in this order) (a) the national standard languages, (b) the repertoire types (diaglossic/diglossic), or (c) the regional dialects differ on both sides of the border.

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