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## **Languages and language policies in Germany / Sprachen und Sprachenpolitik in Deutschland**

### **Abstract (Deutsch)**

Deutschlands (einzige) nationale Amtssprache ist das Deutsche. Die Dominanz des Deutschen in Schulen, Politik, Rechtswesen, Verwaltung sowie im gesamten (schriftlichen) öffentlichen Leben ist so groß, dass das Fehlen einer kohärenten Sprachpolitik lange Zeit nicht als Problem empfunden wurde. Die staatliche Zurückhaltung in diesem Bereich hat einerseits historische Gründe; sie wurde andererseits durch das föderale System in Deutschland, das den Bundesländern in den Bereichen Bildung und Kultur weitgehende Zuständigkeiten einräumt, befördert. In jüngerer Zeit wächst die individuelle Mehrsprachigkeit der Bevölkerung und damit das Interesse, die Sprachensituation in Deutschland genauer zu erfassen und (insbesondere auch) die verschiedenen Minderheitensprachen in den Blick zu nehmen. Im Jahr 2017 gibt es, erstmalig nach etwa 80 Jahren, im deutschen Mikrozensus eine Frage zur Sprache der Bevölkerung. Das Institut für Deutsche Sprache hat außerdem verschiedene Repräsentativerhebungen durchgeführt; z.B. im Winter 2017/2018 eine große Repräsentativerhebung mit Fragen zum Sprachrepertoire und zu Spracheinstellungen.

### **Abstract (English)**

Germany's (single) national official language is German. The dominance of German in schools, politics, the legal system, administration and the entire written public domain is so great that for a long time the lack of a coherent language policy was not seen as a problem. State restraint in this area is due, on the one hand, to historical reasons; on the other hand, it has been promoted by the federal system in Germany, which grants the federal states far-reaching responsibilities in the fields of education and culture. More recently, multilingualism among the population has increased and has resulted in a growing interest in understanding the language situation in Germany and (in particular) taking a closer look at the different minority languages. In 2017, for the first time in about 80 years, there is a question on the language of the population in the German micro census. The Institute for the German Language has also carried out various representative surveys; in the winter of 2017/2018, a large representative survey with questions on the language repertoire and language attitudes is in the field.

## **1. Languages in Germany**

Germany is conceptually and institutionally monolingual, as well as being generally perceived as such. In 2008 the Institute for the German Language (Institut für

Deutsche Sprache, IDS) conducted a survey on language and language attitudes in Germany in cooperation with social psychologists from the University of Mannheim (see below for further details). One of the results was that 90.2% of respondents had German as their sole mother tongue (Eichinger et al. 2009, 54). The virtual dominance of German holds true for schools, politics, the judiciary and administration as well as for the entire (written) public life, i.e. media, theatre, cinemas and books. This means that German is the (default) language of instruction in education,<sup>1</sup> the language of discussion in the German *Bundestag*, the language of trials, official forms and (most) newspapers; in addition, major English-language film productions are translated and dubbed into German. Moreover, not only is there a strong tendency towards the use of a single language in public but also towards fewer (regional) varieties within German. In most language areas of Germany, dialectal competence gradually decreases from older to younger age groups (Eichinger et al. 2009, 14-15). Consequently, the only variety the younger generations have available in terms of regional speech is the so-called regiolect. This is the pronunciation of the written language on the basis of the respective dialect phonology (Schmidt 2017, 108). This regiolect in turn converges more and more towards the articulation norm of the standard variety, meaning that it shows fewer dialectal features. The main reason for this development is radio broadcasting, which started in the 1930s. It was accessed by more and more people in the following decades and serves as a point of orientation for people's own language production. Due to the devaluation of the dialect, as well as to the extensive spread of the standard variety, more and more people from 1970 onwards acquired the standard variety as their first language and thus "inner multilingualism" (*Innere Mehrsprachigkeit*)<sup>2</sup> has shrunk increasingly in favour of "monovarietal competence" (*monovarietäre Kompetenz*, Schmidt 2017, 134).

In reality, however, there have always been other languages. At the time when the state was founded, groups of people with different cultures, different traditions and different languages already lived in certain areas of the German territory. In the course of the establishment of the state and of the nationwide unification on the linguistic level, "the speakers of these languages came to be perceived as linguistic minorities and gradually shifted to the use of German" (Stevenson et al. 2018,

<sup>1</sup> There are a growing number of schools with specialised bilingual classes or a general bilingual approach across the education sector, both private and public. Their languages of instruction involve – besides German – largely English and/or French. The beginning of bilingual teaching goes back to the 1960s and originally it was a measure of Franco-German reconciliation after the Second World War. It was only later that English gained in importance, and a general intercultural education – as well as application-oriented language teaching – became arguments in favour of bilingual subject instruction (Kultusministerkonferenz 2013, 3-5).

<sup>2</sup> The qualification "inner" points to the fact that there is a range of varieties, i.e. local, social, and diachronic manifestations within a certain language. Even a monolingual speaker has, thus, to handle a linguistic repertoire and has to acquire the adequate use of the different varieties (Henne 1986).

17). Today, four autochthonous minority languages and one regional language are recognized as such (cf. Fig. 1):

- 1) Danish (in parts of Schleswig-Holstein),
- 2) Frisian (in parts of Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony),
- 3) Sorbian (in parts of Brandenburg and Saxony),
- 4) Romani (non-territorial), and
- 5) Low German (regional language in parts of North Rhine Westphalia, Lower Saxony, Breme, Hamburg, Schleswig-Holstein, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Brandenburg and Sachsen-Anhalt).



Fig. 1: Distribution of the regional or minority languages in Germany (Bundesministerium des Innern 2015, 9)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The map should be treated with caution: the areas where the respective languages are actually spoken are in most cases smaller. The borders are based on administrative *districts* (Kreise) and historical facts, so if in one part of the district there are towns or villages where the respective language is spoken, the whole Kreis is depicted. Taking into account the actual competence of Low German, the border would lie further north (cf. Adler et al. 2016). Also,

Ethnic denomination or membership is freely chosen and it is forbidden by law to register, verify or challenge someone's ethnic affiliation. This fact is one of the reasons why numbers of speakers are not available for all minorities. For Low German, however, there have been a couple of scientific surveys which delivered representative figures. The last one was conducted in 2016 by the Institute for the German Language in cooperation with the Institute for the Low German Language and revealed that 32% of respondents in Northern Germany have – according to their own assessment – fairly good or even very good active competence in Low German.

The recent growth in multilingualism is mainly due to immigrant languages. Through different waves of migration, different national groups and different languages have arrived in Germany over the past 50 years. From the middle of the 1950s to the beginning of the 1970s, people from a number of Mediterranean countries came as contract workers (generally referred to as 'guest workers') and "family reunification during the 1980s and 1990s saw an expansion of these national groups." (Vertovec 2015). Later, in the 1990s, people from war-torn Yugoslavia fled to Germany.

Now, with the inflows in 2015, an even newer diversity is being layered upon an already varied population in Germany. Syrians, Afghans, Pakistanis, Eritreans, Somalis, Nigerians, Sudanese and Iraqis make up a large proportion of today's arrivals, along with continued high numbers of people from Serbia, Kosovo and Albania. (ibid.)

Additionally – although much smaller in scale – there is free movement of migrants between EU member states.

A third case is the so-called '(Spät-)Aussiedler' or (late) repatriates. These are ethnic Germans whose ancestors emigrated to the former Russian Empire and the Soviet Union respectively at different points in the past. Since the 1950s they have migrated back to Germany. They are thus of German descent, and were recipients (at least partly) of German education and culture; at the same time, they come from a territory outside today's national border and have commonly shifted to the use of Russian.

In 2016, according to the German Federal Statistical Office (Statistisches Bundesamt, Destatis), there were 18.6 million people in Germany with a migrant background. About one third had their roots in the former recruiting countries of contract workers, especially Turkey. For a long time the two other most important countries of origin were Poland and the Russian Federation. In 2015 and 2016, the near and middle East as well as Africa gained in importance (Statistisches Bundesamt 2016; 2017). However, not much is known about the languages of immigrants. As nationality is not always identical with ethnic affiliation and

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Romani is non-territorial, although it is not actually spoken nationwide (as stated in the map legend); rather, speakers are centered around some urban areas.

language, not much is gained from statistics on countries of origin.<sup>4</sup> Amongst people with Turkish nationality, for example, there are many Kurds. Also, second or third generation immigrants have often been naturalised, while still speaking their (grand)parents' heritage language. Unfortunately, they do not appear in current statistics.

## 2. Language legislation in Germany<sup>5</sup>

There are only a few subsidiary laws that indicate the official status or official function of the German language. For example §23 section (1) of the *Verwaltungsverfahrensgesetz* (Administrative Procedure Act) stipulates German as the language of public administration; analogous acts apply to the administrations of the 16 federal states (*Länder*). Section (1) of §184 of the *Gerichtsverfassungsgesetz* (Courts Act) states that German is the language used in court. But the role of German is not mentioned in the constitution (*Grundgesetz*), nor are there any other higher level legal regulations about the language of the republic as a whole. The reasons for this are threefold:

- 1) Given the high number of native German speakers, “the dominant position of German is perceived as normal and unnecessary to mention” (Marten 2016, 145; our translation); thus, it is unnecessary to state this in a law.
- 2) During the time of National Socialism there was substantial ideologically motivated abuse of language and language policy in order to manipulate the population, obscure atrocities and assert claims of power over neighbouring countries. This dreadful experience made it almost impossible for the post-war government to establish any elements of language policy to promote German or keep it “pure” (Marten 2016, 145).
- 3) Germany is a federal republic. This means that the individual *Länder* have cultural sovereignty, i.e. the primary competence with regard to legislation in the field of culture and education. Laakso et al. (2016, 67) interpret this system as the “predominance of the principle of territoriality.” This makes it difficult to have a single language policy for the country as a whole.

From time to time there have been initiatives by individual politicians, political parties or language preservation associations to enshrine German in the Constitution, but so far all these have failed.<sup>6</sup> With regard to language legislation, the

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<sup>4</sup> The Institute for the German Language is currently conducting a research project on the linguistic integration of refugees in Germany with a special focus on professional contexts (“Deutsch im Beruf”, <http://dib.ids-mannheim.de>). Within this project a survey was carried out amongst refugees to e.g. learn more about their language repertoire.

<sup>5</sup> A brief overview is also offered online: <http://efnil.org/projects/lle/germany>.

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of attempts until 2010 to put German as the national language in the Basic Law: see Deutsche Sprachwelt (2010, 3).

German policy can therefore be characterised as “laissez-faire” (Marten 2016, 145) or non-interventionist. Furthermore, this attitude is in evidence not only at the official level, but across the population as a whole. In the nationwide survey on language and language attitudes in Germany mentioned above, 58% of the respondents saw no necessity for a law to protect the German language against possible negative influences (Gärtig/Plewnia/Rothe 2010, 224).

Only the autochthonous minority languages benefit from special regulations aimed at their protection. Most of these focus on the (language) minority rather than on the (minority) language – in other words on the people rather than on the language. On the most basic level, there is article 3 of the Basic Law which forbids discrimination on the basis of someone’s language (amongst other things). Moreover, the Federal Election Law and the Law on Political Parties (*Bundeswahl- and Parteiengesetz*) contain passages that single out the national minorities for special treatment. It is particularly on the international or European level that Germany has made more specific and far-reaching commitments. Two of them are of special importance. Firstly, there is the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities by the Council of Europe, which deals with the protection of minorities in general, including language use. The Framework Convention was adopted as a federal law and has thus priority over the legislation of the *Länder* (Bundesministerium des Innern 2015, 66). Secondly, there is the more language-related European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, “often regarded as the most extensive commitment of the states towards their minority languages” (Marten 2016, 82; our translation). Germany was one of the original Signatory States in 1992 and ratified the Charter in 1995; it has been in force since January 1999. The catalogue of measures to support minority languages, in respect of which a binding commitment was entered into, relates primarily to education. The implementation of the actions is again a matter for the individual *Länder*.<sup>7</sup> This fragmentation is always the subject of critical comment by the advisory committees which are in charge of monitoring the application (Wolf 2017, 22).

Next to these regulations, which concern all of the national minorities, there are some minority-specific laws, most of which are to be found in the regulations of the respective *Land* where the minority lives (cf. the principle of territoriality, federalism). For example, the *Landtag* of Schleswig-Holstein passed the so-called *Friesischgesetz* (Frisian law) in 2004, which recognizes Frisian and its use, for instance with local authorities or on bilingual town signs. There is only one national law where a particular minority is explicitly mentioned. This is section §184 of the *Gerichtsverfassungsgesetz* (see above), which – after stipulating German as the

<sup>7</sup> For an analysis of the *Handlungsplan Sprachenpolitik* in Schleswig-Holstein see Stevenson et al. (2018, 139).

language to be used in the courts – is supplemented by the following amendment: “The right of the Sorbs to use Sorbian in court within the regions of Sorbian population is guaranteed” (our translation).

There is an official regulation concerning corpus planning in the area of orthography; or at least there is an official procedure for handling it. The design and form of the current set of official rules goes back to the set developed on the occasion of the spelling reform in 1996. It consists of a section of rules plus a (non-exhaustive) word list comprising 12,000 entries. Changes or updates were made in 2004, 2006, 2011 and 2017. In response to a lengthy controversy following the reform in 1996, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* (*Ständige Konferenz der Kultusminister*, KMK) set up the Council for German Orthography (*Rat für deutsche Rechtschreibung*). It is a supranational committee which consists of 41 members from 7 countries and regions (18 from Germany, 9 from Austria, 9 from Switzerland, one each from Liechtenstein, Bolzano-South Tyrol and the German Community of Belgium, and one observer from Luxembourg without voting rights, plus the chairman). The members come from different language-related fields and represent different areas of social influence, including teaching, publishing, dictionaries, journalism and linguistic research. The Institute for the German Language sends two members to contribute linguistic expertise, alongside members from other research institutions. The Council observes the development of written and general language change and proposes appropriate adjustments, creating the wording of the regulation, which is then enacted by the responsible authorities (in Germany by the KMK). The regulations are then binding for education and official use. The default venue for the twice-yearly meetings is the Institute for the German Language in Mannheim, which is also the Council’s seat.<sup>8</sup>

Other aspects of the language such as grammar or lexis (for example, the use of foreign words) are not controlled or regulated by any public authorities, either on the national level or on the *Länder* level. A couple of years ago the *Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung* (German Academy for Language and Literature) in cooperation with the *Union der deutschen Akademien der Wissenschaften* (Union of the German academies of sciences) launched an initiative to compile a report on the situation of the German language to serve as a kind of monitor. So far, two reports have been published; one in 2013 on “The richness and poverty of the German language” (*Reichtum und Armut der deutschen Sprache*) and one in 2017 on the “The diversity and unity of the German language” (*Vielfalt und Einheit der deutschen Sprache*). Both volumes analyse the development of German in the 20th century. However, neither of the reports proposes binding

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<sup>8</sup> More information about the members, reports and announcements etc. of the Council can be found on its website: [www.rechtschreibrat.com](http://www.rechtschreibrat.com).



regulations, nor do they argue for this. They rather deliver – according to their scientific orientation – “empirically substantiated and knowledgeably analysed information” (Detering/Stock 2013, 1; our translation) to provide the basis for public and political discourse.

The main area where a certain amount of legislation and regulation can be found is the acquisition of German by immigrants from EU states and other foreign immigrants in the context of integration, as well as by heritage speakers among the resident population. There are provisions both for adults, i.e. immigrants coming to Germany after finishing their schooling, and also for children, i.e. for school pupils.

For the former, articles 43 and 44a of the Act to Control and Restrict Immigration and to Regulate the Residence and Integration of EU citizens and Foreigners (*Zuwanderungsgesetz*), adopted on 30 July 2004, are especially relevant.

Article 43 concerns the organisation of integration courses. It states that these courses should offer foreigners an introduction to the language, legal system, culture, and history of Germany. In this way, foreigners are expected to become sufficiently familiar with living conditions in the federal territory to be able to deal independently with all the issues of daily life without assistance or mediation from third parties. The language course itself consists of a basic course and a follow-up course to obtain “sufficient language skills”. Article 44a even stipulates compulsory attendance in cases where a foreigner who is eligible to attend is not able to communicate orally in a simple way in the German language.

It is obvious that the acquisition and good command of the language plays a central role in the integration procedure. Two points are worth highlighting.

Firstly, it is interesting that in the article of the Act mentioned above (43, paragraph 3), the language of which knowledge is required is not even mentioned. This is further evidence of the fact that German as *the* language of Germany is taken for granted.

Secondly, “it can also be stated that the debates around diversity and migration, while focusing on German language proficiency as a criterion of integration, ‘perpetually reproduce the ideological discourse of the monolingual state’” (Leichsering 2014, 99 cited from Laakso et al. 2016, 66-67; also Stevenson et al. 2018, 19).

Debates of an equal intensity take place concerning the focus of education for children of immigrants:

The key concerns have revolved around the issues of how children from non-German-speaking backgrounds [...] could reasonably be expected to follow lessons in German schools and the effect a large group of non-German-speakers would have on the educational progress of the German children in the same classroom. (Stevenson et al. 2018, 136)



That means that not only is there concern about the cultural integration of multilingual children, but it is also assumed and feared that there will be an impact on the educational success of the monolingual German pupils. While the aim, once again, is seen as a high level of proficiency in German, there is a great controversy “between those who favour incorporating, rather than suppressing, the bilingual repertoires of the pupils and those who favour a German-only approach.” (Stevenson 2018, 137; also Brehmer/Mehlhorn 2015, 3). It seems that the latter have the upper hand, or at least their voice is louder. Time and again, there are – in the same way as on the issue of specifying German in the Constitution – discussions and debates, which attract great media attention. In 2006, for example, a school in Berlin (in the district of Wedding) declared German as its school language in its statutes (Stevenson 2018, 137), thereby excluding any other languages not only from teaching, but also from conversation in the school yard (*Weddinger Sprachverbot*). Furthermore, in 2014 the CSU’s (Christian Social Union) Secretary General at the time, Andreas Scheuer, claimed in a main motion on integration that “[w]er dauerhaft hier leben will, soll dazu angehalten werden, im öffentlichen Raum und in der Familie deutsch zu sprechen” (*anyone who wants to live here permanently should be urged to speak German in public and within the family* – our translation) After strong reactions from various corners of the society and also from within the party, the expressions “angehalten” (*urged*) and “im öffentlichen Raum und in der Familie” (*in public and within the family*) were replaced by “motivated” and “in daily life”. However, a strong preference for German at all times and everywhere is obvious, although speaking another language at home does not necessarily mean that one cannot speak German properly (cf. Adler 2018, forthcoming).

There are only a few (again, subsidiary) regulations for dealing with the heritage languages. The only place where they are an issue is, once more, at school, i.e. in education. In some cases there are supplementary classes for some of the heritage languages (*herkunftssprachlicher* or *muttersprachlicher (Ergänzungs-)Unterricht*), but not on a systematic basis and, again, still less with a national consensus.<sup>9</sup> The confusion and inconsistency concerning the integration of heritage languages within the curriculum of state schools are not only a consequence of the federal education policy, but also of additional uncertainties around the purpose and meaning of heritage language classes (Reich 2014, 3). “In fact, the learning and certainly the teaching of IM [immigrant minority] languages are often seen by majority language speakers and by policy makers as obstacles to integration and as a threat to the national identity” (Extra/Gorter 2008, 9; also: Laakso et al. 2016, 67).

In sum, while the policy related to autochthonous minorities focuses on and even promotes their traditional languages (which are different from the language of the majority), the policy concerning allochthonous or new minorities (= immi-

<sup>9</sup> For an overview on Turkish language teaching see Küppers et al. (2015).

grants) focuses on their acquisition of the German language. In any case, besides simply voicing approval, it is difficult to implement measures to protect and support any minority languages without knowing the number and distribution of their speakers.

### **3. German national census 2017**

To date there are no official statistics on the minority languages spoken in Germany. This may change in the near future, as in 2017 there was – for the first time since 1939 – a question on language in the German national census. The question is about the language which is predominantly spoken in the household (see Fig. 2).

But as promising as this seems, unfortunately it does not mean that valid figures will finally be available for all the languages spoken in Germany. In fact, the census question and the fact that it is being asked raises a lot of issues – including the context and wording of the question, the wording of the possible answers (and the lack of an open answer),<sup>10</sup> and the presumed results and their interpretation (not only by census statisticians, but especially by the media). To name only some of these concerns: firstly, there is the use of singular in the question (“Welche Sprache\_ ...?”, i.e. singular, vs. “Welche Sprachen ...?”, i.e. plural). Only one language is elicited and presumably the respondents are allowed only one answer. To make things worse, it seems that one respondent will be expected to answer for all household members, thus reducing the complexity of the possible answers and their individual and social reality. This already highlights the obvious fact that multilingualism – that is, competence in several languages, including autochthonous as well as allochthonous minority languages and also dialects – is not taken into account here (not to mention the accompanying lack of awareness of multilingualism amongst the German population as well as amongst most officials). Several shortcomings are thus to be expected, e.g. multilingual individuals are being forced to choose one of their languages to name. As far as we know, some multilinguals do not want to decide which language they speak more often (see Adler 2018). Anyhow, even if someone predominantly speaks a language other than German within the household, this does not mean that he or she does not (or is not able to) speak German at all (for a detailed analysis and contextualisation of the census question see Adler 2018).

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<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the question and the proposed answers are not designed in accordance with the guidelines of the Conference of European Statisticians for the United Nations (cf. United Nations 2006, 2015).

159 Welche Sprache wird in Ihrem Haushalt vorwiegend gesprochen?		1. Person	Which language is being spoken predominantly in your household?	
Deutsch	01	<input type="checkbox"/>	German	
Nicht Deutsch, und zwar ...			Not German, namely ...	
... Arabisch	02	<input type="checkbox"/>	... Arabic	
... Englisch	03	<input type="checkbox"/>	... English	
... Französisch	04	<input type="checkbox"/>	... French	
... Italienisch	05	<input type="checkbox"/>	... Italian	
... Polnisch	06	<input type="checkbox"/>	... Polish	
... Russisch	07	<input type="checkbox"/>	... Russian	
... Spanisch	08	<input type="checkbox"/>	... Spanish	
... Türkisch	09	<input type="checkbox"/>	... Turkish	
... eine sonstige europäische Sprache	10	<input type="checkbox"/>	... another European language	
... eine sonstige afrikanische Sprache	11	<input type="checkbox"/>	... another African language	
... eine sonstige asiatische Sprache	12	<input type="checkbox"/>	... another Asian language	
... eine sonstige Sprache	13	<input type="checkbox"/>	... another language	

Fig. 2: Question on language in German national census 2017 („Welche Sprache wird in Ihrem Haushalt vorwiegend gesprochen?“ Which language is predominantly being spoken in your household?). Possible answers: „Deutsch“ (German), „Nicht Deutsch, und zwar ...“ (Not German, namely ...), „Arabisch“ (Arabic), „Englisch“ (English), „Französisch“ (French), „Italienisch“ (Italian), „Polnisch“ (Polish), „Russisch“ (Russian), „Spanisch“ (Spanish), „Türkisch“ (Turkish), „eine sonstige europäische Sprache“ (another European language), „eine sonstige afrikanische Sprache“ (another African language), „eine sonstige asiatische Sprache“ (another Asian language), „eine sonstige Sprache“ (another language). (Example of a questionnaire, *Statistisches Amt für Hamburg und Schleswig-Holstein*: [https://www.stla.sachsen.de/download/Erhebungsboegen/2A\\_MZ\\_EHB\\_VJ.pdf](https://www.stla.sachsen.de/download/Erhebungsboegen/2A_MZ_EHB_VJ.pdf))

It seems fairly clear that the goal of the census designers is not to learn more about the language repertoire of the German population and the existing diversity of multilingualism in Germany but rather to obtain more information on the presumed non-native German population and their use or non-use of German in the private domain (the household), and thereby to single out one aspect of integration, i.e. language.<sup>11</sup> This seems indeed to be the underlying purpose of the language question, as the timing of this question and some official documents emphasise. The process of proposing, discussing and adopting the Micro Census Act (*Mikrozensusgesetz*) took place in 2016; the act came into effect on January 1st, 2017. This shows that the events of 2015, i.e. the so-called refugee crisis in Germany, are the probable reason for the decision to include a language question in the census.

<sup>11</sup> In fact, language appears to be being used here as a proxy for identity, i.e. national category, as it was for example in the beginning of national censuses in the 19th Century (see e.g. Arel 2002).

Presumably the results of this question – which will probably not be published until the end of 2018 – will be very difficult to deal with.<sup>12</sup> Although there has not yet been a lot of media coverage in Germany about this question being asked as part of the national census, one of the more serious German newspapers DIE ZEIT, relying on the AFP (Agence France-Presse), published an article online with the following caption: “Regierung fragt Migranten künftig nach der zu Hause gesprochenen Sprache” (*Government is soon to ask migrants about the language spoken at home*, 26 August 2016) – which unfortunately is not entirely true. So this already gives an indication of the possible outcomes of the language question and its reception by the media and the public arena.

Fortunately, it will soon be possible to evaluate the validity of these results by considering the results of a large set of representative data on language and language attitudes.<sup>13</sup> This dataset and other comparable representative surveys, already mentioned in the first section of this paper, are discussed in the following section.

#### 4. Representative Studies on language and language attitudes in Germany

In fact, some representative figures on language and particularly on language attitudes in Germany are available. The majority of these representative studies were and still are conducted by the Institute for the German Language. There is, firstly, the study conducted in 2008 by the IDS in cooperation with social psychologists at the University of Mannheim (cf. Eichinger et al. 2009). For this study, 2,004 people in Germany were asked about forty questions on language and language attitudes. Respondents were older than 18 and the study was conducted via telephone by the Forschungsgruppe Wahlen (see e.g. Gärtig/Plewnia/Rothe 2010 and Eichinger et al. 2012). The Institute for the German Language had already carried out a representative survey on language attitudes in 1977, with a special focus on eastern and western German differences (cf. Stickel/Volz 1999). Recently, in 2016 the Institute conducted a representative study in cooperation with the Institute for the Low German Language (Institut für niederdeutsche Sprache) with a special focus on competence in and use of Low German – one of Germany’s regional languages (see above) – as well as attitudes towards it (cf. Adler et al. 2016). For this study, 1,632 respondents in Northern Germany older than 16 were

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<sup>12</sup> For current examples of comparable challenging language questions in censuses and how they are being dealt with in the public arena see e.g. for the UK Sebba (2017; as well as <http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/census-2021-an-opportunity-to-acknowledge-multi-lingualism/>) and for Austria Busch (2016).

<sup>13</sup> Lieberman (1966) as well as de Vries (2005) suggest doing so with all kind of language data in censuses.

interviewed via telephone by the Forschungsgruppe Wahlen; this study is representative for Northern Germany (for details see Adler et al. 2016, 7).<sup>14</sup>

Currently, the Institute for the German Language is conducting an extensive survey in cooperation with the socio-economic panel (SOEP) of the German Institute for Economic Research (Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung, DIW). This representative survey consists of two parts, an interview and an online questionnaire, both of them collected in autumn and winter 2017/2018 with approximately 5,500 respondents. Results are expected in 2018 and will be made available to all interested scientists by means of the data infrastructure of the DIW. The survey comprises questions on language repertoire and language attitudes. Compared to the language question in the national micro census, the language repertoire is elicited via a large set of questions including dialect competence as well as the parents' language repertoire.

All these studies involve both closed and open format questions. The quantitative design of the questionnaires allows for broad data collection and data processing as well as for statistical analysis on the large datasets obtained. The amount of data also allows for discerning subsamples and specifying their significant characteristics. Thus, by designing, carrying out and analysing several large surveys the Institute for the German Language is consistently developing, employing and further sharpening quantitative methods for the elicitation and investigation of language and language attitudes, as well as presenting and promoting analyses and results (not only in the context of the German language but also for other language contexts, e.g. the Attitudes Towards Languages scale, AToL, cf. Schoel et al. 2012). One of the benefits of the quantitative design of most of the instruments used in these representative studies is their replicability and therefore their comparability; that is, they can easily be reproduced in different language contexts and thus the results can easily be compared.

## **5. Language attitudes in Germany – some exemplary findings**

To illustrate the design of the surveys and possible analyses, we present some results of a question on language maintenance. This question was part of the 2008 survey as well as the one in 2016 (for a discussion about some of the open format questions, e.g. on liked and disliked languages as well as dialects, see Plewnia/Rothe 2012; Rothe/Wagner 2015).

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<sup>14</sup> This has been the third survey on Low German in the past forty years, the previous ones being Stellmacher (1987) and Möller (2008).

To begin with, one can draw on descriptive results from the instruments used. In the 2008 representative survey, respondents were asked to state whether more should be done for the German language (“Einmal ganz allgemein gefragt: Sollte Ihrer Meinung nach mehr für die deutsche Sprache getan werden?”, *Generally speaking, should more be done for the German language, in your opinion?* – see Gärtig/Plewnia/Rothe 2010, 215ff.). As Figure 3 shows, the majority of the respondents (78.4%) answer positively, while 16.2% say the opposite and 5.4% prefer not to answer this question.

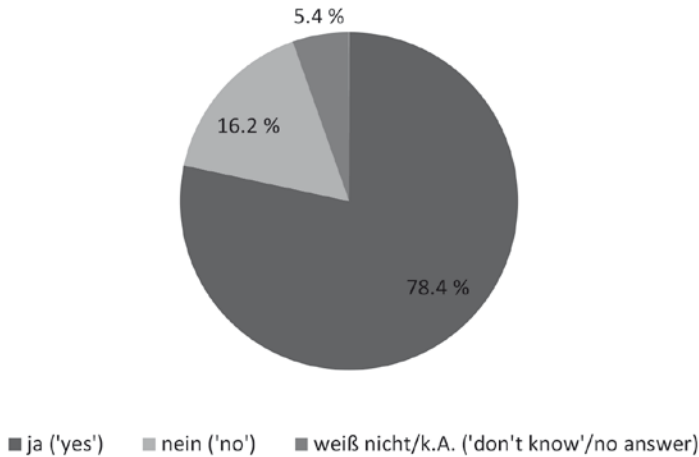


Fig. 3: Language maintenance German language (survey 2008) „Einmal ganz allgemein gefragt: Sollte Ihrer Meinung nach mehr für die deutsche Sprache getan werden?“ ‘Generally speaking, should more be done for the German language, in your opinion?’ (cf. Gärtig/Plewnia/Rothe 2010, 215)

The complete dataset now allows for further analysis, e.g. who is in favour of supporting the German language and who is not. One can compute complex statistical analyses and thereby identify correlations and influencing factors, as for example in Figure 4.

Figure 4 correlates the influencing factors on the maintenance of German, i.e. whether or not more should be done for the German language. The influencing factors,<sup>15</sup> i.e. the questions with a significant influence on the outcome of the answer on the maintenance of German are: the overall interest in language, attitudes towards German, accuracy/diligence in writing, accuracy/diligence in orthography,

<sup>15</sup> To determine which of the other potentially correlating attitudes influences the attitude on hand, regression analyses are carried out.

maintenance of minority languages, the assessment of the development of German language, the approval/denial of a law for German.<sup>16</sup> To illustrate the impact of these other attitudes on the attitude towards language maintenance, a pair of columns is displayed for each of them: on the left one can see the number of those who attached a rather low importance to the influencing factor in question, and on the right those who attached a rather high importance. That is, the first pair of columns on the left illustrates that people who are less interested in language questions are less likely to think that more should be done for the German language as compared to people who are more interested in language questions; the latter are more likely to think that more should be done for the German language. Overall, we can then state that people who are in favour of the maintenance of the German language are more interested in language questions, have more positive attitudes towards the German language, think highly of accuracy/diligence in writing and orthography, are in favour of the maintenance of minority languages, have a more negative assessment of the development of the German language and are more in favour of a law for the German language.

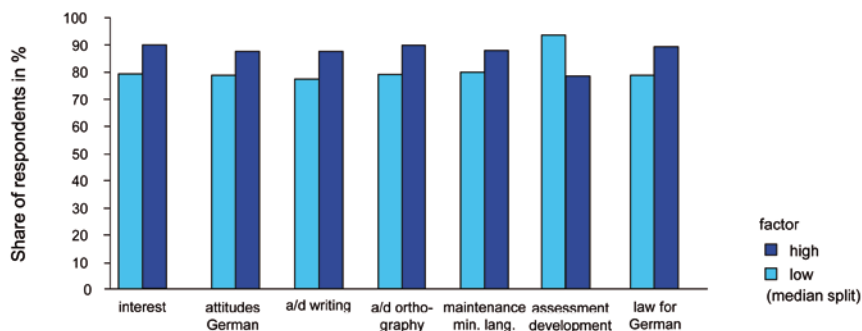


Fig. 4: Language maintenance of German language (survey 2008), influencing factors (cf. Eichinger et al. 2009, 47)

Those respondents who were in favour of more action for the German language were then asked who should take the corresponding actions. Their answers are displayed in Figure 5:

<sup>16</sup> Only 37.7% of the respondents are in favour of a law for the German language and 57.7% are against it (cf. Gärtig/Plewnia/Rothe 2010, 224). See also above for a brief comment on recurring attempts to enshrine the German Language in the German Constitution.



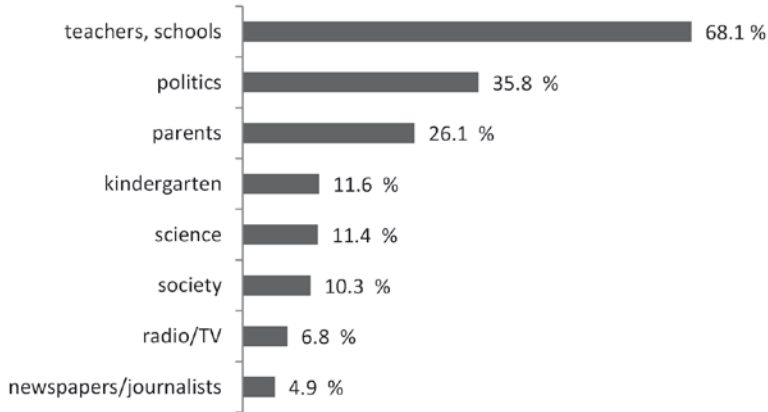


Fig. 5: Instances for Language Maintenance of German (survey 2008) “Und wer sollte sich darum besonders kümmern?” ‘And who should take particular care for it?’, More than one possible answer, % of respondents, all entries over 4% (cf. Gärtig/Plewnia/Rothe 2010, 218)

The vast majority of the respondents (68.1%) think that teachers and schools are potentially the responsible agents; secondly, they name politics (35.8%) and thirdly, parents (26.1%; cf. figure 5).

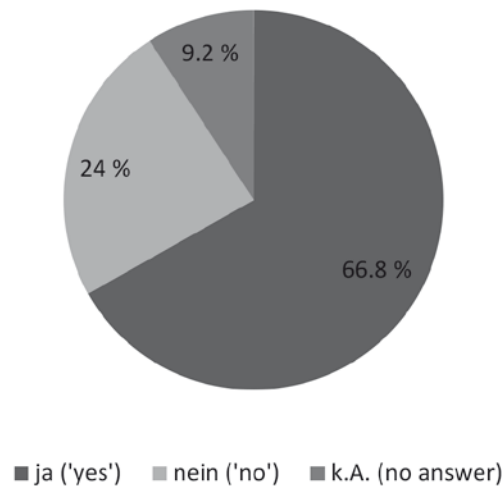


Fig. 6: Language maintenance of Low German (survey 2016), “Einmal ganz allgemein gefragt: Sollte Ihrer Meinung nach mehr für das Plattdeutsche getan werden?”, ‘Generally speaking, should more be done for Low German, in your opinion?’ (cf. Adler et al. 2016, 33)

A comparable set of questions was asked in the study on Low German in 2016 (see above): “Generally speaking, should more be done for Low German, in your opinion?”. 66.8% of the respondents to this survey were in favour of more being done for Low German as compared to 24% saying the opposite (see fig. 6). The comparison of both results on language maintenance, from the 2008 survey for the German language and from the 2016 survey for Low German, show that attitudes towards language maintenance for German are more positive than those towards Low German (a difference of more than 10 percentage points).<sup>17</sup> This means that language maintenance for German is rated favourably by almost the entire German population, whereas language maintenance for Low German is rated favourably by only two thirds of the population within the Low German speaking areas (for influencing factors and attitudes towards Low German’s maintenance see Adler et al. 2016, 33-34).

The second question of the maintenance set was also asked in 2016 to elicit who should be taking care of the maintenance of Low German. The answers are illustrated in Figure 7:

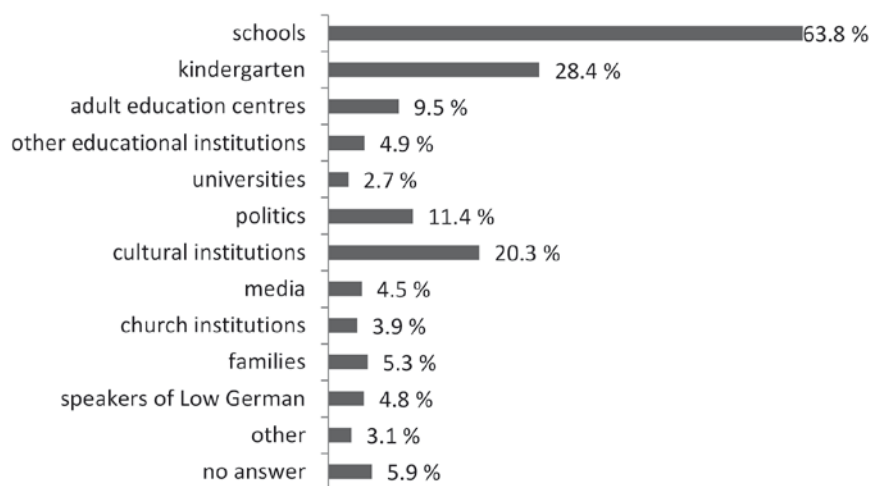


Fig. 7: Instances for Language Maintenance of Low German (survey 2016) „Und welche Personengruppe oder Einrichtung sollten sich darum besonders kümmern?“, ‘And which group of people or institution should especially take care of it?’, more than one possible answer (cf. Adler et al. 2016, 35)

<sup>17</sup> It is self-evident that the respondents for both datasets are quite different: while the 2008 survey is representative for the German resident population – presumably all speaking German – the 2016 survey is representative for the resident population of the Northern German federal states where originally Low German was spoken (and still is, but not to the same degree as Standard German is in all Germany).

The results are as follows: the large majority of the respondents name educational institutions such as schools (63.8%), kindergartens (28.4%), adult education centres (9.5%), other educational institutions (4.9%), and universities (2.7%). A fifth of the respondents (20.3%) also state cultural institutions as potentially responsible for the maintenance of Low German; only 11.4% refer to politics and 5.3% to families. Here again, the comparison with the data of the 2008 study on German is very instructive: responsibility for both German and Low German is assigned to educational institutions but with a clear tendency towards preschool education for the maintenance of Low German, as shown by the higher percentage of 'kindergarten' as an answer. While for both languages – Standard German as well as the regional language Low German – the educational system is to some extent seen as responsible, references to parents and families are different: whereas in the 2008 study almost a third of the respondents say that parents should do more for the German language, only 5.3% of the respondents in the 2016 study name families as potentially responsible for Low German. Clearly there is an obvious discrepancy in attitudes towards the maintenance of Standard German compared with those towards Low German. Accordingly, educational institutions and parents, i.e. families, should be responsible for the former, while for the latter, educational institutions, and particularly preschool institutions, are seen as responsible, but not families. These attitudes can be traced back to the fact that Low German tends to be no longer spoken in families, but there is currently a trend for revitalisation programmes in preschools and kindergartens (see the other corresponding results of the 2016 survey in Adler et al. 2016, e.g. learning contexts of Low German, with whom does one speak Low German etc.). Another apparent difference is the extent to which politics is named. While 35.8% name politics as responsible for Standard German, only 11.4% name politics as responsible for Low German. There is no central political body concerned with Low German issues (as it is spoken in several German federal states, not just in one), whereas issues of the Standard German language can be logically connected with German national politics even if there is no national governmental language institution.

These few examples of the representative studies on language attitudes show that such data and its analysis is quite revealing. The design of the surveys makes it possible to compare the same questions for different evaluated languages; thus we were able to show the differences in attitudes towards German and Low German. For example, language maintenance seems to be rated as somewhat more important for the German language than for Low German. Furthermore, educational institutions are considered to be responsible for the maintenance of both of them.

## 6. Summary

In general, Germany is still basically monolingual in German. This fact is so established that it is almost never questioned, and accordingly there is virtually no official language policy in Germany. The few existing regulations concern the promotion of the autochthonous minority languages and the acquisition of German by immigrants. Both autochthonous language minorities and – especially – immigrants contribute to a growing multilingualism at the individual level. Attitudes towards multilingualism, however, seem to be ambivalent. While multilingualism that includes one of the established European languages such as French or English is deemed prestigious, multilingualism that includes immigrant languages is less so. We may presume that at least 10% of the population is multilingual in some way. Up to now, there have been no official and reliable statistics about these, as there are generally no official figures of the languages spoken in Germany and their speakers respectively. There are however already some representative studies conducted by the Institute for the German Language. To date they mostly offer data on language attitudes, but some data on language repertoires as well. In the near future, there will be a reliable set of data on languages spoken in Germany as the Institute of German Language is currently undertaking a large representative survey with, among others, a set of questions on the language repertoire of the German population. The small number of language policy regulations found in Germany are of the acquisition planning kind, i.e. they centre on the educational sector. This appears to be reflected in the results of the attitudinal questions, which show for instance that a large majority of respondents attributes responsibility for language maintenance to educational institutions.

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