Introduction

This book is intended as an introduction to the sociolinguistic situation in those countries in which German has the status of a national language, with some consideration of those in which it has regional official status. Because a language is an index of the cultures and societies of its users, the monograph may be of value to German Studies and European Studies programmes as well as to students of sociolinguistics and to teachers and students of German. It supersedes Language and society in the German-speaking countries (1984). Momentous sociopolitical changes have taken place since the appearance of that monograph. I am referring not only to the end of the cold war and the unification of Germany, but also to changes in the self-images of Austria, Switzerland and Luxembourg expressed in language use and language planning, the 'redrawing of the map of Europe', influencing the use and status of German as an international language, and internal sociopolitical changes within the various countries, e.g. relating to the status of women.

The publication, in 1990, of Stephen Barbour's and Patrick Stevenson's Variation in German has given us a comprehensive and complementary text which is a critical and contrastive account, devoted specifically to variation, written from the context of Anglo-American sociolinguistic research. This abrogates the necessity to add such a perspective which was absent from my 1984 publication (Barbour 1985). The present monograph, like its predecessor, offers an interpretative synthesis of local studies of the relation between language and society in the German-language countries, complemented by some of my data, to present a coherent picture. The findings of much recent research have been incorporated into this book. The references in brackets (according to social science conventions) are meant to direct the reader to the source of the information. Translations are given for the benefit of those with limited German, and a glossary of some linguistic terminology employed is intended for Germanists and other readers with little training in linguistics. Some of
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the studies used as a basis employ linguistic methods set in a social context while others employ sociological methods to research broader questions of language behaviour, policy and attitudes. The enormity of the subject matter renders it impossible to deal with every topic relating to each German-language country. Some areas have been investigated much less than others and can be treated only cursorily in this book. The recent speed of change means that some findings are only indicative, being based on very sketchy or preliminary data, and in some cases anecdotal and impressionistic. They are included here to stimulate discussion and research.

The study of the sociolinguistics of German is a rewarding one, for it offers the opportunity of comparing the same language in action in societies with different historical and cultural traditions. It also enables us to assess the effects on a language of political division and the attempts to eradicate these effects in a short period. Because of the diversity of German in Europe – international but not to the same extent as English, with a presence in both Eastern and Western Europe, pluricentric and in some areas competing with a rising L language and/or another H language (see below, 1.2) – there are many dimensions that may have more universal relevance.

To prevent the scope of this book from extending to unmanageable dimensions, I shall exclude from consideration minority languages of ethnic or migrant groups in German-language countries. For these topics, the reader is referred to the relevant sections of Barbour and Stevenson (1990).
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1.1 The contemporary language situation in Europe

The language situation in Europe today is driven by two seemingly contradictory tendencies – tendencies towards what Fishman (1971) terms ‘massification’ and ‘diversification’ – which are operating simultaneously. Examples of massification are open economic borders between member countries of the European Union (then European Community) as from January 1993 and the enlargement of the Union to include Austria, Sweden, Norway, and Finland in 1995, and the development of an expanded European Economic Region progressively to include former Soviet Bloc countries, all of which could have homogenizing effects on language and culture. On the other hand, diversification is exemplified in the resurgence of regions in Western Europe and the re-emergence of smaller, largely language-based, nation-states in Central and Eastern Europe to replace the multinational empire of the USSR and the multinational political entities of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. The language-based nature of these nation-states brings to the fore longstanding ethnolinguistic tensions and disputes over minority rights which may result in new post-Communist nations of Central and Eastern Europe splitting up into more and more separate entities.

But alongside this diversification, we see the opening up of nations and groups which have been closed to half of Europe and much of the rest of the world for over forty years. This has brought the challenges of communicating with other peoples in a range of contexts.

Another aspect of diversification is the legal strengthening of regional and ethnic minority languages through the passing of the Charter of Regional and Minority Languages by the Council of Europe member states in 1993. This affords ethnic minorities and regional groups (but not migrant workers) the right that their language be used in administration,
education, the media, care of the aged, and communication across national boundaries.

In this chapter, we will discuss this in relation to the status and functions of German as a medium of inter-cultural communication (see below, 1.4.2 and 1.4.3). This needs to be considered with regard to four questions: the present status of German; the competition with other languages, notably English, the language situation in the European Union, and the future of multilingualism in Europe. But first let us survey the countries in which German has national or regional official status.

1.2 The German-language countries

German is the mother tongue of over 94 million people divided among a number of different countries. It has official (or quasi-official) status in five. In each of these it appears in a different form and has different functions. Each nation has its own variety of Standard German with which its people identify, as well as regional and local varieties, whose status and relation to Standard German will be discussed in later chapters.

The countries with German as an official (or de facto official) language are:

**Germany** 81 million users, of whom 65.3 million live in the western states and 15.7 million live in the eastern states. Although the former GDR was incorporated into the Federal Republic of Germany in October 1990, the process of unification is not complete in practice, as we shall see in Chapter 3.

**Austria** 7.5 million users. The old centre of Central Europe, Austria has maintained cultural links with the surrounding newly independent non-German-language nations, even during the time when most of them belonged to the Soviet Bloc and Austria pursued a policy of active political neutrality (i.e. even-handed politics, rather than non-involvement, see also 6.3.2). It has undergone a separate development from Protestant North Germany since the Reformation and from the Prussian-dominated ‘ethnically based’ nation-state of Germany (‘Kleindeutschland’) in the nineteenth century. Since becoming an independent republic for the second time in 1955, Austria has developed into a highly industrialized welfare state and has derived self-esteem and a new national awareness from its economic prosperity (low unemployment and a relatively low inflation rate). In 1995, Austria became a member of the European Union.

**Switzerland** A nation with official national multilingualism (German, French, Italian and, at the regional level, also Rhaeto-
Romansh), Switzerland has its languages distributed on a territorial principle, i.e. most cantons are monolingual, a few are bilingual, and one, Graubünden, is trilingual (in German, Italian, and Rhaeto-Romansh). According to Dürmüller (1991: 115), only 6.2% of the Swiss actually grow up multilingually, most of them not in the German-language area. However, almost all Swiss acquire some competence in one of the other languages of Switzerland at school (Dürmüller 1991: 126–7). The 4.2 million German users (about 74% of Swiss citizens and 65% of inhabitants of Switzerland) were thought to provide us with a classic example of what Ferguson (1959) terms 'diglossia' – a language situation in which two different languages or varieties are functionally complementary. In this case Standard German (the 'High' language, hereafter H) fulfils written and formal spoken functions, while the other, a dialect (the 'Low' language, hereafter L), is used for informal ones. But as we shall see in Chapter 2, L is intruding into some previous domains of H. This is having negative effects on relations between the language groups. German speakers are over-represented in the bureaucracy (Hauck 1993: 156) and draft legislation is available only in German and French. Public servants communicate by speaking their own language and understanding at least one other (Hauck 1993: 151).

Switzerland has enjoyed longstanding economic prosperity and political neutrality. It practises grassroots democracy deriving from the survival of feudal and early capitalist structures into the modern age, something that often appears parochial.

**Luxembourg** The population of 372,000 use Lëtzebuergesch, German and French in a functionally complementary relationship (see 2.7). Through language planning, i.e. the development of a policy on the use and standardization of languages, the dialect of Luxembourg, Lëtzebuergesch (Luxembourgian) has been assigned some of the functions of a standard language. Luxembourg has maintained many traits of a nineteenth-century German duchy with a small bureaucracy and an inherent conservatism. But it has, for centuries, enjoyed an intermediate position between the French and German spheres of influence and now has a strong attachment to the European Union. It acts as host to its parliament and court and to several of its agencies. In 1993 it was the richest country (per capita) in the European Union.

**Liechtenstein** 15,000 users. Liechtenstein is a tiny principality of a predominantly rural character without an airport. It is sandwiched

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1 There are, among them, about 62,500 foreign-born, some of whom have great difficulty adapting to the complex situation.
between Austria and Switzerland and has assumed the function of a tax haven for many business companies. Liechtenstein has had a customs union with Switzerland since 1923 but, unlike Switzerland, voted in favour of membership of the European Economic Region in December 1992.

In addition, German now enjoys regional official status in some eastern parts of Belgium (130,000 German speakers) and South Tyrol (200,000 German speakers, part of Italy), and an emerging special status in Alsace-Lorraine (1.5 million, part of France). In Namibia (once German South West Africa), there are still some state schools employing German as a medium of instruction, but English is being developed as the only official language. Furthermore, German is spoken as an ethnic minority language in Hungary, Romania, parts of the Russian Federation, and in the US, Canada, Australia, Brazil, Colombia and other immigrant countries.

1.3 German in Eastern and Western Europe

The German language has undergone a marked decline in significance in Western Europe and the world. Part of this is due to the unparalleled popularity of English – seen variously as the language of the liberators from Fascism and of resistance to Communism, the language of technological and economic progress, and the language of protest, ecological renewal and youth solidarity. Conversely, part of the decline of German can be attributed to the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany, which were linked with the language not only subjectively in the eyes and ears of the oppressed, but objectively through the use of German by the occupation forces in the execution of oppression and genocide.

The situation in Eastern and Central Europe was somewhat different in so far as there had been a more recent occupying power or dominating force using another language, Russian, as an instrument of oppression and dominance. In this region, the antithesis was provided by German and English – in quite different ways – English as the language of ultimate hope (especially in the younger generation), for the liberation which occurred in 1989–90 was not anticipated, and German for more immediate and practical purposes. German, as the language of the GDR, was not sanctioned as an ‘enemy (or suspect) language’ in the Eastern Bloc as English was, but it did give access to the capitalist world, its scientific and technological developments, and, for the lucky few, a language for the place of escape, usually the Federal Republic, Austria or Switzerland.

It was popularly believed that, with the collapse and dissolution of the
Soviet Union, the vacuum created for a lingua franca to replace Russian, the compulsory language used officially but liked and mastered by few, would be replaced by German. This was because German had been the second language of the cultured and influential middle class in Central and Eastern Europe before the Second World War (and even more so before the First World War when many of the countries were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire) and because the language did enjoy some continuing use and interest in the days of the communist régimes. Since the political upheavals there has been a renewal of the concept of ‘Central Europe’ (Mitteleuropa), which had been bypassed during the division of Europe into East and West. Banac (1990: 253) describes ‘Central Europe’ as a ‘cultural network strongly connected with Vienna’. It has a mythology centring on tolerance and cultural pluralism but with German playing a link role. Central Europe is generally defined to include Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and probably Northern Italy. It may also include Germany, and, since unification, Germany is clearly playing an important role in the link between East and West. The ‘new world order’ of the late 1980s was based largely on the notion of regional co-operation. This brought to the fore co-operative networks such as the Adria-Alpine consisting of Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Northern Italy, Slovenia and the then Czechoslovakia.

German did attract some increased use and favour as a school language, but the interest in English was not fully anticipated in Germany. It is particularly in multilingual and multicultural areas of Central and Eastern Europe that the position of German shows signs of revitalization. This includes Transylvania (in Romania), Galicia (Ukraine), parts of Slovakia, and East Prussia, a former German-speaking area from which Germans were forced to emigrate when it became part of Russia after the Second World War and which has now become geographically separated from Russia. (East Prussia is re-emerging as a free trading zone.)

1.4 The current status of German in Europe

1.4.1 Factors determining the status of German

In considering the actual situation of German today, let us discuss the factors that give a language an international status. Ammon (1991) makes the useful distinction between a lingua franca and an ‘asymmetrically dominant’ language. German is a lingua franca when Hungarians and Slovaks communicate with each other in it. It is an ‘asymmetrically
dominant’ language when Hungarians or Slovaks use it to communicate with German speakers and German speakers do not learn Hungarian or Slovak to communicate with speakers of those languages. As a generic term for both categories I will employ ‘language of inter-cultural communication’ (LICC). Ammon (1991) offers the beginnings of a quantitative method to assess this. Indicators include (i) the size of the ‘mother tongue’ community internationally and in the country concerned, (ii) the number of countries using the language officially, (iii) their economic strength, (iv) the size of the community employing the language as a foreign language, and (v) ‘communicative events’ in the language, including radio programmes, academic publications, and number of citations from academic publications in the language. Of a range of measurable and immeasurable factors discussed by Kloss (1974) as determining the international status of a language, Kloss places at the top the number of people who are learning or have learned it as foreign language speakers of other languages. This is followed by the use of the language in international conferences and organizations, and the number of books translated from it. Coulmas (1991, 1993) has given much attention to the economic value of a language, a question of great importance when it comes to status. He has singled out five factors of paramount importance in language status, whether for a national or an international language:

(i) communication radius
(ii) functional potential of the language
(iii) investment in the language
(iv) demand for the language as an economic commodity
(v) what the language can on balance achieve for the language community

The value of German can be gauged by the fact that about 19 million people throughout the world are learning the language, including 12 million in ‘Eastern Europe’, 6.2 million of them in Russia (Schürmer 1993, Kowar 1992, Domašchnjew 1993a, Földe 1993). Kowar (1992) makes the point that Germany and Austria will be the two prime movers that Central and European countries will use to gain them entry into the European Union.

The case for German is strengthened by the number of speakers, economic argument and traditional cultural links, but this has to be offset against the perpetuating of negative stereotypes (Born 1993: 164ff.), a factor that is continually made by German researchers (see also Ammon 1991).
1.4.2 The actual position of German in various domains in Europe today

In terms of Ammon’s and Coulmas’s factors, the following points need to be made:

(i) Numbers The 94 million native speakers of German in Europe put the language second in Europe after Russian (with 115 million) and well ahead of English with 58 million and French with 62 million native speakers in Europe. The communication radius which a knowledge of German reaches is, however, rather limited, compared with that of English (320 million native speakers throughout the world), French (90 million) and Spanish (300 million), all of which are spoken on several continents. There are five countries of Europe with German as a national official language and three others where it has regional official status (see 1.2). English has official status in only two European countries and French in five, of which one (Monaco) has recently declared its Italian variety (Monégasque) the official language (Magocsi 1993), making France the only European nation with French as its only language. German has sole official language status in three countries.

(ii) Functional potential German has been developed to cope with almost every conceivable domain and field of knowledge. For example, German is used in the Engineering Faculty of the Technical University of Sofia (Bulgaria), and in a number of faculties of some Turkish universities. (But see 1.4.6 for a discussion of German’s declining role as an international academic language.) It is in the area of computer technology that it has been left behind, with software and e-mail networks mainly in English.

Ammon’s (1991) study of German as a language of academic publications suggests that virtually no one outside the German-language countries still publishes in German in the natural sciences. There is, however, substantial reception of German-language scientific publications, restricted to Europe and strongest in Central and Eastern Europe. German trails both English and French in many humanities and social sciences. Even in the universities of German-language countries, German has been overtaken by English in many such disciplines, still leading only in Law, Literature, Classics, History and Theology, and tending in Linguistics. ‘Applied’ sciences use more German than ‘pure’ sciences. At the time of Ammon’s research, 1989–90, East German and Eastern European scholars used the most German, presumably because of the GDR’s technical supremacy in the Eastern Bloc (Ammon 1991: 212–26).

German is not even recognized as an official language of the United
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Nations and its organizations, and in comparison with French and particularly English, it plays a limited role as a conference and organizational language in the academic fields (Ammon 1991: 242–51, Skudlik 1990). Nevertheless, German is sometimes one of the conference languages of international conferences held in Germany, and East Germans are more likely than West Germans to read conference papers in German (Ammon 1991: 249).

(iii) Economic aspects The German-language countries are still economically very strong. Switzerland and Luxembourg are, per capita, the wealthiest countries of Europe (Manheimer Morgen, 31 December 1993/1 January 1994, p.9). The German economy is, in spite of recession, the strongest in Europe, the one on which most other countries are dependent. German is, after English and Japanese, the language of the economically most powerful language community (Ammon 1991: 151). However, there is a tendency for German businesses to communicate with other countries in foreign languages, notably English and French (Ammon 1991: 170) and for the periodicals of German chambers of commerce in other countries to be partly or wholly in a language other than German (Ammon 1991: 174). However, within Europe, German emerges from Ammon’s data as an asymmetrically dominant language. With the political changes, there was a dramatic rise in the number of Japanese business people learning German in Goethe Institutes (Alois Ilg, personal communication). Tourism, a major industry in Austria, Switzerland and parts of Germany (Ammon 1991: 333–7), and the need to provide for German tourists in other countries (Ammon 1991: 337–42) have promoted the German language. It should be noted, however, that the old Federal Republic had the most negative balance of trade in tourism of any European country (Ammon 1991: 337).

(iv) Investment in the language German is traditionally taught and studied as a foreign language in the schools and universities of many other countries (Ammon 1991: 423–41, 462–7). Germany is one of the main countries putting economic resources into the propagation of its language and culture through institutions such as the Goethe Institute and the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD, German Academic Exchange Service). The Goethe Institute promotes the learning and teaching of German as a foreign language as well as German culture through courses, lectures, exhibitions, teacher training and upgrading in co-operation with institutions in its centres in Germany and many other countries. The DAAD furthers academic exchange between Germany and other countries through scholarships and lecture tours as well as through the appointment of German lecturers at univer-