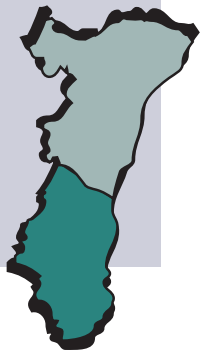


# Elsässisch



Alsace is a region in the north-east of France. It is composed of the Haut-Rhin and Bas-Rhin departments. It has a surface area of 8,280 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of around 1.6 million. Around a quarter of the population lives in urban areas. The emigration and immigration levels, which mainly arise from the movement of civil servants, or are due to economic reasons, are quite low (around 15%).

Language and History

Sociolinguistic situation

Language policy

Legal aspects



Català

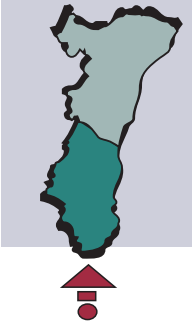
Galego

Euskara

Cymraeg



# Elsässisch



A plain in  
Alsace

Language and  
History

Sociolinguistic  
situation

Language policy

Legal aspects

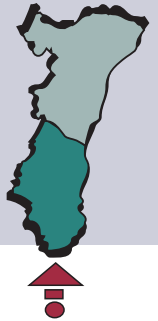
Alsace stretches from the eastern side of the Vosges massif (surrounded by deep valleys and hills) to the river Rhine on the tectonic basin which separates the Vosges from the Black Forest. This means that the region is bordered to the north and east by Germany (more specifically by the German regions of Rheinland Pfalz and Baden Wurttemberg, respectively) and to the south by Switzerland. On its western border is the French region of Lorraine, and the south-west opens up to Burgundy country.

The region is protected by the dominant westerly winds by the Vosges and has a continental climate: hot and humid summers and cold, dry winters.

Alsace is a wealthy region. Agriculture is very varied (wheat, beet, potatoes, tobacco, hops, forage plants, orchards, etc.) and its vineyards produce its renowned strong, white wines. Industry is also an important part of the region's life. The sub-soil contains potassium deposits in the south (which are currently being exploited). Several transformation industries can also be found here: textile industries in Mulhouse/Mülhausen and the Vosges valleys and chemical, mechanical and metallurgical industries in Strasbourg and Mulhouse/Mülhausen.



# Elsässisch



Strasbourg  
(Merian, 1663)



Language and  
History

Sociolinguistic  
situation

Language policy

Legal aspects

The main towns are (from north to south): Wissembourg/Weissenburg, Hagenau, Saverne/Zabern, Strasbourg, Sélestat/Schlettstadt, Colmar and Mulhouse/Mülhausen.

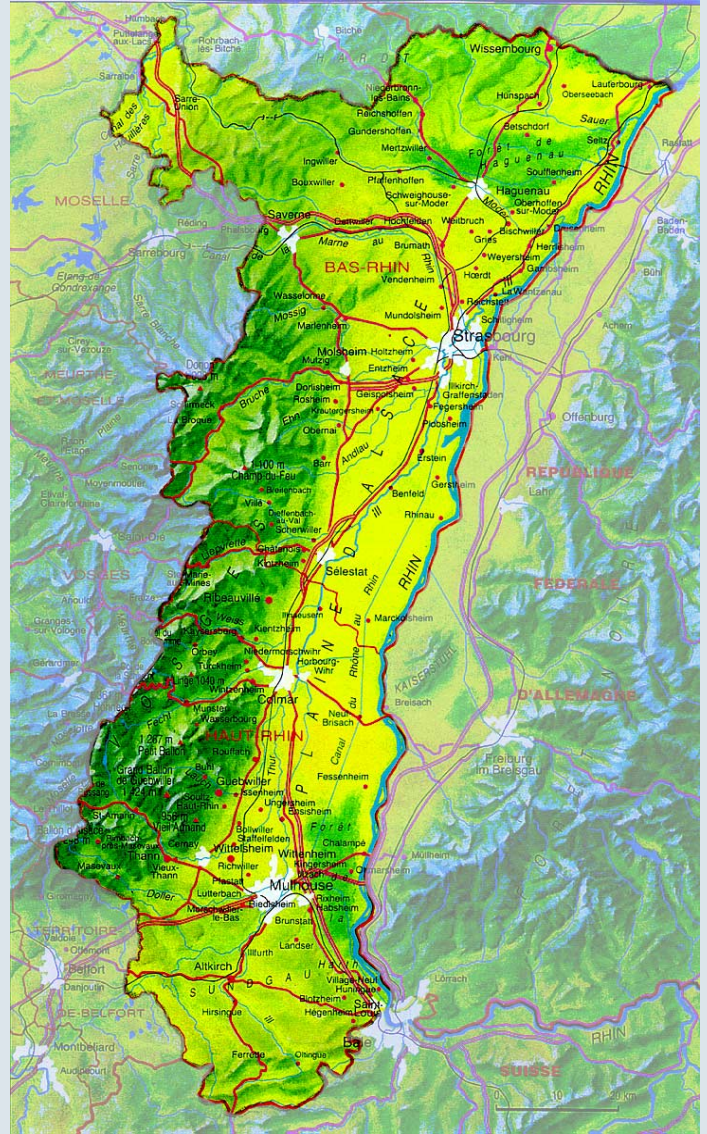
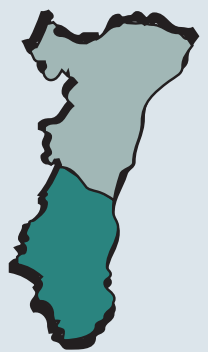
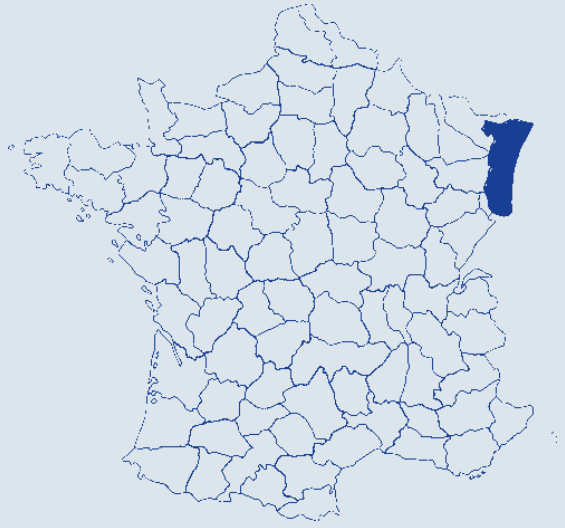
Strasbourg is the capital of both the Bas-Rhin department and the region of Alsace. It is also the seat of many European institutions, such as the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights. Strasbourg also hosts sessions of the European Parliament, and the Eurocorps, made up of soldiers from several European countries, is also stationed here.

The spoken languages used are the German dialects called Elsässisch or Elsässerdtitsch, (Alemannic/Frankish) and French. The standard reference language corresponding to Elsässisch is German: it is used purely in writing and only in a very few fields, such as regional press and literature. Nowadays, French is the standard written language in Alsace. Apart from this, more recently other languages have sprung up, such as Arabic and Turkish. These have been brought to the region by immigrants. Newcomers to Alsace generally do not know the varieties of German which exist but, on the other hand, they do mostly learn French ■



# Map of Alsace

## Elsässisch



# Elsässisch

## Language and History



Roman art in Alsace



Origins

After the French revolution

Recent wars

From 1945 to the present day

Català

Galego

Euskara

Cymraeg





The arrival in the fifth century a.d. of the Alemanni and the Franks, Germanic people from the north led to the disappearance of the Gaulish-Roman language except for a few place and river names. Thereafter, the languages of use were Alemannic - which stretched its area of influence from the Vosges to Bavaria, the south-west of Germany, the German-speaking part of Switzerland and the Vorarlberg, and Frankish - which was spoken in the north of Alsace, in Lorraine and in the Palatinate. Together with Latin, which was reserved for written documents and the clergy, these were the only languages used during the whole of the Middle Ages.

In the sixteenth century, Alemannic and Frankish were gradually replaced by *Hochdeutsch* (standardised German), a common language created under the leadership of chancellors, publishers and Luther, who translated the bible, and a language which was to become the standard language of all the German linguistic area. From then onwards standardised German became more and more the written language of Alsace, and Alemannic and Frankish, which survive even now and which are known under the name of *Elsässisch*, were retained only as a spoken language. Throughout the Middle Ages, and right up until the seventeenth century, Alsace was part of the Germanic Empire and was an area of flourishing economic and cultural tradition, containing some of the major names in German literary history: Otfried von Weissenburg, Gottfried von Strassburg, Reinmar von Hagenau, Johannes Tauler, Sebastian Brant, Johannes Geiler von Kayserberg, Thomas Mumer, Jörg Wickram, Johannes Fischart and Johann Michael Moscherosch, amongst others.

Gottfried of Strasbourg





The seventeenth century was a very conflicting time, with the Thirty Years War, a terrible religious war which led to a complete collapse of cultural life. The progressive annexation of Alsace by France (1648-1681) led, during the eighteenth century to a dissemination of the French language which was nevertheless limited to the upper échelons of society. The vast majority of the local population retained the attachment to *Elsässisch* and standardised German through schools, books and every-day life ■

Thiz ite gisprochan allez süß thir sigenib fon thar d'leuf  
muuäre thesh thir gälbo-drihan istoz selbo  
xxiiii  
IN TER RO CA BANT EQUA TURBE QUID FACIANT  
Ho bëan nan thelüag . er in fon göte maq .  
uuio ste ingiangun alle . thomo ögflichen fülle  
Némei quader häro . göumo thoro uuio  
thi uib üü nu gi zelle . ioh säg ih siu ir fülle  
Quibabel  
duis amaf  
N ist män nihan so fä gi . thar zuu gising a gi  
sunter ir thidala . gispreto thar éna  
S ouerfo ouh müf egi . gebethomo niegi  
thar mit minnu gidüa . ioh gib thar drinken thar zuu  
Nihil aliud  
qua opacatu  
ed uice  
V uirkes ouh thar thar mit . thar uuizod uih lére  
noh ungidan bilibe thar thar forstigo forbe  
O ut chiu gidüer ir uu dur göt . thar ir gindot  
ioh ob irf biginnet . thio hildi giuwinnet  
V uir seulun chiu uuio abton . thar häro ouh zuu drahon  
ioh seulun mer siu ir fülle . mer mih lomo uuillen  
T hä hiar seléne . thast zuu si nu gi kére  
ni mügun uuir thar uuonken . uuir seulun ir bishonken  
S ouer männo so sib biuize . ioh sunca sino riuzte .  
thar tharne uuirlichodüat . ghoufor ermo mänag guat

"Das Evangelienbuch" by  
Otfried de Wissembourg, the  
oldest text in Alsatian literature



## Language and History



### After the French revolution

#### PROCLAMATION

D E S

*Représentans du Peuple.*

Les Citoyennes de Strasbourg sont invitées de quitter les modes allemandes puisque leurs coeurs sont français.

A Strasbourg le 25<sup>e</sup> Brumaire l'an second de la République une et indivisible.

Les Représentans du Peuple  
près l'année du Rhin.

*Signés St. JUST et LEBAS.*

#### Proclamation

d e r

Volks-Repräsentanten.

Die Bürgerinnen Straßburgs sind eingeladen die teutsche Tracht abzulegen, da ihre Herzen fränkisch geünnt sind.

Straßburg den 25<sup>ten</sup> Nebelmonat im zweiten Jahr der einen und unzertrennlichen Franken-Republik.

Die Volks-Repräsentanten  
bei der Rheinarmee.

Unterschrieben St. Just u. Lebas.

In 1789, French travellers still used the word *Allemagne* (Allemanics) when talking about Alsace. In Alsace, the population was happy to accept being called *Allemands* and did not attach any negative connotation to this word. It was from the time of the French Revolution (1793-1794) onwards that the legitimacy of the Allemanic language in Alsace was questioned. The German-speaking people of Alsace were considered by some revolutionaries as allies of the Republic's enemies. The representative of the Lacoste Convention even proposed taking a quarter of the people of Alsace to the guillotine and only letting those who had participated in the Revolution stay in Alsace. The rest, he proposed, should be expropriated and deported.

Between 1800 and 1870, there was an increasing dissemination of the French language, especially after 1850. In 1870 French became the dominant language of the upper bourgeoisie. Amongst the middle and lower classes, French was used by youngsters at school and when carrying out military service. In the meantime, German remained the language of the church, popular literature, the press, people, the home and feelings ■

A declaration made  
by revolutionaries  
posted in Alsace





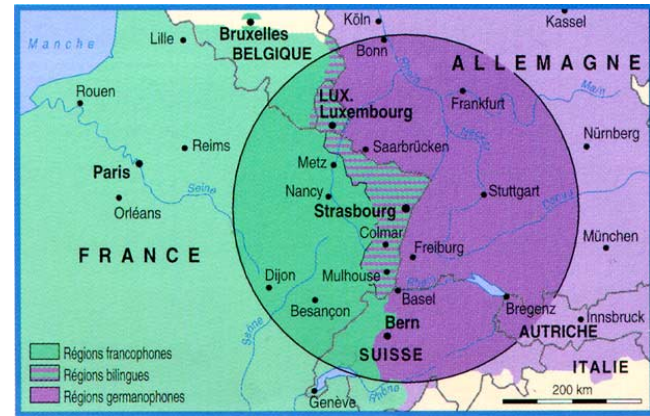
During the period of annexation by Germany (1871-1918), after the 1870 Franco-German war which was lost by France, language choice denoted political choice. Standardised German replaced French in public life. However, certain families, mainly of the upper classes, used French as a way of contradiction and as a language of every-day life, confusing in this way language use and national identity. Amongst middle and lower classes, dialectophones, i.e. those people who spoke *Elsässisch* made considerable progress in their knowledge of standardised German. There was a renewal of literary production in German (Friedrich Lienhard, Rene Schickele, Ernst Stadler, etc.). In 1914 these classes used almost exclusively *Elsässisch* as a spoken language and standard German as a written language. Amongst Francophiles, the (false) idea was extended that *Elsässisch* was different to German and that it had no relation to the Alemannic spoken on the right bank of the Rhine and in Switzerland and the Frankish spoken on the other side of Weissenburg/Wissembourg in the Palatinate. This is a prejudice which persists even today.

Bilingual street names  
strengthen the bicultural  
image of Alsace





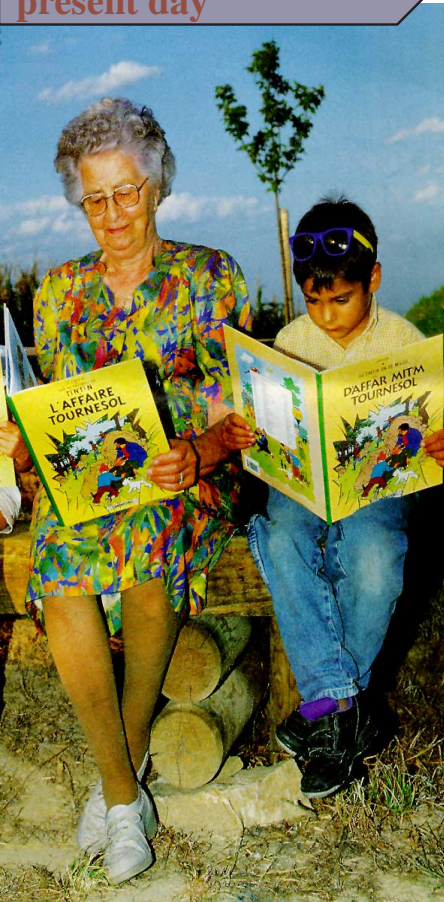
Within a radius of 250 km around Strasbourg live 6 million French-speakers and 25 million German speakers



At the end of the First World War France re-possessed Alsace. Public life was conducted in French and linguistic assimilation which was carried out especially in schools tended to reduce knowledge of standard German and threatened even the very existence of *Elsässisch*.

During the Second World War Alsace was occupied by Nazi Germany. This period in history is regarded by the population as a veritable tragedy (incorporation by force of the Wehrmacht, concentration, camps, etc.) ■





In 1945, the linguistic peculiarity of Alsace was questioned. An inferiority complex gradually emerged. *Elsässisch* started to have negative connotations. A certain degree of loyalty towards France was accompanied by the population's "renouncing" of its mother tongue. For the first time in the history of Alsace, standard German was excluded from primary schools and it was strictly limited to the press. It was taught as a foreign language in grammar schools. *Elsässisch* was forbidden at school and children were punished if they spoke *Elsässisch*. In fact it was regarded as a handicap at school and as a lack of culture or even mental retardation. Above all it was regarded as a national shame given its close ties to Germany. These negative implications together with the effects of changes in lifestyles (urbanisation, development of the tertiary sector, cultural practices, etc.) led to a phenomenon of self-censure within families who did not pass on *Elsässisch* to their children.

Tintin is read equally in  
Elsässisch and German





A demonstration in favour of bilingual education

So the following generation had a great deal of difficulty expressing themselves in *Elsässisch*, nor did they know how to write standard German correctly, and yet their knowledge of French was no better. In this respect, people have even spoken (in a somewhat exaggerated way) of an "alingual" generation. And yet it was precisely this generation, that at the end of the sixties started to take the region's linguistic situation to heart. In 1968 *The Cercle René Schickele*, for example which campaigns for bilingual education, was founded. Little by little, this questioning of the linguistic situation grew and new organisations and newspapers were created which took the regional language as their cause. This meant that there was a gradual raising of awareness and the idea that *Elsässisch* forms a part of the region's heritage grew as did the obvious advantage for mastering standard German.

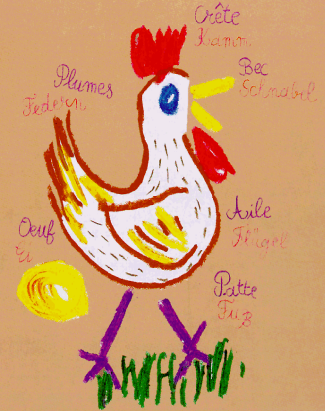




During the seventies, the provincial councils of Haut-Rhin and Bas-Rhin postulated in favour of teaching German at primary school level. Later, after the creation of the regions, the Alsace Regional Council worked side by side with the two provincial councils. In 1991, all three councils supported private initiatives, spoke out in favour of primary level bilingual French-German education and in 1992 encouraged the general introduction of bilingual education by the national education authorities. The regional council also created a Regional Office of Bilingualism, which has the brief of developing transmission, learning, use and dissemination of the regional language.

In spite of these developments, the linguistic behaviour of the majority of the people of Alsace has not changed and there is no sign of *Elsässisch* experiencing a revival ■

Apprendre l'allemand pour un enfant de 3 ans, c'est plutôt amusant.



Avec les classes bilingues dès la maternelle, vous prenez son avenir au sérieux.

A poster promoting early learning

