

CHAPTER FIVE

Dialect and Standard Language in the Other German-speaking Countries

West Germany (the entity which *used* to be the Federal Republic of Germany) had the widest range of native dialects of any of the German-speaking countries¹. These dialects include Low German, Middle German and Upper German dialects. The German Democratic Republic, now a part of the Federal Republic of Germany, encompassed primarily Low German and East Middle German dialects. **Austrian** dialects, with the exception of a few Alemannic dialects in Vorarlberg, are exclusively Bavarian (Upper German). In Switzerland the dialects are Alemannic (Upper German), as they are in neighboring Liechtenstein. In Luxemburg the dialects are Moselle Franconian (West Middle German). In the part of Belgium which was part of Germany until the end of World War I there are about 150,000 speakers of West Middle German dialects, and in France there are speakers of Alemannic (Upper German) in *Elsaß* and Rhine Franconian (West Middle German) in *Lothringen*. **Germany**, using the term to include the old Federal Republic (West Germany) and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) is the only country to have dialects from *all* of the major dialect groupings, as well as from Frisian, making it all the more obvious why Germany itself needed a standard language. The situation is somewhat different in the other countries. France and Belgium will not be discussed here beyond remarking that German is very much a minority language in both countries and that the German-speaking populations look to neighboring West Germany for their norms, both written and spoken.

Austria

In Germany the language of radio and television and the language of newspapers is very nearly uniform throughout the country, i.e. announcers on the *Norddeutscher Rundfunk* and announcers on the *Südwestfunk* and the *Bayerischer Rundfunk* sound much the same. South German and north German newspapers print the same sort of German. In Austria, however, there is a different form of the Standard language. It is very similar to German Standard German, but there are systematic differences in sound (phonology), grammar (morphology and syntax) and vocabulary (lexicon). This is immediately evident to anyone who knows **German** Standard German and who hears Austrian radio for the first time. It is clearly not German German.

Phonological differences between Austrian Standard (AS) and German Standard (GS) include:

¹Most of the factual information in this chapter comes from Clyne 1984.

- 1) use of initial *st* instead of *scht* in foreign loans like *Stil* and *Strategie*,
- 2) initial *k* in loanwords which in GS have *ch* as in *ich*, e.g. *China*, *Chemie*,
- 3) initial and medial *s* where GS has *z*, e.g. *sausen*,
- 4) the *ch* of *ach* rather than the *ch* of *ich* after *r*, e.g. *durch*,
- 5) the final *-ig* of words like *fertig* and *ruhig* is pronounced like *ik* rather than like *ich*,
- 6) *r* is formed by trilling the tip of the tongue against the upper teeth rather than by trilling the uvula (the appendage of flesh which hangs down in the back of the mouth) against the upper part of the back of the tongue,
- 7) the use of a *glottal stop* in GS as opposed to no glottal stop in AS²,
- 8) a less diphthongised pronunciation of the three diphthongs *ai*, *au*, *eu*

Morphological differences include the use of the auxiliary *sein* with *sitzen*, *stehen*, *liegen* (as opposed to GS *haben*), the addition of *-t* rather than *-st* after verb stems ending in *-sch*, e.g. *du nascht* (GS *du naschst*) and a number of differences in word formation suffixes, e.g. AS *Speisenkarte*, GS *Speisekarte*, AS *Aufnahmsprüfung*, GS *Aufnahmeprüfung*, AS *Visitkarte*, GS *Visitenkarte*. Some nouns have different genders in Austrian and German Standard, e.g. AS *der Gehalt* "salary", GS *das*.

Syntactically AS often appends the past participle *gehabt* to sentences already in a perfect tense. This is, for instance, prevalent in the writings of Thomas Bernhard, as the following quote from Bernhard's short story "Der Zimmerer" indicates:

Ich selber hatte Winkler schon in dem Moment, in welchem er aus dem Gerichtssaal geführt worden ist, vergessen gehabt,...

Weil in AS imposes following verb-**second** order (i.e. is like *denn*), whereas it imposes following verb-**final** order in GS.

The most obvious differences are in the lexicon. AS uses different words for many items. AS *Marille*, GS *Aprikose*; AS *Semmel*, GS *Brötchen*; AS *Ribiesl*, GS *Johannisbeere*; AS *Paradeiser*, GS *Tomate*; AS *Jänner*, *Feber* GS *Januar*, *Februar*; AS *Plafond*, GS *Decke* ("ceiling"); AS *Flugpost*, GS *Luftpost*; AS *sich verkühlen*, GS *sich erkälten*, and many many more.

Austrian German, being basically Bavarian in nature, has much in common with German spoken in adjoining Bavaria in Germany, including much of the material just described, but the difference is that these things are standard in Austria but *not* standard in Germany, even in Bavaria.

Clyne (1984:10) writes: "At all levels of language there are marked distinctions between local or regional Austrian dialects and Austrian Standard - both in the capital city and the provinces. Due to its belated overall industrialization, Austria still has a more pronounced class structure than the Germanies, and social class and educational background are indicated through the variety of Austrian German (dialect or standard) used. Vienna is the political and cultural centre and its German exerts an influence on the educated speech of the provincial cities (e.g. Graz, Linz, Salzburg, Innsbruck)."

²A glottal stop is a momentary pause, produced by pressing the vocal cords together to cut off the flow of air from the lungs. Glottal stops are used in GS before words which begin with vowels and within complex words before internal word boundaries, e.g. before *-ein* in *Verein*. Glottal stops will be examined along with many other phonetic features of German in later chapters.

Switzerland

Switzerland presents a totally different picture. Switzerland has four national languages: German, French, Italian and Romansh (German *Rhätoromanisch*), a language spoken only in one canton of Switzerland. Romansh is a Romance language closely related to Italian, and most of the speakers of Romansh are able to speak some other Swiss language, usually Italian or German.

In Switzerland each language has its own territory. There is therefore a German-speaking area, a French-speaking area, an Italian-speaking area and a Romansh-speaking area. In the German-speaking area, which is the largest area in Switzerland, the native Swiss-German population all speak the local Swiss-German dialect as their first language. This practice knows no social-class boundaries, which is emphatically *not* the case in Austria and Germany. In German-speaking Switzerland *everybody* speaks the dialect first and foremost. Standard German is very much a foreign language, albeit a closely related one.

In German-speaking Switzerland *Swiss* Standard German (which is very similar to German Standard German, as is Austrian Standard German, but is nevertheless also reasonably different from German and Austrian Standard) and **Schweizerdeutsch** (the dialect) have different and clearly defined domains of usage. Swiss Standard German is the predominant written language and is used in the National Parliament (at least by German-speakers - French and Italian are also used), is the language of secondary and tertiary education, of radio and television (except for regional programs), of *formal* church services and of non-fiction literature in general and of fiction literature which is intended to be read outside Switzerland (e.g. Max Frisch, Friedrich Dürrenmatt). Swiss dialect is still the first and major language, used in cantonal parliaments, in primary education, in any reasonably informal situation, including weddings, prayer meetings, university working groups, etc. This type of situation, where two languages are used, but each in its own domain, is known as *diglossia*, which means literally "two languages". German-speaking Switzerland is very definitely a diglossic society, in that the two languages (the Standard and the dialect) each have their proper domains of usage.

Swiss dialects differ considerably among themselves, so Switzerland is a goldmine for dialectologists. There is no "Standard" version of Swiss dialect. The three major centres of influence are Zürich, Basel and Bern, and Swiss from different parts of the country adapt their local dialects in the direction of those of major regional centres, a situation similar to the Swabian situation discussed in the last chapter.

Liechtenstein

Liechtenstein is a very small country which does not even have an airport or a train station, but which has become a tax haven for German and Austrian business-people. It lies between Austria and Switzerland, and the local dialect is an Alemannic dialect very similar to the dialects in nearby Switzerland. The *Liechtensteiner*, as opposed to the Swiss, encourage the use of the Standard.

Luxemburg

Luxemburg (or Luxembourg, as the French spelling has it) is a trilingual country, the three languages being French, Standard German and the local Moselle Franconian German dialect known as *Letzebürgesch*. Letzebürgesch is the native language of the entire native population. Primary school is conducted first in Letzebürgesch, then in Standard German, and French is taught as a subject in primary school. French takes over as the language of instruction in secondary

school and is also used in what tertiary institutions there are. Since everyone goes to primary school, everyone is able (in theory, at least) to read Standard German. Not everyone goes to secondary school, so not all of the population can read French.

Outside the schools each of the three languages has its own domain. Local newspapers are printed in Standard German, with a Sunday cultural supplement in French. Standard German is used in the church, as is Letzebürgesch, and non-fiction literature is written in Standard German. Fiction literature is usually in Standard German or in Letzebürgesch.

French is the language of administration and of the legal code. Street signs and railway timetables are in French, as are business letterheads. French is the "intellectual" language and as such is the language of choice of the upper and middle classes for formal occasions. Standard German is the language of choice of the lower classes for formal occasions and as a written language.

Clyne (1984:20f) sums up the "well-defined divisions between the use of French, Standard German and Letzebürgesch even within domains" with the following illustrations:

Education: the medium of preschools is Letzebürgesch, that of primary education German, while secondary education is conducted in French. But in all classes, Letzebürgesch is used sometimes. All three languages are taught as subjects at primary and secondary schools. It is the school that makes trilinguals out of a basically monolingual, Letzebürgesch-speaking population.

Correspondence: personal letters tend to be in Standard German (although some intellectuals correspond in Letzebürgesch), but French is the language of local business and official correspondence. The balance between Standard German and French is determined by social distance (degree of intimacy) and class.

Law courts: evidence is given in Letzebürgesch, the counsels speak French (the language of the legal code), and the language of the written verdict is Standard German.

Parliament: most debates are conducted in Letzebürgesch, documents and draft laws are printed in French, and texts for public distribution are in German.

Literature: there are three Luxemburgian literatures, one in each language.

According to Clyne (1984:21), because Letzebürgesch is used in so many domains where a standard language would be used in other countries, and because there are *two* standard languages, French and German, German is considered even more of a foreign language in Luxemburg than in Switzerland. For instance, the Swiss transfer words from Standard German and adapt them to fit the phonology of the dialect, but the Luxemburgers prefer to import new words from French into Letzebürgesch rather than from German.

Clyne concludes: "Because of resentment against Germany, there is a taboo on the use of Standard German for anything relating to national and personal identification, e.g. street signs, letterheads, public notices, tombstones. While Letzebürgesch is the language of solidarity and French that of power and prestige, Standard German is merely a language of convenience." (1984:21)

In theory, then, the entire native population of Luxemburg is able to use all three languages. The three languages are not distributed on territorial principles, as in Switzerland, but are used by all

of the population. Luxemburg is thus a *triglossic* society, one in which three languages are used, but each in its own domain.

The German Democratic Republic (GDR)

Finally, a few words about the now defunct GDR. Much has been written over the last few decades about the inevitability of a split in the Standard German of West and East Germany. Such a split would have been caused by the fundamental differences in the two societies. The Federal Republic is a capitalist society, the GDR was a socialist society. The standard language(s) of both countries derived from the same East Middle German dialect and the written forms were identical. The major differences were in the lexicon. Because of the inherent differences in the two societies, words did not always mean the same things in the two countries. Already existing German words were redefined to cover concepts which came with the new social and economic order, concepts which did not exist in the west, and sometimes new words were created. Some examples of redefinitions (Clyne 1984:34f) are:

Akademiker - GDR: member of the Academy of Sciences
FRG: member of the academic professions; university graduate

Brigade - GDR: a small collective involved in competition with other small groups for national awards, e.g. *Mähdreschbrigade* (harvest-thresher-brigade), *Maurerbrigade* (bricklayer-brigade), *Schlosserbrigade* (locksmith-brigade), *Traktorenbrigade* (tractor-brigade)
FRG: military brigade

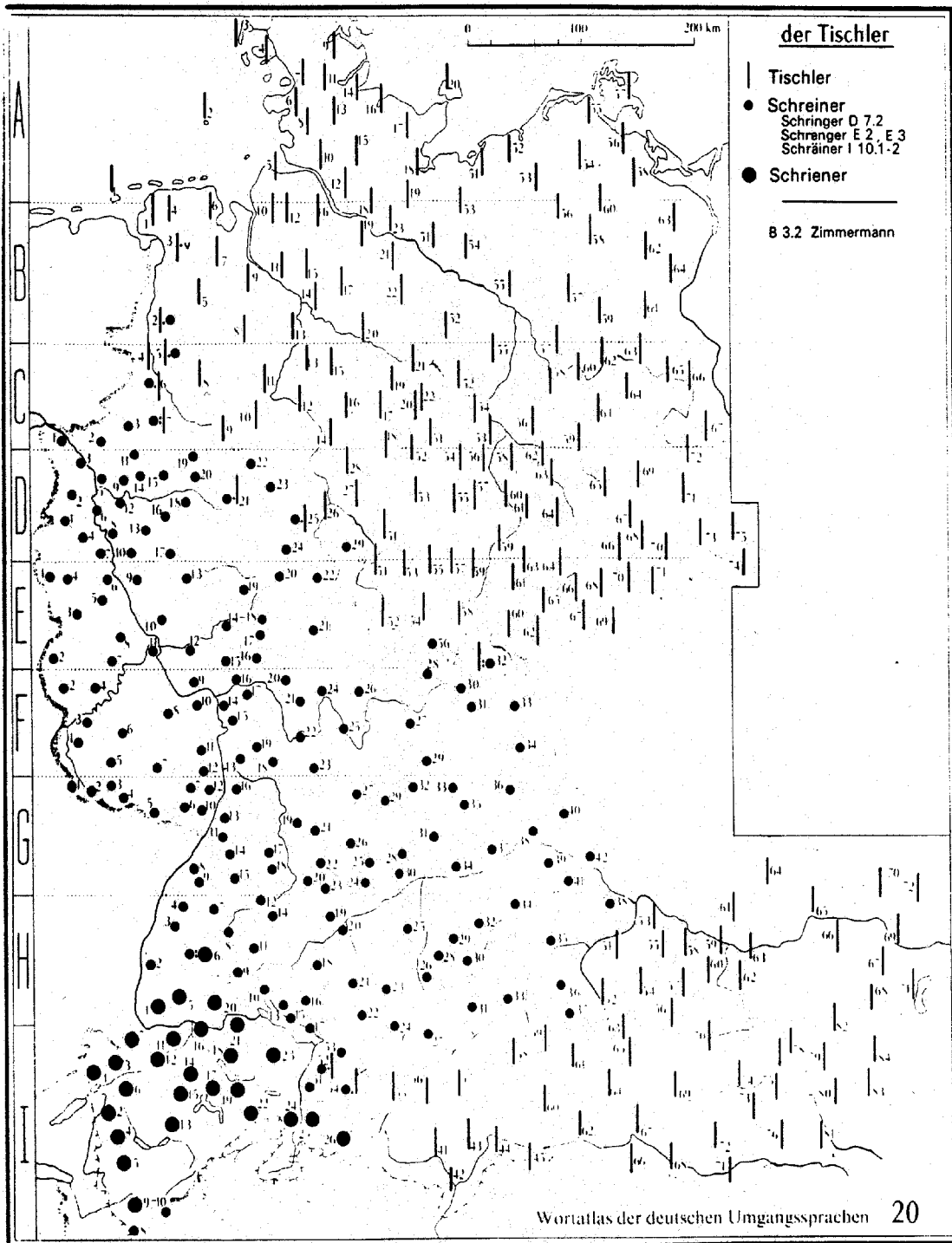
Brigadier - GDR: leader of a *Brigade*
FRG: rank in the army

Some examples of newly created words (Clyne 1984:33) are:

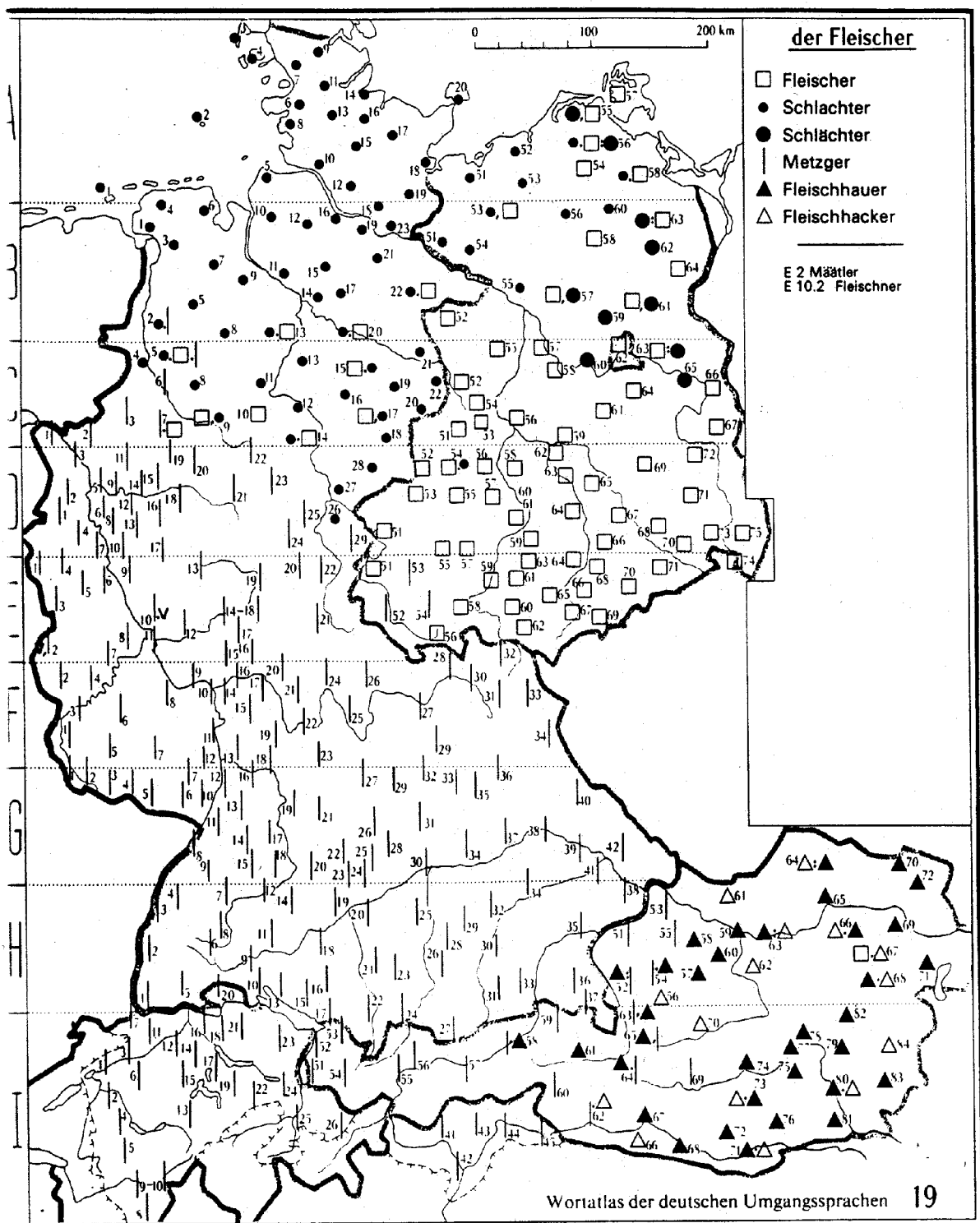
beauflaggen - to produce a compulsory quota per factory or other unit
Friedenslager - ('peace camp') the Eastern Bloc
Soldi-Marken - stamps bought by East Germans to raise money for Third World development aid. (Abbreviation of *Solidaritätsmarken*)

Now that the GDR has joined the FRG politically and economically, any language differences which have arisen in the last 40 years can be expected to disappear within a generation.

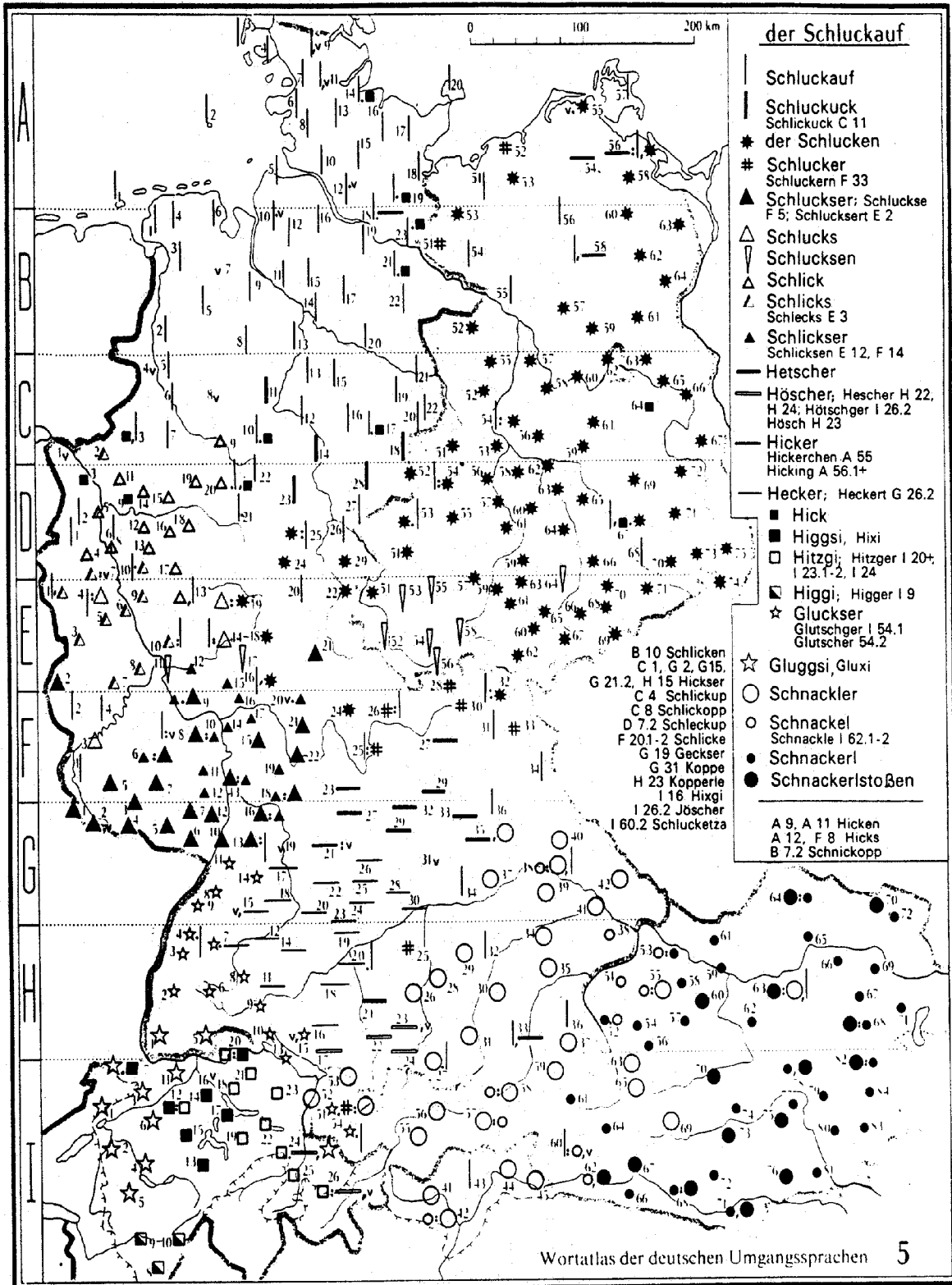
Finally, as should be clear from the preceding, it is a mistake to look at Standard German as a monolithic structure. There is variation within Standard German as well as within non-Standard German. One of the most striking bits of variation is in the lexicon. Eichhoff 1977f. is a compilation of 125 maps covering both Germanies, Switzerland and Austria. A questionnaire containing the names of objects encountered in daily life, e.g. plants, tools, animals, food, household objects etc., was distributed and the results collated and drawn onto maps, four of which are appended with the kind permission of the publisher.



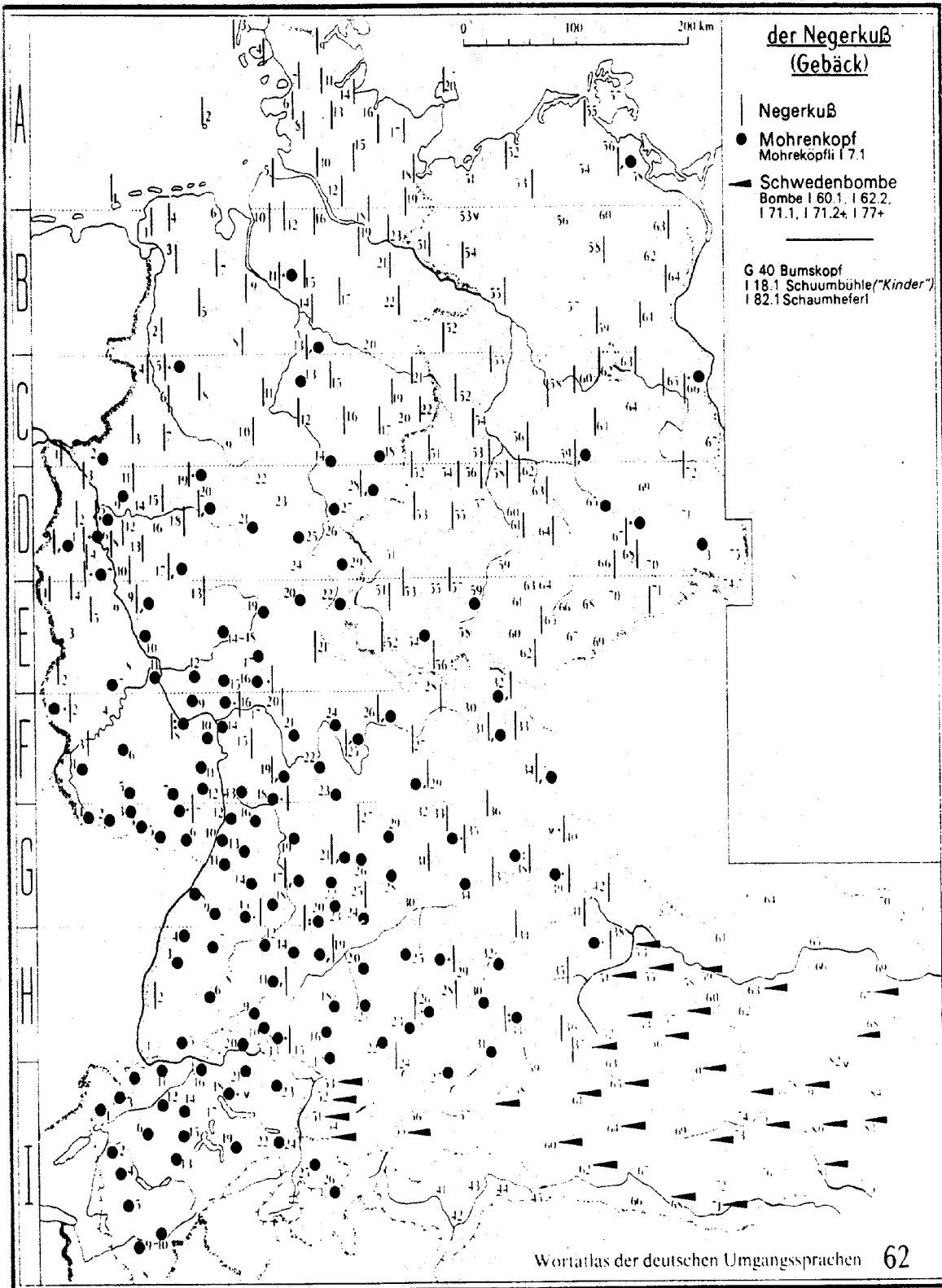
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