Names on Alsatian Gravestones as Mirrors of Politics and Identities

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Abstract
This study focuses on personal names on gravestones in Alsace, a region in the east of France that has shifted several times between France and Germany, especially between 1871 and 1945. These shifts are observable in the cemeteries, not least regarding the personal names inscribed in the epitaphs, which usually exhibit either a French or a German variant of the first name, whereas family names traditionally are of German origin. The choice of a first name was expected to follow the language of the ruler, but this was not always the case and we can observe numerous transgressive choices of first names. Indeed, the simultaneous occurrence of German and French first names shows how naming was subject to different traditions and ideologies. Today, German first names have become rare, which mirrors the region's ongoing, larger language shift to French. More recently, the frequency of at once non-German and non-French names echoes an increasing mobility in Alsatian society.

Keywords: Alsace; identity; first name; cemetery; gravestone, namescape

> *What's in a name? that which we call a rose*
> *By any other name would smell as sweet*
>
> — Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, Scene II[1]

1. Introduction

When walking around in cemeteries, the passer-by encounters names on almost every tombstone: they are necessary to single out a specific grave and they uphold the memory of the departed. Indeed, graves carry layers of identity, presented by names and personal identifications, life narratives and linguistic choices, and also by the monument itself, its location, its size and its materiality. Names on tombstones must be considered in their historical, social and cultural context. As Blount (2016: 617) states, 'personal names can track social change and social status and thus [they]

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[1] Et c'est donc grâce à Shakespeare que nous faisons le raccord entre la littérature, la politique, la France et l'intérêt que porte Ron Paul à ces domaines.

must be part of social and cultural systems.' So the study of names as left to us in graveyards[2] may address a whole range of issues, historical, ideological, legal, linguistic, as well as political and societal.

The present study takes Alsatian cemeteries as a starting point. It aims at contextualizing names in epitaphs in order to examine how they mirror larger changes in society, to wit by asking: How do names on tombstones reflect national and linguistic shifts and identities in Alsace? How do they signal more general societal changes? The linguistic landscape (LL) can perform both an informational and a symbolic function (Landry & Bourhis 1997), and Puzey (2016: 403) notes that names have 'a privileged space in the LL.' This in effect turns the cemetery into an even more privileged space to study. Hence, names on gravestones will here be considered as potential indicators of language shifts and societal changes—as the cemetery is a powerful *namescape* (Puzey 2016: 404). In Alsace, the question of languages, and whith that, the question of names, has been an issue especially since 1871 when the region became German after having been French for more than two centuries, and then changed belonging several times before being granted back to France after World War II. In the following, I will first provide a general background on languages and names in Alsace, and cemeteries. Then, I will discuss methodological questions. Following these introductory considerations, I will proceed to the study of the names in the graveyards, and finally, a conclusion will summarize the findings.

2. Alsace, Names and Cemeteries: A Background

While historically a Germanic region, Alsace was assigned to France after the peace treaty of Westphalia in 1648. French language was introduced by the king Louis XIV's officers and civil servants, and the new administration that operated in French (Huck 2015: 51–60; Vogler 1993: 106–118). Still, both French and German were used: French for the administration and for legal questions, German and its regional varieties for all local communication (Philipps [1975] 1986: 29–49; see also Lazer 2019: 65–68). By studying the proportion of French and German surnames respectively, Lévy (1929: 220–221) has estimated that the French made up some 20% of the population in the middle of the 19th century. Alsace

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[2] The words *cemetery* and *graveyard* will here be used interchangeably, as will *surname* and *family name*.

remained French until the end of the Franco-German war of 1870–1871, when it became German after more than two centuries under French rule. From 1871 on, it was part of Germany until the end of World War I, when the border was modified once more by the Treaty of Versailles. Alsace was then under French jurisdiction yet again, and remained so until 1940 when it was annexed by Nazi Germany. By the end of World War II, in 1945, it was assigned back to France. Throughout its regional history, the language used for daily communication in Alsace had been mostly Alsatian, in effect a German dialect, with German as its written standard. The French authorities now started an uncompromising process of promoting French instead of German as the official language in schools and in daily life. Today the process of language shift from the Germanic languages to French has brought the Alsatian dialect into decline, and German has to all intents and purposes become a foreign language (Vajta 2004; Denis & Veltman 1988, 1989).

Even if the German language replaced French and vice versa when the region's political authority changed, it was more difficult for a new government to impose rules when it came to personal names. It was obviously troublesome to change family names, but less complicated to exert influence and to legislate the choice of first names: during the period spanning 1871 to 1918, the German authorities prohibited French first names in favour of Germanic ones, but this, nota bene, only in Alsace and not in other regions of Germany (Philipps [1975] 1986: 133–134; Lévy 1929: 365, 434). Some years later, the Nazis conducted an even more severe name policy: French first names were forbidden for newborn children, and those already in use were hardly tolerated. Furthermore, the authorities forced the Alsatian population to change French-sounding personal names into more Germanic ones and to use the German equivalent to French first names (Philipps [1975] 1986: 228–229), for example *Hans* or *Johann* instead of *Jean*, or *Margaretha* instead of *Marguerite*. Thus, names and naming became a part of a political discourse, employed as tools to implement the new ideology.

Inhabitants originating from the region usually have Germanic family names. Successively, and notably in the 19th century, parents started to choose French first names for their children, even though the spoken language remained Germanic (mostly Alsatian and, in a more official context, German). This could be seen as marking an increasing feeling of French belonging. Indeed, Aldrin considers name giving as an act of

identity (2017: 45) and states that 'naming is a matter of (more or less conscious) social positioning, in which parents' emotional aesthetic, ideological and social stances […] are expressed. Through this process, parents contribute to the creation of identity, their own as well as that of the child' (2017: 66). As Urbatsch (2014: 463) observes, 'naming children is a very powerful signal' and Ainiala & Östman (2017: 4) note that 'social values […] have great importance in the selection of a first name: national background, mother tongue, religious convictions […] affect name giving' (see also Coates 2016: 532; Ainiala 2016: 378; Clifton 2013: 404). Aldrin (2016: 388) also sees 'naming as part of collective identities,' and states that it is 'evident that the choice of name can act as an expression or construction of cultural identities.' In Europe, surnames are usually inherited within the family and could thus be seen as mediators of a group or family identity—the bearer could then be seen as categorized into a certain group or family. On the other hand, the first name is subject to a deliberate choice made by the parents or the family. As Leroy (2006) points out, family name and first name inscribe a person within a social and cultural context. Both are closely linked to personal identity (see e.g. Aldrin 2014: 2016; Kotilainen 2013; Alford 1988), and Aldrin (2017: 63) concludes that naming is an active choice through which parents position themselves and their child and signal how they want to be perceived.

Blount asserts that 'a name is a person's social, cultural, and legal identity' (2016: 616). However, if identity is to be considered as a non-conflictual whole, this implies that these three should be in accordance. But, in Alsace, the question of identity has been an issue throughout the past several centuries. Legal, or national, belonging has shifted between France and Germany, and languages were supposed to follow: French when belonging to France, while the dialect Alsatian remained the spoken vernacular, and conversely Alsatian with High German as its written form when belonging to Germany. The region developed a sense of identity that is sometimes seen as ambivalent, implying being neither French nor German but rather Alsatian, and often a feeling of being more French than German. (See e.g. Lazer 2019; Burdick 2016; Wahl & Richez 1993; Philipps [1975] 1986.) Lévy (1929: 497, 503) observes that personal names could be a bother and give a bad reputation to Alsatians living in France or the 'intérieur,' when Alsace was German 1871–1918. Depending on the current ruling power, a person's legal identity could for example be French whereas their cultural one was Germanic and their

social one Alsatian. Similarly, their legal identity could be German, their social identity Alsatian and their asserted identity French, and these different identities would then be in latent conflict.

Repeated national shifts left their imprints also on the toponyms. Most towns and villages have both an official German denomination and a dialectal variant of it (Weis 1993: 109), and they still have their German place names written at the entry of the villages (Mittelbergheim, Hunspach, Bergheim, etc.) and sometimes an Alsatian variant of it, as in Kaysersberg, where there also is a sign in Alsatian: 'Kaisersbari,' although this variant rather is to consider as 'tokenism' (Puzey 2016: 407), i.e. a mere symbolic concession to regional linguistic identity claims. Toponyms were often frenchified under French rule and changed into their Germanic variants under German rule. Thus, the towns of *Saverne* and *Mulhouse* were called *Zabern* and *Mühlhausen*, the capital of the region *Strasbourg* was called *Strassburg*, and so on. Some names were simply translated from one language to another, in order to adapt to the new authorities. The Nazis germanised French street names, and reversely, the French translated German names. For instance, the street *Kalbgasse* in Strasbourg received its name from a family *Kalb*, but the name was later translated into French and became *rue des veaux*, a literal equivalent— both *Kalb* and *veau* mean 'veal.' This *rue des veaux* has since then become an almost iconic example of how French authorities were keen on frenchifying Alsace without examining consequences of their decisions (Abalain 2007: 120). Especially in more touristic areas, many Alsatian streets today also have an Alsatian name alongside the French name, although the written standard of Alsatian is High German, which asks new questions: Which dialectal variant is to be chosen? Which orthography? And the redundant question: Why wasn't the German original name chosen? Place names and street names play a powerful and symbolic role in the linguistic landscape (Blackwood 2015: 42), and are an issue in Alsace still today.

Since Alsatian does not have a written standard, the endogenous choice of language on gravestones became a binary choice: French or German, completed by a few occurrences of exogenous languages like English, Russian or Arabic. In epitaphs, language use could then be transgressive (Scollon & Wong Scollon 2003: 146), i.e. it was not authorized and didn't correspond to the language of the rulers (Vajta 2018). Vogler (1993: 424) reminds us that during the periods of 1871–

1918 and 1940–1945, under German rule, names and inscriptions in French were tracked down (see also Huck 2015: 141–146, 204–208). In the cemeteries, the epitaphs bear traces of these shifts and the conflicts between France and Germany. But it is also necessary to ask which names were inscribed on the tombstones, and why. As observed above, names were subject to a top-down language policy. However, they were also part of people's everyday life, and therefore likely to be used as an act of defiance: a bottom-up strategy to assert personal identities and display standpoints when used in private signage (Pavlenko 2010: 134). Indeed, Lévy (1929: 372) observes that epitaphs very often prove to be in French under German rule, a fact that was embarrassing to the authorities. On a more discrete note, nothing could hinder a German first name in official documents from being replaced by its French variant in daily, private interactions. This may entail that the name inscribed on a tombstone was not the name that was used, nor the name inscribed in official registers of birth. More recently, we will find names that are neither French nor German, but Arabic, Portuguese or Italian, which in turn may testify to a change from a French-German onomasticon to a more heterogenous one.

The cemetery is a semi-public space, usually delimited by a fence, a hedge or a wall, and defined by the very nature of the signs (Blommaert 2013: 15), which contributes to its demarcation: without graves, no graveyard. It is also a changing space, with new graves being added and old ones being removed or altered, with tombstones getting deteriorated or hidden by vegetation. And, not least, the cemetery is a repository of names, both personal names of the departed and toponyms when the places of birth and death are inscribed. The graveyard can be considered as a linguistic space with multiple authors and influences, a multilingual written text constructed in diachrony and synchrony (Vajta 2018; Vajta 2020), and a 'social, cultural and political space' (Blommaert 2013: 3). Within this text, or space, a choice system is produced (Scollon & Wong Scollon 2003: 120). A special category will be highlighted here: names. It can be argued that they are an element of utmost importance: they are essential identifiers, mostly on an individual level, and sometimes on a group level, for example when the tomb is common for a family and when the surnames signal relationships between individuals and between families. The absence of names makes it difficult or even impossible to identify an individual's burial place, and this rare occurrence has been

observed only on tombs of religious congregations of nuns and is not specific for Alsace.[3]

Names are markers of social relationships and identity changes (Emmelhainz 2015). On gravestones they serve a highly utilitarian purpose, as identifiers of the departed buried there. Gravestones reflect society, both in diachrony and in synchrony: the linguistic situation (which language is used when and with whom), the political situation (e.g. did the individual die at war? Is the language choice transgressive?), the social situation (e.g. what was the profession of the departed?) etc. Thus, gravestones and epitaphs fulfill not only the function of identifying an individual, but also of drawing a picture of the departed's contemporary time and transmitting messages into the future (Vajta 2020).

3. The Study: Aims, Method, Material

Names are linguistic objects that can be 'used as evidence for linguistic changes' (Coates 2016: 525). For example, the phonological influence of French on the pronunciation of Alsatian toponyms and anthroponyms has been shown to correlate with the ongoing language shift from the varieties of German and Alsatian to French (Vajta 2004): a 'French' pronunciation appeared to be more frequent among those informants who were clearly part of the language shift process than among those who tried to maintain the Alsatian dialect and/or the German language. As Sandnes (2016: 545) observes, phonological adaptation is compulsory in the long run.

The present study builds on previous research (Vajta 2018; 2020) and here focuses on names, primarily personal names, i.e. surnames and first names, as they are finally inscribed on gravestones. It starts out from the assumption that names on Alsatian gravestones mirror the fact that the region has undergone several national shifts from French to German back and forth, and that cemeteries can be seen as cultural mirrors of both society and individuals (Reimers 1999) and a place where politics meet emotions and culture (Woodthorpe 2011). Quantitative aspects in the

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[3] On these tombs, neither first nor last names were inscribed, nor were lifespan dates given. Furthermore there were no commemorative plaques indicating any relation with siblings, parents or friends: not only did the nuns devote their lives to their Congregation and to God, but after their death, their identity was dissolved into the anonymity of a group and a common grave—visitors who want to honour a *sœur* cannot but honour all sisters.

material have been considered to a certain extent, since they indicate tendencies. But the discussion is not so much based on quantitative results as on qualitative observations allowing to deepen the analysis—even if it is possible to see tendencies, it does not appear fruitful here to deliver too many statistics that would perhaps not be valid outside this limited collection of names. Rather, this study will by informed choice bring forward representative examples of names which in different ways illustrate identity issues or mirror language shifts and politics, in order to present how names also were subject to choices. The provided examples are not picked haphazardly but are carefully chosen and quoted because they illustrate a more general or specific phenomenon and therefore are deemed interesting and relevant. The methodological approach chosen here is mainly inductive and interpretative and based on a a qualitative analysis of the names studied, and constitutes a process that started already when collecting the material (Zhang & Wildemuth 2009: 2).

A gravestone will display anywhere from only one personal name up to more than twenty, but usually around two to ten names. Not all inscriptions were legible: letters and other elements are lost, tombstones are overrun with ivy, they crack and fall apart, or are reused and renovated. An inscription can also at times have been modified or had its names changed outright. So potential error sources are plentiful, not lending the material to a mere quantitative study and making a qualitative examination crucial.

The names we usually find on gravestones are first names, family names and place names. In Alsace, as in many other parts of Europe and the world, most family names are patronyms. This means they were inherited rather than freely chosen, quite contrary to first names which, as pointed out above, have been amenable to parental choice, making them more interesting for the purpose of this study. This is why the main focus here will be on first names. The material was collected in Alsatian cemeteries located both in villages and in towns, and consists of more than 1500 occurrences of first names and more than 1900 occurrences of surnames inscribed on gravestones. The difference in numbers is due to the fact that first names are not always inscribed and that surnames are more frequent e.g. due to the maiden names or because some graves are family graves, then denominated by the family name without any first name. More than half of the first names (55%) are from deceased persons born before 1871, and 35% of them from people born between 1871 and

1918. The surnames from before 1871 correspond to 56% of the total, for the period between 1871 and 1918 to 35% of the total, the remaining 9% being from 1918 or later: the more recent the date, the fewer names, for obvious reasons. The first names were coded and categorised as French, German or, if they could be categorised in both languages, e.g. *Elisabeth*, *Martin*, *David*, as ambiguous (Adams 2008: 70). The surnames were categorised as German or French. Also foreign names (i.e. non-French and non-German) were coded and categorised.

Even if a name can usually be seen as belonging to a specific language (Le Bihan 2006: 11), the classification of names is dependent on the researcher, as Edelman (2009: 147, 151) and Parkin (2013: 200–201) point out, and it is not always obvious how to classify a name. Nevertheless, it seems possible to determine whether a personal name is more likely to be German or French. Sebba (2015a: 219; 2015b: 38) identifies graphic elements indexing Germanness, e.g. umlauted characters allowing the use of 'distinctive elements of orthographies as a brand,' while Spitzmüller (2012: 261) observes that blackletter type and the graphemes <ä>, <Ä>, <ö>, <Ö>, <ü>, <Ü>, <ß> are specific to German writing. Other graphic elements that signal Germanness are <k> as in *Konrad* and *Karl*, and double consonants at the end of the name, as in *Johann*, *Ottmann* and *Doerr*. Especially in women's first names, a final vowel <a> will here be seen as indexing Germanness, whereas a final <e> will signal Frenchness: *Anna – Anne, Maria – Marie*. Finally, diacritics like the French accents will signal Frenchness, as in *Hélène* and *Théodore*, whereas they will be absent in German, as will the grapheme <q>. But accents are usually not placed on capital letters, which makes their absence uncertain to interpret as a sign of Germanness, while however their manifest presence should be seen as a sign of Frenchness. Of course, a name can include more than one sign, like *Katharina – Catherine, Margaretha – Marguerite*. Finally, it is well known that first names have equivalents in different languages, like *Friedrich* (*Fritz*), *Ludwig* and *Karl* (*Carl*) in German for *Frédéric*, *Louis* and *Charles* in French. (See Sebba 2015a; Spitzmüller 2012; Denis 1977; Kintz 1972.) Nevertheless, not all names can be classified, especially not all first names. In situations of language contact, as in Alsace, phonological adaptation is to be expected, as seen above; this might also be a reason for choosing an ambiguous name. They contrast with the more clearly signalling names and could of course be seen as the results of a

wish not to take sides, or simply to select a name easy to integrate in the different languages both in script and phonologically.

4. Transgressive and Non-Transgressive Naming

As seen above, first names were expected to follow the language of the power at hand and thus to be non-transgressive toward the ruling authority. This entails that they should be found to be tending toward French during the first French period, between 1648 and 1871, then gravitating toward German between 1871 and 1918, thereafter to French again after 1918, followed by leanings toward German during World War II, and finally to approach French once more after 1945. Naming was closely linked to reigning language ideology, which in turn was officially and legally implemented by the different regimes. But in the 19th century, the Alsatian dialect was established as the oral vernacular with High German as its written standard, even if French was gaining ground. It should also be remembered that Alsace was French during the Revolution of 1789, and therefore marked by French Republican values (Philipps [1975] 1986: 75).

Ainiala (2016: 378) observes that 'the choice of a first name is based on community values: the name givers' nationality, their mother tongue, religious convictions,' and this seems to be valid for 19th century Alsace. For example, we will find Germanic first names like *Anna, Lina, Luise, Johann, Theodor, Mikael, Jakob, Georg* for persons born in French Alsace before 1871. In Figure 1 we have the inscription for two persons: *Johann* and *Jean*. Johann was born during a French period, whereas Jean was born and departed during a German period. They had the same first name, only different variants of it, and both variants were in fact transgressive since *Johann* occurs during a French period, and *Jean* under German rule.

> Johann Michael Seltz
> geb den 26ten Oct. 1794
> gest den 14ten Jänner 1868
> Jean Blum
> geb den 9 August 1878
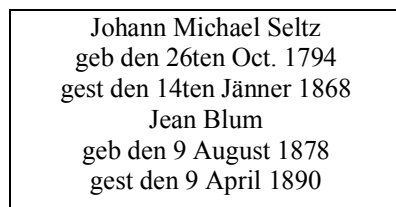> gest den 9 April 1890

Figure 1

The bulk of names for the period before 1871 (when Alsace was French) are French ones, like *Frédéric, Auguste, Théodore, Charles, Eugène, Jean*

Geoffroy, François, Thiebaut, Henri, Louis Auguste, Guillaume for men; and *Henriette, Marguerite, Isabelle, Marie-Madeleine, Catherine* for women. Indeed, in this corpus, 76% of the first names from that time (i.e. before 1871) are French, and only 17% German, although the vernacular spoken every day was Germanic. Philipps ([1975] 1986: 133–134) comments that many parents gave French first names to their children, or used the French variant instead of a given German name. So naming in Alsace was likely to be the result not only of the choice of a first name, but also a feeling of national belonging. Also ambiguous names are used, but to a much smaller extent (7%): *Elisabeth, Martin, Fanny, Paul*. These occurrences might depend on either a wish not to take linguistic sides or perhaps an ambition of choosing a name easy to incorporate in both languages, or yet again simply because the parents liked it.

So in general, even if French is not used for daily interaction and many Germanic first names are used, the main naming tendency clearly appears to be French: *Louis*, *Jacques*, *Henri*, *François*, *Mélanie*, *Marguerite*, *Jeanne*, *Catherine* obviously become more frequent during the 19th century, and they remain viable also during the German period of 1871–1918, while then being transgressive: for persons born between 1871 and 1918, 83% of the first names are French, 10% German and 7% ambiguous. However, it seems important to point out that a given French first name does not prevent the use of German language in the information provided in the epitaph, even if the linguistic indicator only is a *geb.* for *geboren* ('born') before a maiden name (see Vajta 2018) which might cause the whole inscription to be perceived as German. Hence, it is suggested here that the choice of the first name could be a more decisive and emblematic sign of identity than the language that was used daily and more specifically on tombstones: it was absolutely possible to speak Alsatian and write in German, while identifying as French and not naming one's children with German first names.

Lévy (1929: 365, 434–436) explains that the choice of a French variant was not necessarily the consequence of an ideological conviction, but could stem from family traditions or preferences (see also Vogler 1993: 309). Yet, also traditions and preferences can originate in ideology or in a desire to accommodate to French language and culture, or in what Bourdieu (1982) terms a *habitus*, allowing one to take a stand for values and meanings that appear essential and inherent. Indeed, signs of taking an ideological stand can be found in the evolution of first name choices on

gravestones from the same family: for example, in a family Schmitt, *Theobald*, born in 1845, and *Anna*, born in 1847, were bestowed with German first names. However, a child of a later generation, born in 1904, was named with a French variant of Theobald, *Thiebaut*. Here, the shift to French appears as a deliberate choice, even if it was contrary to the law and the requirements of the German authorities of the time. Lévy (1929: 434) notes that from 1892 and onwards French names were not accepted by the German authorities. Thus another possibility is that the child in question was officially named *Theobald*, and that the shift to *Thiebaut* occurred later in life. This dovetails with the circumstance that his death occurred in 1937, i.e. under French rule. Nevertheless, we here witness a manifest evolution from German to French in the first names, an evolution which is underlined by the use of blackletters for the German variants and Latin letters for the French one, a typographic crossing (Spitzmüller 2007) possibly indexing either the different national identities in the family at the time of death, or the rules to follow at that time. The older generation, *Theobald* and *Anna Schmitt*, were born French in 1845 and 1847, and died German in 1913 and 1903. *Thiebaut* was born German in 1904 and died French in 1937. As Alford (1988: 118) reminds us, 'the use of names […] always occurs in a social context. Whether names are used or avoided and whether alternative terms or forms of a name are used both depend upon features of the social context.'

Under German rule (1871–1918, 1940–1945), first names were supposed to be of a German variant. *Karl* was acceptable, while *Charles* was prohibited, *Marguerite* should be *Margaretha* and *Guillaume* *Wilhelm*, *Emile* should be written without the final <e>, *Bernard* became *Bernhard*, etc. (Lévy 1929: 435–436; Vogler 1993: 426.) However, French names without a corresponding German variant could evidently on occasion be accepted, as we also find instances of e.g. *Aimé(e)*, *Gaston*, *Raymond* etc. Also the French *Germain* and *Germaine* were condoned, perhaps as they literally mean 'German.'

For persons born under German rule and deceased under French rule, or reversely, the name on the gravestone is necessarily transgressive, because it was either transgressive at the time of birth, or at the time of death, unless it can be classified as ambiguous. Indeed, *Charles Schmid*, born in 1900 under German rule and deceased in 1973 under French rule, should have been named *Karl* – which he perhaps was, at least officially, but on his gravestone, he is named *Charles*. The same for *Jean Charles*

Weiss, born in 1911 and deceased in 1984, for *Charles Erdmann* (1841–1891), and for *Jean Louis Kreitmann* (1824–1886), etc. This type of 'counter-hegemonic acts of naming and renaming' clearly problematizes 'the onomastic dimension of the LL,' as Puzey (2016: 405) observes. As a result, naming practices contributed to a political discourse of identity, and names on Alsatian gravestones implicitly carry many facets of politics, identity and ideology.

Not surprisingly, the linguistic shifts and the language contact situation in Alsace also led to a feeling of linguistic insecurity. Indications of this can also be found in the gravestone name inscriptions. For example, we can observe a phonological interference that resulted in an error; there is at times a confusion between the bilabial sounds voiced [b] and the voiceless [p], which in 1880 made the carver rename a *Jean-Baptiste* to *Jean-Paptiste*. On the same stone, we notice another error, this one tellingly grammatical: the phrase *Regrets éternel* (sic) is missing the final plural <s>. (See also Denis 1977.)

5. Changing Names, Changing Society

Cemeteries are connected to specific places: a village, a town, a parish. This implies that the patronyms inscribed on the tombstones will usually come from the surroundings, and in Alsace most of them will be German. Here, while the surname remained the same, it was possible for a first name to change according to a new national belonging. This can be observed in Saverne: *Françoise Hausser* (French first name and German surname), 'Epouse de *Louis Hentz*,' died under French rule in 1861. The same *Louis Hentz*, 'Geboren den 10. Octobre (sic) 1810' passed away in 1891 and his first name is then inscribed as the German variant *Ludwig*. Both first names and the texts in the epitaph loyally follow the currently ruling language, even if an occurrence of linguistic interference or insecurity between French and German can be observed in the name of the month. The name *Louis* is adapted to a new national belonging, but the name that remains the same is the surname *Hentz*, clearly of Germanic origin, which corroborates that first names were more likely to carry idelogy and national identity. (See Figure 2.) Retrospectively, the meaning of this change of first name from French to German can be interpreted as an adaptation to new national circumstances and linguistic rules, a desire to belong and not to be transgressive either linguistically or politically, all the more since an epitaph is displayed in a semi-public space (Vajta 2018).

Today, it can be seen as encompassing all other name changes that were enforced in the region, thus adding an extended significance to the individual choice that might not have been intended originally (see Malinowski 2009: 118).

Ici repose
Françoise Hausser
Epouse de
Louis Hentz
Née le 23 mars 1811
Décédée le 8 novembre 1861

Ludwig Hentz
Geboren
Den 10. Octobre *(sic)* 1810
Gestorben
Den 22 Juli 1891

Figure 2

In other places, the change of first names from German to French within a family is noteworthy: When the older generation is named *Peter* and *Barbara*, the younger is called *Jacques* and *Henriette*, with feminine diminutive -ette emphasizing the French form. *Albrecht* and *Wilhelmine* in turn were followed by a younger generation with *Albert*, *Ernestine* and *Louise*, born in 1857, 1859 and 1861 respectively. (See Figure 3a.) The first names *Luise*, *Adolf*, *Anna* and *Albrecht* (see Figure 3b) are German variants of *Louise*, *Adolphe*, *Anne* and *Albert,* whereas *Germaine* is French and also had a French maiden name (*Benoît*). Finally, the last person has both a French first name (*Bernard*) and family name (*Crépin-Leblond*). Nevertheless, other linguistic indicators may contradict the first name language. For example, in Figure 3a, *Louise* Koehler was born and deceased in France and had to change citizenship four times during her lifetime. In the inscription on her gravestone, she has a French first name, but the indicator 'geb.' marks a German linguistic context (Vajta 2018).

Gravestones with French family names do appear as rather exceptional, especially among the older ones: before 1871, 90% of the surnames are German, and 82% between 1871 and 1918. This can be estimated as roughly corresponding to the 20% of French surnames observed by Lévy (1929: 220–221, see above). However, when people

move domestically or migrate transnationally, not all names will necessarily originate from the Alsace region. Times change, and so do names on gravestones: the passer-by can note that the number of exogenous marriages seems to have augmented through the years. On the one hand we can observe an increasing frequency of non-German surnames: after 1918, 35%, compared to 10% before 1871 and 18% between 1871 and 1918. French or foreign surnames, e.g. a French or German maiden name indicate a marriage into an Alsatian or French family, which might be confirmed by the places of birth and death.

3a	3b
Albrecht Settekorn 1852–1903 Wilhelmine Settekorn geb. Suag 1827–1909 Albert Koehler 1887–1906 Jacques Koehler 1857–1929 Ernestine Settekorn 1859–1937 Louise Koehler geb. Settekorn 1861–1952	Luise Stilcke geb. Pilet 1813–1881 Adolf Funke Oberregierungsrath 1828–1901 Anna Funke 1839–1918 Albrecht Funke Docteur es Sciences 1901–1982 Germaine Funke née Benoit Docteur es Sciences 1901–1983 Bernard Crépin-Leblond 1929–2010

Figures 3a and 3b

On the other hand, we also encounter names that can be classified as foreign, which in this context is to be understood as non-Germanic, names that reinforce the image of a society more subject to migration. Apparently, many of these persons integrated into their new culture, at least according to their tombstones. For example, in the North of Alsace is buried a *Marguerite Kovalenko* (1927–2012). Her first name is clearly French, and both her names are inscribed with Latin characters, whereas the other person's name on the tomb (most probably her mother's) is written in Cyrillic script (Людмила Коваленко, Ljudmila Kovalenko). On this grave, the first name *Marguerite* can be considered as adapted to a

new societal context, a form of accommodation which is supported by the script changing from Cyrillic into Latin alphabet. As in the example of *Theobald* and *Thiebaut* (see above) this typographic crossing refers to an identity changing from Slavic to French, or an integration into a new French context, as indicated by the first name *Marguerite* where both <gu> and the final <e> index Frenchness. (See Figure 4.) Here, the choice of a written form of the name in an epitaph provides an essential link between language and identity, visualised in the change of scripts (Sebba 2018; Unseth 2008).

Figure 4

We find a further example of changing first names in another town (see Figure 5). *Edouard Coelho* (1960–2012) has a Portuguese surname, and the first name is the French variant of *Eduardo*: He (or his parents) has in all likelihood left Portugal for France and Alsace, where his first name was modified in order to sound more French and show an assimilation into the new cultural environment (Clifton 2013: 404). But on a commemorative plaque, his parents still call him *Eduardo*. In fact, they call him by all his

Portuguese names: *Eduardo Luis Calado Coelho*, and address a short text to him in Portuguese. To them, it was obviously his Portuguese names and language background that carried decisive meaning. Another commemorative plaque has evidently been placed on the tombstone by relatives and friends. On this, the man in question is also called Eduardo, but the text is in French and the first names listed are both French and Portuguese. This encapsulates both identities, when it comes to names as well as to languages.

Figure 5

With the *Edouard/Eduardo* name variants given, we can follow how this person and his names and languages probably have migrated between different cultures. The French variant of the first name, *Edouard*, is displayed in a more official way on the tombstone, *Eduardo* being spared for the commemorative plaques placed by his closer friends and family, and for a more private and affectionate context. The process of renaming becomes a means of expressing a new relation to and conception of a changing social context. At the same time, keeping the original *Eduardo* links back to his ancestral origin. We here witness a change of names when arriving in a new country, which possibly might show a wish to integrate in a new environment or a way of leaving an old identity, and in any case testifies to an individual change in life (Aldrin 2016: 388–389; Blount 2016: 627), and also to a change in society.

6. Conclusion

National and linguistic shifts turn Alsatian graveyards into a forceful namescape, where history, politics, ideologies and identities are archived, and with personal names testifying to changes in society both in diachrony and in synchrony. In diachrony, names reflect dynamic identity processes and mirror a changing societal and historical context. At different points in synchrony, we find German surnames and French first names. The simultaneous occurrence of German and French first names indicates how naming was subject to different traditions and ideologies. Furthermore, there clearly seems to be an augmenting frequency of the French family names, during the 19th century and following the ongoing language shift. More recently, the occurrence of both non-Germanic and non-French names mirrors an increasing migration: names in graveyards reflect another, more mobile society and a changing environment.

Names, the most obvious personal identifiers in a graveyard, declare identity and belonging, and in the linguistic landscape of the Alsatian cemetery, they carry national changes but do not necessarily follow national belonging, especially not first names. The personal names appear as manifestations of identity processes: ideological, political and societal factors must be taken into account when attempting to explain how and why they vary. French first names contrast with German family names and the great majority of French first names also for persons born during the German periods, especially 1871–1918, is noteworthy. Several explanations are conceivable: the French first name was chosen in

accordance with a French identity in the family, the first name has undergone changes and finally become French, the departed was buried when Alsace was French and the French variant of the first name was a logical choice. Still, at some point, an active choice was made and the French variant of the first name finally inscribed on the grave. The combination with a German surname then inscribes the person in the historical and cultural context of the region.

On gravestones, names do not only have an informational function in order to facilitate the identification of a grave, but are also endowed with a symbolic function, i.e. asserting identity, in this case a final identity. They mirror the very last name choice that was possible to make and index an identity that was intended to last. Furthermore, names display how people integrated into a new community by adapting a first name to the new cultural context. Thus, as shown in this study, names in graveyards are not only names of individuals, they are also a mirror of a changing society and their meanings are to be seen within this historical and ideological context (Spitzmüller 2015: 138). Together, they provide an understanding of how identity shifts influenced the life of individuals and families both on a personal level, and on a group level. They not only carry history and ideology, but can also be seen as performing it. The physical space of the graveyard becomes 'imbued with social meaning' (Eckert 2010: 167) and names in Alsatian cemeteries become valuable indicators of identity changes. Indeed, names on Alsatian gravestones were more than names—otherwise authorities would not mind which forms and variants were used, and people would not care about which variant to inscribe on a gravestone.

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