

Language management in the digital era

Abstract: This article reports on the 8th International Language Management Symposium held at Yangzhou University on October 18–20, 2024.

Language Management Theory (LMT), initially established by Jiří V. Neustupný and Björn H. Jernudd (see their now classic paper Jernudd & Neustupný 1987), addresses language phenomena and issues across different levels; it examines language management taking place both in everyday interactions (*simple management*), and in institutions of varying complexity (*organized management*), with the focus on the interplay of these levels. However, the increased use of digital tools and technologies over the past two decades has transformed how people and institutions access information, communicate, interact, and, in general, behave toward language. This rapid digitalization, characterized by the rise of social media and online platforms, the growing demand for multilingual content creation and translation, and advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), has introduced new challenges for language management practices at both micro and macro levels, and the question has emerged: what linguistic, communicative and sociocultural features of digitalization draw attention of social actors, that is, are managed? Thematically specified as *Language Management in the Digital Era*, the 8th International Language Management Symposium responded to this evolving context.

The symposium was hosted by College of International Studies at Yangzhou University in China on October 18–20, 2024, and was attended by approximately 40 participants delivering 23 contributions. In addition to those based at various universities in China, the contributors came from the Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, Italy,

Japan, the Netherlands, Russia and South Korea. Unfortunately, there were also a few last-minute cancellations, of which the most regrettable was the absence of Björn Jernudd, living in the USA.

On the symposium's first day, participants attended lectures by three keynote speakers. The first was Dai Manchun from Beijing Foreign Studies University, a prominent scholar in China specializing in language policy, sociolinguistics, and second language acquisition. Dai's presentation, titled *Hierarchical governance in digital language life*, examined the current state of language use in the digital era, differentiating between digital and non-digital language life. He proposed a comprehensive framework for digital language capacity, structured around four interconnected modules: (1) *knowledge* – includes linguistic knowledge, digital technology knowledge, and general literacy; (2) *skills* – involve both linguistic and digital proficiencies; (3) *ethics* – pertains to the moral principles guiding individuals' participation in digital language life; and (4) *governance* – encompasses the awareness, knowledge, attitudes, techniques, and assessments necessary for language management. These modules, according to Dai, form an interconnected and hierarchical system, adaptable to evolving digital contexts. While Dai's presentation did not directly employ LMT, his approach to language governance in digital contexts is grounded in an analytical model specific to China, with relevance to the broader Chinese academic community. He advocated for collaborative engagement from government, academia, educational institutions,

social organizations, and individuals to foster proactive language governance, ultimately promoting a harmonious digital language environment. However, his notion of ‘abuse of language’ was critiqued at the symposium by the participants subscribing to Functional Linguistics, as he failed to consider the functional differentiation of language, above all language functions such as playful or poetic function, or ‘gratifications’ in the sense of LMT (Neustupný 2003), and, in general, underestimated testing the creative potential of language by the young people.

The second keynote presentation titled *How to digitalise sociolinguistics*, delivered by Dick Smakman from Leiden University, explored inequalities in sociolinguistics, focusing on disparities in access to international digital technology. From the perspective of LMT, his contribution focused on management of ‘channels’ (Neustupný & Nekvapil 2003: 329; Neustupný 1987: 133). Smakman argued that successful cooperation in sociolinguistics depends heavily on accessible digital communication and visibility, which are essential for fostering interaction among scholars and facilitating the exchange of ideas. However, sociolinguistic research remains dominated by contributions from scholars in high Human Development Index countries, especially those from Anglophone institutions. In addition, Smakman highlighted that these inequalities are exacerbated by a growing digital divide, with scholars from low Human Development Index countries facing barriers to accessing cutting-edge digital tools and resources, which further limits their research dissemination and engagement in international dialogue. To address this imbalance, he proposed several strategies, (1) *monetary collaboration*, facilitating access to international grants and collaborative applications to provide financial support for scholars from less-resourced backgrounds; (2) *enhancing journal policies*, adjusting open-access policies, increasing special issues and edited volumes, and revising editorial and peer-review policies to ensure more inclusive representation and equitable access; (3) *language*

support, strengthening collaboration with language editors and polishers to support scholars who may face challenges with academic English, and publish in more than one language, helping their work reach broader international audiences (see also Smakman et al. 2024). Overall, his contribution supported one of the main theses of LMT regarding the relationship of the communicative and socioeconomic dimension, that is, if one intends to successfully influence communication phenomena, one also has to influence related socioeconomic phenomena. In other words, linguistic, communicative and sociocultural (socioeconomic) management are intertwined.

The third keynote speech, delivered by Zsófia Ludányi from the HUN-REN Hungarian Research Centre for Linguistics, explored the use of an online spelling advisory portal as a tool for language management. Her presentation, titled *Online spelling advisory portal as language management – from a developer and user perspective*, focused on the Helyesiras.mta.hu platform, a portal launched in 2013 to help users navigate Hungarian spelling norms with the support of language technology. This portal allows users to quickly access spelling guidance, thereby addressing common language issues in written Hungarian. Ludányi framed the portal’s role within LMT, which provides a systematic approach to understanding language management practices at both individual and institutional levels. She explained that from the developer’s perspective, the platform represents an instance of organized language management by the Hungarian Research Centre for Linguistics, addressing recurring normative issues, or ‘type problems’ (Lanstyák 2014). The development and maintenance of the portal involve formalizing Hungarian spelling norms into algorithmic rules, which can then guide users in their everyday writing tasks. While on the user side, the portal serves as a resource for handling simple language management situations, where users encounter and address specific ‘problem tokens’ in their texts. By providing immediate guidance, the platform assists users in correcting spelling errors in real

time. This dual function demonstrates how the portal bridges macro-level management, which involves institutional efforts to regulate spelling, with micro-level management, where individual users resolve particular language issues.

In the afternoon of the first day of the symposium, participants attended two concurrent sessions featuring a total of 14 presentations. Of the 14 presenters, 3 joined remotely (from Italy, South Korea, and Hungary respectively), sharing their insights and findings online, while 11 scholars delivered their presentations in person. The mix of in-person and online presentations not only underscored the symposium's commitment to accessibility but also allowed for real-time engagement and discussion among participants across different time zones and geographical locations.

Despite the diversity of research topics in the concurrent sessions, one of a clear emphasis emerged on the role of language education in language management. Many presentations investigated educational settings, exploring how digital tools, multilingual resources, and sociolinguistic theories can be applied to enhance language learning and teaching. For example, over recent decades, the Chinese government has invested substantial resources in developing broad language plans and implementing policies aimed at supporting Chinese language and culture among overseas Chinese. Tommaso Pellin and Yedi Yu (University of Bologna, Italy) investigated the impact of China's language policies on heritage language education for Chinese in Italy, especially as adapted to online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Davi Albuquerque (Nankai University, China) presented research on Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PFL) instruction for Chinese university students, employing LMT to analyze classroom interactions. His study utilized a robust set of data sources, including interaction interviews, classroom observations, two questionnaires (administered at the beginning and end of the semester), recorded group interviews, and assessment tasks. Albuquerque's findings underscored how institutional policies shape both teaching practices and

students' attitudes, behaviors, and interactions within the classroom. Additionally, he argued that digital tools can significantly enhance the learning process when their use is acknowledged, regulated, and guided by professors and peers in the classroom. In the same vein, Wang Yingjie (Shandong University of Finance and Economics, China) investigated 29 mainstream Chinese language learning apps, analyzing them based on content, framework, strengths, and weaknesses. He highlighted several advantages these apps offer, such as diverse learning resources, flexible approaches, and convenient accessibility, making language learning more adaptable to users' schedules and preferences. However, Wang also identified significant limitations: extensive content homogeneity, over-reliance on a single medium language, lack of localization, insufficient authentic resources, and limited personalized learning options. In addition to evaluating these features, Wang explored user behavior and preferences through a detailed questionnaire, examining common usage scenarios, the primary purposes of app use, preferred content types, and reasons for discontinuing usage. Christine Yi (Sophia University, Japan) reported on her research on the types of discursive discrimination (in the sense of Boréus 2013) that overseas English teachers in Japan witness among their students and colleagues. She focused on the ways these teachers respond to discriminatory discourse in a digital age, where hateful messages can spread rapidly through online platforms, exacerbating issues of bias and discrimination. Based on her findings, she offered several recommendations for education policymakers and educators. Her suggestions aim to foster a more inclusive and equitable learning environment that protects all students and staff from discrimination, emphasizing the need for policy adjustments and practical measures that promote respect and equality across educational settings.

Another significant research topic relates to the online interactions in various settings. Zhu Kai (Charles University, Czech Republic) presented a study on the language ideologies manifested in

the linguistic hierarchies produced by relevant EU governmental/political institutions through their language requirements for visa application documents (see also Zhu & He 2024). At the macro-level, he analyzed the language ideologies underpinning the language requirements for national/long-term visa application documents. At the micro-level, he explored the intersecting point where language management behaviors from different levels converge through individuals' pre- and post-interaction management behaviors, as observed in social media posts related to document preparation and potential visa interviews. Zhu's findings highlight that these requirements not only convey specific language ideologies, but also have broader socio-political effects, influencing perceptions of linguistic legitimacy and affecting the lives of individuals navigating global mobility. Vít Dovalil (Charles University, Czech Republic) framed his research by two ideological contexts drawn from Neustupný (2006): humanistic ideology, which celebrates linguistic variation and relaxes norms, and rationalistic ideology, which emphasizes economic efficiency and norm maintenance to reduce variation. He examined two types of digital tools that embody distinct language management forms. First, programming languages that represent rational, standardized communication, prioritizing efficiency and productivity, but raise questions about how they handle variation; second, spellcheckers and grammar checkers that act as language management tools that detect deviations from the norm and suggest adjustments for deviations, thus enforcing normative standards. Dorottya Jakab (Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary) presented a pilot study analyzing comments about linguistic phenomena. Her research was based on a corpus of 106 comments (comprising 1,578 words) from the public Facebook page of a Hungarian online newspaper. Employing Atlas.ti software for analysis, Jakab explored how these comments reflect language management, specifically examining the motivations behind users' evaluations of a particular word as a language issue. She uncovered language ideologies underlying the comments,

shedding light on broader tendencies in users' attitudes and beliefs about language norms and standards in online discourse. Alexandra Vasileva (Innopolis University, Russia) presented a study that explored the intersection of Jakobson's translation theory and Charles S. Peirce's sign theory, particularly focusing on how digital tools and AI can enhance intersemiotic translation in today's visual society. Vasileva analyzed how digital tools can assist in this process, especially in terms of the emotional impact of translated signs. She argued that the growing role of digitalization in the creative industries has expanded the potential of intersemiotic translation, making it possible to express concepts across various media beyond traditional linguistic boundaries. Furthermore, she raised important questions about the balance between human and digital creativity, as AI and digital tools play an increasing role in the production of these translations. Chuan Tian (Sophia University, Japan) reported on how popular dating apps, such as Tinder, Bumble, Hinge, and Coffee Meets Bagel, address issues like sexual harassment, aggression, and hate speech. His comparative analysis revealed that, in the pre-interaction phase, all apps prohibit explicit content, nudity, and solicitation, with Tinder allowing consensual sexual content in private chats. Harassment and hate speech are banned across all platforms, with Bumble providing clear definitions and detailed guidelines. Post-interaction measures include reporting systems and AI detection, while features like Bumble's "first move" option and Hinge's profile prompts aim to reduce inappropriate behavior. Tinder also offers educational content on YouTube. Tian's findings highlight the importance of having robust policies and proactive measures to create a safer and more respectful environment for users in the realm of online dating.

Two participants reported on research that has become a traditional subject approached through the lens of LMT, that is, management conducted in and by multinational companies (see a recent overview in Nekvapil & Sherman 2022). Wu Ping (Tsinghua University, China) investigated Huawei,

a leading Chinese multinational enterprise. Through semi-structured interviews and public materials, her research identified three key findings: (1) Huawei's language management is influenced by both internal and external factors, with internal drivers like organizational transformation and leadership support being most significant. (2) The language management process at Huawei involves four stages: identifying language demands, formulating strategies, implementing measures, and integrating resources, with digital technology playing a crucial role. (3) Digital-driven language management not only transforms how multinational enterprises address language challenges but also aids their digitalization. Though Wu's starting point was language management as a business strategy tool, the approach based in organizational and management studies (see Sanden 2016), she acknowledged the importance of the micro-dimension of LMT for the identification of language demands in the enterprise. In contrast, Minyoung Park (Hankuk University, South Korea) fully relied on LMT in dealing with evaluation as one of the essential phases of simple language management. He focused on the issue of neutral evaluation in the context of Korean-based multinational companies in the Czech Republic. Park's study was guided by the concept of power (Neustupný 2002), and it sought to address questions related to how neutral evaluation is managed in different communicative contexts, including balanced and unbalanced communicative situations.

The remaining three presentations on the first day of the symposium explored various topics, each contributing unique insights into language management practices in different contexts. Zhang Zhiguo (Shanghai Maritime University, China) presented a diachronic analysis of script management in Mongolia from the Mongol Empire to the digital era. He explored the political influences, particularly Soviet policies, that led to the shift from the Old Mongol Script to the Latin and Cyrillic scripts after Mongolia's separation from China in 1911. Since 1991, there have been efforts to restore the Old Mongol Script, culminating

in a bicultural policy in Mongolia that allows both Cyrillic and Old Mongol scripts to be used. Zhang's analysis emphasized the political and environmental factors shaping script management and their broader implications for language policy and identity. In his contribution, Fang Xiaobing (Nanjing University, China) presented a thought-provoking perspective on the development of language management field, suggesting that the field is currently represented by two major schools of thought: the Czech school and the Anglo-American school. According to him, the Czech school, represented by scholars such as Jiří V. Neustupný, Björn Jernudd (*sic!*) and Jiří Nekvapil, views language management as a dynamic, multi-stage process involving noting, evaluation, adjustment, and implementation, distinguishing between simple and organized management. In contrast, the Anglo-American school, with scholars like Bernard Spolsky as a key figure, focuses on language selection and deliberate control of language choices in domains. Fang proposed that integrating Spolsky's framework into the Czech school model can offer a more comprehensive analysis. Moreover, Fang suggested that combining both theories with the Chinese concept of language governance could provide a holistic perspective, fostering development and innovation in Language Management. Zhang Lanzhen (Ritsumeikan University, Japan) examined how Chinese students studying in Japan invest in language and social practices to construct empowered identities in the digital era. Her findings underscore the challenges students encounter in transforming their multilingual competencies and intercultural experiences into resources for identity negotiation and engagement with power dynamics.

On the second day of the symposium, four presenters delivered their contributions in parallel across two concurrent sessions. Gaowa Bao (Tohoku University, Japan) presented a case study that examined the challenges and solutions for integrating foreign workers into Japan's rural workforce, with a particular focus on the need for Japanese language education and cross-cultural

adjustment. Through surveys of managers of companies in sectors such as railroads, fisheries, and above all nursing care, Bao's research provided valuable insights into enhancing language and intercultural education, with the goal of improving job satisfaction and supporting the successful integration of foreign care givers in rural Japan. Nong Xi (Peking University, China) compared the development of organized language management ('language policies') in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. She concluded that in the CR in most cases the management activities stopped at the stage of noting or evaluation, and rarely advanced towards the stages of adjustment planning, implementation and feedback. In contrast, facing an expansion pressure from Hungarian and an assimilation pressure from Czech, Slovakia's language managers were motivated to go beyond the stage of evaluation and performed the language management process in its entirety putting it into effect in the form of policy and legislation. Petar Vuković and Kristina Katalinić (University of Zagreb, Croatia) reported on a study comparing online language counselling centers from Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, and Croatia, with a focus on their role in facilitating pre-interaction language management. Their findings revealed that these centers differ in terms of interaction with users, information organization, and the digital tools they employ. Furthermore, they proposed that effective pre-interaction management is achieved through encouraging user engagement, organizing materials intuitively, and utilizing user-friendly digital tools. Zhang Jingtao (Hebei Normal University, China) examined the impact of digital technologies on foreign language education through the lens of LMT. He explored the use of digital tools and platforms in language teaching, evaluating their effects and proposing adjustments to optimize their application.

The final stage of the symposium concluded with two keynote speeches delivered by Jiří Nekvapil and Lisa Fairbrother. Jiří Nekvapil (Charles University, Czech Republic) reported on *Noting as social action: Some remarks on Language*

Management Theory. According to him, the importance of noting consists in the fact that, logically and commonsensically, there is no language management without the phase of noting. His approach to noting as social action led him to devote attention to the use of everyday language and think of noting as an interactional rather than mental phenomenon. He also joined the ongoing debate on the distinction between 'noting' and 'noticing' in LMT, this distinction being motivated both by everyday meaning of these words and their theoretical specifications in various fields of study. He concluded that not only 'noting' but also 'noticing' is taken as social action in some approaches (this is so, for example, in ethnomethodology; see Mondada 2022). However, in some other approaches 'noting' and 'noticing' is distinguished programmatically (here he referred among others to Notice and Note approach; Beers & Probst 2013), and this distinction might be used also in LMT. Thus 'noticing' would be a matter of inevitable perceptual monitoring done by humans or a matter of technologically based monitoring done by machines (for example, in case of spellcheckers) and 'noting' would remain social action.

In her presentation titled *Linguicism in the digital era: A language management perspective*, Lisa Fairbrother (Sophia University, Japan) proposed that one significant issue related to language use in the digital age is linguistic discrimination or, following the term coined by Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, 'linguicism'. Fairbrother examined various ways in which digital technology may intentionally or unintentionally discriminate against certain language users (such as immigrants), and provided examples of how individuals and organizations address ('manage') these challenges. In general, she focused on computer algorithms that discriminate against different groups based on race, ethnicity or gender, and specifically, she dealt with digital name discrimination analyzing a common language problem in Japan, namely the inability to input 'non-standard' first or family names on certain online digital forms, which may lead to the complete refusal of service. On a theoretical

plane, she worked out and elaborated the concept of 'missing management' that covers absent activities on the part of relevant institutions (such as banks), which are not responding to repeated simple language management acts performed by common people (customers, for example).

Overall, the symposium held in Yangzhou has demonstrated the benefits of small-scale academic gatherings, allowing for face-to-face contact and rich formal and informal discussion. Thanks for this are largely due to the main organizer of the symposium, Professor He Shanhua, and his students, who were instrumental in the organization of the symposium.

Following Japan (see Mrázková 2020), Croatia (see Ludányi & Domonkosi 2022) and China, the 9th International Language Management Symposium will return to Europe, taking place in Budapest in 2026.

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Kai Zhu 

Charles University, Faculty of Arts,
Department of Linguistics
nám. Jana Palacha 1/2, 116 38 Praha 1,
Czech Republic
kai.zhu@ff.cuni.cz

Jiří Nekvapil 

Charles University, Faculty of Arts,
Department of Linguistics
nám. Jana Palacha 1/2, 116 38 Praha 1,
Czech Republic
jiri.nekvapil@ff.cuni.cz



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