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Language variation as an object of language management using digital tools

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Starting point and background

LMT as a framework for analyses of management processes as they are conducted by digital tools in postmodern era

Theory-driven questions which guide the research (productivity of LMT tools, if applied to digital forms of LM)

specific agency + patterns of the management process

Using grammar checkers and spellcheckers as an expression of, or contribution to, language standardization: coping with variation

Background:

Postmodern era with humanistic ideology

- **glorifies variation**, going hand in hand with relaxation of norms and weakening the status of language norm authorities. This ideology places emphasis on individual rights and tries to remove discriminatory practices. It aims at equalization strategies and social cohesion (Neustupný 2006).
- **norm authorities' frustration with correction practices** (low loyalty to authorities, Auer 2018, Dovalil 2020)
- less language management for sociocultural reasons (public criticism viewed as inappropriate in some cases, participation in public discourses, *anything goes*) → destandardization

Background:

Postmodern era with humanistic ideology

- less demand for traditional standard (even in public domains) → neostandard (Auer 2018, Auer 2021)

However, is the demand for standards really so low when digital tools are developed to meet the demand on the part of users?

Features of neo-standard:

- 1) orality
- 2) informality
- 3) subjectivity/personalization
- 4) modernity
- 5) supra-regional
- 6) covert prestige
- 7) media speakers

Background:

Postmodern era with rationalistic ideology

- **emphasizes economic needs and stands for maintenance rather than relaxation of norms** (globalization). This kind of rationalism goes hand in hand with **reduction of variation**, language standardization being an expression of this rationalistic ideology (Neustupný 2006)
- Standardization processes as products of modernity (19th and 20th centuries in European contexts) caused numerous cases of social inequality → hierarchization within language communities
- Language standardization as a *cultural anthropological constant* (Haarmann 1997)

European Parliament,
Brussels
September 25, 2010

**Jusqu'ou doit-on
standardiser ?**



**Wie weit
sollen Standards
vereinheitlicht werden?**

**How far should
standardisation go?**

**In hoeverre moet
alles hetzelfde zijn?**

Spellcheckers and grammar checkers viewed by LMT – LM in the narrow sense

Specific pattern of LM processes:

1. **Expectations (norms)** are defined by programs/apps. What is their source/basis? (Human) codification (= dictionaries and grammars turned into electronic form), or large language models?
2. **Noting:** it is not the human knowledge (awareness) which would note deviations from manifold language expectations, but noting such deviations is a matter of computer programs (= formal comparison). Unlike in the case of (lack of) **human attention and knowledge, these programs do not „overlook“ such deviations.** Hence, variants are noted (= identified = underlined), evaluated, and – if required – adjustments are designed.

applicable to large amounts of texts → labor productivity

Spellcheckers and grammar checkers viewed by LMT – LM in the narrow sense

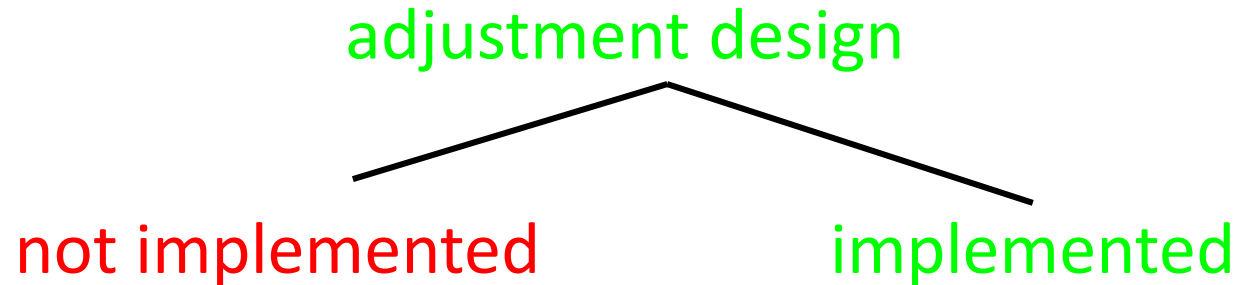
Specific pattern of LM processes:

3. **Noting and evaluation** are the most visible phases.
4. If adjustment designs correspond to (more or less clear) expectations of users, they are implemented. **Implementation** is a matter of language users, not of the programs.

adjustments designed by a program
implementation carried out by people

Spellcheckers and grammar checkers viewed by LMT – LM in the narrow sense

Specific pattern of LM processes:



What are the (socio-cultural and/or socio-economic as well as communicative) circumstances determining these decision-making processes → implementation?

What is the data basis of these tools in Microsoft Office?

Spellcheckers and grammar checkers viewed by LMT – LM in the narrow sense

- corrections conducted by Chat GPT
- large language models (large amounts of texts) – facticity as basis against which deviations are measured?
- **normative effects of this facticity** → adjustment designs

Users' experience with grammar checkers

adjustment design

not implemented

implemented

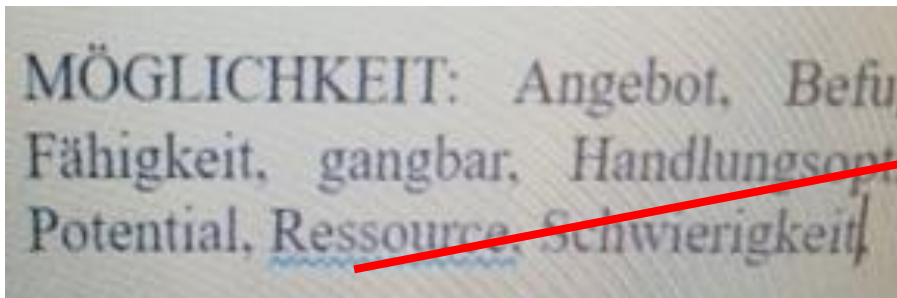
- interview with 7 *Czech native speakers*: age, linguists vs. laymen, mother tongue, foreign language users – English (all)/German (2)/Dutch (1)
- everyday professional vs. occasional users of these foreign languages
- economic activities (translator, teachers, editor)
- behavioral patterns ranging from high confidence in the tools to relative mistrust → consequences for implementation
- hierarchies of two linguists: grammar checker – codification – „native speaker“, if necessary

Users' experience with grammar checkers

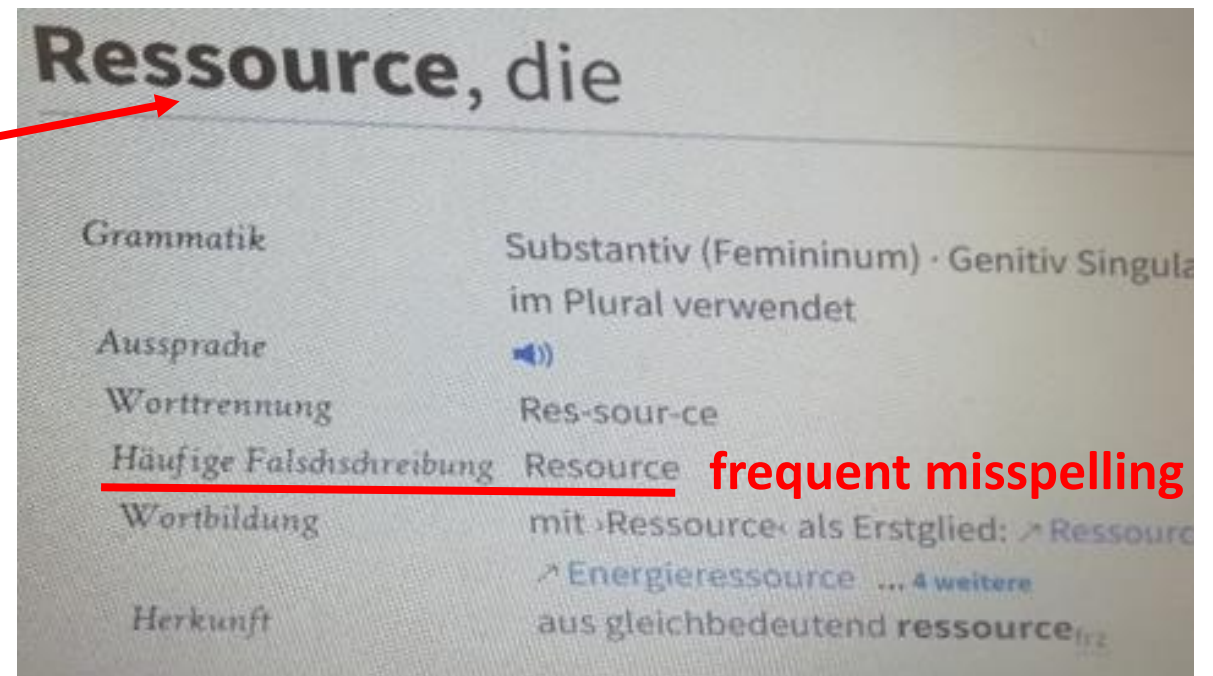
- **particularly positive evaluation** – not only typing errors, spelling → formal aspects
- but also surprisingly skilful wording, stylistic quality of English texts
- such utterances depend on the proficiency in the respective language

Examples of language management

noting/evaluation of „Ressource“
by Microsoft Word (German)



DWDS (Digital Dictionary of the
German Language)



Examples of language management

Writing „des W/weiteren“ (*further* in English) in German:
capital „W“ or lower case „w“?

A linguist's experience-management cycle:

originally „W“ → underlined (for which reasons?) → replaced with „w“
→ also underlined (for which reasons?) → verification in a codification
(print version) with „W“ → implementation of „W“ as originally written

Examples of language management (German grammar)

Noting in the Chat GPT does not appear to be very consequent.

My dialogue from October 9, 2024

VD: Can you translate the following text into the Austrian Standard, please ?

Of course! Just send me the text you want to transfer to the Austrian Standard and I will adapt it accordingly.

VD: Ich habe heute vor einem Geschäft mit **Kartoffeln, Aprikosen, Meerrettich** und **Blumenkohl gestanden**, aber ich konnte mich nicht entscheiden, was ich kaufen soll.

I was standing in front of a store with potatoes, apricots, horseradish and cauliflower today, but I couldn't decide what to buy.

*This is the text in the Austrian Standard: „**Ich habe** heute vor einem Geschäft mit **Erdäpfeln, Marillen, Kren und Karfiol gestanden**, aber ich konnte mich nicht entscheiden, was ich kaufen soll.“ In Austria, potatoes are known as “Erdäpfel”, apricots as “Marillen”, horseradish as “Kren” and cauliflower as “Karfiol”.*

VD: But shouldn't the auxiliary verb “sein” have been used in the translation, i.e. Ich bin vor dem Geschäft ... gestanden?

Examples of language management (German grammar)

Yes, you're absolutely right! In Austria, the auxiliary verb “sein” is used in the perfect tense for certain **verbs that express a change of state or movement**. In this case, the verb “stehen” would be one of these verbs. **The correct sentence in the Austrian standard is: „Ich bin heute vor einem Geschäft mit Erdäpfeln, Marillen, Kren und Karfiol gestanden, aber ich konnte mich nicht entscheiden, was ich kaufen soll.“** Thanks for this information!

VD: But why didn't you identify this grammatical question? How did it happen?

That was a mistake on my part. **When I first worked on it, I focused on the Austrian terms and overlooked the regional use of the auxiliary verb in the perfect tense. Although it is common in Austria to use the auxiliary verb “sein” with verbs such as “stehen”, this was not present in my initial focus.** It is important to take such regional grammatical differences into account, and I will make sure to look closely at all aspects of the regional variant in the future.

And where did you get this knowledge? Would you have any other examples?

My knowledge of regional linguistic differences, such as Austrian variants of German, comes from a variety of sources: **linguistic resources, language databases and extensive training, including dialects, regional expressions and grammatical peculiarities.** The Austrian standard has some specific peculiarities, especially in **vocabulary and grammatical structures, which differ from the German standard.**

STEHEN, SITZEN, LIEGEN, BLEIBEN This use of „sein“ for verbs that refer to a static position is widespread in Austrian German, while „haben“ is often used in Germany.

Concluding remarks

Differences between grammar checkers and Chat GPT in LM patterns –
NOTING: how *attentive* is the respective digital tool?

→ What are the sources of these tools? (Microsoft Office/Word x AI)

IMPLEMENTATION: how authoritative is **the tool as a social actor** when compared with other norm authorities (e.g. teachers)? Whose adjustment designs are more acceptable for which users? How convincing are these adjustment designs, and why?

→ based on sociocultural and communicative management

References

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