



Working Papers in Language Management

No. 3

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A language management approach

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Working Papers in Language Management are published online by Language Management Research Group, associated with Charles University, Prague, and Sophia Linguistic Institute for International Communication, Sophia University, Tokyo. The opinions used or expressed therein are not necessarily shared by the publishers.

Editors: Goro Christoph Kimura Jiří Nekvapil Marián Sloboda

Website: http://languagemanagement.ff.cuni.cz/

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Standard varieties of pluricentric languages: a language management approach

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Abstract

The paper draws upon the fact that pluricentric standards come into existence as discursive constructs which are created by metalinguistic activities of various actors operating both on the micro- and macro-level. Such activities reflect these actors' behavior toward language, i.e. their language management (Nekvapil 2016). The management processes take place in the following phases: expectations of relevant actors aimed at standards \rightarrow noting the deviations from the expectations \rightarrow evaluation \rightarrow adjustment design \rightarrow implementation. In cases of monocentric standards, the deviations from the normative expectations are noted and evaluated negatively. Alternative variants are designed in accordance with such monocentric standards and implemented as *corrections*. In contrast, the management of pluricentric standards involves the positive evaluation of some of these deviations. This kind of language management does not lead to changes in linguistic structure, but to the changes of the expectations from which pluricentrically oriented management cycles are derived.

Contextualization of pluricentrism in the language management perspective

The concept of pluricentric languages, including the debate about dominant and non-dominant varieties, has been discussed from various points of view for decades (see e.g. Clyne 1992, Clyne 1995, Muhr 1995, Muhr 1997, Muhr 2015, Muhr/Marley 2015, Ammon 1995, Schmidlin 2011, Ammon 2016, Silva 2014 and many others; see also the homepage www.pluricentriclanguages.org). This debate has led to a relatively consensual result of how a pluricentric language can be defined. With reference to Muhr (2013: 30), the following conceptual features are usually pointed out: sufficient structural distance between the standard varieties of the respective pluricentric language, status as an official language at least in two different countries or their regions, sufficient codification of such varieties, institutionalized teaching in schools, their function as a relevant means for their users to establish a specific identity, and acceptance of the pluricentric character of the language by the respective language community itself.

Linguistic pluricentrism – just like many other social phenomena – is constituted in diverse discourses. These are created in oral and written interactions of participating actors (individual speakers as well as institutions) who behave toward language in various ways.¹ As these actors' behavior is related to a language, these interactions are metalinguistic in nature.

¹ There are numerous approaches to the concept of discourse. I refer to the one by Spitzmüller/ Warnke (2011: 22-25). Discourses are conceived of as sums of both written and spoken texts related to overarching topics. Hence, the discourse is located at the top of the hierarchy of the levels of language system.

This discursive perspective, which places emphasis on the metalinguistic acts of various actors, enables the systematic consideration of the dynamic character of these interactive processes. This is a very important aspect, because pluricentrism is conceivable not only mainly as a *product*, which has been typical for the research so far, but also as a *process*. Admittedly, it is not simple to grasp the dynamic character of these processes.

Pluralization of standard varieties of a language (German, English and many others) represents one form of destandardization of the respective language (Auer 1997: 136, Auer/Spiekermann 2011: 162-166). Plurality of codification, which goes hand in hand with the pluricentric character of the respective language, is, at the same time, both a *consequence* and a *cause* of the deepening pluricentrism. This pluralization of standards as a form of language destandardization dovetails with a part of the features of the current postmodern era: the increase in social heterogeneity and in linguistic variation, and loosening normativity (Neustupný 2006: 2217-2220, Dovalil 2016).

The concept of language management is based on differentiating between the generation of utterances, which can be observed in the language production and reception on the one hand, and the management of utterances, which is realized as comments, evaluative acts, corrections, codification, language cultivation etc., on the other (Nekvapil 2016, Dovalil/Šichová 2017: 19-20). Oral and written utterances are not only produced and received, but also managed. Management acts are very common and happen frequently. The generation of utterances represents the linguistic activities, whereas the management is realized through metalinguistic acts. They complement each other. To sum up, the language management concept is defined as *behavior toward language as it appears in discourse.*²

Introductory examples

To begin with, I would like to present two quotations from Rudolf Muhr's article on the pluricentric character of German (1995: 86) which illustrate two cases of language management par excellence. The first summarized case has to do with the lexical variable *apricot juice*. The Austrian variant of this variable is realized as *Marillennektar*, while the German one as *Aprikosennektar*:

"Bei der Handelskette "Hofer" findet man z.B. […] "Aprikosennektar" statt "Marillennektar" […]. Die Folge davon ist, daß diese Bezeichnungen mit der Zeit in den Gebrauchsstandard aufgenommen werden, wie ich in meiner eigenen Familie beobachten konnte. Denn wenn eine Familie beim Mittagessen ist und jemand möchte Fruchtsaft trinken, wird automatisch "Aprikosennektar" verlangt, wenn es so auf der Packung steht."³

² There is extensive literature on language management (Nekvapil 2016, Nekvapil/Sherman 2015, Neustupný/Nekvapil 2006, see also the web page run by the research group based at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague: languagemanagement.ff.cuni.cz). As a detailed overview of the language management theory would exceed the proportions of this paper I am going to point out only its main features to make the application of the theory to the data analysis transparent.

³ In the grocery stores of the chain "Hofer", one can find e.g. "Aprikosennektar" instead of "Marillennektar". The consequence is that these labels become a part of standard use over time, as I could observe in my own family. When a family is having lunch and someone would like to have fruit juice, then *Aprikosennektar* is

The second management case experienced by Muhr (1995: 87) is related to the labelling of products in other Austrian stores. It applies to the lexical variable *pot/cup/beaker*:

"In einem Supermarkt der Firma LÖWA fand ich auf einem Preisschild z.B. die Bezeichnung "Becher". Bei der Betrachtung der Ware stellte sich heraus, daß es sich um das handelt, was man in Österreich "Häferl" bezeichnet: Eine große Kaffeetasse mit Henkel, während unter "Becher" immer ein Trinkgefäß ohne Henkel verstanden wird. Ich ging daraufhin zum Filialleiter und fragte ihn, warum man eine für Österreich offensichtlich falsche Bezeichnung auf das Schild schreibt. Die Antwort war: Die Preisschilder werden zentral in Wien gemacht und ab 1. Jänner wird 1995 alles in der Zentrale in Deutschland für sämtliche Filialen auch in Österreich produziert, er habe da gar keinen Einfluß."⁴

These two short management summaries exemplify evident cases of behavior toward German lexical variants in very concrete social contexts as conducted by individual actors. How these situations can be interpreted in terms of the language management approach is shown in the next section.

The language management approach: an overview of the theoretical framework

Both situations draw upon specific language expectations on the part of the person whose perspective is decisive for triggering the language management process. In the first case, the person expected the labelling Marillennektar, and in the second case, the price tag with *Häferl*. In both situations, there were evident deviations from such expectations. Instead of the expectable Austrian variant Marillennektar, the German Aprikosennektar was used (and Becher instead of the expectable Häferl). The crucial actor noted these deviations, which is logically based on his formulations ("I could observe in my family" or "Looking at the products, it turned out that [...]"). Not only did he note these deviations, he also evaluated them. The negative evaluation is particularly apparent in the second case, because the actor used the expressions *apparently wrong* ("offensichtlich falsch" in the German original text) in his summary. However, the negative evaluation can be derived in the first case as well. The negative evaluation initiates the need to design an adjustment which would help to solve, or at least get rid of, the noted language inadequacy. These adjustments are easy to design. The actor knows that there are more adequate Austrian standard variants equivalent to the German ones. The last phase of the language management process consists in the implementation of the adjustment design. It is not contained in either of the two cases, though. The failure of this implementation is described more thoroughly in the second case, in which the boss of the store says that he is not powerful enough to change the practice.

automatically asked for when the container is labelled like this (my translation, V.D.).

⁴ In a store of the chain LÖWA, I found e.g. a price tag with the label "Becher". Looking at the goods more carefully, it turned out that it was something called "Häferl" in Austria: a large cup for coffee with a handle, whereas "Becher" always denotes a vessel without a handle. I addressed the boss of the store and asked him why apparently wrong labels – related to Austria – were written on the price tags. He answered: The price tags are made centrally in Vienna, and from January 1, 1995 on, everything is going to be produced in the headquarters in Germany anyway, including all chain stores in Austria. He said he was not able to influence this at all (my translation, V.D.).

A new cycle can start when the results of implementation are measured against the original expectations which brought about the first management process. The whole process can be put into the following diagram:

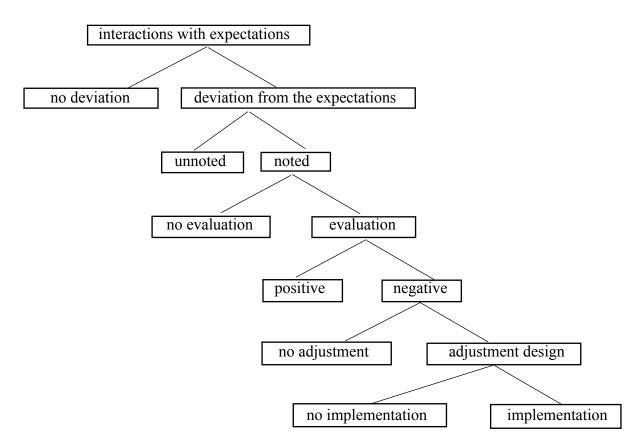


Fig. 1 Phases of language management process (based on Dovalil/Šichová 2017: 21)

The outlined cases represent a constellation in which the process finished in the second last phase (adjustment design): the expression *Marillennektar* could have replaced the *Aprikosennektar* and the noun *Häferl* could have replaced the *Becher*.

Apart from that, the figure shows that the process may stop during any of the phases. When deviations from someone's expectations are not noted, the process does not start. In other cases, the deviations may be noted, but they need not be evaluated. The process also stops when the evaluation is not negative (or negative enough). Obviously, the deviations may be evaluated positively (gratifications), which also ends the process. In such cases, there is no need to change the managed language structures. Just on the contrary, the gratification contributes to the stabilized use of the managed variants, which is particularly important for language use in public discourses or normative settings. Apart from the failed implementation corresponding to the above-mentioned situations, the management process may end when no adjustments are designed, although a deviation is noted and evaluated negatively.

Besides the structure of the processes, language management theory also takes the actors into consideration. The summaries above are based on situations in which individual interlocutors acted – members of a family during lunch, or a customer speaking with the

manager of a store. This type of management is called simple management and is attributed to the micro-level in empirically accessible interactions. However, institutions may also participate in these processes which are triggered by interlocutors (e.g. the phases of *noting* and *evaluation*), but a part of which can be transferred to the macro-level (e.g. designing adjustments), before they reach the micro-level again (observable implementation). Thus, the theory is able to systematically interconnect the micro- and macro-level of the behavior toward language (Nekvapil/Sherman 2015). Moreover, its concentration on the (status of the) social actors enables the analyst to capture their pursued interests and power relations among them.⁵

The social, or sociological orientation of the language management approach is projected into one more component of the theory. It reflects the language ecological aspects of language use, which is another indispensable desideratum for the contemporary research on pluricentric standards. The theory takes not only the linguistic, i.e. structural features of the language use into account, but also its sociocultural and communicative circumstances. It says that if the linguistic management in the narrow sense (management of language structures in terms of pronunciation, spelling, lexical items, morphology as well as syntax) is believed to be successfully implemented it should draw upon favorable sociocultural and communicative management. In other words: the efforts aiming at successful managing the language structures of pluricentric standards can only turn out well provided the sociocultural circumstances of these varieties can be, or have already been, influenced favorably. According to the theory, management of pluricentric standards should start with the sociocultural aspects of these goals. Then, it should move through the communicative level and eventually reach the level of linguistic management in the narrow sense (for more details see Nekvapil 2016: 7, or Dovalil 2013: 75-77). The theory recommends that social actors carry out their management activities in this order: sociocultural \rightarrow communicative \rightarrow linguistic management in the narrow sense.

The usefulness of this theoretical approach is revealed in another methodological aspect, because it contributes to better and more transparent operationalization of the research question:

- 1) What do which social actors expect in which sociocultural contexts when a pluricentric standard begins to be, or has already been established?
- 2) Relating the first question to the crucial problem of public awareness, which deviations from these actors' expectations are noted by whom and when?
- 3) Which of the noted deviations are evaluated positively and which are evaluated negatively under which circumstances?
- 4) Subsequently, which adjustments are designed and which of these can be implemented?

⁵ For more features defining organized management see Nekvapil (2016: 5).

Management of the monocentric standard

In process of managing the monocentric standard (a dominant center), the noted deviations from the normative expectations are evaluated negatively and alternative variants complying with the monocentric standard are implemented as traditional corrections (sanctions). The deviations triggering the process are viewed as *mistakes*. If this standard is really implemented, which means that the *mistakes* are *corrected* and the corrections enforced, the whole management cycle with all phases, including implementation, repeats itself. Emphasizing successful implementation is very important in this context, because it brings the necessary empirical evidence for removing the alternative, i.e. pluricentric variants, from language use (at least for the time being). At such a moment of language development, people acting with the social status of language norm authorities (e.g. teachers or editors in the media) are powerful enough to impose the corrections on their subjects' language production (e.g. pupils, students, journalists, or other contributors). Based on a simple situation from an Austrian school in which a pupil uses the words Marille, Paradeiser, Erdapfel in a test, the monocentric pattern of the behavior toward the dominant standard German would appear if these Austrianisms were corrected and the pupil was made to acquire and start using the German standard variants Aprikose, Tomate and Kartoffel instead.

It is the strong normative monocentric expectation that underlies the prototypical course of the management process in which the norm authority notes, i.e. does not overlook, such a deviation and evaluates it negatively. In the next step, this person is able to design an adjustment which would replace the Austrian variants with the German ones.⁶ This correction may usually be accompanied by a sanction in terms of a bad grade, which underpins the negative evaluation from the previous phase. If the teacher is powerful enough to make the pupils use the variants *Aprikose, Tomate* and *Kartoffel* instead of the Austrian ones, then one whole cycle of the management process has finished. From the methodological point of view, the decisive phase of implementation is verifiable relatively simply, because the extent to which the pupils are using the variants in their written as well as spoken language can be demonstrated.

This simple example shows that it is the language structures that undergo changes as a result of language management conducted by powerful social actors. Consequently, these actors' expectations have remained unchanged. They can be reformulated as follows: in the texts for which standard variants are adequate, the above-mentioned lexical variables should be realized by means of the variants *Aprikose, Tomate* and *Kartoffel*.⁷ This course of language management differs from the pluricentric standard, which is analyzed in the next section.

⁶ Designing adjustments may not be be as easy and quick under all circumstances as in this prototypical case of the well known lexical variables *apricot*, *tomato* and *potato*. In other situations, actors favoring the monocentric standard may look up the variants in dictionaries, or consult experts or institutions.

⁷ This refers to the normative expectations (for more details see Luhmann 2008: 31-43, Dovalil 2016: 149-151) which are enforced, but not adapted to social reality.

Management of the pluricentric standard

In the process of managing the pluricentric standard, some noted deviations from the normative expectations based on the monocentric standard are evaluated positively (gratification), or at least not entirely negatively.⁸ This fact stops the process. The gratification of the deviations contributes to the stabilization of these deviating structures, which is of high importance particularly in public discourses and normative settings. Therefore, this kind of management does not lead to the changes in the variants. Rather, it illustrates and strengthens gradual changes in the content of the expectations (when compared to the original monocentric standard) in further cycles of language management. Continuing the discussion about the three lexical variables from the previous section, but in contrast to their monocentric management, the pluricentric alternative can be demonstrated. The difference is clear: when another user of German has already acquired the expectation that these variables are realized through Marille, Paradeiser and Erdapfel in the Austrian standard, the process does not even start, because no deviation from the expectations arises. What has changed in this second case is not the linguistic structure, but the content of the expectation. The following scenarios of the language management processes may be analyzed:

1) There is no deviation from such expectations, hence there is nothing to note or, consequently, to evaluate. Due to the fact that nothing is evaluated negatively, no adjustments need to be designed, or even implemented.

2) The social actor's expectations may remain the same in the first moment, which would mean that a deviation from them may be identified and evaluated. However unlike in the case of the monocentric management, the evaluation is either not negative, or it is even positive. As the person is satisfied with the Austrian variants, s/he need not design any adjustments, or even try to implement them. This time, it is the gratification that documents the gradual change on the part of the norm authority.

Thus, the empirical fact that this teacher neither corrects nor sanctions the Austrian variants, and also does not make the pupils use the German standard ones instead can be analyzed systematically.⁹

⁸ Obviously, there is an essential precondition that needs to be repeated and emphasized: the general expectations underlying the discussed management process are oriented toward a language *standard*. Many deviations from the monocentric standard are variants of dialects anyway – independent from the region in which such variants are used. Austrian or Swiss dialects represent deviations from the German standard just like Low German dialectal variants differ from the Austrian and Swiss standards.

⁹ Other systematic analyses of the situation in which the Austrian variants are not replaced with the German ones would be based 3) on the lack of attention by the teacher (s/he overlooked the deviations – failed to note them), or 4) on the lack of capacity to design an alternative adjustment (s/he may not always know which variants would be more appropriate in his/her opinion). In addition, 5) the teacher may not be powerful enough to make the pupils change their language use. This would correspond to the failure of implementation. These hypotheses would have to be examined e.g. by means of a follow-up interview with the respective social actor (for further methodological questions, see the web page languagemanagement.ff.cuni.cz).

Conclusion

The paper seeks to provide the reader with a general strategy for the operationalization of the research on pluricentric languages using a coherent theoretical basis. Language management theory has been chosen, because the pluricentric standards can be conceived of in terms of the behavior toward language. The pluricentric character of a language depends on the favorable sociocultural preconditions which direct the communicative, and eventually, the linguistic management of concurrent variants. Several relatively simple examples have been used here to present the procedure of the research as transparently as possible. When we interconnect the conceptual features of pluricentric languages as they are summarized in the first section of the paper (Muhr 2013: 30) with language management theory, we can see that this theoretical approach covers both the structurally based features, and the communicative as well as the sociocultural ones. The interactional components of the concept (establishing a specific identity, acceptance of this identity by the non-dominant community itself as well as by the dominant one and other foreign language communities) are located at the core of the language management approach.

Interestingly enough, some non-dominant communities are not always aware of the pluricentric character of their language, although the linguists and other experts my share the "pluricentric opinion". In the case of German as a pluricentric language, this lack of awareness could be observed e.g. in Swiss German (Scharloth 2006: 88-94, or Auer 2014: 21). Thus, it is primarily the expert discourse that constructs the pluricentric character of German on the level of sociocultural management in these cases - to some extent even on behalf of the speakers themselves. Consequently, it may be revealed that the concept of pluricentric standard is an etic, and not an emic one. Referring to the essential role of experts, this kind of management starts on the macro-level and eventually needs to reach the microlevel. The precondition for success is that the experts are powerful enough and that they coalesce e.g. with the actors who create the relevant media discourse. What seems indispensable here is the crucial role of a state to which the identity can be attributed. This circumstance reconfirms that the language management processes favoring pluricentrism should start from the sociocultural level. One form of behavior toward the pluricentric character of a language following from the sociocultural management is the fact that the pluricentric standards are codified and the way in which they are codified. What seems convenient is the systematically pluricentric character of codification beginning with the Variantenwörterbuch (first edition in 2004), rather than basically monocentric grammars and dictionaries of the respective dominant center with pluricentric marking. Although the standard character of the variants from the non-dominant varieties is not questioned in monocentric-based codifications, the equality of such pluricentric standards is not as apparent as in the case of pluricentric codifications.

Acknowledgements

While writing this paper, I was supported by the Charles University project Progres 4, Language in the Shifting of Time, Space, and Culture.

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