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LANGUAGE AND PUBLICS IN A GLOBAL DIGITAL WORLD. WHAT IS LINGUISTIC CITIZENSHIP IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

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Abstract

In this article, I discuss language from a linguistic anthropological perspective, where the existence of standardised languages is understood as an outcome of socio-political discourses in the age of nationalism, in which the technologies of print literacy enabled national public spaces – and with it, national language standards – to emerge. What happens to language standards and public spaces in the era of digital technologies and transnational interaction? I introduce some examples and develop ideas on language policing in settings where monolingual national ideals exist besides other emerging linguistic authorities.

Keywords: languages, nationalism, public spaces, standardization, late modernity

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Introduction

Language plays a central role in imaginations of European citizenship, and most states have developed language policies designed to make heterogenous populations conform to monolingual, national ideals. In linguistic anthropology, it has been argued that, historically, the emergence of national standard language is in a dialectal relationship to the emergence of national public space. In national publics 'voices from nowhere' are formed, whose hegemonic position renders their language practices to appear unmarked and neutral.[1] In this sense, the construction of public authority and the construction of linguistic norms are intrinsically related to each other. At the same time, as a technical medium is required to distribute the ideas of standard language and national publics, both are inconceivable without the technologies of the printing press and mass literacy.

The concept of monolingual national publics has to be scrutinized in contemporary society. Beyond the observation that societies have always been multilingual and will become increasingly so in the future, it is important to study the reconfigurations of national language orders where print literacy is replaced by digital communication. What are the effects of this on the relationship of language, public space and citizenship? In this article, I give various examples of language practices that hint at a reconfiguration of linguistic orders, and with it, public spaces. The observations indicate that we are confronted with simultaneous developments of destabilization and reification of traditional language norms. On the one hand, there is an increase of multilingual practices and an apparent destabilization of formal written language in online settings. At the same time, English is dominant on various levels, from transnational lingua franca uses to being an index of education and class belonging. In addition, through the inscription of English as unmarked language in digital culture – in programming and as training tool for AI controlled language tools (from translation to Alexa) – we may ask whether English is on its way of becoming a 'voice from nowhere' in transnational digital publics.

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[1] Susan Gal and Kathryn A. Woolard, *Languages and Publics: The Making of Authority*, Manchester: St. Jerome, 2001.

On the basis of these observations, questions to be discussed are: What are European responses to the dominance of English and to linguistic complexity that is beyond multilingualism as ordered additive monolingualisms? Can or should we nationally or supra-nationally regulate the reifications and new patterns of dominance that develop through programming, digital platforms and AI tools? What is linguistic citizenship in the 21st century?

In the first part, I introduce the idea of 'languages' as discursive constructs, based on insights from contemporary linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics. Secondly, I focus on the construction of language as it has been typical for modern nation-state societies, that is, a concept of language as 'naturally' based in national communities, leading to imaginations of monolingual territories and unambiguous linguistic standards, in lay and in academic settings alike. I contrast these imaginations with empirical examples of language uses in contemporary transnational publics and digital culture, where multilingualism and a destabilization of national norms come to the fore, as well as the dominance of English in a large number of social settings. Finally, I discuss the consequences of such observations for linguistic research and for institutional and governmental language policies.

Standard Languages as National Language Ideologies

The assertion of *languages* as given entities is a pre-condition for research in synchronic structuralist linguistics, which is based on Saussurean models of the linguistic sign.[2] Both, the sign, as consisting of a stable combination of *signifier* and *signified*, as well as the *speech community* are here treated as a priori categories.[3] From a linguistic anthropological and deconstructive view, however, the meaning of the sign is not given and stable[4] and languages and their boundaries have to be problematized and studied as an outcome of social discourses. In this light, "[l]anguages are no more pregiven entities that preexist our linguistic performances than are

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[2] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours De Linguistique Générale. (Course in General Linguistics)*, London: Duckworth, 1913 (1993).

[3] For a critique, see e.g. Thomas Metten, *Kulturwissenschaftliche Linguistik. Entwurf einer Medientheorie der Verständigung*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014, Ch.1.

[4] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1974.

gendered or ethnic identities. Rather they are the sedimented products of repeated acts of identity."[5] If we regard *languages* as an outcome of social developments, their discursive, historical and social preconditions come into focus. These include the emergence of the idea that there is only one 'correct' language in one nation, and that all other uses within a national territory are compared and devalued in relation to this one standard.[6] Among the elements that contribute to the establishment of language standards are, for example, social power differentials as it is the speech habits of the social elite that are turned into 'languages'. Also, technological printing devices that allow for the development of uniform representations of sounds as visual symbols, which, on the medium of paper, can be distributed across territories as large as a nation, are crucial for the general acceptance of national language norms.[7]

Besides social and technological preconditions, the social power of language standards is accomplished via discourses that make them credible. The discourses, that is, the interactional practices that bring social reality into being,[8] concerning language are referred to as *language ideologies* in the tradition of linguistic anthropology.[9] The term *language ideologies*

[5] Alastair Pennycook, "Performativity and Language Studies," *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 1, 2004, p.15.

[6] See also Pierre Bourdieu, *Was heisst Sprechen? Die Ökonomie des Sprachlichen Tausches*, Wien: Braumüller, 1980 (2005); *Language and Symbolic Power,* Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1999.

[7] For thoughts on the role of the printing press in imaginations of language, see also Daniela Kloock, "Oralität und Literalität," in *Medientheorien: Eine Einführung*, ed. Daniela Kloock and Angela Spahr, Stuttgart: UTB, 2008; Per Linell, *The Written Language Bias in Linguistics,* Linköping: The University of Linköping, 1982; Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy. The Making of Typographic Man*, London: University of Toronto Press, 1962; Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word,* London: Routledge, 1982.

[8] As elaborated in e.g. Michel Foucault, "The Discourse of Language," in Lucy Burke, Tony Crowley and Alan Girvin (eds.), *The Routledge Language and Cultural Theory Reader*, London: Routledge, 1970 (2000); Adam Jaworski and Nikolas Coupland, "Introduction. Perspectives on Discourse Analysis," in Adam Jaworski and Nikolas Coupland (eds.), *The Discourse Reader*, London: Routledge, 2006; Sara Mills, *Discourse,* London: Routledge, 1997.

[9] See e.g. Susan Gal and Judith T. Irvine, *Signs of Difference. Language and Ideology in Social Life,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019; Paul V. Kroskrity, "Language Ideology," in Jan-Ola Östman and Jef Verschueren (eds.), *Handbook of Pragmatics*, Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2001; Kathryn A. Woolard, "Introduction. Language Ideology as Field of Inquiry," in Bambi B. Schieffelin, Kathryn A. Woolard, and Paul V. Kroskrity (eds.), *Language Ideologies. Practice and Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

emerged in the late 1970s in a paper by Silverstein.[10] He discusses the cultural concept that languages should be regular as affecting language structure in processes of language change. Language ideology research focuses on interrelationships between the social and the linguistic, and in the interaction of language and social hierarchies[11] and

> [t]hough language ideology has become a familiar term, it is still worth emphasizing that it labels a form of reflexivity: It is metacommunication, participants' talk about talk, or their reflections, signals, and presuppositions about linguistic forms and their use. Sometimes this reflection is explicitly formulated, as in corrections ("don't say ain't"), generalizations ("dropping your r's makes you sound like a New Yorker"), or nomic statements ("proper people do not curse"). More often, it is simply an unspoken inference that participants make on the basis of prosody, intonation, the frequency of sociolinguistic variables, or shibboleths.[12]

Language ideologies can be considered a 'switchboard' between language choice on the micro level of everyday interaction and the macro level of social discourse. They "organize and order the normative relationships between speaking, social identity, situation and social function, as perceived by speakers."[13] Speakers are often unaware of these models as – in their functions of being ideologies – they are mostly naturalised, "they represent commonsense views of language and society that people take for granted".[14]

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[10] Michael Silverstein, "Language Structure and Linguistic Ideology," in Paul R. Clyne, William F. Hanks, and Carol L. Hofbauer (eds.), *The Elements: A Parasession on Linguistic Units and Levels*, Chicago: Chicago Linguistics Society, 1979.

[11] See Britta Schneider, *Salsa, Language and Transnationalism*, Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2014 for a more detailed history and overview of the field.

[12] Susan Gal, "Sociolinguistic Differentiation," in Nikolas Coupland (ed.), *Sociolinguistics. Theoretical Debates*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 116.

[13] *Ibidem*, p. 115.

[14] Alan Bell, "Succeeding Waves: Seeking Sociolinguistic Theory for the Twenty-First Century," in Nikolas Coupland (ed.), *Sociolinguistics. Theoretical Debates*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 403.

Naturalised concepts of language are closely interrelated with the discourses that construct social order and are never about language alone as language practice is a central element in the constitution of social relationships.

> Indeed, one can point to a general analytical ploy. Ideologies that appear to be about language can be read as coded stories or 'displacements' about political, religious or scientific systems; ideologies that seem to be about religion, political theory, human subjectivity or science can be reinterpreted as implicit entailments of language ideologies, or the precipitates of widespread linguistic practices.[15]

Therefore, the study of the conceptualisation of language allows insight into processes of social structuration, which is crucial where discourses of nationhood have made invisible the fact that the social world is not 'naturally' made up of monolingual, culturally homogenous nation-state societies.[16]

Language ideologies that are central to the orders of the national age are, above all, based on the idea that citizens of one state live in a clearly defined territory where one language is spoken. This implies the discursive concept that only one type of language – the *standard language* – is correct. This linguistic system is understood as a stable entity. Its actual form is legitimised through what is defined as 'native speakers', that is speakers with national heritage who have been socialised in the territory in question.[17] Overall, the effect of national language ideologies is the conception of self-contained categories of language, tied to national (ethnic) territories.

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[15] Susan Gal and Kathryn A. Woolard, "Constructing Languages and Publics: Authority and Representation.," *Pragmatics*, 5, 1995, p. 132, footnote 5.

[16] For discussion, see Britta Schneider, "Methodological Nationalism in Linguistics," *Language Sciences*, 76, 2019; Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, "Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences," *Global Networks*, 2, no. 4, 2002.

[17] On the discourses of the native speaker, see e.g. Stephanie Hackert, *The Emergence of the English Native Speaker. A Chapter in Nineteenth-Century Linguistic Thought,* Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012; Nigel Love and Umberto Ansaldo, "The Native Speaker and the Mother Tongue," *Language Sciences* 32 (2010); Ben Rampton, "Displacing the Native Speaker: Expertise, Inheritance and Affiliation," in Tricia Hedge and Norman Whitney (eds.), *Power, Pedagogy and Practice*, Oxford: Oxford Unviersity Press, 1996.

On grounds of the above made observations, it can be maintained that the formation of standard languages is a historical process that is conceivable via national language ideologies. Scrutinizing the historical processes that produce the dominance of these ideologies, Gal and Woolard argue that there is a dialectical relationship between the emergence of public authority and the emergence of standardised, national language.[18] In other words, language form and political power in public space interact. Language form becomes credible because of political authority and political authority is enforced through particular language forms. In this light, national public space 'makes' language and languages 'make' public spaces. One of the outcomes is what Gal and Woolard call "voices from nowhere",[19] that is forms of speech that are perceived as 'normal' and unmarked, apparently not indicating a social position.

In contemporary, 21st century societies in Europe, we are still very much accustomed to the idea that there are 'normal' forms of speaking that are based on using 'correct' language, reproducing the discourses of power of the national age. Yet, the development of new technologies that distribute language in written form via digital media has not only brought about the possibility to easily interact across national boundaries, it has also reconfigured the relationship between languages and publics.[20] What happens to the discursive construction of national, standardised *languages* in contemporary publics under the conditions of transnational digital mediality and digital publics? In the following, I give some examples of language use that illustrate that national language standards in national public spaces today exist besides other, heterogenous settings that involve heterodox writing, multilingual language uses and new, non-national configurations of language and social structure. I also argue that digital algorithms as found, for example, in smartphone texting tools, AI translations or voice-controlled devices, intervene with these developments.

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[18] Susan Gal and Kathryn A. Woolard, "Constructing Languages and Publics: Authority and Representation.," in Susan Gal and Kathryn A. Woolard (eds.), *Languages and Publics. The Making of Authority*, New York: Routledge, 2001.

[19] *Ibidem*.

[20] For further discussion, see also Theresa Heyd and Britta Schneider, "The Sociolinguistics of Late Modern Publics," *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 23, 2019.

Restructuring Language in Late Modern Publics

Informal and non-standard writing in digital publics

It is now a common observation that writing in digital contexts, such as chatting, email-writing, social media posting or texting, often does not conform to traditional orthography or grammar. Some of the deviations are based in the technical affordances of the tools, where it may be easier to only use small letters or to use the words the text tools of, for example, smartphones suggest. A lot of the social functions of uses in digital settings correspond to what formerly has been performed in oral uses, namely informal, interpersonal communication,[21] so a second factor that impacts on the non-adherence to traditional standards is the informality and the rapidity with which these interactional activities are realised. Thus, even though practices of specification such as, for example, punctuation, do not necessarily imply more effort than in previous times (or, comparing it to using a typewriter, actually less), the genre of informal writing, its social functions and need for instant reaction make complex punctuation or orthography rules less relevant. Furthermore, consequently adhering to formal norms in this context may be interpreted as signalling social positioning, such as social distance, official communication or a stiff personality.[22]

Thus, in digital settings such as in the below example, non-standard writing is common. In image 1, we see a Facebook post from a neighbourhood group in Berlin.

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[21] For a traditional model of oral and literate uses, see Peter Koch and Wulf Oesterreicher, "Sprache der Nähe – Sprache der Distanz. Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit im Spannungsfeld von Sprachtheorie und Sprachgeschichte," in Olaf Deutschmann, et al. (eds.), *Romanistisches Jahrbuch*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1985.

[22] On functions of digital writing, see Jannis Androutsopoulos, "Theorizing Media, Mediation and Mediatization," in Nikolas Coupland (ed.), *Sociolinguistics. Theoretical Debates*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

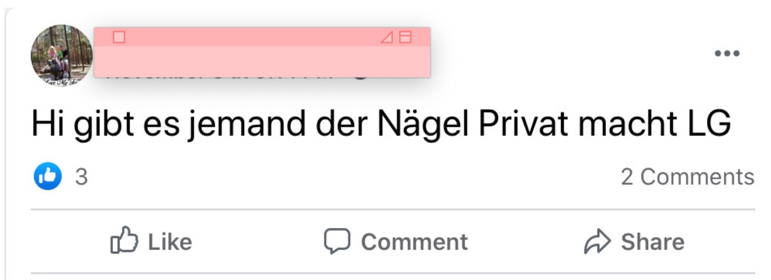

Image 1: Non-standard writing in social media settings – "Is there someone who does nails privately?"

The writer asks other group members (about 1800 members in total, so it is not a private context) for someone who offers professional nail care privately (given that stores are closed due to the Corona pandemic). In formal German, the sentence would be something like: "Guten Tag. Kennen Sie jemanden, der privat Nagelpflege anbietet? Mit freundlichen Grüßen" (*Hello. Do you know anyone who offers nail care privately? Best wishes*). The post is, however, much more informal stylistically and it would be unusual and socially marked for a Facebook post to display traditional formal language styles (as for example using 'Sie', the German personal pronoun indicating social distance). The person instead asks: „Hi gibt es jemand der Nägel Privat macht LG" (*Hi is there anyone who does nails privately bw*). This involves not only informal language but also shows lack of punctuation, grammatical deviation, non-standard use of capital spelling and an online-specific abbreviation. In standard (colloquial) German, the spelling of this sentence would be (differences from the original post in bold letters): "Hi**. G**ibt es jeman**den,** der **p**rivat Nägel macht**? Liebe Grüße**". Using colloquial language and non-standard spelling and grammar is not commented upon by other users and has become common in many online settings, where traditional formal writing is often a socially marked form.

English in emerging transnational publics

Besides changes of social functions of writing and the loss of perceptions of standard orthography and punctuation as socially unmarked, the context of digital interaction allows for everyday interaction that is

beyond the reach of national boundaries. Speakers can easily and instantly interact with others who are located elsewhere or who speak other languages, in contrast to previous times. Before the digital age, media technologies based on print literacy and nationally regimented mass media limited cross-national interaction to mostly private communication in, for example, letter writing and telephone calls. As public discourse depended primarily on formalised and nationally confined distribution – for example, TV and radio broadcasting or newspapers – public space was above all perceived as national.[23]

Given the ease of interaction in digital settings and its availability beyond private contexts, it is unsurprising that public spaces have emerged that are transnational and not governed by concepts of national monolingualism, ethnocentricity or formality. Thus, individuals with similar interests may form new types of community that are not based on territorial location or ethnic affiliation. Blommaert calls such social formations *light communities* or 'communities of knowledge':

> … think of Hip-Hop, Rasta, Metal or Gothic communities, but also of 'fashionistas' and 'foodies', of Premier League soccer fans and so forth. All these micropopulations could be more finely described as groups of people who are translocally connected as what we could call *communities of knowledge* […] We are facing a new type of social formation here: a 'light' community that differs from the 'major social formations'.[24]

Language use is here less bound to national hierarchies that have been crucial in the formation of national language norms. Without being able to say today what will be the defining authorities in these contexts (and assuming that social status will define what is considered appropriate or correct here, too, as in any other social setting), the often international character of these communities involves the use of English.

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[23] See e.g. Susan Gal, "Linguistic Theories and National Images in 19th Century Hungary," in Susan Gal and Kathryn A. Woolard (eds.), *Languages and Publics. The Making of Authority*, New York: Routledge, 2001.

[24] Jan Blommaert, *Durkheim and the Internet. Sociolinguistics and the Sociological Imagination*, London: Bloomsbury, 2018, p. 71

Based on an ethnographic study, I here want to introduce an example of such a transnational and anglophone social setting, namely the so-called *Third Wave Coffee Culture*. It is a cultural environment based on the production, distribution, sale and consumption of so-called specialty coffee. Third Wave Coffee Culture is a contemporary trend in locations in many countries in the world, tied to an urban lifestyle and associated with other elite practices of food consumption such as the *slow food* movement.[25] For various reasons, the use of English is very common in this context.[26] Consider names of local coffee bars or coffee roasteries in Berlin, Germany (see image 2), for an illustration of this dominance of English:

Image 2: English names for Berlin-based coffee bars and roasteries

[25] Discussed e.g. in Richard Wilk, *Home Cooking in the Global Village*, Oxford: Berg, 2006; on holding conversations over coffee as classed practice, see Rudolf P. Gaudio, "Starbucks and the Commercialization of Casual Conversation," *Language in Society*, 32, 2003.

[26] For further analyses, see Britta Schneider, "Language in Transnational Communities of Consumption – Indexical Functions of English in Third Wave Coffee Culture," in Susanne Mühleisen and Sofia Rüdiger (eds.), *Talking About Food: The Local and the Global in Eating Communities*, Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2020.

The names *Five Elephant*, *The Barn*, *Aunt Benny* and *Father Carpenter* are all taken from local Berlin roasteries and cafés, displaying that it is very common to use English for naming. This shows that English here functions as a prestige language, appropriate for advertising the luxury product speciality coffee.

Even though it would require empirical study to document to what extent the use of English is as common in other places as it is in Berlin (as for example in Third Wave Coffee places in Sofia, Warsaw, Paris, Stockholm or Rome), it is safe to say that English is used as *lingua franca* in transnational interaction among members of this cultural setting. In the Berlin case, as was found in my empirical study,[27] English is not only used for communication with members who live elsewhere but also the dominant mode of interaction in local contexts, including in menus, in interaction between customers and staff, and in some conversations where both speakers have German as their first language. This aroused a public language ideological debate in the summer of 2017, where newspaper articles from the local, national and international press appeared that reported on customers' complaints about the expectation to order food and drinks in English in these settings,[28] expressed in headlines such a "Spricht Ihre Kneipe noch Deutsch?" (*Does your pub still speak German?*).[29]

The common use of English in these contexts has the effect that, as is common for situations of language contact, linguistic features of English and German are used in combination, particularly when German is spoken (less so when English is spoken as competence in German is not commonly expected). See below one example from an interview with a leading figure of the Berlin Third Wave Coffee scene, who explains the concept of 'Third Wave' and its aims and ideals, in a qualitative interview:

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[27] See also Theresa Heyd and Britta Schneider, "Anglophone Communities in Germany: The Case of Berlin," in Raymond Hickey (ed.), *English in the German-Speaking World*, Cambridge: CUP, 2019; Schneider, "Language in Transnational Communities of Consumption – Indexical Functions of English in Third Wave Coffee Culture" In Sofia Rüdiger and Susanne Mühleisen (eds.), *Talking about Food – The Social and the Global in Eating Communities*, Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2020.

[28] Philip Oltermann, "Berliners Frustrated over Restaurants Where No German Is Spoken. German MPs Say Some Waiters Only Speak English and That It Ostracises Native Population from Life in the Capital," *The Guardian*, 14.08.2017 2017; Jens Spahn, "Sprechen Sie doch Deutsch!," *DIE ZEIT*, 24.08.2017, 2017.

[29] Sophia Kräge, "Spricht Ihre Kneipe noch Deutsch?," *Berliner Kurier*, 13.08.2017 2017.

Excerpt 1
Der Begriff **Specialty Coffee** ist der, der eigentlich besser ist als **Third Wave**, ***weil die Wellen versteht eh keiner***, äh, wir sagen immer alles was nach **Starbucks** kam is **Third Wave**, dabei sind wir eigentlich schon **Fourth Wave** und dann ham wir gesagt ‚so können wir eigentlich niemanden abholen, weil wir wollen eigentlich unsere Barrieren senken und ähm ***es geht am Ende des Tages*** um Geschmack.'
[…]
Der **Reach**, der die Erreichbarkeit und so wird glaub ich auch immer größer, also **Specialty Coffee** ist die stark wachsende Nische in dem Bereich [...] wir sind eigentlich die **quality leaders** und **pushen** und **pushen** und **pushen**.

The term Specialty Coffee is the one that is actually better than Third Wave, because nobody understands the waves anyway, uh, we always say everything that came after Starbucks is Third Wave, but we are actually already Fourth Wave and then we said 'so we can't really pick anyone up because we want to lower our barriers and uh, at the end of the day it's all about taste.' […]
The reach, the accessibility and I think it's getting bigger and bigger, so Specialty Coffee is the strongly growing niche in the area [...] we are actually the quality leaders and push and push and push.

In the above quote, all lexical items that stem from English are in bold script, showing that a considerable number is English-based, including verb use that is combined with German inflectional morphology, marking first person plural (underlined in *push-en*). Besides, I have marked two passages in bold and italics which make use of German lexical items but display non-traditional German syntax and a loan translation. In the first example – "weil die Wellen versteht eh keiner" – where the conjunction *weil* (because) is used as coordinating, meaning it is followed by a main clause with S-V-O order, that is, subject (die Wellen, *the waves*), verb (versteht, *understands*), object (keiner, *nobody*). Traditional German syntax defines *weil* as subordinating conjunction, followed by a subordinate clause that has a verb final order, that is, subject, object, verb order (S-O-V). Using *weil* as coordinating conjunction is common in spoken colloquial German, where some suspect that this tendency is enforced through English, in

which *because* is also followed by S-V-O clauses, given that word order in English is generally fixed.[30] A much clearer case of the impact of English on German is, however, the second example, "es geht am Ende des Tages um Geschmack" (*at the end of the day it's all about taste*). The phrase "at the end of the day", meaning "after all", is not common in German and thus "am Ende des Tages" has to be understood as a loan translation or calque. Taken together, the lexicon, syntax and idiomatic expressions in the above quote show clear impacts of English.

Examples of the impact of English, in the form of either using English as medium of communication or in producing mixed forms of English and German, are also found in other transnational social contexts, such as other communities of consumption related to food (e.g. veganism) or media, music culture, social media groups, academia or artists communities. These are obvious examples of the development of new public spaces in which the logics of national publics, with national language standards, loose in relevance. While such translingual mixings are often understood as emancipatory and a liberation of national normativity in current sociolinguistics,[31] it is important to consider that new publics not only bring about liberation but also new normativities. In order to ponder the question of linguistic citizenship and language policies in the 21st century, these new normativities have to be considered. Besides the cultural dominance of Anglophone culture and the established role of English as international *lingua franca*, digital algorithms and the logics of machines here play a role.

Reifications in digital programming and AI technologies

As has been mentioned in the theoretical considerations about language ideologies (see above), technical tools have played a role in the formation of normative language standards for a long time. Thus, the printing press is central in the establishment of national public spaces and

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[30] On *weil* with V2 constructions, see e.g. Gerard Kempen and Karin Harbusch, "Verb-Second Word Order after German Weil 'Because': Psycholinguistic Theory from Corpus-Linguistic Data," *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics*, 1, 2016.

[31] See e.g. Suresh Canagarajah, *Translingual Practice. Global Englishes and Cosmpolitan Relations,* London: Routledge, 2013; Alastair Pennycook and Emi Otsuji, *Metrolingualism. Language in the City,* London: Routledge, 2015.

national language norms, allowing for the distribution of written text that makes use of homogenous scripts and letters across territories as large as a nation.[32] Digital tools make use of the letters developed in early modernity but are based on different ideas of representation and correctness. Definitions of correct language in the age of print literacy are largely based on the writings of elite speakers, among them authors of literary, religious or governmental text (see e.g. etymological dictionaries). Many contemporary dictionaries or translation tools are based on text that appears online. The corpus on which correctness is defined is therefore larger and, to a certain extent, more democratic, as more people have access to publishing text in the digital era than in the era of the printing press. Basically, this implies that social elites' ability to produce printed written text, and with it, to define standards, is replaced by a logic in which frequency of use in a very large number of texts defines what is conceived as 'correct' (even though very informal writings as in chats or social media are probably excluded from corpora that are used for translation tools or dictionaries).

An example for these newer formations of standards is given by translation tools. A very successful tool from the German context is the Cologne-based company *deepl*, which has been celebrated for very good results in producing text translation via the use of an artificially intelligent algorithm.[33] The corpus with which the AI tool is trained is based on websites that exist in the languages in question. In the case of German-English translation, this means that texts available online in both English and German function as source for the AI to learn what is 'correct' English and 'correct' German. Many of the texts stem from commercial and governmental settings – the same source texts are used in the online dictionary *linguee.com*, in which passages of the corpus are given, so that at least some of the original text samples can be examined. The available texts have been translated by individuals who are competent in both English and German. Some linguistic phenomena occurring seem to indicate that many

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[32] On the role of the printing press in early modern European culture, see Michael Giesecke, *Der Buchdruck in Der Frühen Neuzeit. Eine Historische Fallstudie über die Durchsetzung neuer Informations- und Kommunikationstechnologien,* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991.

[33] See www.deepl.com, discussed e.g. in Zeit Online. (29.09.2020). "DeepL" macht Google Translate Konkurrenz. https://www.zeit.de/news/2020-09/29/deepl-macht-google-translate-konkurrenz, 16.12.2020

of these translators must have had German as their first language as semantic contents and metaphorical constructions appear that are common in German but (so far) not so much in English.

For example, the German phrase German ‘die Barrieren senken‘, meaning ‘to make something more easily accessible’ (see Extract 1 above), is translated as ‘to lower the barriers’ in both *deepl* and *linguee* (as of 18th of November 2020, the results may change if the corpus changes). The fact that the phrase ‘to lower the barriers’ is not very common in English can be seen when searching the web for this phrase, showing that the most frequently retrieved hits stem from the *linguee/deepl* corpus and not from other uses in public space. Without having access to the algorithms and corpus data of the company, we may interpret this phenomenon as showing the social effects of computer corpora, which are chosen on grounds of easy access (only texts that are automatically retrievable online on the web are used), in combination with the machine logics of frequency (items that appear frequently in the corpus appear as ‘correct’). The potential long-term effect of this may be that the phrase is enregistered as correct beyond the translation tool. As it is to be assumed that the phrase will be used more often as it is shown as ‘correct’ in the translation tool, a looping effect is likely, as the corpus with which the translation tool works will have even more hits with this phrase. In the end, it is language items that are frequent in language corpora accessible to machine reading that become ‘correct’. The logics of national standards based on elite language use is then combined with logics of machine readability and frequency.

Besides the above described looping effects, it is likely that English will generally have an increasing impact in contexts in which frequency plays a role, with a high potential for the language becoming the “voice from nowhere” (see above) in transnational public settings as English is the language used most in web (statistics ranging from 25% of all web content to over 50% of all web content, see e.g. www.usertesting.com/blog/localization, www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm, Date of Access: 18.11.2020). The fact that anglophone cultural and linguistic concepts underlie many tools which we use in digital everyday life is also obvious in the use of programming languages – all programming languages that are prominent and commercially used are based on English lexical items (see e.g. https://www.bitdegree.org/tutorials/most-used-programming-languages/).

Furthermore, increasingly popular voice-controlled home computers such as *Google Home*, *Alexa* or *Siri* also have been designed and programmed in English-speaking contexts. It is thus, at least currently, not uncommon to be confronted with anglophone concepts when using such tools. Besides phonetic realizations that do not match, for example, French, Spanish or German phonology, there can also be cultural concepts that are transported via these tools. Consider image 3 below, where a German user asks Apple's IPhone tool *Siri* what to give the children for Christmas:

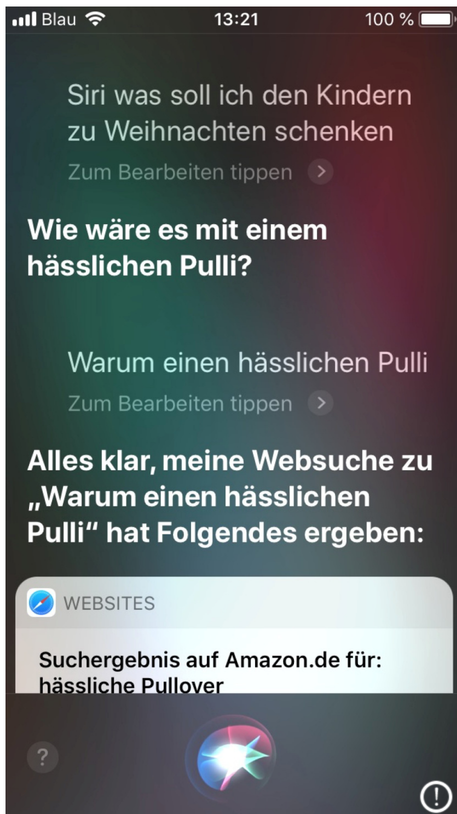

Image 3: Anglophone cultural concepts in Siri use

The answer of Siri is "How about an ugly pullover?". In German, the concept of 'ugly pullover' is its direct semantic meaning – a pullover that is ugly. Thus, the answer in a German context does not make sense and is

even irritating (after all, why does Siri want someone to give their children something ugly for Christmas?). Only users who have access to US American Christmas traditions will be able to understand the answer, as knitted pullovers with Christmas designs (Santa Claus, reindeers, etc.) are referred to as *ugly pullovers* in English. The examples show on the one hand that some of the tools are still badly designed and more efforts will have to go into what companies refer to as 'localization', that is, adapting computer programmes and AI tools according to local cultures and traditions. On the other hand, it is likely that machine logics and algorithms, with their very often Anglophone cultural bias and logics of frequency, where what appears often is taken as model, will interact with and influence cultural and linguistic practices worldwide. And indeed, the custom of buying and giving 'ugly pullovers' is currently becoming popular in Germany.

The Consequences of Late Modern Language Phenomena for Language Study, Language Education and Language Policy

The above made observations have consequences for how to study language from a scientific point of view and they have consequences for language policy and language education.

In the field of linguistics, the role of standard languages has to be reconsidered. While homogenous and standardized languages are often treated as 'natural' phenomena, understood as arising from the unconscious development of genuine cultural communities in which native speakers live,[34] standard languages, as we know them today, are not conceivable without the discourses of the nation-state and the technologies of the printing press. In this sense, they are not natural, quasi-biological entities but an outcome of social processes and power struggles. A view on languages as part of cultural history allows for overcoming what has been referred to as methodological nationalism[35] – the tendency of social sciences to work under the "assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural

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[34] For a critique, see e.g. Pierre Bourdieu, "The Production and Reproduction of Legitimate Language," in, Lucy Burke et al. (eds.), *The Routledge Language and Cultural Theory Reader* London: Routledge, 1980 (2000), p. 468.

[35] Wimmer and Schiller, "Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences."; Schneider, "Methodological Nationalism in Linguistics."

social and political form of the modern world".[36] We can then start to study language as not 'naturally' framed in ethnic or national cultures and consider the role of socio-political discourses (e.g. the idea that groups in one territory should be homogenous), the impact of institutional practices (e.g. schooling that teaches only one correct version of language and co-produces discourses of linguistic anxiety) and the crucial contribution of media technologies – from writing, the printing press and digital devices – in framing cultures of standardization and the territorial distribution of norms. Multilingual and non-standard productions of language, in written or spoken form, no longer appear as deviations from a norm but as practices that index individual life trajectories and potentially complex forms of social belonging.

Considering possible educational responses to late modern language practices, we first of all have to ask what would be reasonable reactions to linguistic complexity that is beyond a 'multilingualism' as additive and ordered monolingualisms. Schools and universities as educational institutions have to deal with diversity on different levels. New forms of language teaching should, for example, include reflecting (presumably neutral) standards and reflecting social indexical functions of language instead of presenting some forms as inherently or morally better than others. Creative language production and word play with multilingual resources can here be one option to create awareness of the social functions and power of language. At the same time, this should not mean that traditional language standards are no longer taught as they continue to fulfil important functions in hierarchical social contexts as on the job market, but also in producing social bonds among populations.

Policy responses on the governmental level will have to deal not only with the fact that populations become increasingly diverse but also with technological realities. One question that emerges in this context is in what way we can or should nationally or supra-nationally regulate the reifications and new patterns of dominance that develop through programming, digital platforms and AI tools. Assuming that language will develop 'naturally' in

[36] Wimmer and Schiller, "Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences.", p. 301.

communities as is still common in many strands of linguistics is certainly not helpful as large supranational commercial actors, from Google to Amazon, already impact on the way linguistic features are distributed and framed as correct. Whether or not this is a problem will have to be discussed elsewhere. What is, however, clearly problematic is data security as most language tools are based on the uncontrolled collection of large amounts of language data from private individuals, often from private face-to-face settings as in the use of voice-controlled devices in families or from other private or semi-private settings in, for example, WhatsApp, Facebook or Instagram communication. In the European context, data security standards as developed in the European Union should be a measure to collect data from AI translation tools, social networks and voice-controlled devices.

Another problem we face is the logics of algorithms, which is mostly based on the idea that what is frequent is right. As has been discussed in relation to, for example, race or gender discrimination,[37] these tools produce cultural biases in Big Data settings. The effect of these programmes is that what is already dominant will become more dominant, a kind of Matthew principle.[38] It is likely that this presents a threat to minority languages as what now is dominant may, because of its frequency, become more dominant. On these grounds, the dominance of English and of anglophone culture is likely to increase. As the use of English as lingua franca contributes to cross-cultural understanding, this is not necessarily a problem as such – as long as other linguistic and cultural practices continue to have a place in publics. Financial support for the development of less commercially successful software (e.g. auto-correction, AI templates) for lesser spoken or minority languages may thus be one solution to continue the European idea of unity in diversity.

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[37] See e.g. Joy Buolamwini and Timnit Gebru, "Gender Shades: Intersectional Accuracy Disparities in Commercial Gender Classification," *Proceedings of Machine Learning Research*, 81, 2018; Joy Buolamwini, "Artificial Intelligence Has a Problem with Gender and Racial Bias. Here's How to Solve It," *TIME*, https://time.com/5520558/artificial-intelligence-racial-gender-bias/, 07.02.2019.

[38] See e.g. Robert K. Merton, "The Matthew Effect in Science. The Reward and Communication Systems of Science Are Considered," *Science*, 159, 1968.

Linguistic Citizenship in the 21st Century

To finally give some answers to the question of what is linguistic citizenship in the 21st century, we can maintain the following:

- To avoid provincialism and ignorance, language competences of the informed citizen should not be limited to one monolingual standard.
- Citizens of an educated Europe should have access to (digital and analog) literacy in minority languages to be able to maintain cultural diversity and to reproduce their heritage cultures, including languages with a migration history.
- Competences in national standards have to be ensured to allow for access to discourses of the social and educational elites.
- Competence in standardised varieties English is similarly relevant for access to elite discourses and participation in transnational knowledge production.

Besides actual linguistic competences, knowledge about language has to involve meta-linguistic competences in order to be able to not only produce language form but to develop awareness of the social power of language in a complexifying world:

- Speakers generally have to develop the ability to deal with linguistic complexity and constantly evolving forms.
- This implies the ability to reflect on the existence, conditionality and potential relevance of norms.
- Finally, this also means to develop an awareness of the important functions of language in ordering social relationships.

Taken together, this is probably demanding and will require a restructuring of established form of schooling and governmental language policies. Yet, democratic ideals can neither be maintained by hopelessly reproducing language cultures from a bygone age of monolingual national print culture, nor by leaving the field to capitalist actors.

Conclusion

In this article, I have introduced linguistic anthropological concepts that conceive of separate and standardised *languages* as an outcome of socio-historical processes that were particularly prevalent in the age of nationalism and print culture. Several examples were introduced that illustrate a potential reframing of language, and with it, a reframing of public cultures, where the technologies of digital culture play an important role. Finally, I have given some thoughts on what these observations may imply for education, language policy and the enlightened linguistic citizen in contemporary times.

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