

THE EVOLUTION OF A EUROPEAN LANGUAGE: STANDARD GERMAN

1. PRESENT GERMAN IN EUROPE

Every language has its history, especially the dominant variety of a language that developed its standards out of the various regional and social varieties of so-called natural language. As you are celebrating Standard Lithuanian and its history, I would like to contribute to this event by briefly sketching and discussing the emergence and present situation of another European standard language, the language I am most familiar with because it is my native tongue, i. e. German.

At present, German is the official language of Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein, two thirds of Switzerland and a small region in East Belgium. It is one of the official languages of Luxembourg and a province in Northern Italy. It is also being spoken as a minority language in Hungary, Romania, Poland, Russia, and several other European and non-European countries.

German is the first language of approximately 100 million people in Europe and is being used or learned as a foreign language by another 30 to 40 million people. These impressive figures, however, have to be looked at more carefully. If I limit myself to the 100 million native speakers, I could not say, that they all speak the same kind of German. Many of them speak dialects or regional varieties of German. All one can say is that the vast majority of all these people **understand** – within smaller national variations – the same variety of German, that is, standard German, as we would say *Hochdeutsch*. How this came about is a long story of more than a thousand years.

2. FROM THE 8TH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT

Early forms of German developed out of the languages of West Germanic tribes who during the migration of peoples – some 1500 years ago – settled

in Central Europe and merged gradually to larger tribal formations. With the exception of a few runic inscriptions and single words in Latin contexts, no documents of the earliest forms of German before the second half of the 8th century have been preserved. Medieval German existed in various tribal and regional varieties. These varieties developed and partly merged in a process of several centuries that started during the reign of Charlemagne and continued more or less until the 18th century.

The main formal development, which resulted in the separation of the German varieties from the other West Germanic languages, such as English, Frisian, Dutch and Low German was the High German sound shift, that is, the gradual change of certain Germanic phonemes into phonetically related ones. To give a few examples: a Germanic word such as Old Saxon *appul* ‘apple’ thus became *apful* in Upper German. Old Saxon *settian* ‘to sit’ corresponds to Old High German *setzan/sezzan*, Old Saxon *that* to Upper German *daz*.

In Carolingian times, the use of German besides Latin was encouraged as a medium of Christianization and religious practice in the Germanic parts of the Frankish Empire. Data of that time are primarily religious writings and, additionally, fragments of magic spells and heroic poetry. In the 10th century until well into the 11th century, Latin took over again as almost the exclusive medium of religion, law, learning, and literary production. The functional bilingualism (diglossia) of the prestige language Latin as the main medium of religion and learning and of the vernacular varieties of German continued for centuries, in some domains until the 18th century. In a sense, the emergence of the German standard language was a process of gradual emancipation from medieval Latin. Traces of this process are among others the many Latinism and other romanisms in the lexicon or modern German.

From the middle of the 11th century onwards German gained ground as a medium of literature that was created not only by learned clergymen but also by members of the lower nobility. They knew little or no Latin and were influenced by the traditions of French and Provençal chivalry and courtly love poetry. Thus, secular lyrics (*Minnesang*) and epics (*Parzival*, *Nibelungenlied* etc.) flourished. In the fields of warfare, chivalry, and luxury goods, many words were borrowed from Old French or Provençal; e.g. *āventiure* < OF *aventure*, *banier* < OF *baniere*, *tanzen* < OF *dance*.

Towards the end of the 13th century, when more and more burghers of the growing cities and towns also became literate, the use of German (besides Latin) for literature, legal documents, educational, medical, and religious writings increased. Though features of the regional varieties of the written language are still noticeable, first tendencies towards a High German standard language developed in poetry.

From the 12th to the middle of the 14th century, the German-speaking population increased considerably in density and territorial extension. German princes expanded their realms into Slavonic lands and founded new towns and villages in great numbers, sometimes but not always by invitation of the local Slavonic rulers. A rather stable German linguistic territory was formed and existed more or less until the 20th century. After the fall of the Hohenstaufen (1268), the political and economic power shifted from the German southwest to the east and southeast with the powerful dynasties of Meißen-Saxony, the Luxemburgers in Bohemia and then the Habsburgs in the Austrian territories. This also led to an increasing influence of the eastern linguistic varieties on the development of German, as documented among others in legal papers for some chanceries (*Kanzleien*) used the vernacular German, though most of them still continued to write Medieval Latin.

During the 16th century, the development of German towards a standard language made a remarkable progress. Two factors were of importance: the use of a special blend of Central and Upper German by the imperial chancery in Prague, later Vienna, which influenced the language of other chanceries, and Martin Luther's choice of the officialese of the Meißen-Saxon chancery, an East Central variety of German, for his translations of the Bible and his reformatory writings. The use of the printing press with movable metal types invented by Johannes Gensfleisch, known as Gutenberg, in the middle of the 15th century and the rise of printing houses in several cities around the beginning of the 16th century helped to spread the reformation all over central Europe. Linguistically this affected the northern German regions, where Low German had been the standard language of religion and administration. Until then, Low German had also been the lingua franca of the mighty *Hanse*, the Hanseatic league, between Nowgorod in the East and Bergen and London in the West. Now, Protestant pastors preached and prayed in the Lutheran variety of German. The decline of the *Hanse* furthered this change of the written language from

Low to High German. In the German-speaking South, there were also tendencies of standardizing the written language. Despite these tendencies, the regional and local varieties of the **spoken** language remained in use, and they do so more or less until the present.

Luther's writings and the religious and legal texts of authors from different regions enriched the lexicon of the standard varieties of German with words such as *geistreich* 'witty', *kleingläubig* 'of little faith', *Machtwort* 'word of command' and many others. Loan translations of Latin expressions appeared such as *Eigennamen* (<*nomen proprium*), *Gegensatz* (<*oppositio*), *Muttersprache* (<*lingua materna*). The borrowing from Latin, Greek (via Latin), French, and Italian continued: *Kapitel*, *Minister*, *Akademie*, *Dekan*, *Professor*, *Manier*, *Bankier*, *brutto*, *netto* etc.

By the middle of the 17th century a standard form of written German with some regional variants was fairly well established in the central, Northern, and some parts of the Southern German regions, though it lacked recognition as a medium for many 'higher' domains. Besides Latin that was still the language of education and – in the Catholic regions – of the church, now the French of the court of Louis XIV rose also in German lands to be the language of prestige, especially among the aristocratic élite. This was criticized and opposed to by the *Sprachgesellschaften* 'language societies' that arose in several places. The oldest and most influential one, the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* 'Fructifying Society', was founded in 1617 in Weimar on the model of the Florentine *Accademia della crusca* (since 1582) and gathered many of the prominent writers and grammarians of the time with the aim to preserve and further the German language, which was conceived of as an ideal and 'pure' medium of literature without foreign words and dialectal expressions.

The 18th century, finally, brought about an evening out of regional differences of the standard and the establishment of the use of German in all functional domains. Among other influences, the exhortations of the versatile scholar Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) to use German in science and politics, the provocative use of German instead of Latin by the university professor Christian Thomasius (1655-1728) and the terminological work of the philosopher Christian Wolff (1679-1754) paved the way for German as a medium for education, philosophy, science, and public administration. The use of the prestige languages Latin and French gradu-

ally decreased in ‘high society’ and science. Altogether, the emancipation of German from Medieval Latin started later and took longer than the emergence of Spanish, Italian, and French as dominant languages in their respective countries and regions. Other than the emancipation and standardisation of these languages, the development of Standard German was not supported or even forced by royal or governmental decrees but by an increasing cultural consensus among scholars and educated burghers. It is characteristic that Latin – besides German – remained one of the two official languages of the *Holy Roman Empire of German Nation* until the end of this empire in 1806.

Towards the end of the 18th century, philosophers such as Kant and Herder, writers such as Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller, and many other authors could develop their own linguistic creativity on the basis of an established standard language and, thus, became models for the language use of the educated classes. By the end of the 18th century, these classes, however, did not comprise more than at most 20% of the population in all German-speaking regions. The passive understanding of the standard language improved during the 19th century with the introduction of general mandatory school education in the various German-speaking states, and, consequently, the alphabetization of the majority of the population rose. The standard language was also stabilized and strengthened by dictionaries and grammars which appeared in the course of the 19th century.

As a (grossly simplifying) illustration of the formal changes of German since the 9th century, here are several short excerpts from different German translations or adaptations of the bible (Luke 2.1):¹

- Latin (Vulgata):

Factum es autem diebus illis exiit edictum a Cæsare Augusto ut describeretur universus orbis. (In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. From: The New Revised Standard Version)

- Old High German (Tatian, c. 830):

Uuard thô gitân in thên tagun / framquam gibot fon demo aluualten keisure / thaz gibrievievit v vurdi al these umbiuuerft.

- Middle High German (Matthias von Beheim, 1343):

Abir geschên ist in den Tagen / ein gebot gînc ûz von dem keisere Augustô, daz bescriben worde der ummecreiz allesament.

¹ Examples taken from Tschirch : 1969, 24f.

- Early Modern German (Martin Luther, 1522):
ES begab sich aber zu der zeytt / das eyn gepott von dem keyser Augusto aus gieng / das alle welt geschetzt wurde.
- Modern German (ca. 1900):
Es begab sich aber zu der Zeit, daß ein Gebot von dem Kaiser Augustus ausging, daß alle Welt geschätzt würde.

From the middle of the 19th century onwards, German, as other European languages, underwent a vast expansion of its lexicon as consequence of the industrial revolution, the development of ever more and specialized sciences and technologies and the multiplying contacts with other languages by trade, wars, new media, and, more recently, tourism. Since the middle of the 20th century, the lexical borrowing from English, that started earlier, has increased considerably. Symptomatic is the exchange of old French loan words by anglicisms; e.g., *Appartement* by *Apartment*, *Bankier* by *Banker*, *Mannequin* by *Model*.

The orthographic norms of the various German-speaking regions converged to a great extent until the end of the 19th century. After earlier futile attempts, a standard orthography was finally resolved at the 2nd Orthographic Conference (1901) in Berlin and was officially introduced during the following years into the schools and the public administration of all German-speaking states and regions. Changes of this norm were proposed and discussed again and again. Finally, in 1996 a revised norm was agreed upon by the authorities of the participating countries and regions, and – after some slight revisions – officially accepted and introduced into the schools in 2006.

On demand of the actors of the many theatres in the German-speaking area, there were also attempts towards the end of the 19th century to standardize the pronunciation of spoken German. In 1892, Theodor Siebs presented his “Deutsche Bühnenaussprache” (German Pronunciation for the Stage). His norm, which was mainly based on the Northern German articulation of the standard language, did not, however, gain supra-regional acceptance outside the theatres, although, in a moderate form, the Siebs norm still has some influence on the pronunciation of radio and TV speakers in Germany. In Austria and Switzerland, the orthoepic norms for the public use of the standard language differ slightly from the German one.

3. MODERN GERMAN INSIDE THE GERMAN-SPEAKING COUNTRIES

The German-speaking area in Europe had its largest extension after the colonisation of German-speaking settlers and migrants in the 13th and 14th centuries. Despite political, military, and economic developments, this area remained more or less constant until the Second World War. After this war, started by the Nazi governed 'Third Reich' in 1939, the territory of Germany was reduced considerably in the east. The German-speaking population of the lost regions was forced to move westwards into the remaining parts of Germany and Austria.

The national varieties of Standard German are marked by differences in small parts of the lexicon, especially in legal and administrative terminology and in expressions that refer to food items. There is also some variance in morphophonemics and pronunciation. The national varieties also differ in the uses of regional varieties as against the use of the standard language. The north of Germany uses little or no dialects in everyday speech but rather standard or near-standard pan-regional varieties. In the south and in parts of Central and East Germany regional varieties are frequently used but linked to the formality of the situations. Dialects are preferably used in informal situations, standard or near-standard varieties in formal situations. In general, distinctive regional varieties are receding and are being replaced by pan-regional varieties. The usage of regional language forms is still marked by low social prestige if the speaker fails to adapt to the speech situation (formal-informal, distant-close, etc.).

The Austrian language situation is marked, on the one hand, by dialectal varieties which are linked to individual regions (*Bundesland*) and on the other hand by the increasing use of a koiné-variety that spreads from the Vienna region across the eastern and central parts of the country. Characteristic for the use of the varieties in Austria is the switching between regional, pan-regional and standard varieties within short discourse sequences, depending on factors like speaker-listener relation and the status of the speech situation as formal or non-formal. The use of non-standard varieties in everyday speech situations is normal across all social groups and not socially marked. There is, however, an urban-non-urban difference with non-urban varieties being considered as lower in prestige.

Switzerland's language situation is still different from that of the two other countries as there is a diglossia between the varieties of "Switzer-

dütsch” (Swiss German), that is, the regional (cantonal) varieties of Alemannic German, and the Swiss Standard form of German. No social group uses the standard language as the norm for everyday conversations. Swiss German speakers speak dialect and write in standard language – a situation called medial diglossia in sociolinguistics. There is no interlanguage between the medial varieties. Oral use of the standard language is only found in formal instruction at schools and universities, in fact-oriented radio and TV programmes, in parliament, and in formal speeches. Generally speaking, there is no social prestige or stigmatisation involved in the use of any of the varieties of Swiss German vernacular, which comprises a large number of mostly mutually comprehensible regional varieties.

Aside from the uses of dialects and pan-regional varieties, the differences between the national varieties of Standard German, especially in its written use, are not as pronounced as, for instance, the differences between the standard varieties of English in Great Britain, Australia and the United States of America.

4. LANGUAGE LEGISLATION AND LANGUAGE INSTITUTIONS

In Germany, the German language has no constitutional status as for instance French in France, Spanish in Spain or Lithuanian in Lithuania. That is, there is no regulation in the German constitution such as “German is (or shall be) the state language of Germany”. Only special laws prescribe German as the official language of jurisdiction and public administration. The status of German as “national” or “official” language or as one of several official languages is, however, explicitly stated in the constitutional laws of Austria, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, and Belgium.

Official institutions with extensive normative competence for the standard language as for instance the Académie française for French or the Academia Española for Spanish do not exist in any of the German-speaking countries. The de facto codification of Standard German is in the hands of publishing houses such as the Dudenverlag, Bertelsmann and others for Germany and the Österreichische Bundesverlag for Austria which publishes the dictionary “Österreichisches Wörterbuch”. Switzerland does not have its own German dictionary, instead the dictionaries published in Germany are used.

In Germany, several institutions divide among themselves functions comparable to those of a language academy. The Institut für Deutsche Sprache (Institute for the German Language) in Mannheim being the largest research centre for the German language has its focus on the empirical description of Modern German and its recent history. Results are among others a large grammar of contemporary German, special dictionaries, and a multitude of monographs and handbooks on various aspects of German². The Institute is also renowned for the large language corpora that have been collected during the past 40 years. The Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung (German Academy for Language and Poetry) in Darmstadt assembles renowned novelists, poets, literary critics, and (a few) linguists from the various German-speaking countries with the aim to foster and cultivate the German language and literature by organising conferences on literary and linguistic issues and awarding prizes to outstanding writers. The Goethe Institut is primarily concerned with the spreading and promoting of German in non-German-speaking countries.

There are several other, mostly private organisations that are concerned about the present use and development of Standard German. By far the largest, the Verein Deutsche Sprache (Association German Language) with about 30.000 members, is vividly fighting against the use of anglicisms. The Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache (The society of the German language) also cares for the use of contemporary Standard German but on a more serious and linguistically founded basis. The larger state supported language institutions cooperate since 2003 in the Deutscher Sprachrat (German Language Council), a loose association with the aim to improve the language awareness among the German population.

In Austria, language codification is in the hands of the dictionary unit of the Österreichische Bundesverlag, which publishes the Österreichisches Wörterbuch (Austrian Dictionary). There are two small research units for the study of Austrian German, the first one at the Austrian Academy for Science and Technology, the second one at the University of Graz. The latter is mainly concerned with the compilation of special dictionaries and corpora.

To date, Switzerland has no codifying institution. A regulative function is exercised by the Schweizerische Erziehungsdirektorenkonferenz EDK

² See www.ids-mannheim.de for detailed publication lists.

(Swiss Conference of Ministers for Education) that controls the norms of language in teaching materials for German as a first language in Swiss schools.

The various language institutions and organisations of the German-speaking countries cooperate in various ways, but mostly through informal contacts. The only transnational institution for German is the Rat für die deutsche Rechtschreibung (Council for the German Spelling). Its task is the promotion and adjustment of the reformed German spelling in all German-speaking countries and regions.

5. TENDENCIES AND PROBLEMS

As far as the present development of German is concerned, the conditions of the national varieties of Standard German are unequal. Germany has about 80 million speakers, Austria 8.2 million, and the Swiss German part of Switzerland about 4 million. The other German-speaking regions have no more than 350 000 speakers. Thus, Germany has not only the largest number of speakers but also the greatest influence on TV programmes that can be viewed by almost every household in the German-speaking areas. The vast majority of newspapers and magazines and most children programmes and audio-products are issued in Germany. This means that the development of Standard German in Germany also concerns the national standard varieties of Austria and Switzerland, especially in the realm of neologisms, phraseology and text conventions. On the other hand, many Austrian and Swiss speakers insist on the use and preservation of their own linguistic characteristics as marks of their national identity. This also influences the relations between Standard language and dialects: in Germany the use of marked dialects is decreasing. In Austria, the regional varieties and their use are more stable, although there are also tendencies of a shift from local dialects towards larger pan-regional varieties. In Switzerland, on the other hand, the domains for the oral use of the regional dialects instead of Standard German is increasing, that is, the diglossia of spoken dialect and written standard language is getting more distinctive. This is being criticised by the Swiss citizens of the French and Italian-speaking regions, because it makes oral

communication with people of the German-speaking part of the country increasingly difficult.

A major problem that all German countries and regions are confronted with is the decreasing use of the standard language in several domains of science and economy. Until the first decades of the 20th century, German was used, besides English and French, as an international medium of communication in sciences such as chemistry, physics, biology, medicine and some fields of the humanities. Students of chemistry in the United States or medical students in Japan had to learn German in order to read the relevant international journals and handbooks. After two world wars the German language has lost this status. Because of the importance the United States gained in science and technology and the demand for international exchange, English has become the almost exclusive language for publications in the natural sciences and medicine. English is also the preferred working language at scientific conferences, even those held in German-speaking countries. At several private universities that specialize in business administration and economics, English is also used as the medium of instruction. If this development continues, the German language might suffer a severe loss of domains, that is, German would not develop any more along the progress made in certain sciences, which means that some day even German, Austrian and Swiss scientists would not be able to communicate about topics of their fields in their native language. This, however, is a problem that other European languages are also confronted with.

The threatening loss of domains is the main worry of many intellectuals in the German-speaking countries concerning the future development of the German standard language. It took centuries of efforts of scholars, scientists and writers to develop their language varieties into a standard language for all domains of the society, that is, a medium in which everything we know and want to know can be expressed. Now, there is the danger that our standard language like other European standard languages may lose this valuable quality. The way to overcome this danger can only be to convince our scientists and economists of the advantages of practical bilingualism or even better: trilingualism. This should, of course, also be the aim of all people in order to preserve their standard language as part of the linguistic diversity of Europe that is the basis for the cultural diversity and wealth of our continent.

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VIENOS EUROPOS KALBOS RAIDĀ: BENDRINĒ VOKIEČIŲ KALBA

S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje apibūdinama vokiečių kalbos situacija pasaulyje, nuosekliai apžvelgiama kalbos formavimosi istorija ir teritorinis variantiškumas, šiandieninė kalbos padėtis, problemos ir jų sprendimo būdai.

Autorius pateikia faktinę informaciją apie vokiečių kalbos paplitimą pasaulyje, supažindina su kalbos raidos apžvalga nuo pat VIII a. iki šių dienų. Atskleidžiami

įdomūs vokiečių kalbos vartojimo polinkiai ir šios kalbos teritorinis variantiškumas. Daugiau dėmesio skiriama ne tiek Vokietijos, kiek kitų šalių (Austrijos, Šveicarijos) vokiečių kalbos situacijai apibūdinti. Regioninis ir tarminis vokiečių kalbos variantiškumas nėra toks akivaizdus kaip anglų kalboje, kurioje ryškios britų, australų ir amerikiečių kalbos atmainos. Aptariamos Austrijoje vartojamos tarmės ir jų prestižas, ypatinga Šveicarijos situacija, kuriai apibūdinti vartojamas *medialinės diglosijos* terminas, kai raštui pasirinktas oficialusis vokiečių kalbos variantas, o šnekama laisvai susiformavusia vokiečių kalbos atmaina. Taip pat apibūdinama vokiečių kalbos teisinė bazė ir kalbos priežiūros institucijos. Skirtingai nuo lietuvių kalbos padėties Lietuvoje, vokiečių kalba neturi konstitucijoje įtvirtinto statuso.

Aptardamas pagrindinius kalbos plėtotės polinkius ir problemas šiuolaikiniam pasaulyje, autorius pripažįsta, kad šiuo metu aiški grėsmė kyla kai kuriems vokiečių kalbos domenams (pavyzdžiui, mokslo kalbai), jie prarandami. Siūloma išeitis – dvikalbystė arba trikalbystė; tai atitiktų šiuolaikinius daugiakalbystės polinkius Europoje.

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