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Language institutions and language criticism in European perspective

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Abstract. This article examines state institutions with a political mandate to standardise and to regulate the standardisation of a national language, along with non-state-mandated associations (e. g. linguistic societies, language or cultural associations) that have dedicated themselves to this cause. Against this backdrop, the highly prestigious language academies in Italy, France and Croatia, which have long been active in the establishment of standards, are compared with the linguistic-political activities being pursued in countries where there are no such institutions. All institutions and associations, regardless of their state or social ties, have one thing in common: as regards self-attribution, they all want to contribute to their individual societies through the cultivation of their languages.

Keywords

language academies, standard, national language, linguistic societies, language associations, cultural associations, language culture

Note to the reader:

This article pulls together the central aspects contained in the articles on the different languages in this collection. To gain a deeper understanding of the individual language cultures, it is recommended that the reader also read the articles on each of these languages, which also include references to secondary literature.

This comparative article examines the question of how language-cultivating institutions aspire to integrate their lexical and grammatical concepts into preferred language usage within their individual societies. In the individual regions and languages, the tasks associated with language standardisation, language maintenance, and language criticism are carried out by various private, state, or imperial institutions, among which the language academies and linguistic societies feature prominently. France,

with its numerous public and private organisations, unquestionably plays a special role here.

Since the founding of the *Accademia della Crusca* in 1582–83, language academies have represented a specialised form of European academia. They were originally committed to the task of developing the philological tools necessary for the modification of languages or national languages, primarily through reference to the standard literary variety (dictionaries, grammar books, poetics, and rhetoric). In political terms, this means that language academies have historically been established to serve as the principle institutions for promoting a national language policy. The move from private organisations, such as language societies or salons, to state-mandated institutions was politically organised, e. g. in Florence via patronages or, as in France, directly by the state (1634–35). In the Croatian area as well, the Italian influence in Dubrovnik led to the establishment of this type of a literary society, the *Accademia dei Concordi*, as early as the 16th century. In other countries, including Great Britain and Germany, this move was never made.

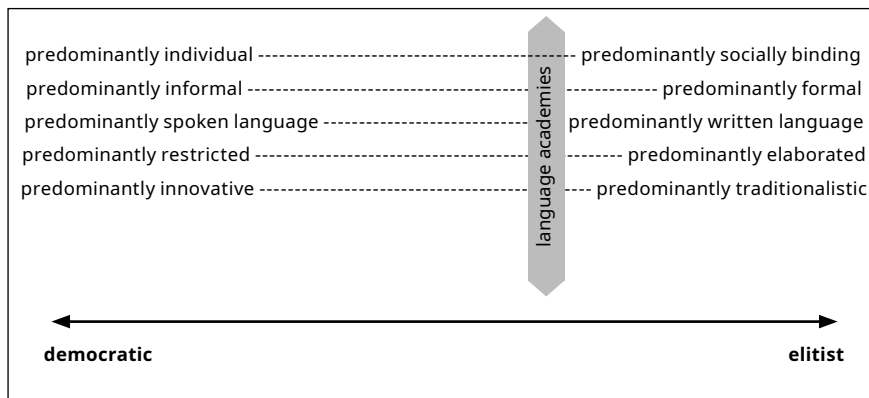
Language academies view themselves as organisations comprised of intellectuals who have a political mandate to rightfully contribute to linguistic standardisation and, ultimately, to the standardisation of a literary language or a national language. Later, particularly in Germany but also in England, language societies and linguistic associations took on a non-binding engagement in this task. A special situation exists in England, where the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), since its founding in the 1920s, has been cultivating an awareness of existing language norms, particularly of correct pronunciation.

In terms of the architecture of the varieties, the focus of language academies is upon the standard and its norm, i.e. a relatively elitist and prestigious educational language (e. g. *lingua colta*, *langue cultivée*), with a legalised claim to dissemination.

Following the First World War, and especially after the Second World War, a gradual functional decline of the academies began in Italy and France, in which their claim to representation clearly exceeded their scientific areas of responsibility. This was partially a result of the democratisation of these societies – a process that brings with it a decline in dedication to norms in general and language norms in particular, thereby restricting the validity of the standard in use. Another factor was the fact

that literature increasingly rarely served its principle linguistic function. Emancipation from spoken and speech-related norms results in the increasing implementation of an intermediate standard, in which the so-called “educational” language norms no longer play a role. Compared to the other national languages considered here, the Academy's regulated language development activities, as well as those regulated outside the academy system, were a particularly explosive political issue in Yugoslavia. As a multi-ethnic state comprised of several nations, language policy was closely interwoven with the country's otherwise eventful history. Despite this, by means of the large historical dictionary *Rječnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika*, published in 23 volumes from 1880 to 1976, as well as through annotated editions of literary works, the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts left important traces on Croatian linguistics.

From a transnational and interlingual perspective, a profile emerges that organises the dissemination forces as follows:



Language academies claim to be of a norm-preparatory or norm-giving nature. Even their recommendations are binding to a degree that can rarely be attained by other language-regulating domains such as journalism, or even by dictionaries and individual grammar books. Language academies use the authority granted them to consolidate standardisation efforts, which are also visible at the meta-linguistic level in that they profess to exert a prescriptive influence, unlike linguistics, which is predominantly descriptively oriented.

At the centre of the language standardisation efforts undertaken by the academies – and, in part, also by the linguistic societies – was and remains lexicology and the development of normative dictionaries (in Italy, OVI – *Opera del Vocabolario Italiano*), with which the language academies in France and Italy are often still identified today. From the beginning, these lexical efforts were impressed with a puristic linguistic attitude that rejected foreign lexical influence.

In the Croatian language, the 20th century was marked by two contrasts, namely the approach to Serbian prescribed by institutions up to the 1960s and the subsequent retreat from Serbian and return to Croatian language history, which is why these may be called *convergent* and *divergent* processes.

In Italy, country of origin of academic language institutions, the advisory function of the academy responsible for language standardisation has been made accessible to a larger public since the 20th century; today, this is also available via online services. Due to its conservative attitude, the *Académie française* has not made any significant adaptations to new language requirements in terms of content, and now maintains a strongly symbolic significance, although it also uses modern media to disseminate its ideas. The Croatian Academy of Sciences (along with the cultural association *Matica hrvatska*) has played a leading role in the process of Croatian becoming recognised as an independent language. Currently, the Academy is particularly active as an editor of Croatian historical texts, journals, and scientific publications, and as an organiser of scientific symposia. Representatives of the Academy are members of the institutions (Institute of Croatian Language and Linguistics and Council for Standard Croatian Language) that make proposals regarding practical standardisation and, following public discussion, implement it in manuals.

With regard to the English language, there have been calls for the establishment of an English Academy especially in the 17th and 18th centuries, but this never took place. Language academies have never gained a foothold in England; instead, linguistic societies and organisations, such as the Philological Society, as well as individual literary luminaries, have taken a role in the standardisation debate. However, they have never had far-reaching support of an official nature. The standardisation of English thus took place largely as a bottom-up process with regard to the general dissemination of literacy and the spread of normative reference works, such as grammar books, dictionaries, and usage guides.

In the German language as well, standardisation has not been tied to academies (the *Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung* (*German Academy for Language and Poetry*) operates without a government mandate and has little influence in this respect). Rather, standardisation is tied to linguistic societies, which operate with limited normative authority, although they have sometimes modelled themselves after the academy system. Puristic linguistic tendencies in these associations vary greatly, as does the question of the extent to which the inclusion of foreign words should be controlled. Language associations and linguistic societies have thus only played a limited role in the standardisation of German as a national language. Today, the linguistic societies and language associations are primarily involved in the discussion of minor linguistic issues and do not make a decisive contribution to the general codification of the German language.

Finally, if one examines organised attempts to influence and regulate state-mandated academies, it can be seen that in states such as Italy and France, where there is a relatively unified understanding of the notions of state and nation, the issue of language regulation is discussed differently than it is in Croatia, within the context of a state and a national history that has been characterised by political upheaval: In the first case, it is an issue of internal demarcation, with no questioning of national identity; in the second, it had been an issue of external demarcation from other ethnic groups who spoke the same or a similar language in the past, so that the identity factors represented by individual lexical or grammatical phenomena naturally represented a key moment. At present, in contrast, the focus is on the differentiation of the individual diatopic and diastratic varieties. In Italy and France, consideration of the standard in juxtaposition with other varieties (in addition to the standard norm) is being undertaken in relation to the social-communicative practices of influential stake-holders (e. g. regions and metropolises, intellectual circles, academic organisations, the media, etc.). In Croatia, however, following the demarcation discussions that took place around the turn of the century during the course of the new standardisation, which also involved a reflection on one's own linguistic history and dialectology, currently, the determination of the standard in relation to the regional metropolises (all of which have dialectal varieties) is again becoming a topic of research and discussion. In the tri-ethnic state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the situation

with the Croatian language is different. Here, processes of demarcation from other ethnic groups, as well as from the historically different standard in Croatia, continue to take place.

In England and Germany, there are no language cultivation institutions with a national political mandate; the situation in those countries is therefore different. Accordingly, the activities of language-cultivating organisations (e. g. linguistic societies, language and cultural associations) were particularly prominent in these national language countries – with the unique situation in England that in the early 20th century, the BBC became a special point of reference for pronunciation with regard to postulated pronunciation norms. Its influence on standardisation has, however, increasingly waned during the late 20th and early 21st centuries, in part, due to its own programmatic demands in presenting linguistic diversity.