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Language institutions and language criticism in German

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Abstract. With the exception of the Council for German Orthography, there is no German governmental institution with a political mandate to legitimately provide support for a linguistic standardisation of a national language. Against this backdrop, this article will examine the various non-governmental German-language linguistic institutions. In the German-speaking regions, the language academies of neighbouring countries have always served as a model; however, the linguistic societies and language associations that have been established have primarily been devoted to language cultivation.

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General

The terms “Sprachgesellschaft” (*linguistic society*) and “Sprachverein” (*language association*) are currently, and have historically been, used to refer to language institutions within the German-speaking countries. These are organisations that promote the cultivation of the German language, but which cannot be always clearly distinguished, as different language institutions pursuing similar endeavours have alternatively been referred to as linguistic societies or language associations. Although efforts were made during the 17th century to establish a German language academy in the mould of the *Accademia della Crusca* in Italy, or the *Académie française* in France (cf. Flamm 1994), linguistic societies were historically the dominant organisational form for groups interested in language cultivation in the German-speaking areas, especially from the Baroque period onwards. Although language associations also belong to these language criticism/cultivation interest groups, there are fewer of them than there are linguistic societies and, more significantly, they have only been active since the beginning of the 19th century.

Despite the efforts of the linguistic societies to cultivate language from national political or ideological viewpoints, none of the early German linguistic societies were state-oriented or organised by the state. The objectives and concerns of German linguistic societies can be condensed into three main categories: language purification or purism, language cultivation, and scientific language reflection. Until 1950, language purification and language cultivation were the objectives of the language-cultivating efforts. Since the second half of the 20th century, linguistic societies have been concerned not only with language cultivation, but also with scientific reflection. Whereas during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, German linguistic societies reflected on borrowed words and the related question of the identity-forming function of words in the German vocabulary, critically examining the linguistic varieties (especially the spoken dialects) in order to promote a standard that would go beyond dialect (i. e., the written language as the standard variety), beginning in the second half of the 20th century, words and their usage (e. g. anglicisms or gendering), segments of the German vocabulary (e. g. vocabulary used by adolescents), and language changes (e. g. the alteration to verb placement in the word order of subordinate clauses) have become the subject of language reflection and criticism.

Historical

The earliest interest groups for language cultivation were documented during the 17th century. It was not until the 19th century that German scholars took up the term “Sprachgesellschaft” (*linguistic society*), which had been already used by Leibniz in 1697, and applied it retroactively to language-cultivating interest groups (cf. von Polenz 1994: 115f.). The linguistic societies that held central importance during the 17th century were the Tannengesellschaft (*Pine Society*), the Deutschgesinnte Genossenschaft (*Germanophile Cooperative*), the Pegnesische Blumenorden (*Pegnesian Order of Flowers*), the Elbschwanenorden (*Order of the Elbe Swans*), and the Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft (*Fruitful Society*), later renamed the Palmenorden (*Order of Palm Trees*). With the exception of the Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft, all members of these associations were primarily scholars and writers. The focus of their interest was language purism.

Not every linguistic society, however, existed in reality. Both the Pegnesische Blumenorden and the Deutschgesinnte Gesellschaft were fictitious associations, conceived of and established in writings. Whereas the latter would become a German institution of language cultivation modelled on the *Académie française*, founded by Richelieu in 1635, the Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft was designed in the mould of the Italian *Accademia della Crusca*, founded in 1582/83 (see chapters 6.0 and 7.0 in this volume). It existed between 1617 and 1680 and would become the most important linguistic society during the Baroque period, with the national character of an academy and a broad range of influence. Although three-quarters of its members were of noble origin, the views characteristic of this society originated from its bourgeois members (e. g. Andreas Gryphius, Martin Opitz, Kaspar Stieler). Its language cultivation was intended to be of a moral-ethical and socio-political nature; language purism was the primary objective, so as to cultivate and maintain the German language through the establishment of a standardised language that would be protected from the inclusion of foreign words.

In the 18th century, the Deutsche Gesellschaft (*German Society*), the Parnassus Boicus, and the Societas incognitorum were the most prominent associations. The Deutsche Gesellschaft, of which Johann Christoph Gottsched was a member, not only promoted preference for the New High German written language as opposed to Latin and French, but also the establishment of a German standard language based on Upper Saxon, a concept that was directly furthered by societal criticism over the use of (primarily French) foreign words and dialectisms. Both the Societas incognitorum and the Munich linguistic society Parnassus Boicus became involved in the controversy that Gottsched initiated over the standardisation of the German language. The Parnassus Boicus wanted both to align the German standard with Bavarian and to cultivate the scientific language.

The Allgemeine Deutsche Sprachverein (*General German Language Association*) was founded in 1885 and renamed Deutscher Sprachverein (*German Language Association*) in 1923. Its objectives were to cultivate language by purifying the language from foreign influences and the language cultivation inherent therein, through which the German language would be restored and preserved, and to strengthen the resultant linguistic and national consciousness (cf. Tereick 2009). At first,

its members had enthusiastically greeted the takeover of the National Socialists, but they later criticised the foreign vocabulary employed in National Socialist communication (e. g. "Propaganda" (*propaganda*), "Terrorakt" (*act of terrorism*). In 1940, this, in turn, was criticised by the National Socialists. Wiechers (2004, 54ff.) mentions a paper shortage brought about by the war, which, in 1943, led to the discontinuation of the journal *Muttersprache* (*Mother Tongue*), thus significantly restricting the work of the Deutscher Sprachverein. The last branch of this association was likely dissolved in 1945, although Wiechers also mentions that the sources are not entirely clear.

In 1947, in the wake of World War Two, to dissociate themselves from the objectives of the Deutscher Sprachverein, some of its members founded the Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache (*Association for the German Language*) in Germany and the Muttersprache Verein (*Mother Tongue Association*) in Austria. Both of these linguistic societies still exist today. The Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft was re-established in 2007 in Köthen as the Neue Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft (*New Fruitful Society*), and the Pegnesische Blumenorden has existed without interruption since the Baroque period.

Present

Since the second half of the 20th century, many different language-cultivation interest groups have been established (see attached list). The Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung (*German Academy for Language and Poetry*), founded in 1949, and the Verein Deutsche Sprache e. V. (*German Language Association*) are two examples of these. Whereas the Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung devotes itself to German language and literature throughout all of the German-speaking regions, focusing its language-cultivating activities primarily in the area of German literature (www.deutscheakademie.de), the Verein Deutsche Sprache e. V., founded in 1997, places its language-cultivation focus on contemporary language used in the social sphere. Its primary objective is to promote "*German as an independent cultural language*", pursuing, essentially, purism from foreign words. The association's target

audience and sphere of activity are “language enthusiasts [...] in Germany and [...] native speakers [...] abroad” (www.vds-ev.de).

Founded in 1947, the Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache is a firmly established language cultivation institution whose objective is the “cultivation and research of the German language” (www.gfds.de). It critically observes language development and issues recommendations based on scientific research. The association is a language consulting institution for contemporary German.

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Contemporary language academies, linguistic societies and language associations (selection)

Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung (*German Academy for Language and Poetry*)

<http://www.deutscheakademie.de>

founded in 1949

Based in: Darmstadt

Publications: Jahrbuch (*Yearbook*) (1953ff.), Dichtung und Sprache (*Poetry and Language*) (1984ff.)

Deutscher Sprachrat (*German Language Council*) (DAAD, GfdS, Goethe-Institut, IDS)

<http://www.deutscher-sprachrat.de>

founded in 2003

Based in: (currently) Mannheim

EFNIL – European Federation of National Institutions for Language

<http://www.efnil.org>

founded in 2003

Based in: The Hague

Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache (GfdS) (*Association for the German Language*)

Successor to the ADSV organisation (1885)

<http://www.gfds.de>

founded in 1947

Based in: Wiesbaden

Publications: Der Sprachdienst (*The Language Service*) (1957ff.),

Muttersprache (*Mother Tongue*) (1890ff.)

Goethe Institute

Successor to the Akademie zur Wissenschaftlichen Erforschung und Pflege des Deutschtums (Deutsche Akademie) (1925) (*Academy for the Scholarly Research and Fostering of Germandom/German Academy*)

<http://www.goethe.de>

founded in 1951

Based in: Munich

Neue Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft (*New Fruitful Society*)

<http://www.fruchtbringende-gesellschaft.de>

founded in 2007

Based in: Köthen

Publications: „Unsere Sprache“ – Beiträge zur Geschichte und Gegenwart der deutschen Sprache (*Our Language – Contributions to History and Present State of the German Language*) (2008ff.)

Palmbaum e. V. (Palm Tree)

<http://www.palmbaum.org>

founded in 1993

Based in: Jena

Publications: Palmbaum – Literarisches Journal aus Thüringen (*Palm Tree – Literary Journal from Thuringia*) (1993ff.)

Rat für deutsche Rechtschreibung (*Council for German Orthography*)
<http://www.rechtschreibrat.com>
founded in 2004
Based in: Mannheim

Schweizerischer Verein für die deutsche Sprache (SVDS) (*Swiss Association for the German Language*)
Successor to the *Deutschscheizerischer Sprachverein* (DSSV) (1904)
(*German-Swiss Language Association*)
<http://www.sprachverein.ch>
founded in 1994
Based in: (currently) Thalwil
Publications: Sprachspiegel (*Language Mirror*) (1945ff.)

Verein Deutsche Sprache e. V. (*German Language Association*)
<http://www.vds-ev.de>
founded in 1997
Based in: Dortmund
Publications: Sprachnachrichten (*Language News*) (2002ff.)

Verein für deutsche Rechtschreibung und Sprachpflege (*Organisation for German Spelling and Language Cultivation*)
<http://www.vrs-ev.de>
founded in 1997
Based in: Schwaig/Nuremberg
(latest changes to website in 2004)

Verein für Sprachpflege e. V. (*Language Cultivation Association*)
<http://www.deutschesprachwelt.de>
founded in 2000
Based in: Erlangen
Publications: Deutsche Sprachwelt (*German Language World*) (2000ff.)

Verein Muttersprache (*Mother Tongue Association*)

Austrian successor to the ADSV (1885)

<http://www.muttersprache.at>

founded in 1947

Based in: Vienna

Publications: Wiener Sprachblätter (*Viennese Language Pages*) (1960ff.)

Wiener Sprachgesellschaft (*Vienna Linguistic Society*)

<http://www.univie.ac.at/indogermanistik/wsg>

founded in 1947

Based in: Vienna

Publications: Die Sprache (*Language*) (1949ff.)