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Critique of language norms *(Sprachnormenkritik)* in German

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Abstract. Language norms and language standardisation processes are closely linked to language reflection and language criticism, being either linguistically described or evaluated from both academic (linguistic) and non-academic perspectives. In the 1980s, the process of language standardisation began to be investigated and described as part of a newly formed linguistic subfield – *Sprachnormenkritik* (critique of language norms). The historical perspective shows, however, that intellectual circles had started to reflect upon and criticise language norms and language standardisation processes much earlier and continue to do so to the present day. Since the beginning of the 21st century, linguists have aimed at first describing language norms and language standardisation processes and then evaluating them based on linguistic criteria. This article applies a concept of critique of language norms that spans a continuum of metalinguistic utterances ranging from cautious deliberation of alternative expressions to clearly defined positions on 'good' or 'bad' language use, including both the academic (linguistic) and non-academic perspectives. Critique of language norms is thus understood here as a reflection on language norms and language standardisation in which criteria are expressed explicitly (by more or less descriptive or evaluative metalinguistic comments), or realised implicitly.

Keywords
language reflection, language norms, language criticism (descriptive/evaluative), linguistically founded language criticism, conflicting language norms

General

Language standardisation and language criticism: Language criticism is normally based on norms – regardless of whether we are dealing with a more deliberating (descriptive) or more positioned (evaluative) form of language criticism. The language norms on which the different forms of language criticism are based are, however, not always explicitly stated. Instead, they are frequently just implied. Issues pertaining to language standardisation are thus fundamental for almost all forms of language

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criticism – and vice versa: Descriptive language criticism frequently refers back to explicitly stated or implicitly assumed language norms.

Aspects of language standardisation are highly relevant for all forms of language criticism practised by European language cultures. German is, however, is special in that a linguistic subfield of language criticism (*Sprachkritik*) has developed since the 1980s which explicitly investigates how language norms are implemented (meta-)linguistically. This subfield describes explicit and implicit forms of both institutional and actor-based language standardisation from multiple perspectives. This form of language criticism, which may be coded 'critique of language norms', has become a central topic of investigation of German language criticism since then.

In extension of the current concept, critique of language norms is understood here as a linguistic discussion about the implementation of new language norms – or the attempt to do so – and thus reflects the process of establishing language norms. The language reflection that accompanies linguistic critique of language norms covers the whole spectrum between language description and language evaluation: While the 1980s were characterised by a focus on descriptive analysation techniques, a trend of linguistic papers going beyond the purely descriptive in order to arrive at a linguistically adequate evaluation of language norms may be observed in recent years. This development has occurred both in academic and non-academic treatments of language criticism, such as criticism of newly emerging language norms (for example criticism of language change), criticism of obsolescent and archaic language use (for example criticism of stylistic norms), or criticism based on existing language norms (as voiced in spelling reforms).

The historical perspective

From a diachronic perspective, language standardisation and attempts at standardisation that are based on language criticism are a phenomenon that has emerged for German in the 17th century at the latest and that has persisted until the present day (for the 17th and late 18th century, cf. e.g. Schottelius (1663): "Ausführliche Arbeit von der Teutschen HaubtSprache" or J. H. Campe (1801): "Wörterbuch zur Erklärung und Verdeutschung der

unserer Sprache aufgedrungenen fremden Ausdrücke"; for the end of the 19th and for the 20th century, cf. G. Wustmann (1891/1966): "Allerhand Sprachdummheiten; for the 21st century: B. Sick (2004): "Der Dativ ist dem Genitiv sein Tod", W. Schneider (2008): "Speak German!: Warum Deutsch manchmal besser ist"). Standardisation from a historical perspective with reference to German is the focus of the article "Standardisierung und Sprachkritik" ("Standardisation and language criticism"). Standardisation refers to the process of changing language norms on a more general level, while the individual acts of implementation of language norms serve as the more specific regulatory instances of this process. For this reason, the article "Standardisierung und Sprachkritik" focuses on the German linguistic term *Sprachnormenkritik* (critique of language norms) and begins the historical overview in the second half of the 20th century.

In 1972, Peter von Polenz contributed the term *Sprachnormenkritik* (critique of language norms) to the linguistic discussion of language criticism. At first, von Polenz related critique of language norms only to the fields of morpho-syntax and word formation. His thoughts and ideas were influenced by the social conflicts and discussions of the 1960s and thus by the social critique of norms in general. In particular, the examination of the evaluative (judgmental) "Wörterbuch des Unmenschen" and its non-transparent assessment criteria pointed out a discrepancy between descriptive linguistics and non-academic, evaluative language criticism. For von Polenz, the championing of norms was a sociopolitical instrument for the dominance of humans over humans (von Polenz 1982: 85).

Under the influence of the linguistic-pragmatic discussions from the 1970s to the 1990s, the term *Sprachnormenkritik* (critique of language norms) was transferred from the levels of morpho-syntax and word-formation to that of language usage. In the 1980s, Rainer Wimmer developed the programmatic concept of a "linguistically motivated language criticism" for linguistics. This concept formulates a "deliberate use of language" as the primary objective of language criticism (Wimmer 1982) and requests to make assessment criteria explicit. "Linguistically motivated language criticism understands itself as a critique of language norms and tries to interfere in norm conflicts. It aims at making language norm conflicts visible" (Schwinn 1997: 40, our translation). Linguistically motivated language criticism thus recommends to make subliminal criteria transparent and to closely observe the actors involved in order to determine who

wants to establish which norms and based on which interests. Wustmann ([3]1903), for instance, indisputably assigns the verb *fragen* (to ask) to the category of weak verbs by stating that "the wrong forms for *frägt* (asks) and *frug* (he/she/it asked) have run rampant" (our translation). The Institute for the German Language (Institut für Deutsche Sprache) opposes this by raising linguistic arguments and by descriptively comparing the frequencies of word occurrences (http://hypermedia.ids-mannheim.de/call/public/fragen.ansicht?v_kat= 37&v_id=83).

Current perspective

Recently, efforts have been made in the research context of German language criticism to add evaluation to the formerly purely descriptive critique of language norms (cf. Tereick 2009; Kilian 2001; Kilian / Niehr / Schiewe 2010; Schiewe 2011; Tereick 2014; Bär 2015). Critique of language norms thus treats the reflection of norms in a descriptive and/or evaluative manner in the 21st century. It further comprises academic and non-academic forms of norm reflection.

One of many of the "100–200 year old shelf-warmers" (Dieckmann 1991: 363, our translation) of language-critical norm reflection is, for instance, the pair *anscheinend / scheinbar* (apparently / seemingly), which has pervaded all editions of Wustmann's language eccentricities since the second edition in 1892 up until the 14th edition (1966) and which is also listed in Sick (2004: 140), inter alia. The usage norms of this pair are in turn described from a linguistic, language-norm critical perspective in J. G. Schneider (2005), DUDEN ([7]2011), and Dieckmann (2012), among others. These authors formulate their evaluations resting on a linguistically comprehensible set of criteria.

Almost all types and forms of language-critical norm reflection can be subsumed under the term *critique of language norms*, whereby the language norms may refer to different linguistic aspects.

Bär (2015: 245) differentiates in a criteria matrix between I) subject of language criticism, II) quality of the subject, and III) assessment criterion:

I) Subject matter	II) Quality of the subject matter	III) Assessment criterion
1) Sound/Letter	1) Langage (Language)	1) Quantity
2) Grammar	2) Langue (Language system, abstract level)	2) Intention
3) Signifier/form	3) Parole (Language use/concrete utterance)	3) Expectation
4) Communicative pattern		4) Referent
		5) Analogy
		6) Aesthetics

(Table from Bär 2015: 245)

Gloy lists the following standardisation criteria: "(a) the constitution and preservation of a *unity of the nation* or of the language community [...] (b) *general comprehensibility* [...] (c) the *established language usage* of the common people [...] (d) the language usage of (cultural) *authorities* [...] (e) the preservation of *social distinctions* [...] (f) the *"correct" or "logical"* with respect to the *language system* (g) the *culturally or socially appropriate* [...] (h) the results of *historical development* [...] (i) the *politically feasible* [...] (k) that which can be *financed* [...] (l) the *true expression* [...] (m) the *cognitive consequences* of certain language phenomena" (Gloy 1998: 397ff.).

All standardisation attempts try to control the usage of variants by denominating the standard variant and thereby imposing it as the norm. Language norms exist due to the presence of our language and speech. They are modulated in ongoing language change. In the context of language change, various phenomena of language and communication following different normative criteria can coexist and come into conflict. These conflicts simultaneously trigger critique of language norms and mark themselves as communication effects on the level of language usage. Here, competing rules of linguistic expressions – i.e. meaning attributions in Wittgenstein's sense – come into conflict with each other. The different advocates of these variants of meaning each try to elevate their respective usage rule to the norm in social discourse.

Some examples for German linguistic or communicative items that have been evaluated as reprehensible and have been subject to critique of

language norms are: the use of the letter <ß> in German; the use of derivational suffixes such as *-bar* in *unkaputtbar* (indestructible); the word order of main clauses in causally related subordinate clauses with the sentential connective *weil* (because); expressions with different manners of use such as *Leitkultur* (dominant culture); the use of technical terms in everyday language. Normally, language criticism discusses individual usage norms that are codified in grammar books and dictionaries. For instance, in German, the standard norm prescribes the use of the genitive case after the preposition *wegen* (because of), as in *wegen des Urlaubs* (because of the holiday). However, the dative case (*wegen dem Urlaub*) has become more accepted in informal usage contexts and the use of the genitive in everyday, vernacular speech may be regarded as stylistically marked and even as pretentious.

The authorities that are being quoted in language-critical discourses in order to support the validity of assessment criteria may vary drastically: Criticism may be reflected in grammars, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, literary models, and prominent figures and institutions. Next to the language guidebooks that play a role in various professional contexts (e.g. the journalistic publications by Schneider 2008), the combinations and annotations of cases of doubt are also worth mentioning. They have been investigated thoroughly by linguistic experts (cf. "Richtiges und gutes Deutsch", "Correct and Good German" DUDEN [^{7}2011]).

Overview of terms used in this article

Language standardisation and language criticism

(The article takes into account the continuum of language observations that are characterised by cautious deliberation of alternative expressions on one end and clearly defined positions on the other. It incorporates both descriptive and evaluative reflections of language norms and standardisation in academic and non-academic contributions)

- Historical perspective: Language standardisation and language criticism (in intellectual circles: mostly evaluative)
- End of the 19th century and 20th century: Language standardisation and language criticism (in non-academic contributions: evaluative)
- Starting in the 1980s: Linguistically motivated language criticism coins the term *Sprachnormenkritik* (critique of language norms) (in linguistic contributions: descriptive)
- Since the turn of the 21st century:
  On the one hand: Critique of language norms (in non-academic contributions: evaluative)
  On the other hand: Critique of language norms (in academic contributions: first descriptive, then evaluative following linguistic criteria)

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