

Ulrich Ammon †

## The wealth of varieties of German as a challenge for language policy

Editorial comment: This is the title of a highly stimulating presentation that Ulrich Ammon gave at the Amsterdam conference of EFNIL. He could not provide a written version because he fell very ill after the conference and died on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2019. In commemoration of the internationally renowned sociolinguist Ulrich Ammon, our colleague and friend, we present here the abstract of his paper submitted for the conference.

### Abstract (English)

The paper begins with an explanation of essential concepts because terminology varies widely in the relevant literature. Languages are conceived as sets of varieties subdivided (among other possibilities) into standard and non-standard varieties, with dialects being a subset of the latter. This distinction is essential for classifying varieties as being German or another language based on the two relationships of *linguistic distance* and *roofing* (German *Überdachung*). The latter is especially needed to divide dialect continua. In the case of several standard varieties with only a small linguistic distance between them (linguistically very similar), all of them, together with all the dialects they roof, belong to the same *pluricentric language*. The terms will be specified as regards logical relationships and a possible operationalisation (for empirical research), including clarification of why standard varieties can roof non-standard varieties (especially dialects) but not other standard varieties while non-standard varieties cannot roof any varieties at all.

The wealth of variation in German poses a number of challenges for language policy, especially in relation to keeping the language together and promoting its international standing. These challenges will be explained in some detail in a short historical summary which shows the evolution of the political and geographic distribution of German today. The various – seven to ten – *centres of the language* are outlined and illustrated by maps with their prominent linguistic, demographic and political features. It is argued that each centre's specific standard variants, which make it an (autonomous) centre of the language, are fully valid and correct within their respective political realm. Furthermore, the *Variantenwörterbuch des Deutschen* (Ammon et al. (2016 [2004])) will be presented as the first comprehensive dictionary of a pluricentric language, containing the entire pluricentric

variation of German. It is based on a newly conceived dictionary structure that provides easy access to any pluricentrically relevant linguistic feature. The previously conflicting attempts at promoting German globally have been harmonised hand in hand with the evolving full acceptance of the language's pluricentricity.

The paper is based, among other sources, on the author's recent book *Die Stellung der deutschen Sprache in der Welt* [The status of the German language in the world] (Ammon 2015).

## References

- Ammon, U. et al. (eds.) (2016 [2004]): *Variantenwörterbuch des Deutschen. Die Standardsprache in Österreich, der Schweiz, Deutschland, Liechtenstein, Luxemburg, Ostbelgien und Südtirol sowie Rumänien, Namibia und Mennonitensiedlungen*. 2nd edit. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter. [First edition Berlin 2004].
- Ammon, U. (2015): *Die Stellung der deutschen Sprache in der Welt*. Berlin/Munich/Boston: De Gruyter.

### Obituary

On 3rd May 2019, the internationally renowned German sociolinguist Ulrich Ammon died. His research activities and many publications on the social relevance of the use of dialects and standard language, the national varieties of a standard language, the use of languages in international research and academic teaching, European language politics and policies and other relevant topics of sociolinguistics and the sociology of language made him an attractive partner for international projects and a highly welcome speaker at EFNIL conferences as well. He contributed three substantial and highly stimulating papers to annual conferences: in Riga 2007 (“On the dilemmas of any European language policy”), in Florence 2014 (“German and English in research and teaching at German universities”), and in Amsterdam 2018 (“Varieties of German as a challenge for language policy”). He also participated actively in the various discussions between EFNIL members in Amsterdam. Before he could complete the written version of his contribution to this conference, he passed away. We will keep this eminent scholar in good memory whom we could also consider a friend and supporter of our European language organisation and its aims.

**Bibliographical information**

This text was first published in the book:

Tanneke Schoonheim/Johan Van Hoorde (eds.) (2019): Language variation. A factor of increasing complexity and a challenge for language policy within Europe. Contributions to the EFNIL Conference 2018 in Amsterdam. Budapest: Research Institute for Linguistics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences. [250 pages.]

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