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THE POLITICS AND IDEOLOGIES OF PLURICENTRIC GERMAN IN L2 TEACHING

Abstract:

Despite a history of rigorous linguistic research on the regional variation of German as well as professional initiatives to promote German, Austrian, and Swiss Standard German as equal varieties, there is still a lack of awareness and systematic incorporation of regional varieties in L2 German teaching. This essay follows two goals: First, it reviews the development of the pluricentric approach in the discourse on L2 German teaching as well as the political and ideological preconditions that form the backdrop of this discussion. Particular emphasis will be given to institutional tri-national collaborations and the standard language ideology. Second, by drawing on sociolinguistic insights on the use and speaker attitudes of (non-)standard varieties, this contribution argues that the pluricentric focus on national standard varieties in L2 German teaching falls short in capturing the complex socioculturally situated practices of language use in both (often dialectally-oriented) everyday and (often standard-oriented) formal and official domains of language use. I argue that the pluricentric approach forms an important step in overcoming the monocentric bias of *one* correct Standard German; however, for an approach to L2 German teaching that aims at representing linguistic and cultural diversity, it is necessary to incorporate both standard and non-standard varieties into L2 German teaching.

Keywords: L2 German ♦ language variation ♦ language ideologies ♦ language politics

Introduction

Since the 1980s linguists and language experts have been working towards establishing the concept of German as a pluricentric language, which recognizes the German, Austrian, and Swiss standard varieties as equal, in the teaching of L2 German¹ (e.g., Ammon 1995; Clyne 1984; Hägi 2007; Shafer 2018a; Thomke 1986). Various institutions and representatives from the three countries have since been closely collaborating on this mission. Nevertheless, in the theory and practice of L2 German teaching, the asymmetrical representation of Germany versus Austria and Switzerland prevails. This essay explores political preconditions and ideological assumptions that underlie the pluricentric approach in L2 German teaching. An examination of the political context is relevant since the international teaching of a country's language(s) often forms part of a nation's or region's culture politics, that is, it can be more or less directly related to state affairs. However, I will follow Joseph (2006) in his expanded notion of language and politics, who argues: "we find a broader application of the political to any situation in which there is an unequal distribution of power, and where individuals' behaviour reflects the play of power, or is guided (or maybe even determined) by it" (2). In other words, in the context of this essay, the political in L2 German teaching refers to discussions and measures of language politics and planning (see also Li Wei 2013) as well as sociolinguistic dimensions that explore how language policies, language use, and language attitudes (re)produce power inequalities. The latter idea of language attitudes is closely tied to another concept that appears relevant for this discussion, namely language ideologies, which Philips (2015) relates to the above notion of politics and unequal power distribution:

The term "language ideologies" refers to people's ideas about language and speech. Such ideologies concern both what language is like and what it should be like. The use of the term ideologies, rather than more neutral terms such as culture, beliefs, attitudes, or interpretive frameworks, points to a theoretical commitment to the idea that people's views about language are shaped by political and economic interests, and by relations of domination and subordination. (557)

This paper will examine questions on how politics and language ideologies influence the theoretical discussion and incorporation of regional linguistic variation in L2 German teaching. More specifically, my aim is to, first, briefly survey relevant aspects of the current discussion on pluricentricity in L2 German teaching; second, review the institutional, political context as

¹ For L2 German, this discussion has been led primarily in the field of German as a so-called "foreign" language (*Deutsch als Fremdsprache*). In this article, I will use L2 German to refer to the teaching of German as an additional (i.e., "foreign" or second) language, while placing particular emphasis on contexts of institutionalized L2 German teaching outside the German-speaking countries and regions.

well as ideological bases of this discussion; and, finally, point towards an expanded approach of teaching linguistic variation in L2 German – an approach that not only includes both standard and non-standard varieties as well as their discursive, affective, and identity-based functions, but that also critically reflects on (standard) language ideologies and their social consequences. In other words, throughout this article, I will draw on sociolinguistic research on language politics, language attitudes, and the standard language ideology to lay out directions to further develop the discussion on regional variation and pluricentricity in L2 German teaching by transcending the focus on standard varieties.

This discussion is relevant for an approach to L2 German teaching that aims to represent and teach the “diversity of the German speaking regions” (see Demmig, Hägi, and Schweiger 2013: 11-12 for the *DACH-Prinzip*; see also Criser and Knott 2019; Tarnawska Senel 2020), include a wide range of cultural products, practices, and perspectives (ACTFL 2014), and expand frameworks based on linguistic skills with critical approaches to the connections between language and social structures (MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages 2007; Kramersch 2020). Such a teaching approach needs to critically evaluate what the “language” is that it is teaching, whose language it is, whose interests are served, and who this includes but also excludes. In other words, this paper is a call to reflect on the politics and ideologies of whose language(s) are taught. It is also for these above questions why, throughout this article, I will place emphasis on how this discussion is led from scholars in Austria and Switzerland, who seem to have taken a particular interest in these arguments that demand more equitable linguistic representations of German-speaking Europe (Shafer 2018a: 91).

The Pluricentricity Debate and L2 German Teaching

The discussion on German as a pluricentric language started in the 1960s (Schmidlin 2014: 24) and gained ground in the 1980s with Clyne’s (1984) work. Ammon’s (1995) seminal work *Die deutsche Sprache in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz. Das Problem der nationalen Varietäten* finally established the concept in German linguistics. Ever since the 1990s, a rather heated debate between proponents of German as a pluricentric language (e.g., Ammon 1995; Dollinger 2019; Muhr 1996; Schmidlin 2011; de Cillia and Ransmayr 2019) and critics, who propose pluriareality as a counter concept (e.g., Glauninger 2013; Elspaß 2005; Scheuringer 1996; Seifter and Seifter 2016), has shaped the discourse on regional variation. Around the same time, in the field of L2 German teaching, the 1990s featured unprecedented institutional collaboration among stakeholders from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland on projects to promote the linguistic and cultural diversity of the German-speaking countries (Shafer 2018a; Sorger 2010, 2013). In what follows, I will briefly discuss, first, theoretical positions on German

as a pluricentric language, second, empirical studies on national standard varieties with a focus on political as well as attitudinal and ideological questions, and third, theoretical and empirical approaches to pluricentricity in the discourse on L2 German teaching.

German as a Pluricentric Language?

German is spoken in communities all over the world and it has politically official status in Germany, Austria, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Luxembourg, parts of Belgium (East Belgium), and Italy (South Tyrol) (Ammon, Bickel, and Lenz 2016: XXXIX). Ammon (1995; see also Ammon, Bickel, and Lenz 2016: XXXIX-LXIII) argues that German is a pluricentric language with several centers, that is, countries or regions that have distinct standard varieties of German. So-called *Vollzentren* [full centers], such as Germany, Austria, and German-speaking Switzerland have codified standard varieties (e.g., dictionaries such as the *Duden*, *Österreichisches Wörterbuch* or the *Schweizer Schülerduden*) whereas *Halbzentren* [half centers], such as Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, East Belgium, and South Tyrol, or *Viertelzentren* [quarter centers] like areas in Romania, Namibia, and Mennonite communities in North and South America do not have such formal codifications (Ammon 1995: 96; Ammon, Bickel, and Lenz 2016: XXXIX). The distinct standard varieties in the centers are to be seen as equal, correct, and co-existing standard-language forms rather than – as a monocentric view suggests – deviations from one encompassing norm (Ammon, Bickel, and Lenz 2016: XLI). Ammon (1995: 2; 2004: 277) defines a standard variety as an official, state-based language which is used for public and formal communication. It is institutionalized in public authorities and their communication. This also requires that the standard variety is the language of education so that residents of a region are enabled to fully participate in public, political, and administrative life. Standard varieties are thus conceptually written and codified forms of public, official speech in contrast to non-standard varieties such as dialects (see also Kellermeier-Rehbein 2014 for challenges in the definition of standard varieties).

The first comprehensive project to collect and codify standard varieties of German on a lexical level is the 2004 *Variantenwörterbuch des Deutschen*, which is now in its second edition (Ammon, Bickel, and Lenz 2016). Codices such as dictionaries, however, are only one dimension in the construction of standard varieties. Ammon (1995: 73-82) defines several social forces, a so-called *Soziales Kräftefeld*, that co-create standard varieties in interdependent processes. They consist of (1) norm authorities, such as teachers or publishing editors, (2)

codices as well as their writers², (3) language experts such as linguists, and (4) model speakers and writers, such as journalists or authors, and their texts. The standard varieties and the prescriptive norms of their codices are spread, maintained, and enforced by nationally organized institutions (e.g., schools, national media outlets, legal and public authorities). Such national institutions, in turn, are typically characterized by their idiosyncratic institutional language, which is why standard varieties are often nationally bound.

The specific manifestations of the standard varieties, the variants, can be either specific, that is, only used in one nation, or unspecific, that is, used across national borders. Specific variants for Germany are called *Teutonismen* or *Deutschlandismen*³ (e.g., *Sahne*), for Austria, *Austriazismen* (e.g., *Obers*), and for Switzerland, *Helvetismen* (e.g. *Rahm*).⁴ Wiesinger (2006) points out that unspecific variants, which are used across national borders (e.g., *Matura* in Austria and Switzerland), by far outnumber specific variants (e.g., *Abitur* in Germany). Schmidlin (2014: 23-24) estimates that the pluricentric standard variation makes up around 5% of German, with the majority being on a phonological and lexical level, and less on a morphological, syntactic, and pragmatic level.

The pluricentric conceptualization of national standard varieties of German has, since its inception, faced critique from proponents of a so-called pluriareal approach (Glauning 2013; Elspaß 2005; Seifert and Seifert 2016). Points of critique include, for example, that the low quantity of variation between the standard varieties does not justify speaking of independent varieties (Koller 1999); that pluricentricity has a nationalist ideological bias (Scheuringer 1996) and is a merely political concept (Elspaß and Niehaus 2014: 50). The main point of pluriarealists' critique of pluricentricity, though, refers to the fact that much of the regional variation of German follows historical dialect areas, which transcend the borders of modern nation states (Elspaß and Niehaus 2014: 50; Scheuringer 1996).

The concern of equating national borders with linguistic borders is certainly justified and the significance of dialectal isoglosses on linguistic and social spheres should not be minimized.

² Schmidlin (2011: 52) points out that the codification of languages always contains gaps. De Cillia and Ransmayr (2019) argue that the codification of Austrian Standard German specifically is far from comprehensive.

³ For a discussion on the controversies on the terms *Teutonismus* and *Deutschlandismus* see Ammon (1995: 99, 319). Schmidlin (2011: 76) reports on a survey among linguists and notes that although the term *Teutonismus* raises concerns, it is widely spread and accepted.

⁴ All three words in parentheses are national standard variants for cream.

However, in defense of pluricentricity, the concept refers explicitly to standard varieties whereas pluriareal research has its roots in dialectology, focusing often on non-codified and/or non-standard variation.⁵ Moreover, several scholars (e.g., Ammon 1995; de Cillia and Ransmayr 2019; Hägi 2006; Schmidlin 2011) point out that pluricentricity does indeed take into account intra-national and transnational variation and does not propagate one norm for one entire nation. These researchers take a more conciliatory stance on the pluricentric vs. pluriareal debate by recognizing that linguistic variation on a standard and non-standard level is both national and regional and that the two approaches follow different conceptualizations of linguistic variation. The political borders between Germany, Austria, and Switzerland do have an impact on some, though certainly not all, language forms (Dollinger 2019; Schmidlin 2011). To counter the pluriareal argument that pluricentricity is a purely political and ideological concept, Dollinger (2019) takes a rather strong stance. He argues that the pluriareal position, which proclaims one standard variety – the one standard German axiom – and negates the existence and legitimacy of an independent Austrian national standard variety, is at least as political and ideological as the pluricentric approach. It puts Austria’s national sovereignty into question and ignores the fact that discussions about what constitutes “language” are always a fundamentally political issue:

When pluricentrists are accused of ideological or political bias, quite unfairly so, it is apparently forgotten that no language would have developed a standard variety without a political and language ideological dimension. The bias of the pluri-areal approach is a monocentric one that is, surprisingly, not discussed, especially since a substantial body of work has recently been carried out in a pluri-areal mindset. Is a language standard political? Yes, it is. But it is just as political to propose a Standard Austrian German as it is to promote the ONE STANDARD GERMAN AXIOM. (54, highlight in original)

Dollinger’s concerns echo Milroy and Milroy’s (1999) arguments for expanding the descriptive paradigm of linguistics with explorations of prescription, which they consider an integral part of language and its use. Apart from the arguments concerning language politics in the above quote, Dollinger (2019: 52, 62-63; see also Elspaß and Niehaus 2014) sees the pluriareal approach as a bottom-up modelling of language with less emphasis on social forces that shape

⁵ One exception forms the *Variantengrammatik des Standarddeutschen* (2018), which, as the name indicates, refers to standard varieties as found in written newspaper articles. Yet, the authors’ definition of standard in the theoretical basis of their project description does not explicitly acknowledge any national dimension of standard varieties but only a so-called areal one.

languages and varieties; it stands in contrast to the more top-down approach of pluricentricity (Hägi 2006: 42). That is, rather than only describing language, Scharloth (2005b: 94) sees pluricentric linguists also as agents in the norm creation of standard varieties.

The pluricentric versus pluriareal debate comes down to who or what is seen to create a regional linguistic variety and what specific varieties are investigated. It is important to point out that a standard variety (or multiple standard varieties) constitutes only one of many varieties of a language. Baßler and Spiekermann (2001) propose a model of regional variation of German that features different regional varieties on a continuum between dialect and standard (see Figure 1). Dialects, on the right end of the continuum, are seen as highly localized regional varieties with a small communicative radius, while the standard, on the left end of the continuum, refers to an abstract, constructed, codified variety with no regional features that is hardly ever found in natural speech. This artificial standard variety is visually disconnected from the three national standard varieties that contain national standard variants. The center of the model is made up by regional standards and regional varieties, which are also often referred to as colloquial language (*Umgangssprache*) or everyday language (*Alltagssprache*). The absence of any visual separations between varieties in the model (for instance, between dialect and regional languages) underscores the fluid transitions from one variety to another and the impossibility to clearly demarcate them.

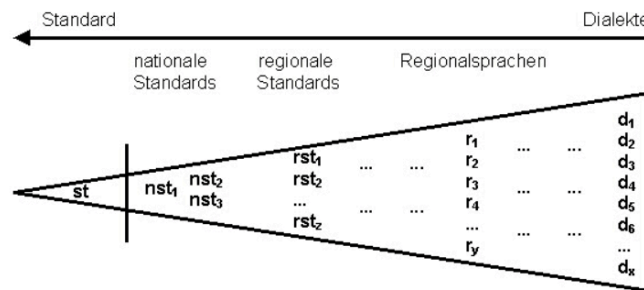


Figure 1. Baßler and Spiekermann's (2001) model of regional variation of German

What Baßler and Spiekermann's (2001) model illustrates is the spectrum of regional varieties in German that are used in different contexts of communication. Yet, it needs to be highlighted that the model represents the dialect-standard continuum that is characteristic only for large parts of Central and Southern Germany and Austria where speakers shift back and forth between more or less regionally based varieties, depending on the communicative context. Switzerland, the Austrian state Vorarlberg, and parts of Northern Germany, conversely, are characterized by a diglossic situation, that is, speakers use either dialects or the standard variety. In-between forms of regional or colloquial varieties do not exist in these regions (Spiekermann 2007).

The pluricentric approach explores the level of national standards in the above model whereas pluriareal approaches focus on regional standards, regional languages, and dialects. In other words, proponents of pluriareality often work with usage-based rather than prescriptive norm-based conceptualizations of standard varieties. Large projects on regional variation focus, for instance, on mapping everyday colloquial and regional standard varieties (*Alltagssprache*; see *Atlas Alltagssprache*⁶) or grammatical variation (see *Variantengrammatik des Standarddeutschen*⁷).

Empirical Approaches to German as a Pluricentric Language

The following section presents a number of relevant empirical studies on pluricentrism. Specifically, I focus on two key studies (de Cillia and Ransmayr 2019; Schmidlin 2011) and tie in findings of smaller projects. Schmidlin's (2011) large-scale study explored the use of pluricentric German in a large corpus of texts from different genres written in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Furthermore, she examined the awareness of pluricentricity among speakers of German in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland (n=908) via an online questionnaire. The corpus analysis found national variants in all texts, regardless of the genre: "*Variantenfreie Texte gibt es nicht.*" ["There are no variant-free texts."] (178).⁸ In terms of cognitive speaker attitudes, Schmidlin found the following: First, respondents' region of origin was related to their linguistic loyalty. Speakers from Northern and Middle German regions were more loyal toward their own national variants than speakers from Southern Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. They also tended to locate the "best" spoken and written standard variety in (Northern) Germany. Participants from Austria, however, were more skeptical of such a geographical location of a (single) German standard variety, which corresponds to the theoretical consensus among pluricentric linguists. Second, while in Germany the notion of "best" spoken standard was associated with education, in Switzerland it was related to a person's professional training as media representatives (286-287). Finally, Schmidlin

⁶ <http://www.atlas-alltagssprache.de>

⁷ <http://mediawiki.ids-mannheim.de/VarGra/index.php/Start>

⁸ More detailed analyses showed the following: First, texts from Switzerland featured more national variants than texts from Austria and Germany. Second, literary texts featured fewer variants than magazines. Third, younger literary authors from Germany used more national variants than their older colleagues whereas in Switzerland there was a reverse trend. Fourth, newspapers exhibited a decline of national variants over time. Austrian quality newspapers featured the highest density of national variants, followed by Switzerland and Germany (Schmidlin 2011: 178-179).

concluded that national borders formed a stronger pragmatic and cognitive boundary in the surveyed respondents' minds than dialectal isoglosses (297-299). In sum, the findings show that whereas national standard variants are naturally used in writing, speakers of German still largely hold a monocentric standard language ideology and mistrust the concept of national standard varieties (296, 300).

Schmidlin's study corroborates many of Scharloth's (2005a) findings on Swiss German speakers' awareness of national standard varieties of German.⁹ Scharloth found that 58% of the respondents in his study held the opinion that Swiss Standard German forms should be maintained, yet their loyalty toward their national variety was rather low. Between 60% and 70% of Swiss Standard German variants were assessed as bad or wrong. Other findings showed that 58% reported using dialect partially for writing e-mails and 75% for writing text messages; 79% even considered the standard variety as their first foreign language. In Scharloth's (2005b: 241) study, the Swiss German respondents assessed their competence in the standard variety as mediocre to bad, though they still rated their individual competence higher than that of average Swiss Germans. Hägi and Scharloth (2005), however, argue against the notion of standard German being a foreign language for Swiss German speakers and alternatively propose that the standard variety in Switzerland constitutes a so-called "secondary variety" (41-43). This means, for instance, that speakers have a native receptive competence in the standard variety but they may often find their productive (spoken) competence insufficient. As a result, the secondary language is associated more so with functionality, formality, distance, and coldness whereas the primary language, the dialect, is associated with local and national identity among Swiss speakers of German (42).

De Cillia and Ransmayr (2019) conducted a comprehensive study on the status of Austrian (Standard) German¹⁰ in Austrian schools. They analyzed policy documents, teacher education curricula, and state-approved teaching materials. Furthermore, they collected data among teachers of German and pupils in 56 schools across the country via a questionnaire (teachers:

⁹ The study had two parts: The questionnaire in part one had 98 participants and the subjective evaluation test in part two had 50 respondents. The author does not list any demographic details of the study participants.

¹⁰ While Austrian German (*Österreichisches Deutsch*) is commonly used by linguists to denote the Austrian standard variety, de Cillia and Ransmayr's study found that most of their respondents understood the term as referring to all varieties spoken in Austria, including non-standard varieties. For the sake of clarity, I will use the term Austrian Standard German to refer specifically to the standard variety.

n=164; students: n=1,253), interviews, group discussions, and classroom observations, focusing on language use and attitudes towards linguistic variation in German. Among other things, they found: First, there was no systematic incorporation of linguistic variation in the policy documents or teaching materials, nor was it part of teacher education curricula (73-87). Second, both teachers and pupils shared an intuitive understanding of an independent Austrian standard variety. However, many teachers were not explicitly aware of its existence and specific norms. They also tended to correct Austrian standard variants significantly more often than variants from Germany (122-145). Teachers and pupils reported ambivalent attitudes on whether Standard German from Germany or Austria was more correct, which, the authors argue, speaks to their linguistic insecurity and a linguistic complex of inferiority (146, 162, 225). The participants also reported that they would adapt their Austrian varieties to German Standard German in conversations with speakers from Germany, which, for the authors, indicated a low linguistic loyalty (163). Third, the authors found a broad spectrum of observed and reported use of varieties (standard, colloquial, dialects) in the classroom and beyond. In class, teachers used non-standard varieties for organizational, personal, and emotional matters and the standard variety for instructions and lectures (200-201). Outside of the classroom, both teachers and pupils reported using colloquial and dialectal varieties. For instance, only 3-8% of teachers and 8-10% of pupils use the standard variety with colleagues, friends, partners, and family (201-211). Fourth, teachers tended to associate German from Germany more so with “correct”, “educated”, and “direct” (*korrekt, gebildet, direkt*) whereas German from Austria was seen as more “likable”, “intimate”, “comfortable”, “melodic”, “soft”, and “natural” (*sympathisch, vertraut, gemütlich, melodisch, weich, natürlich*), and German from Switzerland as more “slow” and “foreign” (*langsam, fremd*) as well as more “sloppy”, “uneducated”, and “impolite” (*schlampig, ungebildet, unhöflich*) (154). To highlight the at times very emotional speaker attitudes on different German varieties, one teacher from Styria reports on her teaching experience abroad:

Und da war ich auf der Suche nach ah österreichischen Hörtexten [...], aber dieses eine [bundesdeutsche, Anm.] Hörbuch, was i do am Beginn ghört hob, des hot ma den Magen umgedreht, muaß i gonz ehrlich sogn [...] mich ärgert das schon, wenn am/wenn i im Ausland bin, und das österreichische oder meine Standardvariante ... als charmanter Dialekt abgetan wird, das (mag) ich nicht.

[And then I was looking for ehm Austrian audio texts [...], but this one [Federal German, note] audio book, which I listened to in the beginning, it really turned my stomach, I have to honestly admit [...] I really am annoyed when ehm/when I am abroad, and the Austrian or my standard variety ... is dismissed as charming dialect, I don't (like) that.]

(de Cillia and Ransmayr 2019: 198, my translation)

In brief, de Cillia and Ransmayr's (2019) study highlights the lack of awareness of the status and norms of the language of education in Austria among the teachers as norm authorities, who are supposed to enforce Austrian Standard German, as well as among their students. Furthermore, the results point to the key role that the language takes for speakers' identities and hence also for Austrian national identities (see also Wodak et al. 2009), which to date is not reflected in educational policies and frameworks in Austria. The authors call for raising awareness of German linguistic variation (both on a standard and non-standard level) and teaching a reflective approach to dealing with both internal and external multilingualism and the norms of different social contexts.

Similar to the above findings on the usage of regional varieties, Soukup (2015, 2016) and Winkler (2015) found that non-standard varieties were commonly used in formal, official situations, that is to say in situations in which one would typically expect the Austrian standard variety. Soukup (2015, 2016) analyzed political discussions on Austrian national television, where she found a considerable number of shifts to non-standard, dialect variants. Her results demonstrated that the dialect shifts served strategic, rhetoric purposes, such as indexing negative social attitudes (Soukup 2016: 159-160). Further results included that speakers of Austrian Standard German were perceived as more educated, serious, industrious, intelligent, competent, and smart but also as more arrogant whereas speakers of dialect were perceived as more natural, relaxed, honest, emotional, having more sense of humor, but also as less refined (Soukup 2015: 72; 2016: 166). Winkler (2015) analyzed radio interviews with Austrian celebrities. She found that the interlocutors used non-standard varieties to create intimacy, informality, and emotionality whereas the standard variety was used for objective topics. The shifts on the dialect-standard continuum had an important function in steering the conversation. In sum, the results of these studies highlight that even highly formal settings in schools or national media broadcasts feature non-standard varieties, which speakers consciously use for strategic discursive purposes that add an additional layer of meaning.

To conclude this section, the review of several central studies on national standard varieties in Austria and Switzerland showed that although they are used, speakers demonstrate insecurities and a low loyalty toward their national standard varieties. Monocentric views that favor the national standard variety from Germany prevail. Language attitudes of speakers of German indicate that in Austria and particularly in Switzerland, non-standard varieties constitute a central factor in national identities. While in Switzerland, dialects do not carry negative social associations, in Austria, dialects are often associated with less education and competence, and

in Germany, they are often related to socioeconomically disadvantaged groups and the countryside (Baßler and Spiekermann 2001). Speakers of German use a broad repertoire of non-standard and standard varieties in both informal and even formal settings (for Germany see also Lameli 2004: 19). While linguistic insecurity is common among most speakers of the non-dominant standard varieties of German, trained speakers often consciously choose their varieties for rhetoric and discursive purposes. Speech free of regional accents is a myth (Maitz and Elspaß 2013), even on the standard level.

Pluricentricity in L2 German Teaching

Although the discussion on regional variation has been going on since the 1980s, there is yet only a handful of research on its application in L2 German teaching. Some publications call for a systematic integration of standard varieties (Demmig, Hägi, and Schweiger 2013; Hägi 2006, 2007; 2014, 2015; Shafer 2018a) or also non-standard varieties (Baßler and Spiekermann 2001; Ruck 2017; Spiekermann 2007; Studer 2002) into L2 German curricula. Empirical or other forms of data-driven research, however, remain rare. In a review of handbooks, introductory textbooks, and the main journals in L2 German, Shafer (2018a: 76-86) concludes that many publications touch upon regional variation only punctually and that it is often constructed as a problem rather than a natural, let alone a positive, phenomenon. In what follows, I will summarize some of the most central empirical studies on pluricentricity in L2 German teaching (for a comprehensive review, see Shafer 2018a).

Hägi's (2006) study was one of the first comprehensive investigations of pluricentricity in L2 German teaching. She analyzed the incorporation of the pluricentric approach in L2 German textbooks and materials. The results of her study indicated that there was no clear linguistic concept in the presentation of national varieties, which was often only superficial and at times incorrect (see also van Kerckvoorde 2012 for U.S. textbooks). Materials that prepared learners for the pluricentric standardized proficiency exam *Zertifikat Deutsch* (now *Zertifikat B1*) featured national standard variants more so than materials that were not explicitly pluricentric. This observation demonstrates the backwash effect of proficiency tests on the design and production of teaching materials and, consequently, curricula. Advanced-level (B2/C1) materials, for which there are only few pluricentric proficiency exams (the less-commonly used *ÖSD* exams), hardly feature any national varieties. Hägi observes little emphasis on the specific functions and impacts of national variants and argues that, if they are dealt with, it is primarily for purposes of political correctness (227). She sees some of the reasons for this tendency in the lack of awareness and interest on behalf of stakeholders based in Germany, who, as they represent the financially most important market for teaching materials, determine the supply

and demand. Often, textbooks that feature national varieties are considered as too complex and instructors show a high level of insecurities. This, Hägi argues, may also have to do with the lack of academic training that many language instructors receive.¹¹ In brief, Hägi's (2006) findings resemble Schmidlin's (2011: 80) point that the variety with the most speakers dominates the publishing industry, tends to monopolize the codification of the standard variety, and controls L2 teaching.

Ransmayr (2006) collected attitudes on Austrian Standard German among more than 900 instructors and students of German in the UK, France, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. She found that the majority of respondents held the opinion that German students at universities should learn solely German Standard German. Only a minority opted for an inclusion of different varieties; there was more awareness of Austrian Standard German in the Czech Republic and Hungary. Ransmayr (2006) further reported that students were often discouraged from longer sojourns in Austria in order to not be exposed to so-called incorrect German. Austrian standard variants were likely to be marked as incorrect on exams and instructors from Germany tended to classify these standard variants as dialect. Lastly, some Austrian instructors even reported that their native-speaker status and thus their teaching qualification was questioned (290-295). Ransmayr summarizes: "*Das österreichische Deutsch ist in der Auslandsgermanistik wegen seiner Einstufung als Nonstandardvarietät krass unterrepräsentiert. Es gilt als dialektal, charmant, aber nicht korrekt.* [Austrian [Standard] German is strikingly underrepresented in international German Studies programs due to its categorization as a non-standard variety. It is seen as dialectal, charming, yet not correct.]" (Ransmayr 2007: 9).

The interest in pluricentricity in L2 German teaching in the early 2000s led to the publication of the 2007 issue of the journal *Fremdsprache Deutsch* on pluricentricity. After this initial wave of research and its pedagogical applications, interest in pluricentric variation in the field seems to have faded. That said, the question whether materials and attitudes on linguistic variation in L2 German teaching have changed since, remains open. The most recent study is Shafer (2018a), who explored whether phonological variation of national standard varieties would cause comprehension problems among elementary-level (A2) learners of German via an online

¹¹ Although the field of L2 German teaching is becoming more and more professionalized, many instructors do not have any postsecondary training in this area. There is no comprehensive overview of how regional variation is represented in curricula of DaF/DaZ programs in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The *DACHL-Gremium* of the IDV is currently collecting data on this issue but, at the time of writing, there are no data available yet.

survey with audio comprehension tasks (n=375). She found no evidence that the usage of national standard variants caused any difficulties in comprehension. In other words, learners understood German Standard German speakers just as well as Austrian and Swiss Standard German speakers. What needs to be pointed out is that the standard language audio recordings featured conceptually written speech with no regional or national lexical variants.

Elspaß (2010: 422) highlights that L2 German teaching places an emphasis on written language and a form of standard speech in textbooks that, in reality, does not exist. While most researchers working on pluricentricity in L2 German teaching do point to the importance of including non-standard varieties, some demand their inclusion more explicitly (Ruck 2017; Spiekermann 2007; Studer 2002). Baßler and Spiekermann (2001) collected attitudes among teachers and learners of German at a language school in Freiburg im Breisgau (Germany), an area where Alemannic dialects are spoken. They found that learners (more so than their teachers) did consider being able to understand dialects an important learning goal. Based on these findings, Studer (2002) initiated the discussion on integrating dialects into L2 German teaching by proposing a model of a so-called perceptive tolerance (*Wahrnehmungstoleranz*), however, to date there are only few further developments or coherent applications of this model. In Ruck (2017), I argued that the goals of proficiency-based (e.g., standardized frameworks such as the CEFR or the ACTFL World-Readiness Standards) as well as discursive approaches to L2 instruction (e.g., literacy (Kern 2000), multiliteracies (Paesani, Willis Allen and Dupuy 2015; Cope and Kalantzis 2009), or a symbolic competence (Kramersch 2011)) can only be attained if they attend to sociolinguistically realistic representations of language use. I proposed a sequence of activities to heighten learners' *Wahrnehmungstoleranz* of regional nonstandard varieties with the example of an Austrian TV series. The activities guide learners to both notice linguistic differences between the regional nonstandard and standard varieties as well as analyze their (meta)discursive functions and social indexicalities.

To sum up, the initial interest in pluricentricity in L2 German teaching in the early 2000s has achieved some small successes, yet, twenty years later there are still no coherent curricular models on incorporating both, national standard as well as non-standard varieties into L2 German teaching. Shafer (2018a) sums up the lack of commitment to promoting regional varieties in the field:

Während eine plurizentrisch-plurinationale Minderheit die Plurizentrik des Deutschen als Vielfalt, Diversität, Reichtum valorisiert und propagiert, assoziiert eine schweigsame monozentrisch orientierte Mehrheit damit salopp gesagt Unordnung, Ländlichkeit und Luxusprobleme.

[While a pluricentric-plurinational minority values and propagates the pluricentricity of German as variety, diversity, and richness, a silent, monocentrically-oriented majority associates it with, to say it crudely, disorder, the countryside, and luxury problems.]
(54)

Despite the many demands for a less monocentric representation of the German language in L2 teaching, regional varieties still face an image problem and only slowly find their way into materials and curricula.

Politics and Ideologies of Pluricentricity in L2 German Teaching

The Politics of Pluricentricity in L2 German Teaching

In what follows, I will discuss several political and ideological conditions that have been impeding a successful incorporation of either regional standard or non-standard varieties in L2 German teaching. I will first examine the institutional and political context in which the discussion on pluricentricity in L2 German teaching has been held in recent history and, second, the politics of power imbalances in the context of German pluricentricity.

The international collaboration to foster linguistic and cultural diversity of German-speaking Europe was substantially shaped by the language political initiatives of the International German Teacher Association (*Internationaler Deutschlehrerinnen- und Deutschlehrerverband, IDV*), which was founded in 1968. The teaching of German internationally at the time followed the respective political orientations of either the Federal Republic of Germany (*BRD*) or the German Democratic Republic (*DDR*) (Sorger 2010). Austria and Switzerland, if mentioned at all, found their representation in teaching materials as clichéd vacation destinations (Hägi 2015: 112; Shafer 2018a: 58). Within the geopolitical context at the time, the IDV took an important role as a mediator between the *BRD* and the *DDR* (Sorger 2010: 426). In 1988, a group of representatives from the *BRD*, *DDR*, Austria, and Switzerland conjoined in a historic meeting in Munich with the aim to discuss methods of the teaching of culture (“*Landeskunde*”¹²), as well as teaching materials and issues of teacher education and training. One of the group’s most

¹² The term *Landeskunde*, though anything but controversial, continues to be used in the professional and academic discourse on teaching culture in L2 German. Altmayer (2013: 20-21), who has considerably shaped the discourse on cultural learning from a constructivist, discursive, cultural studies (*kulturwissenschaftliche*) perspective, calls for overcoming the notion *Landeskunde* in favor of concepts of cultural learning (*kulturelles Lernen, kulturbezogenes Lernen*).

impactful publications were the 1990 *ABCD-Thesen*¹³ (1990), a collection of methodological and pedagogic-didactic principles for the teaching of “*Landeskunde*” within an intercultural framework. One of the core political demands of the theses was to represent the linguistic and cultural diversity of all German-speaking countries. The theses were further developed in the *DACH* concept and later on the *DACH-Prinzip* (Demmig, Hägi, and Schweiger 2013: 11-12), which, in its latest definition refers to a general, encompassing principle that embraces plurality, diversity, and context-specificity (Shafer et al. 2017; Shafer 2018b: 113; see also the contributions in Shafer, Middeke, Hägi-Mead and Schweiger 2020).¹⁴ Krumm (2020) points out the language political nature of the *DACH-Prinzip* and summarizes both advantages and disadvantages of the nationally and regionally oriented basis of the institutions that shape and implement the concept. Several of the demands in the *ABCD Thesen* and *DACH* concept found their application in L2 German teaching on a political and institutional level as well as in teacher education and material production in the 1990s, however less so in the scholarly discourse and research (Shafer 2018a: 59).

The geopolitical changes after the fall of the Iron Curtain led to a growing demand of L2 German teaching in Central, East, and Southeast Europe and concomitantly to increasing language political initiatives on behalf of Germany and Austria (Sorger 2010: 178). During the 1990s, most of today’s key L2 German institutions in Austria – including the divisions for L2 German at the universities of Vienna and Graz – were founded, which considerably strengthened Austrian Standard German internationally (Schmidlin 2011: 98; Sorger 2013: 34). Switzerland, conversely, has never actively promoted language politics internationally but rather focuses on international culture politics and serves as a cooperation partner in language agendas (Hägi 2006: 23-24; Hägi 2015: 119). The 1990s saw a peak in tri-national institutional collaboration on projects to promote linguistic and cultural diversity of German-speaking Europe which, however, started to abate in the 2000s. In 2007, the *IDV* initiated the creation of a *DACHL* task force (*DACHL Arbeitsgruppe*, since 2018 *DACHL-Gremium*) with the purpose to further consolidate the *DACH* agenda in L2 German teaching (Shafer 2018a: 63-69).

¹³ The acronym *ABCD* in the *ABCD-Thesen zur Rolle der Landeskunde im Deutschunterricht* stands for Austria (A), *BRD* (B), Swiss (Helvetic) Confederation (C), and *DDR* (D). The subsequent development, the *DACH* concept, refers to Germany (D), Austria (A) and Switzerland (CH).

¹⁴ Shafer (2018b) points out that even though *DACH* as a principle has been widely accepted in the professional discourse, the concept still lacks theoretical foundation. However, this critique does not only refer to the *DACH-Prinzip* alone but also the overall lack of a theoretical foundation for current concepts of a so-called “*Landeskunde*” (Altmayer 2013).

As the review of research on pluricentricity in L2 German teaching has demonstrated, the application of the concept has been slow. Sorger (2013) explains this with the “handicap” (33) of having L2 German agendas politically decentralized in intermediary institutions in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Many – but not all¹⁵ – of these institutions are associations that are officially politically neutral but partially state-funded (e.g. *Goethe Institut*, *DAAD* in Germany; *Österreich Institut*, *KulturKontakt*, *Kultur und Sprache*, *Österreich Kooperation*¹⁶, *Österreichisches Sprachdiplom Deutsch* in Austria; *Pro Helvetia and Präsenz Schweiz* in Switzerland). While the institutions based in Germany are very active in promoting L2 German instruction on an international level, Austrian institutions are particularly fragmented and split as intermediary institutions across a number of different ministries. Switzerland, conversely, presents itself as a multilingual country and, so far, does not actively promote any German language politics abroad. This situation, Hägi (2015: 118-119) argues, leaves a highly complex collaboration among stakeholders in the three countries. Though many of these institutions actively shape and promote pluricentrism and the *DACH-Prinzip*, these principles constitute a particular focus for Austrian institutions (Sorger 2013: 34). For example, the Austrian Language Diploma (*ÖSD*) is the only international German proficiency exam that consistently incorporates the pluricentric approach. The pluricentric *Zertifikat Deutsch B1* proficiency exam that was developed tri-nationally (*Goethe Institut, telc, ÖSD, University of Fribourg*) in 1999, is celebrated as one of the key achievements in the collaboration to incorporate the national standard varieties into L2 instruction, not at least because of its considerable backwash effect on the production of more pluricentric teaching materials (Hägi 2006: 227). Despite the importance of this achievement, one may wonder why the B1 proficiency level still forms an outlier, what the rationale is to keep exams for all other levels monocentric, and make an exception particularly for this specific level. Without any solid theoretical and empirical justification for this question, the pluricentric B1 exam seems more a relic of a punctual attempt

¹⁵ The *Österreich Institut* is a nationally owned limited liability company, the *Österreichisches Sprachdiplom Deutsch (ÖSD)* is a self-funded non-profit association that was founded in cooperation with several government agencies, *Pro Helvetia* is a foundation, *Präsenz Schweiz* is an organization of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. The *Schweizerische Konferenz der kantonalen Erziehungsdirektoren (EDK)* cooperates with Germany and Austria in matters of (German language) education.

¹⁶ The *Österreich Kooperation* is now defunct and the *Österreichisch Akademischer Austauschdienst (ÖAD)* – Austria’s pendant to the *DAAD* – was tasked with continuing the agendas.

of transformation and an institutional add-on of political correctness, rather than a full commitment to pluricentrism and the *DACH-Prinzip*.

Institutions based in Germany, whether they are directly or indirectly state-funded, dominate the field of L2 German teaching (Hägi 2015: 118). This, with the country's geopolitical and economic status, does not come as a surprise. For Germany, L2 German agendas seem to be a well-funded part of the soft power of the country's international culture politics. While there are initiatives of international collaboration, such as the *IDV's DACHL-Gremium*, they strongly depend on financial contributions from nationally organized political and intermediary institutions. The minimal language political and thus also financial involvement on behalf of Austria and Switzerland leaves it up to professional organizations and scholars to demand more equal representation of German-speaking countries under the premise of pluricentrism and the *DACH-Prinzip* (Sorger 2013: 32-35). The dependency on national political funding leaves the issue of whose language should be represented a matter of national or at least nation-based interests. Contrary to some pluriareal linguists' critique (e.g., Scheuringer 1996), I highlight these nation-based aspects of language as an observation rather than an ideological accusation. It is a given that languages are shaped, maintained, and spread via institutions that are nationally organized and which may serve national political interests. These nation-based political contexts are one of many factors of what constitutes language. As I will point out in the following part, the pluricentric nation-based focus on standard varieties, however, perpetuates language ideologies which themselves hinder the central demand for more equality and diversity in L2 studies.

Standard Language Ideologies and Pluricentricity in L2 German Teaching

This section takes a closer look at a common ideology that underlies pluricentricity and language teaching in general. I will argue that this ideology, a standard language ideology, contributes to the little attention that has been given to non-standard varieties in the discourse on L2 German teaching. Language ideologies in general refer not only to language but also to associations with their speakers, their social categories, and social activities (Philips 2015: 557-563). Some of the most widely held ideologies are the one-nation one-language ideology (Philips 2015: 564) and the standard language ideology (Milroy 2001; Milroy and Milroy 1999). Garley (2019) argues that, for the German language, these ideologies interact in what he calls a "standard language ideology complex" (101).

The standard language ideology, according to Milroy (2001), is an expression of a "firm belief in correctness" and the "common sense that some forms are right and others wrong" (535). This

necessitates accepting that native speakers do not possess a language, that native speaker intuition has no meaning, that grammar is not shaped by the speakers of a language but it is rather defined in books and schools where “real” language learning occurs (Milroy 2001: 537). The idea of a “a clearly delimited, perfectly uniform and perfectly stable variety” (Milroy 2001: 543) is a socio-political imposition that disregards the natural variability of language. Such over-simplified views of what language is reduce it to what is considered correct in codices and what is applied in written language in public and formal situations. The act of smoothing out variability and creating unity is most successful for written language but less for speech (Milroy 2001: 531-535; Milroy and Milroy 1999: 44-45). Written language is associated with status, prestige, and education. Its norms are also commonly used to evaluate spoken language. As a result, many people believe that writing is more difficult, more important, yet even superior to speech (Milroy and Milroy 1999: 46-55). Through its institutionalization, the standard variety becomes the legitimate form of language and deviations from it become, in the popular mind, illegitimate (Milroy 2001: 547). In language teaching, the representation of supposedly authentic speech in audio texts and videos many times adheres to the norms of the (written) standard varieties. This constructs a distorted representation of spoken language, which is naturally characterized by variability, and, in the case of German, common usage of non-standard variants.

For pluricentric languages such as German, I see the standard language ideology working on two levels. First, from a monocentric perspective, it favors the notion of *one* rather than multiple standard varieties of a language. The preferred variety typically corresponds to the dominant variety, in this case German Standard German (Ammon 1995: 484-499) whereas the non-dominant varieties, Austrian and Swiss Standard German, are often perceived as dialects and deviations from the one “real” norm. Second, from a pluricentric perspective, which demands that all standard varieties are to be taken as equal, the standard language ideology creates a hierarchy between standard and non-standard varieties, which, as the aforementioned reviewed research has pointed out, make up a considerable part of everyday communication and constitute an integral part of speakers’ identities (e.g., Baßler and Spiekermann’s 2001; de Cillia and Ransmayr 2019; Scharloth 2005a; Hägi and Scharloth 2005; Soukup 2015, 2016; Winkler 2015). While in Austria, both standard and non-standard varieties contribute to speakers’ construction of national identities (Wodak et al. 2009), in Switzerland it is primarily dialects that fulfill this function (Hägi 2015: 122).

The standard language ideology is powerful because of the associations that standard varieties carry: They are politically official varieties, they are institutionalized, there are codices that define them as correct, they are the language of education and supposedly of the educated, they

are considered to be the legitimate form of language use, they have social value; in Bourdieu's (1983) terms, they are a cultural capital that can be transformed into economic capital. In other words, standard varieties carry prestige and economic value. Yet more specifically, it is not the language itself that carries the prestige but rather its speakers (Milroy 2001: 532). From this point of view, the pluricentric approach is a demand to have the legitimacy and prestige of speakers of Austrian and Swiss standard German recognized. As the previous sections have demonstrated, the standard varieties are often associated with desirable social qualities such as education, competence, and economic success. At the same time, though, the sole focus on national standard varieties perpetuates attitudes that exclude all those speakers and situations that do not commonly employ the standard varieties. A reduction to a prescriptive linguistic standard runs the risk of reproducing social hierarchies and separating between those who do and those who do not follow the norm. Within this paradigm, it is no wonder that dialects and their speakers are exoticized in L2 German teaching materials since a norm-based approach constructs them as, in a literal sense, abnormal, as not following the norm. The representation of German-speaking Europe has become more varied with the inclusion of Austrian and Swiss standard German speakers in L2 German teaching, but it is still only partially diverse and inclusive. In other words, the focus of pluricentricity on national standard varieties in L2 German teaching reproduces a standard language ideology and thereby excludes speakers of non-standard varieties as well as conceptually oral communication in informal and personal situations.

More Than Standard: Theoretical and Pedagogical Implications

In this last section I will provide a number of implications from the discussions on the politics and ideologies of pluricentricity for L2 German teaching. I first present theoretical conclusions and then discuss pedagogical considerations on the inclusion of regional varieties in L2 German teaching.

Germany's engagement and financial investment in language politics on an international level is high in comparison with Austria and Switzerland, who seem either unable or unwilling to set more initiatives. This creates imbalanced representations of the German language and its speakers in L2 teaching. Language experts have a low realistic impact on effecting change on such national politics and depend on the funding of national intermediary institutions for many projects. They revert to professional and theoretical arguments in order to counteract these national political imbalances (Sorger 2013). This is done, for example, through the theoretical concept of pluricentricity (Ammon 1995) and the *DACH-Prinzip* (Demmig, Hägi, and Schweiger 2013; Shafer 2020), on whose basis they demand more consistent and equal

treatment of the three national standard varieties of German in L2 teaching (see also Hägi 2007, 2015). This demand is a pivotal claim for legitimacy, to not have one's own language labelled as incorrect or wrong, to have one's language represented and valued. As such it is an important demand. However, the pluricentric focus on national standard varieties falls short in capturing the sociolinguistic complexities of language use. Representing standard varieties typically means representing the communicative habits of members of the urban, educated elite; non-standard varieties – be they historical regional dialects or more recent multilingual ethnic and social varieties – and their speakers remain marginalized.¹⁷ The demand to include national standard varieties in L2 German instruction may appeal to funding agencies that implicitly or explicitly bolster national interests. However, pluricentricity reproduces a standard language ideology (Milroy 2001; Milroy and Milroy 1999) and it plays into language attitudes that link non-standard varieties with negative social attitudes such as lower education and lower socioeconomic status (e.g., Baßler and Spiekermann 2001; de Cillia and Ransmayr 2019: 154; Soukup 2016: 166). Such attitudes are more prevalent in Germany than in Austria or Switzerland, where regional varieties more commonly form integral parts of speakers' identities. A focus on only standard varieties excludes personal situations of intimacy, solidarity, and cooperation, which is when non-standard varieties find their main usage. It thus excludes learners from participating in some of the affectively perhaps most important situations of language use. It also perpetuates representations of a socioeconomically privileged urban class, thereby contributing to what Block (2015) calls a “social class *erasure*, as social class has tended to receive little or no attention in publications that deal with issues around identity and social life” (p. 2, highlight in original). In other words, pluricentrism as a language political demand for inclusion also creates exclusion and only partially lives up to the *DACH-Prinzip's* core value of recognizing the diversity of the German-speaking world (Demmig, Hägi, and Schweiger 2013: 11). It addresses only a part of the linguistic diversity of German through its focus on conceptually written and formal, codified language.

Calls for greater diversity in L2 German materials and curricula have increased in recent years (Criser and Knott 2019; Döll, Fröhlich, and Hägi 2015; Ruck Forthcoming; see also the contributions in Criser and Malakaj 2020 for German Studies).¹⁸ While the linguistic

¹⁷ Wiese (2015) highlights the marginalizations in the recognition of what is seen to be a “legitimate” German dialect in the public discourse. Regional dialects that have developed on the German-speaking territories are accepted – and celebrated – as important cultural heritage while newer, urban, multilingual dialects such as *Kiezdeutsch* are not due to their speakers' stigmatized ethnic identities.

¹⁸ Scholars working on German as a Second Language (*Deutsch als Zweitsprache*) often follow critical research agendas that focuses on postcolonial approaches to critique hegemonic structures and societal

heterogeneity of multilinguals in German-speaking regions has gained traction in L2 teaching (e.g., the contributions in *Fremdsprache Deutsch* 50/2014; The Eaton Group 2019), the notion of the German language norm largely remains characterized by an unquestioned homogeneity. In this article, I have argued for the integration of non-standard varieties into L2 German teaching by placing particular emphasis on historical regional non-standard varieties. Yet, it is important to note that this call should be seen as part of a larger move towards more sociocultural and sociolinguistic inclusion and diversity:

Given the inextricable relationship between language and culture, the fields of language studies are well-positioned to introduce transcultural perspectives and encourage students to rethink issues of ability, age, citizenship, class, ethnicity, economic status, gender, gender identity, nationality, race, religion, and sexual orientation because these identity markers and systems of oppression are imbedded in language. (Tarnawska Senel 2020: 66)

In what follows, I will discuss a number of pedagogical implications that can complement the skills and competence-based learning goals, which many language programs follow, with a critical approach to questions of norm, power, and social inequality. Such questions resonate with critiques of the marketization of language skills (Gray and Block 2012) and pedagogical models that seek to balance skills-based language education with reflective and critical thinking (Levine 2020). These approaches highlight the utmost importance for educational institutions to support their learners in looking beyond the surface of language and social structures (see also Cope and Kalantzis 2009). Language should be seen as “as political action in a situational and cultural context” (Kramsch 2020: 473). This includes social, political, historical, and ideological aspects of contexts within which a language is used as well as the social and political power of the indexicalities of language (i.e., variety, style, code, register) choices. Linguistic variation in L2 teaching should form not only the basis of linguistic skill acquisition but also a continuous content that is connected to functional, emotional, identity-based, social, historical, and political aspects of language and culture. In sum, I want to encourage a flexible way of thinking about norms in L2 teaching rather than trying to pronounce generalizable suggestions for curricular change. Curricular decisions will always have to be evaluated within their local

power imbalances. Such critical approaches, however, are still less common for German as a Foreign Language (*Deutsch als Fremdsprache*) teaching internationally, with the exception on discussions on L2 German curricula in higher education in North America (e.g., Criser and Malakaj 2020 and the work of the Diversity, Decolonization, and the German Curriculum Committee: <https://diversityingermancurriculum.weebly.com/ddgc-blog>).

social, cultural, economic, and political contexts and programmatic, instructors', and learners' goals (Levine 2020: 84-85).

To determine which varieties should be taught when, how, by whom, and for which specific goals remains a challenge for curriculum planners and instructors with limited time and resources. It is thus not surprising that they may perceive additional and perhaps unfamiliar contents as a burden (Hägi 2006: 228-229). That said, some regions and varieties of German may be more or less relevant than others for a particular language program, based on factors such as exchange programs or institutional collaborations. Shafer (2020) advocates a progressive model of receptive variety competence in line with the proficiency levels of the CEFR and with a focus on listening, yet also points to the importance of considering local curricular needs. She suggests incorporating national standard varieties at the A1 and A2 levels, expanding them with regional standards at the A2/B1 levels, introducing regional and colloquial non-standard varieties at the B1/B2 levels, and exposing learners to dialects at the B2/C1 levels. While such a step-by-step model can be useful for language programs with high consistency and retention among the student population, I would add recurring activities that raise awareness for sociolinguistic variation from the early stages on. For example, discussions on where German is spoken, which are common to elementary-level courses, can complement the political maps and normative presentations of language in the textbook with linguistic maps such as the *Atlas Alltagssprache*¹⁹ or the *Varietengrammatik des Deutschen*²⁰. A subsequent reflection assignment²¹ can attend to analyses of regional and social variation in learners' languages and, specifically, questions on what social associations different linguistic variants carry, what the reasons for these associations may be, what consequences this may have for their speakers, and how negative consequences might be mitigated. Such activities can encourage learners' critical thinking about the discrepancy between official norms as presented in textbooks versus actual language use. Learners should receive opportunities to discuss issues of standard and non-standard varieties, dominant and non-dominant varieties, prescription and description of language use from their own experiences. Activities that encourage a critical

¹⁹ <https://www.atlas-alltagssprache.de/>

²⁰ <http://www.variantengrammatik.net/>

²¹ At elementary levels, students won't be able to express complex reflections like these in the target language. I therefore recommend such reflection assignments in a language the learners feel comfortable with and which the instructors can also understand. In line with models of a flipped classroom, such reflections can be written at home as writing assignments or interactive discussion posts and serve as preparation for in-class discussions.

engagement with socially constructed norms such as linguistic norms may empower those students who speak marginalized languages or varieties while it may lead speakers of advantaged languages and varieties to interrogate their privilege (see also Tarnawska Senel 2020: 77). Such an approach can open the door to uncover intersectional social identities and inequalities and how they are constructed through and connected with language.

Any discussion about representations of language requires thinking about texts. Proponents of a multiliteracies approach (Paesani, Willis Allen and Dupuy 2015) remind us of the centrality of texts for L2 instruction. Texts serve as models not only for language use in different genres; as cultural products, they also allow for insight into cultural practices and perspectives (ACTFL 2014) among different communities of language users. Particularly spoken and audiovisual texts featuring primary discourses, that is, intimate, personal, often informal everyday communication in German-language communities, are abundant with non-standard varieties and should be more present in L2 instruction. Reasons for excluding texts with regional variants may include their perceived difficulty for learners or the wish to not present learners with models of language use that do not adhere to what is perceived to be the “norm”. In Ruck (2017), I proposed a pedagogical sequence on how to teach filmic materials with dialect features to intermediate learners of German. I outlined activities that attend to the forms and discursive functions of language use, allowing learners not only to notice salient dialect features, build a *Wahrnehmungskompetenz* (Studer 2002) of German varieties, develop a critical language awareness, but also explore the indexicalities and social implications of language choice. Activities that contrast standard and non-standard varieties can be used for texts with a high density of non-standard variants and offer ways to productively use these texts for linguistic and cultural learning goals. While such explorations that compare a regional dialect with a standard variety make sense for intermediate and advanced proficiency levels, authentic texts with national standard and regional varieties can easily be introduced in elementary-level courses. In short, texts featuring a broad repertoire of language resources can be fruitfully applied in L2 German education for linguistic and cultural learning goals. They give learners a more realistic image of the complexity and fluidity of the German language-in-use.

To incorporate different varieties in L2 German teaching, not only learners but also instructors should interrogate their beliefs about language and norms as well as how these are reflected in their pedagogical practice. L2 pedagogy has traditionally been a field with strong orientations towards prescription, and instructors in many ways are enforcers of linguistic norms. Within the context of L2 German, Austrian and Swiss standard varieties should be seen as legitimate norms but, at the same time, non-standard varieties should be seen as commonly used and equally legitimate language forms. A necessary first step in this direction is to accept not only

the Austrian and Swiss standard varieties as legitimate norms but also non-standard varieties as commonly used and legitimate language forms. Language varieties must be seen in terms of both their structural linguistic forms and their functions in different communicative contexts. Different code choices have specific discursive functions, add additional layers of meanings, serve as a manifestation of speaker identities, and carry political and social consequences (Soukup 2015, 2016; Winkler 2015; Ruck 2017: 128-130)

In-depth knowledge of linguistic, social, and political factors of linguistic variation may not be relevant for all teachers of German. However, an awareness of norms as social constructs and their indexicalities will be indispensable for anyone wishing to instill their learners with critical thinking of language and society. Linguistic norms are social constructs and are important in many social contexts; however, they are also regularly challenged, subverted, and changed. A critical treatment of norms entails that instructors themselves model a judgement-free approach to language that neither discredits nor exoticizes regional or social varieties. Within this context it may be worth to take L2 pedagogy back to one of the core principles of linguistics: description. In line with Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, it is fruitful to think about language as a system of context-dependent choices (Halliday 1974: 55-58) – and I would like to highlight that these choices have social consequences – rather than a normative binary system of right or wrong. It is up to instructors to provide their learners with access to different perspectives and not to shy away from having these perspectives expressed in language forms that may not align with the constructions of a static and homogenous linguistic norm that L2 pedagogy often artificially tries to uphold. This critical attitude can run as a common thread throughout the curriculum without the need for expansive reforms or the creation of new materials.

The discussed implications can only be realistically implemented if the political-institutional and ideological preconditions are taken into consideration. This requires addressing underlying assumptions and working within the means of existing structures. The research reviewed above has demonstrated that there is very little awareness of the status and forms of regional standard varieties of German. Native speakers, teachers, and learners often demonstrate negative social attitudes towards non-dominant standard varieties, let alone, non-standard varieties. Hägi (2006: 229) observed high insecurity and little awareness regarding linguistic variation as well as a lack of open-minded and positive dispositions among many instructors of German. The idea of one norm that defines what is right or wrong is appealing to many. It should be a central goal to achieve a more inclusive representation of the linguistic repertoires of speakers of German. In order to reach this goal, though, it is necessary to openly discuss language attitudes, ideologies, and their social and political implications with (future) teachers of German, to

develop knowledge and teaching strategies to apply the proposed approach. To do so, stakeholders in L2 German teaching will need to critically analyze how language attitudes inform and are represented in their own practices. An awareness of language attitudes is important since they likely function as a proxy for social power relations (see Wiese 2015: 363 for *Kiezdeutsch*). To put it in Shafer's (2018a: 109) words: Who if not experts and teachers of German should (get to) know the German language in its depth and breadth?

Conclusion

While L2 teaching is a field in which linguistic norms have always been central, this essay demonstrated that questions of linguistic standards, prescriptions, and norms need to feature more critical approaches that explore whose standards, prescriptions, and norms are represented, and whose interests such representations serve. There has been considerable work on overcoming the monocentric view of *one* standard variety of German in favor of a pluricentric approach. However, due to the language political context of L2 German agendas and the standard language ideology, regional varieties are only slowly finding their way into the L2 German classroom. I argued that, while the recognition and acceptance of the national standard varieties of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland as equally correct and legitimate varieties is crucial, research on language use and attitudes demonstrates the central roles that non-standard varieties take for speakers' everyday lives and their identities. National standard and regional non-standard varieties both fulfill important functions for their speakers' communicative realities and identities and many writers, musicians, and filmmakers bear testimony of the centrality of these varieties in their speakers' individual and collective expressions. An integrative approach to the teaching of L2 German that pays regard to representations of a broad linguistic repertoire of speakers of German enables learners to gain access to cultural products, practices, and perspectives of more diverse groups of speakers of German. A basic comprehension of speech in regional varieties enables learners to also participate in everyday interactions that are characterized by intimacy and informality. Linguistic variation in L2 German teaching is politics and ideology in practice. Yet, in real-life language use, linguistic variation is the norm. It is a norm that should find its way into the L2 German classroom.

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