

The Revolutionary Argumentative Pattern in Puristic Discourse: The Swabian dialect in the debate about the standardization of German in the eighteenth century.¹

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1. Argumentative Patterns in the Puristic Discourse about Standard Languages

The research on linguistic purism has focused recently on the classification of its various types (Geers 2003, Thomas 1991). A promising method of this approach is the analysis of discursive strategies and argumentative patterns in the debates about language and culture. In this paper I would like to shed light on the argumentative patterns that can arise within the puristic discourse about *standard languages*. In the following, I distinguish between two major patterns: the conservative and the revolutionary.

Using a definition from Gerorge Thomas's "Linguistic Purism" (1991), the common discursive pattern can be characterized as follows: "We, a section of the speech community want to preserve a language from, or rid it of, putative foreign elements or other elements held to be undesirable, including those originating in dialects, sociolects and styles of the same language" (Thomas 1991: 12). This implies that the standard language had once been in a pure state, before it degenerated through foreign elements. People with expert knowledge have the ability to decide by which qualities the desirable state of language is defined and in what ways the speech community can return to this state of purity. Because these arguments aim to keep a certain state and defend it against new developments, I call this argumentative pattern "conservative". This is indeed the most common and most influential discursive figure in the history of German puristic discourse.

Yet in the history of purism we find another discursive pattern, which I will refer to as revolutionary. It can be characterized by the following statement: "Through borrowings from foreign languages or from language change induced by an illegitimate social group the standard language has degenerated to such an extent that it is impossible to restore it. We, a section of the speech community, believe that this standard language is an insufficient instrument for true and authentic communication. Thus it has to be abandoned and replaced by a new standard language." While the conservative position believes that somewhere in the past or in a particular textual tradition there existed a state of 'purity' that the language can and should return to, the revolutionary position denies this possibility. This much more radical argumentative pattern in puristic discourse is often found among alternative social movements, which aim for a complete revision of culture, life and political order, such as the student movement of the 1960s.

In this article I focus on this second pattern, which was held by a minority of grammarians and lexicographers in the last third of the 18th century. In order to understand the contemporary conditions of its emergence it is necessary to first outline the debate about the standardization of German.

¹ I am most indebted to Emily Krueger for helping me with my English, any mistakes are of course my responsibility alone.

2. The Debate about the Norm of standard German in the Late 18th Century²

2.1 Johann Christoph Adelung

In the period that succeeded Johann Christoph Gottsched's death in 1766 the dominant position in this debate, acknowledged by his contemporaries (cf. Heynatz 1771-76, V: 127, Rüdiger 1782/93, I: 32f), was taken by Adelung. Like his predecessor he was of the view that the Upper Saxon dialect should serve as a standard language. This can be shown by a quotation from the introduction of his famous "Versuch eines grammatisch-kritischen Wörterbuchs" published in 1774:

Diejenige, welche in jedem großen Lande die Stelle einer [...] allgemeinen Sprache vertritt, ist allemahl nur die Mundart einer Provinz, aber der blühendsten, cultiviertesten und durch Geschmack und Wohlstand am meisten ausgebildeten Provinz [...]. In Deutschland ist es seit der Reformation die Mundart der südlichen Chursächsischen Lande [...]. (Adelung 1774: VIII f)

[The dialect which represents the common language in every great country is always the vernacular of only a single province, but the most flourishing, most cultivated and through taste and wealth most developed province. In Germany since the Reformation it is the vernacular of Southern Saxony.]

In his attempt to codify standard German, he granted predominance to linguistic usage rather than to linguistic correctness in controversial cases:

Der *Sprachgebrauch* ist die höchste und unumschränkste Macht, was dieser einmahl entschieden hat, ist unwiderruflich entschieden, er müßte es denn selbst für gut befinden, in seinen einmahl getroffenen Verfügungen eine Änderung zu treffen. (Adelung 1971, I: 109)

[Linguistic usage is the highest and most sovereign authority, what it disposes once is disposed forever, unless it would fit its own needs to change a once disposed order.]

He justified this procedure by claiming that "in no other province of Germany do the people speak so purely and correctly as here; both for the reason that good taste is nowhere more widely spread than in this province."³ However, he did not consider linguistic usage from all strata of society as representative of standard German. On the contrary, he assumed that the highest linguistic competence was in the upper strata. In his conception, the upholders of a refined culture were also in possession of the most elaborate and sophisticated language.

Adelung concluded the dominance of Saxony over all other German provinces from a process in Germany's cultural history that he describes as follows:

Dagegen bildete sich das südliche Sachsen durch Bergbau, Manufacturen und Kunstfleiß zu der blühendsten Provinz Deutschlands aus, zog durch seinen Wohlstand Einwohner aus allen übrigen Provinzen an sich, und nahm dadurch an Volksmenge und Reichthum sichtbar zu. Hierzu kam nach und nach noch der Flor der Wissenschaften und des Geschmacks, und wie weit diese in kurzer Zeit in Ober-Sachsen erhöht wurden, beweiset die große Revolution in dem menschlichen Verstande, welche [...] von Sachsen ausging, und sich von hier nicht allein über ganz Deutschland, sondern selbst über einen großen Theil Europens verbreitete; ich meine die Reformation, welche nicht allein Reformation der Religion blieb, sondern sich nach und nach auch über alle Wissenschaften und Gegenstände des Geschmacks erstreckte. [...] Es hätte ein Wunder erfolgen müssen, wenn alle diese Umstände nicht auch sehr mächtig auf die Sprache hätten wirken sollen. (Adelung 1974, I: 49f)

[Through mining, manufacturing and industry in trading, Southern Saxony became the most flourishing of Germany's provinces, attracted citizens from all other provinces because of its wealth and therefore grew in population and prosperity. Little by little it became a centre of sciences and good taste. How far these two were raised in a short period of time in Upper Saxony is proved by the great revolution in man's thought which [...] emerged from Saxony and

² For a more detailed description of this debate cf. Scharloth 2003.

³ "In keiner Provinz Deutschlands wird [...] im Ganzen genommen, so rein und so richtig gesprochen [...], als eben hier; beydes, weil der gute Geschmack in keiner Provinz so allgemein verbreitet ist, als in dieser." (Adelung 1782: 25)

spread from here not only through the whole of Germany, but through a large part of Europe: I refer to the Reformation, which turned out to be not only a reformation of religion but also a reformation of sciences and taste. [...] These circumstances could hardly remain without a very strong effect on the language.]

Cultural and linguistic hegemony, as claimed by Adelung, provokes opposition. Therefore, it is not surprising that his ideas were fiercely criticized by linguists and authors from other parts of Germany.

2.2 *The Swabian Opposition*⁴

The most profound opposition formed in Swabia, a province that was considered at the bottom end of the cultivation scale. Linguists like Friedrich Carl Fulda and Johannes Nast and authors like Gottlieb David Hartmann, Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart and Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz rejected Adelung's conception of standard German by contradicting his arguments for the predominance of the Upper Saxon vernacular. In their eyes, the origin of the Upper Saxon vernacular proved that it was unsuitable as a sample of standard German:

Schwäbische uralte gemeine Innsasen; slavische vormals Herrn, nun Knechte; ein Zulauf aus allen Gegenden Teutschlands; und das regierende NiederSächsische, welches sich HochTeutschen Befehlen unterzog [...] errichteten endlich im zehenden Jahrhundert eine neue HochTeutsche Mundart, die Meisnische (Fulda 1776: 7).

[In the tenth century, ancient Swabian natives, former Slav rulers, now slaves; flocked in from all provinces of Germany; and the reigning Lower Saxon which came under the rules of Upper German [...] finally built a new Upper German vernacular, Upper Saxon.]

According to Fulda, in the 10th century the Saxon dialect developed from the mixing of the Swabian dialect with other varieties, such as Lower Saxon and Slav, and by borrowing from all other German vernaculars. It was therefore regarded as "irregular" and "poor" (Hartmann 1774b: *36), an argument common to purists.

However, Upper Saxon was not branded as an irregular mixed language because of its historical roots alone. The Swabian linguists also turned against actual linguistic developments in Saxony. Schubart, for instance, complained in the "Deutsche Chronik" that Saxons and Prussians were anxious to "sweeten the bitter juices" of the German language and "cross-breed tasty branches from France into the wild oak tree" (Schubart 1975, II: 702f).⁵ He therefore called Upper Saxon "französierendes Sachsendeutsch" ("French Saxon German"). Keeping Adelung in mind, Fulda accused the Upper Saxon grammarians of making fundamental mistakes in what they called cultivating their language:

Endlich Leipzig. Sie finden hier Ausschluß der besten Kraftwörter, Tyrannei über das Lehrvolle Provinziale, bis auf den heutigen Tag; eine Ohrfeige des Priscians über die andere; französisch-italianische Terminologie; mit englischen durchwebt. (Fulda 1774a: 81)

[Leipzig at last. Here one can find the elimination of strong language; the tyranny of the instructive provincial, which continues today; a slap in the face of Priscian, one after another; and French and Italian terminology, mixed with English.]

Leipzig is a synonym for a linguistic usage which mocks precise codification (grammaticography) and in which nonstandard words are eliminated and replaced by foreign words. This linguistic usage was the object of fierce criticism because Fulda and his companions were advocates of the analogy principle. Fulda pointed out:

Denn die wahre einzige Quelle der Sprache ist die Natur und das Wesen der Sprache selbst, so wie es die Geschichte der Wortbildung, der Wortabänderung und der Wortverbindung gibt [...]. (Fulda 1778: 28f)

⁴ Unlike Helmut Henne (1968:115ff) and von Polenz (1994:166), who consider Wieland the strongest opponent of Adelung, I hold the view that the Swabian linguists provided the most severe and elaborate critique.

⁵ "[...] so bittere Säfte zu versüßen, und diesem wilden Eichenstamme schmackhafte Zweige aus Frankreich einzupropfen" (Schubart 1975, II: 702f).

[The only true source of a language is the nature and essence of the language itself, as shown by the history of word formation, declination and word order [...].]

Unlike Adelung, who followed the anomaly principle, the Swabian linguists stressed the importance of correctness and regularity.

By means of these linguistic arguments, they tried to brand the Upper Saxon vernacular as poor, irregular and contaminated with borrowings from other languages, especially French. In their eyes, it therefore could not serve as a model for standard German. Yet, these linguists did not base their rejection of Adelung's conception of standard German on linguistic arguments alone. The Saxon lexicographer and grammarian had claimed that Leipzig, Saxony's cultural metropolis, was Germany's Athens, the hometown of sciences and muses, and the capital of good taste and manners. His Swabian rivals in fact acknowledged that in Germany the Saxon culture was the most refined, yet they interpreted this fact in a completely different way.

Fulda distinguished three stages in the development of culture and language which he designated as "child, young adult and old man" ("Kind, Jüngling und Greis") or elsewhere "shepherd, hero and weakling" ("Hirte, Held und Weichling") (Fulda 1776:27). With these metaphors he described a global model of the rise and fall of cultures. Since the year 1350 he considered German culture to be in old age, that is in the stage of the weakling. He further distinguishes this stage of German cultural history into three periods and characterizes them with only the catch-words "Luther, Opitz and Leipzig". From this we can conclude that in the eyes of the Swabian linguists, Saxony represented the final stage of a cultural development that led to decline. Furthermore, from this point of view Saxony's cultural refinement was in fact decay. This decay arose from and was accelerated by the influence of French culture. The Swabian linguists blamed the Saxons for imitating or, in their words, for aping French customs and therefore gave Leipzig the epithet "Little Paris" and called its citizens not of German but of French kind (cf. Schubart 1975, II: 464).

Whereas French culture was prestigious among the upper strata of society, it was considered an effeminate, immoral and dying culture among large numbers of non-aristocratic citizens in all other German provinces but Saxony, including the Swabian linguists. They claimed that the French influence on Saxon culture had naturally had an effect on the Upper Saxon vernacular. They believed that French words, loan constructions and loan translations of French phrases could be found in linguistic usage to a large extent.

To fully understand why these linguists from Southern Germany rejected Adelung's conception of standard German, it is necessary to consider the contemporary reflections on the connections between language, thought and customs. Lenz, an author of the "Sturm und Drang"-movement characterized language as the "topsoil of the mind" ("mütterlicher Boden des Geistes"). He therefore warned his fellow countrymen that if they enriched their language through borrowings from foreign languages, it would have a great effect on their ways of thinking:

Mir scheinen in unserer Sprache noch unendlich viele Handlungen und Empfindungen unserer Seele *Namenlos*, vielleicht weil wir bisher als geduldige Bewunderer aller Fremden uns mit auswärtigen Benennungen für einheimische Gefühle begnügt haben, die denn nicht anders als schielend ausgedrückt werden konnten. [...] Nur ein kleines Beyspiel geben die Wörter *intereßiren*, *frappiren*, *saisiren*, die alle einem grossen Theil von Menschen nur durch weitläufige Umschreibungen können verständlich gemacht werden, und deren wir doch im gemeinen Leben so nöthig haben.[...] sollten unsere alten Schriftsteller, wenn man sie studirte, für ähnlich Umstände keinen Namen gehabt haben, und werden wir, wie verständige Cameralisten, unserm Vaterlande nicht unsterbliche Dienste erweisen, wenn wir Landesprodukte nicht in fremden Ländern aufsuchen, auf Kosten unserer ganzen Art zu denken, zu empfinden, und *zu handeln*, auf Kosten unsers National-Charakters, Geschmacks und Stolzes? (Lenz 1776: 60ff)

[From my perspective, in our language a tremendous number of actions and sensations of our soul seem nameless. The possible reason for this is that we, as patient admirers of all

*foreigners, were content with foreign designations for native sensations, which could only be expressed bluntly. [...] To give a short example, the words *intereßiren, frappiren, saisiren*, which we require urgently in everyday life, can be explained to a large part of the people only through long-winded paraphrases. Should our ancient writers – if we studied them – not have had names for similar states? And will we not do our native country great service, if we do not seek native products in foreign countries, at the expense of our way of thinking, feeling and acting, at the expense of our national character, taste and pride.]*

The Swabian grammarians feared that with the assertion of Upper Saxon as a standard language in all provinces, French ways of thinking and customs would also penetrate Germany and would encourage cultural degeneration and moral corruption. Thus linguistic and cultural purism went hand in hand.

From this fundamental critique of the Upper Saxon vernacular, the Swabian linguists concluded that it could not serve as a standard language. Yet the borrowings from French were not the only reason for this rejection of Adelung's conception of standard German. The Upper Saxon dialect was rather regarded as a mixed language from its very beginnings. No puristic effort could turn it into a regular and correct language.

At this point the argumentative pattern of the puristic discourse which I previously named as the revolutionary position comes into play. The pronounced standard language has degenerated to an extent from which it is impossible to restore. Therefore, it has to be replaced completely by a different variety. But where is this new standard variety to be sought?

3. The Alternative Conception of standard German

Since the Swabian linguists interpreted cultural development as decay from a certain reference point, only a variety that had kept its ancient qualities could then serve as standard German. Not surprisingly, the Swabian grammarians regarded the Swabian dialect as a language with these qualities. Nast, for instance, called the Swabian dialect "archaic" (Nast 1777: *12) and stressed that it had never mixed with other languages during its long history. Fulda praised the Swabian vernacular as follows: "The Swabian language is (and why should it not be allowed to say it publicly) [...] the proper High German language", it is the "most regular" and "the dialect most adequate to the nature and the genius of the German language".⁶ According to thinkers like Nast and Fulda, only the Swabian vernacular could then claim to reflect the natural order of the German language and therefore be applied as a standard to linguistic innovations, exceptions and deviations.

While Adelung regarded the linguistic usage of the upper strata as the exemplary variety, the Swabian linguists urged their contemporaries to pay more attention to the linguistic usage of the lower strata. Lenz suggested:

Wenn wir in die Häuser unserer sogenannten gemeinen Leute giengen, auf ihr Interesse, ihre Leidenschaften Acht gäben, und da lernten, wie sich die Natur bey gewissen erheischenden Anlässen ausdrückt, die weder in der Grammatik noch im Wörterbuch stehen; wie unendlich könnten wir unsere gebildete Sprache bereichern, unsere gesellschaftlichen Vergnügen vervielfältigen? (Lenz 1776: 66)

[If we went into the houses of our so called common people, if we paid attention to their interests and passions and learned from them, how nature expresses itself in certain situations, which can neither be found in grammars nor in dictionaries; how tremendously could we enrich our refined language and multiply our social pleasures?]

⁶ "[...] die schwäbische Sprache, (und warum soll man es nicht öffentlich sagen dürfen?), welche die rechte hochteutsche Sprache, welche die regelmässigste, welche dem hochteutschen Genius oder der Natur der höheren teutschen Sprache die angemessenste" (Fulda 1774b: 77).

The Swabian linguists considered the lower strata as the "archive of antiquity" (Hartmann 1774a: 138). Therefore, Lenz believed that from the people's linguistic usage he could still learn the remnants of the so-called "Gothic" ("gothische") language, an original and authentic language, which had been more suited for the expression of feelings than the "sterilized" ("entmannt") German of the Saxon grammarians, as Herder had stated (Herder 1985, I: 35).

If we recall the connection between language, mind and customs it becomes clear that the final objective of the efforts of the Swabian linguists was to achieve a reform in the customs of their fellow countrymen. They intended a repression of French influence and a revival of ancient German customs. Thus linguistic purism was a remedy for an intended cultural revolution.

4. Conclusion

By studying the debate about the norm of standard German in the last third of the 18th century we can learn about two aspects of puristic discourse. The first is concerned with the role that dialects play within debates on language. Influences from dialects can be the target of puristic criticism but dialects can also be a model of purity and serve to criticize the standard language.

The second conclusion we can draw is that we were able to distinguish two constant argumentative patterns of puristic discourse, a conservative and a revolutionary. The revolutionary argumentative pattern is based on the language ideology, that the speakers' intellectual and emotional capacities are determined by the quality of their language. It characterizes the actual language as degenerated to an insufficient instrument for true and authentic communication. In the logic of this pattern it thus has to be abandoned and replaced by a new language which contributes to the invention of new forms and contents of communication, better ways of living and – in the most extreme cases – the creation of new man. The revolutionary argumentative pattern usually appears among social movements that intend a complete renewal of the actual culture. Like the Swabian grammarians these social movements may aim for conservative political, social or cultural goals. However, the way of achieving these objectives is always radical, uncompromising and thus revolutionary.

It seems that the revolutionary argumentative pattern is also an indispensable ingredient of utopias and dystopias (cf. Saage 1997, Steiert 1985: 260). In utopias like "bolo'bolo" by P.M., new languages emerge in criticism of the language of power. In dystopias like "1984" by George Orwell repressive and authoritarian political systems invent new languages in order to control their citizens. In both cases the new languages are a medium for the intended renewal of the culture, the political systems and of man himself.

Thus from the analysis of the revolutionary pattern in puristic discourse it has become evident that in order to understand linguistic purism it is always necessary to study its cultural and social reasons.

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