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Domain Dynamics – Reflections on Language and Terminology Planning

Introduction

By way of introduction, we shall present some basic statements and definitions, which we consider to be of paramount importance for the subject of our paper.

The concept “**cultural discourse**” has been created in analogy to Wittgenstein’s statement that a sign receives its meaning by its use. We explain “cultural discourse” as follows:

A very general semiotic concept, which corresponds to Wittgenstein’s ‘linguistic discourse’. This discourse includes verbal and non-verbal forms of representation in different quantitative constellations. Forms of representation often have a complementary function and may be interchangeable.

Language planning has been defined as

An activity carried out in organised form with the deliberate purpose of changing the spoken and written forms of a language (Rubin&Jenudd, 1971). Christer Laurén (1995) added:

- A single person can alter a language
- New creations are possible and not only changes → nynorsk
- Choosing a language and designating it as the official language of a country is language planning, too → Namibia.

The concepts “**status**” and “**corpus**” are closely interrelated; they have been and are still central concepts in language planning and language policy. In relation to our subject, we may state:

- Improvement of status requires development and maintenance of corpus.
- Low priority of status leads, in the long run, to deterioration of corpus.
- Status is determined either by the expressed or tacit will of a language community to maintain and improve its cultural identity via a fully developed language in all domains of life, or by the indifference of a language community towards its language and identity. The consequences are either improvement or deterioration of corpus.

A **fully developed language** (‘Gesamtssprache’ in the sense of Lothar Hoffmann) is a prerequisite for the attainment of a general and high educational level in a language community, which again is a basic condition for democracy. Consequently, we may say that a fully developed language is a democratic right and therefore also a human right.

This latter statement provides the rationale for **linguistic diversity** as expressed in article 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU:

“The Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity”

Whether this provision has been satisfactorily implemented in practice or not is not the subject of our paper.

Given that our focus in this contribution is on means of professional communication including verbal (e.g. terminologies) and non-verbal forms of knowledge representation, the following definitions and statements should be seen against the background of the foregoing, although some of the concepts are – *mutatis mutandis* – applicable to general language as well regardless of how general language might be defined.

In LSP and terminology planning, the following concepts are closely interrelated and have different priorities depending on the degree of intervention in the natural or free process of language development, which means in reality prescription:

- consensus
- acceptance
- authority
- purpose dependence.

The interrelation of the concepts can be illustrated by the following figure (Picht 2005) :

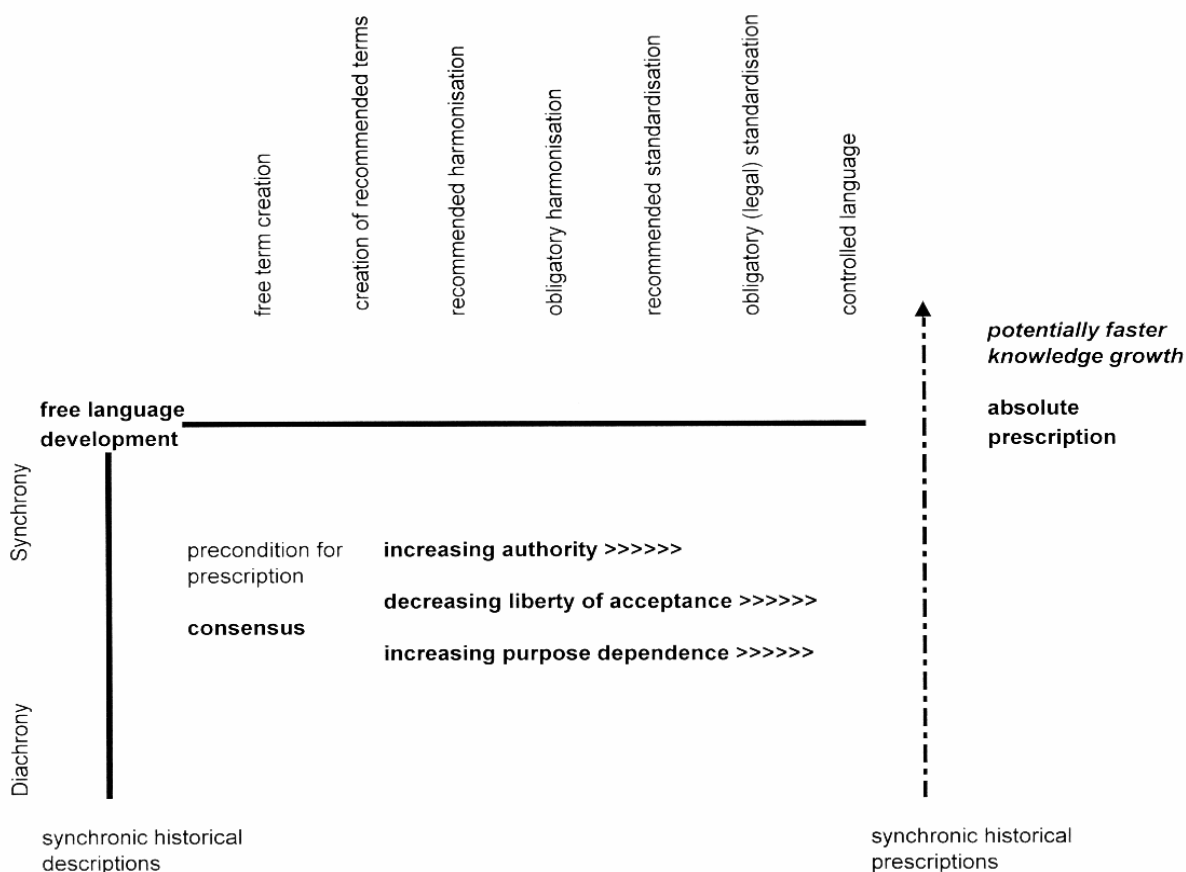


Fig. 1

The two vertical lines represent the synchrony-diachrony relation indicating that subsequent synchronic descriptions on a time axis form diachrony. The left line indicates a gliding development, whereas the right one should be interpreted as intervals because a prescribed terminology is fixed for a certain time and the development becomes visible in small hops corresponding to Drezen's (Averbuh 1994:66) concept of dynamic standardisation.

The horizontal line represents the transition from free language development to absolutely controlled language development and terminology. The seven degrees indicated are only examples; in between the poles there may be other degrees of prescription depending on the purpose of a given case of prescription.

In the middle of the model, we have placed the four sociolinguistic factors and indicated their gliding influence on the different degrees of prescription.

It is obvious that the model presented in fig. 1 cannot be applied in its full range to all domains, since not all domains admit rigid prescription – language and terminology planning in the humanities in general (if at all possible) cannot be compared with the strictly planned and controlled language and terminology of air traffic controllers.

This rough overview of basic concepts and their interrelation and interdependence should be taken into consideration when designing a policy and strategy for planning means of professional communication.

Domain dynamics

At the end of the 80s, it became increasingly obvious that English was gaining ground and was conquering domains from the national Nordic languages. The term “domain loss” appeared in literature and journalism and alarmed linguists, national language commissions and many ordinary members of the language communities. In the beginning, domain loss was a rather fuzzy concept; it was frequently used as a political buzzword without proper definition and place in an adequate conceptual apparatus. However, the mere fact that there is something like domain loss – although not proved by research - changed the direction of discussion from corpus level to status level. Later, Pia Jarvad carried out and published (2001) a substantial research, which confirmed considerable domain losses in Danish. The discussion on domain loss has had a remarkable political trigger function – reports and statements have been published and discussed widely in nearly all Nordic countries.

Since 1996, our research group ‘Nordens språk som vetenskapsspråk’ has been concerned with the problem and has tried

- to clarify and redefine some of the domain-related concepts which had already arisen in the first half of the 90s, although these concepts were rather isolated and hardly defined;
- to supplement the conceptual apparatus by concepts for phenomena observed and researched in the field of practical language and terminology planning
- to organise the concepts into a coherent conceptual system

and thus present an instrument for theoretical analysis and research on the one hand, and a practice-oriented tool for those who have to design a certain language policy or terminology planning concept.

Before we present our conceptual system, we shall define the concept ‘*domain*’:

Field/area of knowledge with the necessary means of professional communication in a certain language; domain is the symbiotic connection between content and expression of a field of knowledge.

Note: Domain includes the social dimension – a domain is always at the same time a social area of use of a language.

The conceptual system of domain dynamics is shown in fig. 2

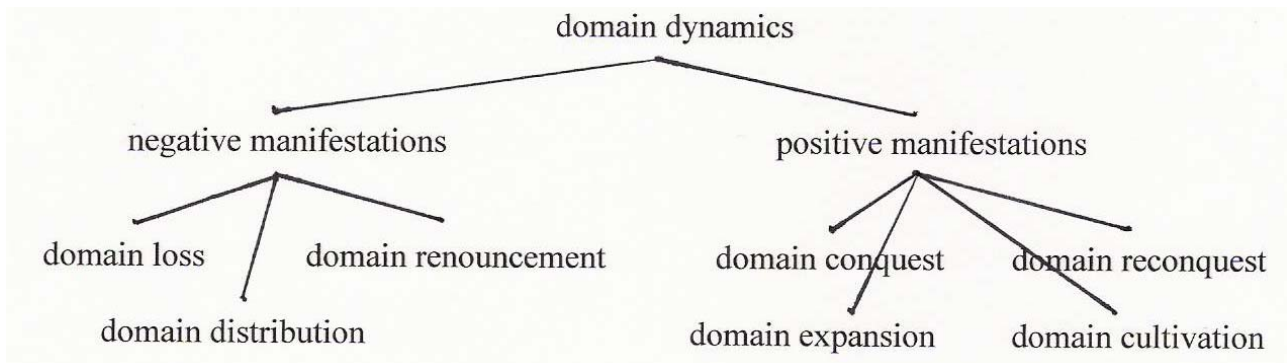


Fig. 2

In the following we present our definitions, which we illustrate by one or two examples; further examples are published elsewhere (e.g. Laurén, Myking, Picht 2004).

Domain dynamics: The interplay of social, political, economic and cultural conditions existing at a certain point of time in a language community which is characterised by a will (directly or indirectly manifested) to maintain its overall cultural identity by a language (Gesamtsprache) that can function in all areas of life, or the partial or complete abandonment of this identity, respectively.

Domain loss: Loss of ability to communicate in the national language at all levels of an area of knowledge because of deficient further development of the necessary means of professional communication.

Examples: The publication policy of certain Nordic universities that rank a publication in English higher than one in the national language, although the content does not differ.

The exclusive use of English teaching material and the decision to lecture only in English.

Domain renouncement: Voluntary or forced abandonment of the possibility of using one's national language in professional communication in multilingual settings.

Example: Contracts between parties with different national languages are drawn up in English and only this version is valid, however, only informative translations without validity may be produced.

Domain distribution: The fact that two or more languages distribute domains in a community among each other resulting in (nearly) monolingual domains while the language community as a whole becomes bi- or plurilingual. This development can happen through deliberate decisions or inherent dynamics.

Example: The international enterprise Scania has decided to use Swedish only at its head office in Sweden whereas the official language is English (Almquist, 2005).

Domain conquest: Development of the necessary means of professional communication needed for communication at all levels of a domain for which previously means of communication were lacking or only available to an insufficient degree.

Example: The deliberate creation of Norwegian oil terminology (Myking & Sæboe, 2000).

Domain reconquest: Renewed creation of means of professional communication in a language community, which originally disposed of these means for a domain, but later for different reasons failed to update them in accordance with the professional development of the domain in question.

Example: The creation of modern Icelandic terminologies in the domains of fishing, navigation, philosophy and mathematics (Jónsson 2001a, 2001b).

Domain expansion: The substantial development of an area of knowledge demands the creation of necessary means of professional communication in order to enable people to communicate about the domain in question. Domain expansion is also characterised by the simultaneous creation of these means in order to make it available for the language community. Changes in the status of a language, which has been shown lower priority or has been suppressed, can also be seen as an instance of domain expansion.

Example: The creation of terminologies in the field of environment protection, the knowledge of which proceeds from already existing domains but is composed in a new knowledge constellation. This phenomenon is widely known from other areas of knowledge.

Domain cultivation: Creation of means of professional communication for completely new areas of knowledge which neither existed before nor was it part of already developed domains.

Note: These concepts share certain characteristics with the previous concept.

Example: The creation of terminologies and other means of communication of the field of IT or gentechologies.

Conclusion

At the beginning of our paper we presented several statements, which reflect observable reality in a number of languages, especially minor ones. On the basis of these observations we have developed a conceptual apparatus for theoretical and practical language and terminology planning, which is not only applicable to national language planning and policy, but also – although mutatis mutandis – to designing language policies for other entities such as enterprises, organisations and institutions in multilingual settings.

However, if no realistic actions aimed at the realisation of linguistic and cultural diversity are taken, the high-sounding declarations in official documents remain political rhetoric, camouflaging the real problem of accepting a dominant language as ‘lingua franca’ which is detrimental – as has been proved - to access of knowledge as a democratic and human right for all language communities regardless their size. To argue over cost and so called efficiency factors is to reveal the shallowness of the solemn declarations and to despise the fundamental value of the concept ‘linguistic and cultural diversity’.

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