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Introduction

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Dear readers of the third volume of our handbook: You may be asking yourselves, and rightfully so, why another book on language purism needs to be published – has not everything been said already? We could answer: yes, but not in a comparative perspective. Another question might be, whether ›linguistic purism‹ is not an outdated concept that should be rejected and replaced by other (more modern) linguistic concepts? To that we, the editors, reply: Language criticism is historically so deeply rooted in language purism in the five represented languages that this justifies it to be treated here in its own right. An especially intriguing question hereby is how the concept of language purism has evolved over time and in different language cultures – and how this is currently being transformed.

›Linguistic purism‹ could be described as the pursuit of language purity. With regard to language, purity may be analysed in two ways: For one, as a goal – ‘language should be pure’; for another, as a process – ‘language should be purified’. Historically, a language was usually understood as ‘pure’ if it lacked foreign words and loan words. This is where we can draw a connection to the first and second volumes of the handbook (“Critique of language norms” and “Standardisation and language criticism”): Individuals, groups, and, above all, institutions made efforts to purify their native language, or to keep it pure, through their writings and publications. The role of institutions in the language-forming process will be addressed in the (forthcoming) fourth volume of our handbook series (“Language criticism and language institutions”).

The idea that language should be freed from something that does not ‘belong’ to it leads us to two anthropological constants: Language is connected to thoughts and actions. It is seen as an identity-forming tool by some, and as the basis of the national and cultural memory that must be maintained by others. Additionally, language is sometimes connected with a national sentiment that also serves as a boundary to other nations or cultures. If the attitude changes and becomes more favourable towards a plurality of society and culture, the perceived need of maintaining and purifying the language usually decreases. These aspects highlight the relevance of this volume for society, since the question of how a

perceived 'other' can and may influence the 'self' is currently at the heart of debates, such as those about the increasing influence of English as an international language or the controversies about linguistic diversity as a result of contact with other languages and cultures.

The "Online Handbook of Language Criticism – A European Perspective" offers a comparative perspective of language criticism in five European language cultures. Our conception of language criticism as a special form of language reflection (which we define as the "practice of subjective metalinguistic reflection" for the present purpose) is explained in the introduction to the first volume.¹

The handbook is a periodic and multilingual online publication. Encyclopedic articles are published successively on selected topics that highlight key issues in language criticism and that are of cultural relevance for the European perspective. On the one hand, the handbook gives insights into the specific language cultures. On the other hand, it aims at comparing and contrasting them. The handbook thus contains articles that focus on individual languages and articles that compare them. All articles are published in German. The articles looking individually at the practice of subjective metalinguistic reflection in English, French, Italian, and Croatian may additionally be read in the article's object language (i. e. in German/English, German/French, German/Italian, and German/Croatian).

Whenever the handbook mentions the practice of subjective metalinguistic reflection in German, English, French, Italian or Croatian, the analysis focuses on the respective historically and geographically rooted language (for instance German spoken in Germany). However, the transnational perspective is not neglected (e. g. regarding German as spoken in Austria, Liechtenstein, Luxemburg, and Switzerland). The regional scope is thus expanded depending on the type of question, approach, and relevance of cultural relations.

The title "Online Handbook of Language Criticism – A European Perspective" may be considered pretentious because only five European languages (German, English, French, Italian and Croatian) are in focus. Although we cannot represent all European language cultures due to a lack of labour resources, we would nevertheless like to emphasise our

1 Introduction. In: HESO 1/2017, p. 13. <https://dx.doi.org/10.17885/heiup.heso.2017.0.23712>

programmatic claim which results from the selected examples and give two reasons for the choice of these languages. On the one hand, we have attempted to choose language cultures that either allow for striking points of comparison or that seem to be opposite to one another upon first glance. On the other hand, we have taken care to ensure that Germanic languages (German, English), Romance languages (French, Italian) and a Slavic language (Croatian) are included. Of the Slavic languages, Croatian is the only one that has seen significant German linguistic interference (for over a millennium), Italian linguistic interference (since the late medieval period), and French linguistic interference (from the beginning of the 19th until the 20th century). This allows for an additional perspective in European comparison. The selection was further consolidated by the cooperation of scholars that promote this project in Heidelberg and Mannheim.

The handbook is published in different volumes that focus on specific topics of language criticism in Europe. The structure of the individual volumes always follows the same pattern: The comparative articles (i. e. “Language purism and language criticism in a European perspective”) display each core topic of the second chapter (i. e. “Language purism and language criticism”) in a comparative perspective and are translated into all five object languages. In the following chapter, the core topic is analysed with respect to its importance for the German language culture (e. g. “Language purism and language criticism in German”). This article is also available in translation in all of the five object languages. The next chapter shows the topic’s relevance for the English language culture and is presented in both German and English. Similarly, the following chapters look at the topic in relation to French, Italian, and Croatian, and are presented in German and French, German and Italian, and German and Croatian, respectively.

The handbook is a publication of the project group European Language Criticism Online (*Europäische Sprachkritik Online*, ESO). The project is based in the European Center for Linguistics (*Europäisches Zentrum für Sprachwissenschaften*, EZS), which is a cooperation between the Faculty for Modern Languages of Heidelberg University and the Institute for the German Language (*Institut für Deutsche Sprache*, IDS) in Mannheim. Various professors, researchers, postgraduate members, national and international cooperation partners as well as scholarship holders of the PhD

programme *Sprachkritik als Gesellschaftskritik im europäischen Vergleich* (Language criticism as social criticism in a European perspective), which was financed by the federal state of Baden-Württemberg from 2012 to 2017, participated in the project. The project group publishes their articles in the online handbook. A multilingual and multimodal online platform enables a reader-oriented access to the online handbook via abstracts, further information and a blog that examines the connection between language criticism and social criticism (www.europsprachkritik.com). The online handbook and the online platform provide further interlinks with many other linguistic topics. They are addressed to researchers, young academics, and students of the various philologies in Germany and abroad. They are also addressed to persons from other disciplines, especially those with a background in social and cultural studies.

We would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the nine reviewers from German, English, Romance, and Slavic linguistics for their comments and suggestions. The published third volume greatly benefited from their expertise. We would also like to thank the translators Simon Abel, Paul Chibret, Sandra Lebailly, Elisa Manca, Iva Petrak, Svenja Ritter and Yohanna Mebrahtu for their precise and professional collaboration. A final thanks is addressed to Vanessa Münch, who has fulfilled the chief editorial responsibility for this volume with great competence.

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