

Camilla Wide, Catrin Norrby and Leigh Oakes
New perspectives on pluricentricity

1 Introduction

The current collection of articles, entitled *New perspectives on pluricentricity*, is devoted to the dissemination of theoretical, methodological and empirical-based discussions of the concept of pluricentricity and its suitability for accounting for linguistic variation in the 21st century. The scholarly interest in pluricentricity, or polycentricity as it was originally termed, goes back to the 1960s and the work of William Stewart. Stewart coined the paired terms *monocentric* and *polycentric* to account for different approaches to national multilingualism, particularly relating to processes of standardisation (Stewart 1968). Polycentricity was used to refer to different standard varieties of a particular language, regardless of whether the (codified) variation existed within a nation or across different nations. In subsequent scholarship, for example the work of Ulrich Ammon (e.g. 1995; see also Darquennes, this volume), the label pluricentric has been used to describe national as well as subnational (regional) varieties of a language. However, predominantly the term has been employed to describe the relationships between standard varieties of a particular language which enjoys official (*de jure* or *de facto*) status in more than one political entity (Clyne 1992), often referred to as nation-states.

It follows that pluricentric variation has been largely associated with separate nation-states and the political demarcation between them. But in an era of globalisation and increased transnational mobility, pluricentricity viewed through such a lens might not be so readily applied to the fragmented or heterogeneous linguistic situations that characterise many community contexts today. For instance, how applicable is this concept to minority languages (autochthonous and immigrant) spoken within or across political entities, or to regional varieties with varying levels of recognition? Furthermore, does the well-established dichotomy between dominant and non-dominant varieties of pluricentric languages, with its inherent assumption of asymmetric relationships, still hold true, or is a more dynamic interpretation of dominance needed to account for new, emergent power relations between pluricentric varieties in different parts of the world? And, if so, how should one account for changing power relations in former colonial contexts, or which variety of a particular

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language should be promoted in foreign-language teaching and learning contexts? Such questions are of an ideological nature, which underscores their significance for identity construction.

Rejecting the “methodological nationalism” (e.g. Wimmer/Glick Schiller 2002; Schneider 2019) that purportedly underpins the notion of pluricentricity, some scholars argue that the notion of “pluriareality” (e.g. Wolf 1994; Scheuringer 1996; see also Dollinger 2019) better accounts for the fact that linguistic borders do not necessarily coincide with national borders, thus shifting attention to linguistic and cultural identities based on perceptions of regional rather than national belonging. Pluriareality has been adopted above all in the German-language context of a historical dialect continuum and has at times caused heated debate between its proponents and those who advocate a pluricentric approach. However, the difference between the two should not be overstated. Both approaches concern themselves with systematic variation in linguistic output, but from different ideological positions. In the pluricentric approach, linguistic distinction is understood as a means of forging separate national identities associated with different political entities, whereas the pluriareal approach generally tends to downplay the significance of such political borders and the ideological constructions associated with them. Accordingly, in pluriareal work, the documentation of actual linguistic usage takes centre stage: a certain lexical variant, for example, may traverse national borders, as a reflection of regional contact and regardless of political borders and symbolic importance to language users. While proponents of pluriareality argue that a pluricentric approach overstates the importance of the nation(-state), advocates of pluricentricity claim that a pluriareal account of variation disregards the symbolic power of language for identity and belonging. How speakers of different varieties position themselves culturally, socially, and politically vis-à-vis speakers of other varieties thus raises questions of linguistic justice within and across politically defined entities (nation-states) for languages and language varieties which coexist locally and/or remotely.

The theoretical underpinnings of pluricentricity are a prime concern – albeit from somewhat different perspectives – in the contributions to this volume by Auer, Langer and Oakes. Common to all is an interest in language policy issues and language ideologies, and how pluricentricity can (or cannot) be useful for describing the relationships between different language varieties based on political, linguistic, attitudinal and, particularly in the case of Oakes, also ethical dimensions of linguistic justice. Such a perspective involves questions like who has authority over language and what counts as a legitimate language. Auer examines both pluricentricity and pluriareality and concludes that neither captures the variety of sociolinguistic contexts where a language exists in more than one standard variety. In Langer’s contribution, a national minority language, North Frisian, is used to illustrate how an understanding of nation as equal to nation-state, common to much scholarship on pluricentric languages, would deny North Frisian the status of a pluricentric language. Both Langer and Auer are critical of the reliance of the notion of interacting *centres* in much pluri-

centric research and the asymmetric relationships that exist between dominant and non-dominant centres/nations.

Several of the contributions to this volume are devoted to how pluricentricity can be developed to accommodate an increasingly diverse and heterogeneous linguistic reality in various parts of the world. In the wake of globalisation, we may expect rapid diffusion of supernorms (e.g. Parisian French) at the same time as locally diffused varieties may gain in importance and provide new norms. An interesting question is how speakers of different pluricentric varieties accommodate to each other. In their contribution on Peninsular and Argentinian Spanish, Amorós-Negre/Kailuweit/Tölke argue that pluricentric communication should be seen through the lens of translanguaging, which would enable speakers of different varieties to communicate on an equal footing. A different situation can be found in countries where a pluricentric language is the official language but where nobody actually speaks it as an L1. Can one talk about a pluricentric variety at all in such cases? This is dealt with in the contribution by Bermingham/DePalma/Oca about Cabo Verdean Portuguese. Yet another interesting case occurs when the perception of pluricentric varieties changes due to historical and political developments, which in turn has an impact also on how the language in question is taught as a foreign language. These implications are discussed in the contribution by Čalić on Serbo-Croatian.

The more empirically focused contributions to the volume make use of a variety of methods of data collection. While Čalić's study on Serbo-Croatian is based on a survey of attitudes distributed to foreign-language teachers, the studies on Spanish by Amorós-Negre/Kailuweit/Tölke and Cabo Verde by Bermingham/DePalma/Oca utilise interviews as a method (or one of the methods). The possibilities and drawbacks of using different methods to explore pluricentric languages is discussed as a topic in its own right in the contribution by Schüpbach/Hajek/Kretzenbacher/Norrby, who have used questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, online data as well as actual interactions in their studies of address practices in pluricentric languages. Common to these three contributions is the focus mainly on reported use or attitudinal data. However, the volume also includes several contributions that focus specifically on actual linguistic usage.

Foundational research on pluricentric languages mainly focused on the description of language structure, typically phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical features of non-dominant varieties (Norrby et al. 2020). With the introduction of variational pragmatics as a distinct field of study (Schneider/Barron 2008), pragmatic differences were brought into focus. These differences were initially explored primarily through reported use in production questionnaires and the like. During the last few years, less controlled oral and interactional data have been increasingly used, as exemplified by Barron's contribution to this volume.

With research programmes such as the binational, large-scale Interaction and Variation in Pluricentric Languages (IVIP), reported on by Norrby in this volume, a further step has been taken towards less controlled data in the study of pragmatic

aspects of pluricentric languages. For the IVIP project, a large number of institutional conversations in Swedish were recorded in naturalistic settings in both Sweden and Finland. To ensure comparability between the two national varieties of Swedish, the settings were selected so as to be as similar as possible from those available in both countries. One setting which was found to provide highly comparable data was that of ticket offices in theatres and the like. These data are analysed by Grahn who takes a conversation analysis approach to examine the action of thanking in this type of service encounter. Another contribution based on naturalistic conversations and a similar method (interactional linguistics) is Reber's article on phrasal constructions in post-match interviews with soccer players in the UK and the USA.

Returning to the core question of the volume, new perspectives on pluricentricity, it is evident that the languages investigated in the various contributions play a central role in determining what aspects of pluricentricity are discussed. The nature of the relationship between pluricentric varieties varies between languages, depending not only on the historical development of the language in question but also on geographical and demographic factors. For example, French being a language with a strong history of centralisation and German a language with several norm centres and a great deal of variation also within Germany unavoidably has an impact on the nature and relation of the pluricentric varieties associated with these two languages. Furthermore, Quebec French is geographically clearly separated from the norm centre in France, while the German-speaking area in Europe – with its different norm centres – forms a geographically connected area. The role of demographic factors may, in turn, be particularly decisive for the internal relation between pluricentric varieties if one of them is spoken by a much smaller number of people than the other(s), which is the case for Finland Swedish (290,000 speakers compared to approximately 10 million speakers of Sweden Swedish). The Sweden-Swedish norm centre is clearly dominant but can at the same time be described as a direction rather than a place – something that Finland-Swedish speakers orientate towards, in certain situations more than others. This contrasts with the situation in contemporary English, where the pluricentric relations are relatively symmetric and not guided by strong normative orientations.

2 Overview of contributions

The volume appropriately begins with a contribution that showcases the work on pluricentricity of Ulrich Ammon, one of the founding editors of *Sociolinguistica*. Darquennes' article undertakes a constructive-critical review of key concepts that underpin Ammon's outstanding contributions on variation in German and pluricentric languages. Darquennes examines two central questions that run through Ammon's work: What are the varieties that a particular language consists of? and Which language does a certain variety belong to? He seeks to further develop Ammon's ideas

around the elasticity of the notion of pluricentricity and in particular the usefulness of “roofing” as a concept to describe the interplay of standard and nonstandard language varieties.

This is followed by four articles that adopt a macro perspective on pluricentricity, taking different theoretical approaches. The first two, from Auer and Oakes, both focus on a theoretical discussion of definitions and their repercussions, with examples from two major languages (German and French). Auer interrogates the notion of pluricentricity, taking as an example the Austrian variety of German. He argues not only that pluricentricity fails to deal with a range of contexts where a language may have two or more standards, but also that the notions of “centre” and “periphery” lack clear definitions. His solution is to propose the more neutral “multi-standard language” as a replacement term. He concludes by arguing that pluriareality is not an alternative to pluricentricity: the two concepts are based on different approaches to the standard – the former on a usage-based and the latter on a normative approach.

Oakes makes the case for a multidimensional approach to understanding linguistic pluricentricity, using the situation in the French-speaking world as an illustration. He critically examines three key dimensions of pluricentricity – political, linguistic and representational/attitudinal – and proposes a fourth, ethical dimension, further developing the notion of “pluricentric linguistic justice” to help identify moral arguments that might support the recognition of distinct national standards. This framework builds on work in political theory and political philosophy and provides an interdisciplinary approach.

The next two contributions, by Langer and Bermingham/DePalma/Oca, concern the status of varieties in minority or diglossic settings. Langer argues that the sociolinguistic situation of minority language North Frisian, from North-West Germany, is similar to that of a number of recognised pluricentric languages. However, the ways in which key pluricentric notions “centre”, “nation” and “norm” are commonly defined means that North Frisian would not be accorded pluricentric status. He therefore proposes more nuanced readings of these concepts, so that pluricentricity can be more readily used to describe the situation of minority languages.

Bermingham/DePalma/Oca examine the diglossic situation in Cabo Verde, located off the coast of West Africa. In this former colonial context, Portuguese is the official language – used in formal contexts, education and written communication – and Kriolu is the first language of nearly the whole population – used in less formal and social interactions of everyday life. Analysing interviews with politicians, language activists and educators, as well as policy and legislative documents, the authors show that, in terms of pluricentricity, Cabo Verdean identity is linked to Kriolu and not to a local variety of Portuguese, and Cabo Verdean Portuguese is not (yet) locally recognised as a standardised variety distinct from European Portuguese.

The articles by Čalić and Amorós-Negre/Kailuweit/Tölke both feature issues of identity. Čalić brings the study of pluricentricity into the classroom by examining language teachers’ attitudes towards the Serbo-Croatian language issue. Since the

break-up in the 1990s of Yugoslavia, which split into the four states of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia, language has become a powerful national identity marker, resulting in previously shared linguistic practices becoming fragmented and separated. Čalić surveyed teachers of Serbo-Croatian as a foreign language, also known as BCMS (Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian), both in and outside the region to investigate language ideologies and attitudes towards the national standard languages.

Contrasting with Čalić's focus on language as ideology and identity marker, Amorós-Negre/Kailuweit/Tölke explore the linguistic practices that enable successful communication across varieties. They examine pluricentricity from the speaker's perspective, moving beyond the standard language model that considers languages as discrete entities linked to national identities. They investigate perceptions and attitudes towards the linguistic accommodation of Spanish speakers from Spain and Argentina when meeting an interlocutor from the other country. Based on semi-structured interviews, their analysis shows that for successful pluricentric communication, awareness of one's own and one's interlocutor's repertoire and a willingness to negotiate a convergent norm play an important role.

The next set of contributions take pragmatic and interactional approaches to pluricentric variation. Schüpbach/Hajek/Kretzenbacher/Norrby present a critical review of methodological approaches to researching pragmatic variation in pluricentric languages in Europe, focusing on their own experiences of investigating address practices in a range of projects. They provide a useful discussion of the advantages and drawbacks of various data collection methods – questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, online data and actual interactions – and also other considerations such as methodological framework, the language variety studied, the context of address use, the type of address forms investigated, and combining quantitative and qualitative analysis.

The final three articles are empirically driven investigations of micro-level features. Barron's and Reber's contributions involve features of English. Barron examines pragmatic variation across three varieties – from Canada, England and Ireland. She analyses partly elicited interactions on direction-seeking, and is able to delimit the cognitive context to make quantitative comparisons of thanking possible. The Canadian English data show greater use of routinised responses to thanks than the Irish English and English English data, with the Irish English data characterised by a more complex closing, potentially related to the value attached to hospitality in Irish culture. Barron highlights the importance of comparability of data in studies of pragmatic variation across varieties, and regular re-examination of how the pragmatic variable is defined.

Reber compares the use of grammatical structures in British English and American English. She takes an interactional linguistic approach to analysing video recordings and transcriptions of the opening sequence of post-match interviews with soccer players from the UK and the USA. She shows how differences can be found in the use of fragmental constructions – such as 'so happy for the team' and 'fantastic win' – used by the players in the two countries, with the British English data showing greater

relative use of these constructions, as well as more grammatical variation. Reber's study also points to a high degree of routinisation in this particular media genre.

Grahn also analyses video recordings in her examination of thanking in service encounters in Swedish in Sweden and Finland. Taking a conversation analysis (CA) approach, she shows how the action of thanking is predominantly performed in the same way in both countries, with an initiating thanking action responded to with another action of thanking. The only difference is a higher frequency of responsive thanking in the Finland-Swedish data, which challenges a perception of Finns as being more reserved than Swedes. Grahn's recordings are sourced from the research programme Interaction and Variation in Pluricentric Languages, which is described in more detail in the research report that follows her article.

The contributions to this issue demonstrate the ways in which current research on pluricentricity is interrogating key concepts, pushing boundaries, and bringing together different disciplinary approaches. We hope that the volume will stimulate further multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research on pluricentricity, from a range of theoretical, methodological, and interactional perspectives.

Acknowledgement: The editors would like to acknowledge the copy editor, Jane Warren, for her valuable assistance in the completion of this volume.

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