

## Chapter 6:

### Different types of pluricentricity

This chapter deals with different variants of pluricentricity. Criteria for categorizing PCLs include the following:

#### 1. Criteria for the categorisation of PCLs - Overview

1. *How well developed is the status of pluricentricity for each PCL distinguished by the criteria that make up a PCL?* The application of the basic criteria for the definition of PCLs leads to 11 different types of PCLs.
2. *The geographical structure of PCL: neighbourhood vs. geographical distance.* Geographical distance reduces language contact with the dominant/mother variety and enables NDVs to define themselves linguistically.
3. *The development as a pluricentric language in respect to its degree of centralisation: centralised vs. little or no centralisation.*
4. *The extent of language planning, status planning and codification: varieties with or without language and corpus planning.* Existing corpus planning leads to documentation, codification and prestige.
5. *Status: Official recognition as a co-state language or a regional language:* This leads to (high) prestige and a high formal status.
6. *The national/social identity associated with the variety: The NDV/language serves as a symbol of the successful struggle for national / social independence.*
7. *Existence of positive ethnolinguistic consciousness - language pride.*

#### 2. PCLs classified according their geographical structure

##### 2.1. Type (1): PCLs with a contiguous language area where the national varieties are geographically next to each other.

The following list of PCLs shows that almost all PCLs have a contiguous language area. The impact of geographical proximity on the standard and development of NDVs is that there is usually strong language contact through the media (print and electronic media) and through economic, cultural and tourist contacts, which means that NDVs have difficulties developing their own standard. PCLs that belong to this category are:<sup>1</sup>

1. Albanian (Albania, Kosovo, Northern Macedonia)
2. Arabic (Egypt and 28 other countries and territories in Northern Africa and in the Middle East)
3. Azerbaijani/Azeri (Azerbaijan, Russia)

4. Aymara\* (Bolivia, Peru)
5. Basque (Spain, France)
6. Bengali (Bangladesh, India)
7. British English (Britain)
8. Catalan (Spain, Italy, France)
9. Chewa/Nyanja\* (Malawi, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Zambia)
10. Chinese | Mandarin
11. Croatian (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina)
12. Dutch (Belgium, Netherlands, Surinam)
13. English | Global English
14. French (Belgium, France, Switzerland, Canada, in 26 independent nations globally)
15. Fula/Fulfulde\* (Burkina Faso, Mali)
16. German (Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Belgium, Italy/South Tyrol)
17. Greek (Cyprus, Greece)
18. Guarani (Paraguay, Bolivia, Brazil, Argentina)
19. Hausa\* (Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon)
20. Hindi (India, Pakistan)
21. Hungarian (Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, Croatia)
22. Italian (Italy, Switzerland)
23. Irish (Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland)
24. Kishwahili/Swahili\* (Tanzania, Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda)
25. Kongo/Kikongo\* (DR Congo, Republic of the Congo)
26. Korean (South Korea, North Korea)
27. Lingala\* (DR Congo, Republic of the Congo)
28. Malay (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore)
29. Maninka/Malinke\* (Mali, Guinea)
30. Mongolian\* (Mongolia/China - Inner Mongolia)
31. Norwegian (Norway)
32. Occitan (France, Spain, Italy)
33. Pashto\* (Afghanistan, Pakistan)
34. Punjabi\* (India, Pakistan)
35. Romanian (Romania, Moldova)
36. Russian (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan)
37. Scots (Scotland, Northern Ireland)
38. Serbian (Serbia, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro)

39. Setswana\* (Botswana, South Africa, Zimbabwe)
40. Somali (Somalia, Somaliland, Ethiopia, Djibouti)
41. Soninke\* (Mali, Mauritania, Senegal and Gambia)
42. Sotho\* (Lesotho, South Africa, Zimbabwe)
43. Swazi/siSwati\* (Swaziland, South Africa)
44. Swedish (Sweden, Finland)
45. Tamazight/Berber (Morocco, Algeria)
46. Urdu (Pakistan, India)
47. Venda/Tshivenda \* (South Africa, Zimbabwe)

**2.2. Type (2): PCLs where the varieties and the language area are spread across different continents and are not geographically close to each other**

The effect of having varieties spread across different continents and with large geographical distances between them is, that the varieties over time develop distinct linguistic features and are more easily able to "build away" their variety from the "mother variety". PCLs that belong to this type are:

- *English*: Official language in 59 sovereign states on all continents (Crystal 2003). English is a PCL that shares contiguous language areas (Great Britain, Africa and Asia) and has scattered varieties (Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, etc.).
- *French*: Official language in 27 countries and in 12 others as an administrative and educational language in Europe, North and West Africa, Central and South America, Oceania;
- *Yiddish*: This diaspora language is spread across all continents due to the migration of the Jewish population;
- *Kurdish*: Kurdish is both a language with a territory in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran, but without linguistic rights, and a diaspora language with speaker communities in Europe, North America, etc.
- *Portuguese*: Official language in 10 sovereign states in Europe, South America and in Africa;
- *Spanish*: official language in 20 sovereign states in Europe, South and Central America and Africa. There is a contiguous language area in South and Central America;
- *Tamil*: Official language in Sri Lanka and India that are separated by the Indian Ocean.

### 3. Types of PCLs distinguished by the criteria making up a PCL - How well developed is the status of pluricentricity?

On the basis of the seven fundamental criteria that define PCLs, eleven different types of pluricentricity can be observed worldwide, depending on how the criteria of pluricentricity are fulfilled and accepted/rejected by the respective language community:<sup>2</sup>

1. Type 1: *Nationless pluricentricity*<sup>3</sup>: Languages with varieties that have no territory of their own and are usually not officially recognised, but can still be considered pluricentric: *Aramaic, Kurdish, Western Armenian and Yiddish*. Some of them are so-called “*disaspora languages*” that emerged after the population was expelled from its original territory and settled in different parts of the world. These languages/varieties are kept alive by the strong ethno-linguistic awareness of their language community (see criterion 2d in chapter 3.1.1).
2. Type 2: *Formal pluricentricity*: Only criterion (1) - occurrence of PCL in at least two countries/regions - is fulfilled. There is formal recognition as a PCL status or not. In all cases, there is no language planning (codification, promotion) in favour of NVs. Examples for varieties that belong to this category are: *Albanian in Kosovo; Aymara, Aramaic, Russian Azerbaijani, Croatian and Serbian in Bosnia Herzegovina, French in Italy, Cyprus Greek, Cyprus Turkish, Acadian French (Canada), French in West African countries (Senegal, Mali, Niger etc.); Italian Occitan, Indian and Pakistani Punjabi, Belarus Russian, Kazakhstan Russian, Kyrgyzstan Russian, Tajikistan Russian etc.*
3. Type 3: *PCLs with varieties lacking the appropriate formal status and waiting for recognition*:  
Criteria 1, 2b and 3 are fulfilled, but not 2a, and there are usually a large number of speakers in these PCLs. Examples of this type are *Hungarian in Slovakia, Romania and Serbia, Russian in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, etc.*  
Hungarian is recognised as a minority language in all neighbouring countries, although its concentration in certain regions makes it more of a regional language. The non-recognition of Russian in the Baltic countries, where up to 40% of the population speak this language, is inappropriate and can only be seen as a temporary measure in view of the political developments caused by Russia since 2022.
4. Type 4: *Languages where the status of pluricentricity is denied by the dominant variety or by the language as a whole*.  
Languages that fall into this category show a high degree of centralisation

and a strong aversion to the plurality of norms. Sometimes pluricentricity is formally recognised by the dominant variety, but at the same time attempts are made to downgrade the non-dominant varieties to the level of regional dialects.<sup>4</sup>

Examples of languages that belong to this group are: *Arabic, Albanian, French, Greek,*<sup>5</sup> *Hungarian,*<sup>6</sup> *Romanian, Russian and Serbian etc.*

5. *Type 5: Languages where the status of pluricentricity is acknowledged by the “dominant/mother”-variety.*

The linguistic characteristics are codified including the minor varieties to some degree in dictionaries and reference books.

This is the case with *Basque, Bengali, Catalan, Chinese, Dutch, English, German, Hindi, Urdu, Irish, Korean, Malayan, Portuguese, Quechua, Spanish, Swedish, Tamil, and Tamazight/Berber.*

6. *Type 6: Languages where the pluricentricity is deliberately practised by model speakers of the respective NV.*

This is the case in many varieties of *English, Dutch, German, Spanish, Swedish, and Portuguese.*

However, it usually takes a longer period of time until some amount of nativisation (stage three of Schneiders 2003/2007 model) has been reached and the endemic features of the NDV are accepted.

7. *Type 7: PCLs where the NVs (a) are taught in schools and (b) the linguistic differences are made aware of:*

In this type of PCL, the NVs are taught in schools in all PCLs, but variation existing between NVs of pluricentric languages is usually ignored, not made aware and a concept of a monolingual written standard language upheld. In respect to making NVs aware, the Austrian Ministry of Education has published a brochure in 2015 that is meant to raise awareness for AG. Despite some shortcomings it was an educational step into the right direction.

8. *Type 8: PCLs that are pluricentric within a nation state: Examples for this are Norwegian and British English.*

There are two written standards of Norwegian used in Norway today: *Bokmål* and *Nynorsk*, the latter introduced in 1885 and mainly used around Bergen in the center of the country, whereas *Bokmål* is close to the Danish standard *Riksmål*. British English in the United Kingdom is divided into four national varieties that correspond to the four parts of the UK: *England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.*<sup>7</sup>

9. *Type 9: PCLs that act as a “dachsprache” (roof language) for (a) many so-called “mother tongues” and (b) as a PCL vis-à-vis the other standard varieties.*

The first category applies to Hindi (Gosh, 2012) where, for language political reasons, no less than 50 often even mutually unintelligible languages are considered to belong to Hindi, making Hindi a PCL towards these languages. Hindi also has a pluricentric relationship with Urdu (Rahman, 2016), which is linguistically close and is the national language of Pakistan but also has a large number of speakers in India.

A similar case is “Chinese” which can also be seen as a dachsprache (roof language) (Tien, 2016, Clyne/Kipp, 1999) as it is pluricentric in respect to a large number of mutually unintelligible *fangyan* varieties (*Cantonese, Hokkien, Mandarin*, etc.) and by *Mandarin*, the standard variety, that is pluricentric with respect to Mandarin used in different Chinese-speaking countries (Taiwan, Singapore).

These cases also show that the term “*language*” is a term that is primarily determined by social and political assumptions rather than purely linguistic facts.

10. *Type 10: Nativized pluricentricity:*

Traditional PCLs (such as English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese<sup>8</sup>) can have a similar function as dachsprache in multilingual societies in Africa, Asia and the Americas. The contacts between these PCLs and a myriad of indigenous languages may lead to a large number of *mixed languages/varieties* that are overarched by the PCL by becoming heavily nativized.

An example for this is the case of Cameroon (Fonyuy 2015, 2016) where the nativisation of French and English lead to varieties like *Cameroon English, Cameroon French, Cameroon Pidgin English, Camfranglais* and regional mixtures with indigenous languages.

It is hard to know whether these varieties can still be considered as “*French*” / “*English*” etc. or are already languages in their own right. More or less the same applies to the multilingual situation in New Caledonia (Bissoonauth, 2015) with French, English and indigenous languages mixing together or to Morocco (Marley, 2012) where Arabic, Tamazight and French are producing new varieties.

11. *Type 11: Migrant pluricentricity - PCLs in a migrant context:*

This category refers to varieties of PCLs that were created through emigration into foreign countries. The development of distinct migrant varieties (MV) of PCLs depends on the migration of a large number of

speakers into a relatively coherent and limited area of a receiving country. As the migrants come from different areas of the homeland the MVs show blending of native varieties and nativisation from the second generation onwards that makes the MV “to build itself away” from the “mother” varieties.

The introduction of this category seems necessary as migration is ever increasing and recent research (Molnár/Huber 2013, Scetti 2016) shows that this aspect of pluricentricity needs attention.

**European Languages with a high amount of internal linguistic fragmentation that makes their status as a PCL unclear, impedes their standardization and makes the survival of the language difficult**

The languages of this category are marked by a high degree of internal fragmentation that reduces the mutual comprehensibility and obstructs the development of a common standard variety. This in turn often leaves the single varieties at the level of informal spoken languages (vernaculars) with functionality reduced to a few domains.

**Occitan:**

Occitan in its variety of *Aranese Occitan* has the status of a recognized regional language in Catalonia, Spain. Occitan is also spoken in France and Italy. The language is heavily fragmented as there are six varieties: *Auvergant*, *Gascon*, *Provençal*, *Limousin*, *Languedocien*, *Vivaro-Alpin* in France and *Aranese* in Spain. The situation is aggravated by the fact that France signed, but never ratified the European Charter of Minority Languages<sup>9</sup> and leaves Occitan unprotected and unsupported in France where most speakers live. Carrera (2019) (this volume) gives a thorough update of the present situation of Occitan and an overview of attempts to create a common orthography.

As with many fragmented languages there is a discussion going on among linguists whether the *lingonym* is an umbrella term for several single languages or a language covering all varieties (Holtus/Metzelin/Schmitt, 1991). Sumien (2006) deals with it extensively. There is no single written standard and there are even competing spelling norms within one and the same variety (such as in *Béarnais* and *Gascon*).<sup>10</sup> There are two main orthographic norms: The *Mistral* writing system (developed by the writer Frederic Mistral in his dictionary of 1879 and the classical writing system based on medieval Occitan. An updated form of the classical writing system was adopted by the *Institut d’Estudis Occitans*. However, how Sumien (2012) shows in detail, other spelling

systems for single varieties were introduced and used in parallel but also contributed to the development of koiné varieties in some sub-varieties that supported the survival of the language. Attempts to create a standard variety are still going on. Due to its fragmentation and the lack of standardization, the status of Occitan as a PCL is doubtful. Too many protagonists seem to fight for their particular interests instead of following the model of the development of Rumantsch in Switzerland (Schmidt, 1982 / Darms, 1989) where a united written language across seven varieties has successfully been created and is now used throughout the community.

**Frisian:**

This language is split into three varieties (West Frisian, North Frisian, Saterland Frisian) which are not mutually intelligible. In addition to their geographic distance, the three varieties are also influenced by different languages: West Frisian is strongly influenced by Dutch, Saterland Frisian and North Frisian by German, and Low German. The status of Frisian as a single language is therefore disputed by scholars who prefer to speak of the “Frisian languages”. Its status as a PCL is doubtful. The social visibility of the three varieties/languages is guaranteed via the recognition as regional or minority languages in the Netherlands and Germany.

**Sami:**

This lingonym is an umbrella term for, “depending on the nature and terms of division, ten or more Sami languages”<sup>11</sup>. The language area is spread over Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia with neighbouring varieties mutually intelligible but not with varieties that are further apart. Moreover, Sámi in all countries has the status of a minority language and very few speakers. Its status as PCL is therefore also doubtful. Social visibility and support are guaranteed via the recognition as regional or minority languages to a greater or lesser degree in the four countries where the language is native. For an insight into the linguistic situation of these languages / varieties, see Rueter (2019).

**4. The development as a pluricentric language in respect to its degree of centralisation: centralised vs. non-centralised.**

Strong centralisation leads to uniform norms at the level of written language and to a language behaviour of the NDV elites that result in a reluctance to promote the native variety. In highly centralised PCLs, great

importance is placed on following and mastering formal spelling and grammar rules, which are often very complicated (due to an elitist attitude) and require a long period of training to master.

Examples of PCLs with a high amount of centralisation are: *French* (via its institutions for language spread and codification), *Arabic* (due to its status as language of the Quran and several language academies), *Albanian* (as a "new" PCL), *Russian* (both are still "new" PCLs), *Hindi* (norm-setting is done in India), *Hungarian* (norm-setting is primarily done in Hungary), *Romanian*, *Serbian* (norm-setting is done in Serbia).

**5. The extent of language planning, status planning and codification: varieties with or without language and corpus planning.**

This criterion is very powerful when it comes to assessing the development status of NDVs. NDVs that don't have a codification of their linguistic norms and thus no dictionary of their own, are on the lowest level of development to linguistic self-definition as there is no instrument for assessing which linguistic features the variety has and how these are used.

This holds also true if there is no corpus planning and status planning. A prerequisite for the development of a dictionary and other books of reference is a large electronic text corpus, which ideally is annotated and covers a wide range of text types. This requires some sort of a language policy that promotes the native variety of the NDV.

**6. Status: Officially recognised as a co-state language or a regional language:**

This leads to (high) prestige and a high formal status, as they are protected by laws defining their linguistic rights. Examples include: *Finnish-Swedish*, *Belgian-Dutch*, *Belgian French*, *South Tyrolean German*, *Canadian French*, *Irish Scots*, *Spanish Basque*, *Spanish Catalan (Valencian)*, *Singapore Hokkien*, *Finnish Swedish*.

**7. The national/social identity associated with the variety: The NDV/language serves as a symbol of the successful struggle for national / social independence.**

Political and social struggles make the language/NDV a symbol of this struggle, as it is 'charged' with emotions related to these events as examples show: *Irish English*, *Irish Irish*, *Austrian German*, *Canadian French*, *Bosnian / Croatian vs. Serbian*; *Kosovo Albanian*, *Bosnian*, *Croatian*, *Belarusian*.

**8. Positive ethnolinguistic consciousness - language pride**

This leads to a strong attachment to the language, language culture and language maintenance. According to Fishman (1997) who researched 61 languages in his seminal publication "*In Praise of the Beloved Language*". Positive ethnolinguistic consciousness is the prerequisite for the preservation of endangered languages (and NDVs that are under pressure from the DVs). If there are no positive emotions and attitudes towards one's own language, sooner or later it will no longer be used and will therefore disappear.

Examples of strong positive language pride are *Western Armenian, Irish English and Canadian French*. Examples of weak language pride are *Belgian French, (partly) Austrian German and most varieties of French in Africa and Asia*.

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### Footnotes:

- <sup>1</sup> The language names in this list, marked with an \*asterisk have not yet been researched in respect to their pluricentricity but fulfil the geographical and status criteria of being a pluricentric language.
- <sup>2</sup> This list is a revised and updated version of the one published in Muhr (2012 and 2015).
- <sup>3</sup> See chapter 12 for details of this type of PCL.
- <sup>4</sup> German belonged to this type of language until the mid 1980s. It is to Michael Clyne's credit that he initiated a broad discussion about the pluricentricity of German with his publications in 1984 and 1995. However at the moment we can see repeated attempts by German scholars to downgrade Austrian German to a regional variety and to deny the status of a *national* variety by pretending that German is not a "pluricentric" but a "*pluriareal*" language (see chapter 14).
- <sup>5</sup> See Karyolemou (2012).
- <sup>6</sup> See Sebök (2016) and Kozmacs/Vanco (2016).
- <sup>7</sup> See Weilinghoff (2019).
- <sup>8</sup> See among others Ashby (2012), Fonyuy (2016).
- <sup>9</sup> The latest attempt to ratify the Charter in France in the National Assembly failed in 2015 due to the resistance of the political right-wing parties. [[https://www.francetvinfo.fr/societe/le-senat-dit-non-a-la-charte-europeenne-des-langues-regionales\\_1712811.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/societe/le-senat-dit-non-a-la-charte-europeenne-des-langues-regionales_1712811.html), acc. 21.02.2025]
- <sup>10</sup> Joubert (2015: 164).
- <sup>11</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C3%A1mi\\_languages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C3%A1mi_languages) [acc. 25.02.2025]