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*Published in:*  
Sociolinguistica

*DOI:*  
[10.1515/soci-2021-0002](https://doi.org/10.1515/soci-2021-0002)

*Publication date:*  
2021

#### [Link to publication](#)

*Citation for pulished version (HARVARD):*

Darquennes, J 2021, 'On the elasticity of centers and the possibility of multiple roofs: revisiting some of Ulrich Ammon's views on language variation and pluricentricity', *Sociolinguistica*, vol. 35, no. 1, pp. 9-27.  
<https://doi.org/10.1515/soci-2021-0002>

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Jeroen Darquennes

# On the elasticity of centres and the possibility of multiple roofs: revisiting some of Ulrich Ammon's views on language variation and pluricentricity

**Abstract:** Against the background of a concise overview of Ulrich Ammon's *oeuvre* this article first of all provides a constructive-critical account of some of the key concepts and questions that guided his macrosociolinguistic work on pluricentric languages and variation in German. In what follows, an attempt is made to further develop some of Ammon's thoughts through emphasising the elasticity of the concept of pluricentricity and arguing for a creative use of the concept of "roofing" when describing the intricate interplay of standard and nonstandard varieties especially in language contact zones.

**Keywords:** Ulrich Ammon, German, language contact, pluricentricity, roofing, standardisation

## 1 Introduction

Over the past five decades, Ulrich Ammon significantly contributed to the debates on variation in German and the status of German as a pluricentric language. Relatively soon after he passed away in May 2019, the decision was made to highlight parts of Ammon's work in this volume of *Sociolinguistica*, a series that he co-founded together with Klaus Mattheier and Peter Nelde in 1987. Rather than letting a number of selected online articles speak for themselves, the present editors of the yearbook considered it more appropriate to frame them with a constructive-critical review of some of the key concepts and questions that guided much of Ammon's work (see section 3 of this article). When reading the articles as well as the (unavoidably subjective) account of parts of Ulrich's works presented below, not only his modesty and his urge for clarity of thought<sup>1</sup> should be kept in mind, but also his sense of critical self-reflection and

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<sup>1</sup> It is safe to say that Ulrich Ammon belonged to a category of linguists that he himself described as linguists who strive for clarity of thought even when there is no direct practical use related to such clarity (see Ammon 2018: 13: *Sprachwissenschaftler, die [...] nach gedanklicher Klarheit auch bei praktischer Nutzlosigkeit streben*).

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his tendency to season his writings with food for thought meant to push scientific debates forward. In section 4 of this article, a modest attempt is made to develop some of the “loose ends” of Ammon’s ideas on the study of pluricentric languages through intertwining them with views of some of his contemporaries. Section 4 is not only meant to tentatively home in on the elasticity of the concept of pluricentricity, but also especially on the multiple ways in which “roofing” (a somewhat neglected concept in contemporary sociolinguistics) could be used to both analyse and describe the interplay of standard and nonstandard language varieties in language contact settings that characterise a considerable part of the German-speaking world. To start with, however, section 2 presents the selected writings against the background of an overview of Ulrich Ammon’s many research interests.

## 2 The selected writings as part of Ulrich Ammon’s *oeuvre*

Ulrich Ammon counts as one of the most active German sociolinguists of his generation. The impressive list of monographs, articles and edited volumes on [www.ulrichammon.de](http://www.ulrichammon.de) gives a good first impression of his many research interests. Following an approach similar to some of the contributions in Koerner’s *First Person Singular* series (Koerner 1980, 1991, 1998), Ammon’s autoethnographic account of the development of his research interests (Ammon 2017) provides readers with background information on the connection between his personal trajectory and his professional focus on a variety of topics related to the corpus, status, prestige and acquisition of German.

Growing up and going to school in (the surroundings of) Oppenweiler, a village in Southwest Germany where a Swabian dialect was (and still is) used by the locals, Ulrich Ammon quickly became aware of differences in the status and prestige related to the different varieties and variants of German used by different people in different sorts of settings. As a student at the University of Tübingen in the 1960s he developed a keen interest in Basil Bernstein’s popular language deficit hypothesis based on the assumption that language users belonging to the lower class would use a “restricted code” whereas language users belonging to the middle class would use an “elaborated code” (see Löffler 2005: 12–16, 161–173 on the role of Bernstein’s hypothesis in German sociolinguistics). In his PhD, Ammon devoted himself to the detailed socio-historical and sociological study of “the social distribution of regional dialects and standard German, and on prejudices against dialect speakers (who were, as a rule, judged as generally less intelligent than standard-variety speakers)” (Ammon 2017: 31). His dissertation was published in two volumes: one on dialect, social inequality and school (Ammon 1972), the other on the social distribution of dialects and the standard variety (Ammon 1973).

Ammon's scientific interest in *variation* in German dates back to his early days as a sociolinguist. The *status* and *prestige* of German (and other languages) is a topic that he became aware of when he started to develop an interest in the "international standing of the language and of German-speaking countries' endeavours to boost its standing or stop its decline" (Ammon 2017: 37) at Wesleyan University (Middletown, Connecticut), first as an exchange student in the mid-1960s and, later on, during a one-year research stay as a German instructor. Already at that time, he focused on the special status of English as a global *lingua franca* and the effects of its dominance on "other languages, like French, German, or Italian, which had previously been international, and still were, to a limited extent, or rather, for their language communities" (Ammon 2017: 33). He devoted a considerable part of his attention to the detailed study of the status of German as an international language of science and over the years earned himself the reputation of "the leading researcher today on the question of scientific language" (Gordin 2017: 8).

The use of German for international scientific and academic communication is a topic that – along with other topics such as the status of German as an official language, the economic strength of German, German as a language of business and tourism, German as a foreign language, the promotion of the German language – features in *Die Stellung der deutschen Sprache in der Welt* (2015), translated into English as *The Position of the German Language in the World* (2020). In this magnum opus, Ammon revisits and updates some of his earlier writings on variation in German and the pluricentricity of German. That is why this contribution heavily relies on chapter B.1 (*Strittige Varietäten und ihre Zuordnung zur deutschen Sprache* ['Disputed varieties and allocating them to the German language']) and chapter B.2 (*Allgemeine Regeln der Zuordnung von Varietäten zu Sprachen* ['General rules for allocating varieties to languages']) of the 2015 monograph. Both chapters have been made accessible online.<sup>2</sup> Given the many cross-references to *Die deutsche Sprache in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz* (Ammon 1995),<sup>3</sup> readers are also encouraged to read section 4.5 (*Definition von 'nationalem Sprachzentrum', 'plurinationaler Sprache' und verwandten Begriffen* ['Definition of "national language centre", "plurinational language" and related concepts']) of chapter A of that book.<sup>4</sup> Even 25 years on, this short chapter hasn't lost its potential to fuel discussions on how to refine views on the concept of pluricentricity.

In what follows, some of the core elements of the above-mentioned chapters B.1 and B.2 and section 4.5 are summarised. The summary also contains references to: Ammon (1989), a lengthy book chapter that covers the bulk of the basic principles and thoughts on which he relied in his later work; Ammon (1994), a chapter in which he

<sup>2</sup> The excerpts are freely available here: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110241075-004>.

<sup>3</sup> Ammon (1995) builds the theoretical backbone of the selected chapters of Ammon (2015).

<sup>4</sup> The chapter is freely available here: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110872170.1>.

attempts to develop a more precise definition of “German dialect”; Ammon (2017), the previously mentioned autoethnographic account of the development of his research interests; and Ammon (2018), a chapter in which he lists basic concepts of research on German as a pluricentric language.

### 3 Key questions and concepts

To Ammon (and many others with him), a language such as “German” is to be considered as a complex cluster of different sorts of varieties (Ammon 1989: 28–31, 1995: 1–2, 2015: 108–110). Such an approach almost automatically provokes two heavily intertwined key questions that run like a thread through Ammon’s work, namely:

Key question 1: What are the varieties that a particular language consists of?

Key question 2: Which language does a certain variety belong to?

Bearing in mind the “divide” that already marked the early days of sociolinguistics (Paulston/Tucker 1997), one can say that Ammon, when tackling these questions, was not so much interested in the more microsociolinguistic study of the intricate interplay of different repertoires, styles and registers that colour much of the everyday interpersonal communication in (transnational and/or hyperdiverse) urban or other communities of practice or networks. Inspired by the work of Heinz Kloss and others (including Charles A. Ferguson, Joshua A. Fishman and William A. Stewart), he preferred to study the corpus, status, acquisition and/or prestige of a named language used by (a) pre-defined social group(s) in a supranational, national, regional and/or local setting from a macrosociolinguistic point of view. Showing a real concern for the social relevance and the impact of his work, he defined his geographical units of analysis mostly in line with the social, political and administrative reality he was confronted with, that is, he paid attention to the status and function of language varieties “in societies or social systems, or more specifically, in countries as an important subset of social systems” (Ammon 1989: 24). It should be added, however, that the less tangible concept of “nation” (used especially in relation to language centres and language varieties) replaced his focus on “countries” in the 1990s, only to become less prominent in his later publications.

#### 3.1 Key question 1: What are the varieties that a particular language consists of?

As a macrosociolinguist taking a norm-theoretical point of view, Ammon (1989, 1994, 1995, 2015) considers a language to consist of (one or more) standard varieties and (one or more) nonstandard varieties. With his systematic description of the social

forces that tend to primarily determine what counts as “standard”, he made a significant contribution to the macrosociolinguistic study of standardisation processes. This is discussed in section 3.1.1, while sections 3.1.2 and 3.1.3 focus on Ammon’s views on what constitutes a centre-specific standard variety of a pluricentric language and on his interpretation of the “weight” of centres.

### 3.1.1 Social forces and the distinction between standard and nonstandard varieties

Ammon explains the classification of varieties as standard or nonstandard varieties above all on the basis of four “social forces” (linguistic codices, language norm authorities, language experts, professional speakers and writers) and the concept of roofing (see Ammon 2015: 111, 142–148 for details).

3.1.1.1 A first feature that helps to distinguish standard from nonstandard varieties is that the “linguistic codices” that capture the vocabulary (dictionaries) and the structural properties (grammars) of a standard variety are – and this in contrast to codices of nonstandard varieties – valid in the whole of a state, an area within a state, or a “border area” that covers more than one state where the language (to which both the standard and the nonstandard varieties belong)<sup>5</sup> is used. In order to more clearly emphasise the normative force of the codified standard variety (*vis-à-vis* non-standard varieties), Ammon makes use of *Überdachung* [‘roofing’], a concept originally introduced by Kloss. Whereas in Kloss’ writings (Kloss 1952: 21, 1978: 60, 387), “roofing” is above all used to refer to the structural relationship (and especially the absence thereof) between a dialect and a standard variety of a language (by which is meant, in fact, the written form of the standard variety, i.e. the *Schriftsprache*), Ammon uses “roofing” rather to illustrate the function of codified standard varieties as normative points of reference that – especially in school contexts, but also in public domains of language use – serve to correct written and oral language use (see Ammon 1994: 373, 2015: 111).<sup>6</sup> He repeatedly emphasises that the roofing relationship between standard and nonstandard varieties is asymmetrical in the sense that only standard varieties can function as a roof.

3.1.1.2 All those entitled to correct other people’s language behaviour in the direction of the standard norm are considered to be language norm authorities. Such authorities also exist in the case of nonstandard varieties. It is typical of norm authorities in

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5 The use of “state” is not entirely loyal to Ammon’s writings. As previously mentioned (see section 3), he most certainly in the 1990 and the early 2000s often uses “nation” (in the sense of a nation-state, i.e. a *Staatsnation*) alongside “state”. See also section 3.1.2. for more details on Ammon’s use of “state” and “nation”.

6 The school context is also explicitly mentioned in Kloss (1978: 60–61).

the case of standard varieties, however, that correcting language behaviour and/or spreading and transmitting standard variety norms is part of their professional duties. Ammon (1995: 75–76, 2015: 144, 2018: 15) explicitly mentions schoolteachers and copy editors as language norm authorities.

3.1.1.3 The category of “language experts” comprises “acknowledged linguists who are taken seriously when they criticise the language codex, or also the language use of model speakers and writers or even the corrective behaviour of language-norm authorities” (Ammon 2017: 39).

3.1.1.4 Anyone who regularly speaks and writes in public can affect the norm of the language they use. Of particular relevance, however, are model speakers and writers, i.e. “professional speakers and writers, such as prominent authors and actors in the past and journalists and newsreaders in the present” (Ammon 2017: 38). In line with Kloss (1952: 28), Ammon considers nonfiction to have a much stronger impact on forming standard norms than fiction. The impact of fiction would be less strong, because it “often intentionally uses clearly nonstandard forms” (Ammon 2017: 38).

The four social forces are presented in a diagram that can be found in Ammon (1995: 80, 2017: 38, 2018: 11) as well as in Ammon (2015: 143). The double-headed arrows in the scheme are meant “to symbolize the comprehensive interaction among the four forces” (Ammon 2017: 39). Professional linguists, for example, often not only act as language experts. When correcting their students’ papers, they also act as language norm authorities, they might be involved in codification activities, they might even play a role as “model writers” if they produce widely received texts, and they are quite often a member of the majority population. As far as the “majority population” is concerned, Ammon (2017: 39) reminds us that “any codification” is related to “the language use of the majority of the population”, which does not, however, mean that the majority population would have an “immediate say [...] as to what actually counts as standard”.

Since the model did not change over time, one can still consider the version that was published in 2018 as an *ad hoc* model (Ammon 1995: 81) that would deserve to be more firmly rooted in sociology. As Ammon (1995: 81, 513–514) explains, a reflection on the weight of the different social forces as well as a discussion on other possible social forces that play a role in standardisation processes could help to improve it. In its current form, the model is above all meant to provide some practical guidance (*eine praktisch brauchbare Orientierungsgrundlage*, as Ammon [1995: 81] describes the model),<sup>7</sup> for example when it comes to describing the autonomy of a certain national variety or centre *vis-à-vis* other national varieties or centres of the same language.

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<sup>7</sup> For an example of the practical value of the model, see e.g. Hägi (2013).

According to Ammon (1995: 81), that autonomy is limited if, in a certain centre, parts of the language codex are based on the language codices of other centres or if the codifiers, the language norm authorities or the language experts base themselves on model texts that are produced outside of their own centre (*Diese Autonomie ist z. B. eingeschränkt, wenn Teile des Sprachkodexes aus anderen Sprachzentren übernommen werden oder sich die Kodifizierer, die Normautoritäten oder die Sprachexperten an auswärtigen Modelltexten orientieren*).

Through emphasising the existence of different “standard varieties” or “centres” of German and advocating for their recognition, Ammon opposes the “linguistic arrogance” (Ammon 2017: 38) that was still present in the 1970s and the 1980s. In those years, even among linguists the attitude prevailed “that Germany’s standard variety was the only correct version of the German language, with anything else being non-standard or even regional dialect” (Ammon 2017: 37–38).

### 3.1.2 Pluricentricity or the existence of centre-specific standard varieties

In general terms, pluricentricity from Ammon’s point of view<sup>8</sup> refers to the fact that a language has not one, but several standard varieties that each have their own “area of application” (*Geltungsbereich*; see Ammon 2018: 19) that is referred to as a centre. As already stated above, he tended to put emphasis on the existence of *national* centres in which *national* varieties (i.e. standard varieties) are used.<sup>9</sup> In his 1995 monograph, Ammon lists Austria as an example of a “nation” and the former FRG and GDR as examples of “states” that cannot be considered as nations (Ammon 1995: 95). He adds, however, that within what he considers to be national and state centres of a language one can also find subnational or substate centres (*Innerhalb von nationalen oder staatlichen Zentren einer Sprache kann es subnationale oder auch substaatliche Zentren geben*). He mentions Bavaria as an example of a subnational centre within the national centre that is Germany. Additionally, transnational centres (*einzelnationalenübergreifende Zentren einer Sprache*) can be identified. Although he does not use a German-speaking area as an example, he broadly refers to a transnational area covered by France and the French-speaking part of Switzerland. Aware of the fact that the use of concepts such as “*national* varieties” and “*national* variants” (even if they are, in fact, also intended to cover subnational as well as transnational reali-

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<sup>8</sup> Chapter A.3 in Ammon (1995) offers a detailed history of research on German as a pluricentric language (including an overview of research on German as a pluricentric language *avant la lettre*).

<sup>9</sup> Ammon is clearly inspired by the work of Michael Clyne. In chapter A.3. of the 1995 monograph he pays tribute to Michael Clyne who defined a pluricentric language as a language with several national varieties, each with its own norms and for whom “national varieties” equal “standard varieties” (Ammon 1995: 48).

ties)<sup>10</sup> is not that precise,<sup>11</sup> Ammon (2018: 7, 9) indicates that, from a scientific point of view, it would make more sense to refer to “centre-specific varieties” and “centre-specific variants” of pluricentric languages (see also Ammon [1995: 48] for comments on the use of *zentrumspezifische Varietät*). Ammon (2018: 7) argues, however, that “centre-specific” is *ungebräuchlich* [‘uncommon’] and *nur für Fachleute verständlich* [‘only understandable for experts’]. While there might be some truth to this, the notion of “centre-specific” is worth elaborating on, especially since some experts point out that literature on pluricentricity, due to a focus on “national varieties”, often helps to feed the impression that “pluricentricity” and “plurinationality” are interchangeable notions (see e.g. Elspaß/Dürscheid/Ziegler 2018: 74). To counter that impression, they prefer to talk about pluriareality (instead of pluricentricity),<sup>12</sup> even though it would be equally possible to embroider on the concept of “centre-specific varieties” (and variants). In other words, rather than focus on “centres” as “nations”, one could – perfectly in line with Ammon – also actively promote the use of “centre” as a variable concept, the geographical contours of which, depending on one’s focus or research interests, can correspond to a state, an area within a state, or a transborder area (see also sections 3.2 and 4 below). Furthermore, one could question the claim that a certain area can only be considered a language “centre” if a centre-specific standard variety exists.<sup>13</sup> However, before that specific issue is dealt with it seems appropriate to first consider the criteria that Ammon proposes to distinguish one centre-specific variety (i.e. a standard variety) from another centre-specific variety (i.e. another standard variety) of the same language.

Following Ammon (1995: 71–72), a centre-specific standard variety is a variety that contains (i) at least one centre-specific variant, or (ii) combinations of centre-specific variants that can themselves also be unspecific. A variant is considered to be the concrete realisation of a phonetic/phonological, grammatical, lexical, pragmatic or syntactic variable (Ammon 2018: 6). While recognising that all levels of linguistic analysis are relevant, Ammon devotes most of his attention to the lexicon, distinguishing between onomasiological and semasiological variables (Ammon 1995: 62, 2018: 8). In the case of onomasiological variables, there are two or more variants (word forms) for one and the same meaning. Kellermeier-Rehbein (2014: 35) illustrates this by means of

**10** Ammon (1995) deals with transnational areas in chapter F.9, entitled *Region und Nation als varietätsprägende Kräfte* [‘Region and nation as forces that shape variation’].

**11** Ammon (2018: 9) considers the use of the adjective *nationale* in *nationale Varietäten* to be a *Vereinfachung* [‘simplification’].

**12** Another argument put forward by scholars who are in favour of using “pluriareality” (instead of “pluricentricity”) is that pluriareality would help to stress the *oft nur regionale Geltung standardsprachlicher Varianten* [‘often only regional validity of standard language variants’] (Elspaß/Dürscheid/Ziegler 2018: 74). One could, however, argue that a notion such as “subnational centre” would allow for precisely that.

**13** Here one notices that Ammon’s point of view is influenced by Kloss (1978: 66), who talks about *plurizentrische Hochsprachen* [‘pluricentric standard languages’].

the onomasiological variable ‘first month of the year’ for which the onomasiological variant *Jänner* is used in the Austrian standard variety of German and *Januar* in the German and the Swiss standard varieties of German. In the case of semasiological variables, one is confronted with two or more variants (meanings) for one and the same word form, e.g. the meaning ‘a place where bread and cakes are made or sold’ and ‘baked goods such as bread and cakes’ for the word *Bäckerei* [‘bakery’]. The first meaning is used in the standard varieties of German in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. The second meaning is specific to the Austrian standard variety of German (Kellermeier-Rehbein 2014: 36).

A centre-specific variant is a variant that is only used in one centre. *Marille* [‘apricot’], for example, is said to be specific to the Austrian standard variety of German. Unspecific variants are used in more than one centre-specific standard variety (an example is *Aprikose* [‘apricot’] that is used in the standard variety of German in Germany and Switzerland, but not in Austria). As soon as words are used identically in all the standard varieties of a language, they are considered to be communal words, or in the case of German, communal German (*gemeindeutsche*; Ammon 1995: 104, 2018: 8) – words such as *Mann* or *Frau*. Communal words that have no synonyms are called constants (*Konstanten*; Ammon 1995: 66, 2018: 7). An example of a German constant is *Donnerstag* [‘Thursday’].

Combinations of centre-specific variants that can themselves also be unspecific are listed in the table below, adapted from Kellermeier-Rehbein (2014: 39):

|                               | standard variety of German in |                |                               |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
|                               | Austria                       | Switzerland    | Germany                       |
| <b>specific variants</b>      | <i>Jänner</i>                 | <i>Autocar</i> | <i>Abitur</i>                 |
|                               | <i>Marille</i>                | <i>Rüebli</i>  | <i>Möhre</i>                  |
| <b>specific combinations</b>  | <i>Reisebus</i>               | <i>Januar</i>  | <i>Januar</i>                 |
| <b>of unspecific variants</b> | <i>Matura</i>                 | <i>Matura</i>  | <i>Reisebus</i> <sup>14</sup> |

Ammon (1995: 96) specifies that the minimal requirement for the existence of a standard variety is that the specific variants or combinations of variants are recognised as belonging to the standard variety by at least one of the social forces that primarily determine what counts as a standard. He also points out, however, that only if this condition is fulfilled several times will one seriously speak of a standard variety in its own right. Because of centre-specific differences related to the interplay of social forces, it is clear that the centre-specific standard varieties each have a different weight.

<sup>14</sup> *Abitur* and *Matura* = ‘high school diploma’ (as a result of a school examination usually taken at the end of year 13 and more or less equivalent to the British A-level exam); *Autocar* and *Reisebus* = ‘coach’.

### 3.1.3 The asymmetrical weight of different centres

In his 1995 monograph, Ammon devotes an entire chapter to the asymmetries between centres of pluricentric languages (i.e. chapter F.7. *Überblick über verbreitete Asymmetrien zwischen den nationalen Sprachzentren* [‘Overview of widespread asymmetries between national centres of a language’]). He describes in detail how extra-linguistic factors (number of inhabitants, economic strength, etc.) as well as the use that is made of a centre-specific standard variety in different domains within a centre, the range of media in which a centre-specific standard variety is used, the spread of a centre-specific standard variety in “foreign language classes”, the size, the number and the spread of language codices, etc., influence the weight of a centre with respect to other centres of the same language. Trying to bring some order to the centres of German, he builds clusters of centres on the basis of a number of selected criteria. The availability of endonormative language codices is the central benchmark used in Ammon (1989: 90–91) to distinguish *full* centres (fully endonormative), *nearly full* centres (predominantly endonormative), *semi* centres (semi endonormative) and *rudimentary* centres (predominantly exonormative). Ammon (2018: 18–19) uses the official status of the standard variety in addition to the presence (or not) of centre-specific language codices to make a rough distinction between *Vollzentren* [‘full centres’], *Halbzentren* [‘half centres’] and *Viertelzentren* [‘quarter centres’].<sup>15</sup>

- Typical for a full centre is that the centre-specific standard variety is used as an “official language” (a status that it possibly shares with the standard variety of another language). The standard variety of a full centre is documented in centre-specific (endonormative) language codices and characterised by centre-specific variants on all linguistic levels (*standardsprachliche Besonderheiten (Varianten) auf allen grammatischen<sup>16</sup> Ebenen/Stufen*; Ammon 2018: 18–19).
- Typical for a half centre is that the centre-specific standard variety is used as an “official language” (a status that it possibly shares with the standard variety of another language). The centre-specific standard variety is not documented in centre-specific language codices and is only characterised by centre-specific variants on the lexical level (*Sie verfügen über keine eigenen Nachschlagewerke und nur über Besonderheiten im Wortschatz*; Ammon 2018: 19).
- Typical for a quarter centre is that the centre-specific standard variety does not have the status of “official language”. The centre-specific standard variety is not documented in centre-specific language codices. The centre-specific standard variety is only characterised by centre-specific variants on the level of the lexicon.

<sup>15</sup> Ammon (1995: 96–97) makes a distinction between *Vollzentren* and *Halbzentren*; *Viertelzentren* are not mentioned as such.

<sup>16</sup> Since it is clear from the broader context of Ammon’s work that *grammatisch* as used here refers broadly to several aspects of language structure (including morphology, phonology, semantics and syntax), it was translated into English as “linguistic”.

Ammon arrives at a total of ten centres (i.e. *soweit bisher zuverlässig ermittelt* [‘in so far as one can assume that they have been reliably determined to date’]; Ammon 2018: 18). Three of them have the status of a full centre (Germany, Austria and German-speaking Switzerland), four the status of a half centre (Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, South-Tyrol, East Belgium) and three the status of a quarter centre (Romania, Namibia and the settlements of the Mennonites in North and South America). The second edition of the *Variantenwörterbuch des Deutschen* (Ammon/Bickel/Lenz 2016), a project of which Ammon was particularly proud, contains an inventory of the “standard language” in the ten above-mentioned centres.<sup>17</sup>

While the three broad categories of centres certainly help to create order in the German-speaking world, they also raise a number of problems. First of all, one could argue that they somewhat tend to obscure the differences between the centres belonging to the same category. Secondly, the exemplary nature of the already identified full, half and quarter centres (states or (settlement) areas within a state) does not really invite one to consider transborder areas as potential centres in their own right. Thirdly, one could ask why it suffices to concentrate on the lexicon in order to identify a centre-specific standard variety in the case of half and quarter centres while in the case of full centres “all grammatical levels” have to be taken into consideration. Fourthly, because of the fact that a certain area is only considered to constitute a centre on the basis of the presence of a centre-specific standard variety, a considerable part of the German language area is in danger of being left out, unless one would indeed be willing to define a “standard variety” in an extremely minimalist way, i.e. on the basis of the existence of *one* single centre-specific lexical variant.<sup>18</sup>

Precisely in order to identify the great diversity of the entire German-speaking area (a diversity that transcends the ten centres identified above), it would make sense to argue more explicitly in favour of the interpretation of a centre as a variable concept, the geographical contours of which can correspond to a state, an area within a state, or a transborder area where a certain language is intergenerationally transmitted in the form of a standard variety and/or at least one nonstandard variety. That would help to shift the focus from the description and analysis of a centre-specific standard variety to the description and analysis of the centre-specific interplay of standard and nonstandard varieties of the same or – what is typical for language contact zones – different languages. In fact, Ammon himself is very much in favour of a consideration of the interplay of standard *and* nonstandard varieties of the same language (see Ammon 1995: 70 for details). As the next section will show, he also has a clear interest in the interplay between standard and nonstandard varieties of *different* languages. One of the concepts that he uses to come to terms with that interplay

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<sup>17</sup> The idea of creating such a dictionary is mentioned in the last chapter (F.10 *Forschungsdesiderata* [‘research directions’]) of Ammon (1995: 516).

<sup>18</sup> See also Kellermeier-Rehbein (2014: 40) on problems related to such a minimalist approach and to the delimitation of varieties more generally.

(i.e. the concept of “roofing”) will be discussed in more detail in section 4, since it is a concept that could help to describe and analyse the pluricentricity of languages in the broad sense that is advocated here.

### 3.2 Key question 2: Which language does a certain variety belong to?

In order to answer key question 2, Ammon (1995: 2, 2015: 131) puts forward two criteria. The first is *Ählichkeit* [‘similarity’], the counterpart of Kloss’ focus on *Abstand* [‘distance’] (see Kloss 1978: 23–30). He identifies three degrees of similarity: high, moderate, and low (Ammon 2015: 131; on page 114 he also mentions the possibility of no similarity at all). The second criterion is “roofing” (see 3.1.1 for Ammon’s view on roofing).

When considering this second research question, Ammon focuses on two specific scenarios. In the first scenario, one is confronted with two standard varieties. The question here is to which language each of the standard varieties belongs. Given the fact that standard varieties themselves cannot be roofed, Ammon relies solely on the criterion of similarity to answer this question. The rules that he uses to decide if the standard varieties belong to the same or to a different language are the following (see Ammon 2015: 134):

- (ia) Two standard varieties SVa and SVb belong to the same language when the degree of linguistic similarity between SVa and SVb is high.
- (ib) Two standard varieties SVa and SVb belong to different languages when there is a moderate or small degree of linguistic similarity between SVa and SVb.

Rule (ia) allows for the allocation of the standard varieties of a pluricentric language to one and the same language. Rule (ib) allows for the allocation of standard varieties that clearly belong to the same “language family” to different languages (Dutch or German as part of the Germanic language family, French and Spanish as part of the family of Romance languages).

The second scenario that Ammon deals with is where one is confronted with a standard variety and a nonstandard variety. In order to decide to which language the standard and the nonstandard variety belong (i.e. the same language or a different one), he suggests using rules in which both “similarity” and “roofing” play a role:

- (ia) A standard variety SVa and a nonstandard variety NSVb belong to one and the same language when SVa functions as the roof of NSVb and when there is at least a moderate degree of linguistic similarity between SVa and NSVb. That is also the case when NSVb is more similar to SVc but is not roofed by SVc (Ammon 2015: 135).

- (iib) A standard variety *SVa* and a nonstandard variety *NSVb* belong to different languages when the degree of similarity between *SVa* and *NSVb* is less than moderate. In this case, it is not relevant if *SVa* roofs *NSVb* or not. If *NSVb* shows at least a moderate degree of linguistic similarity with a standard variety *SVc*, then *NSVb* belongs to the same language as *SVc*, irrespective of whether *SVc* roofs *NSVb* or not (Ammon 2015: 136).

Rule (iia) implies that the Moselle franconian dialects (*NSVb*) as they are used in Germany in the area of Bittburg are considered part of German and not of Luxembourgish, based on the fact that, while they might indeed be more similar to the standard variety of Luxembourgish (*SVc*), they are not roofed by that variety, but rather by the standard variety of German in Germany (*SVa*) with which they are similar to a moderate degree.

Rule (iib) implies that the nonstandard varieties of German that are used in Alsace (*NSVb*) belong to the German language and not to the French language, given the fact that they show a less than moderate degree of similarity with the standard variety of French (*SVa*) and at least a moderate degree of linguistic similarity with the standard variety of German used in Germany (*SVc*). The criterion of roofing is in this case not considered to be relevant.

A question that deserves to be asked here concerns the operationalisation of the criteria that are central to the rules defined by Ammon. Ammon (2015: 138–141) devotes a number of pages to the description of the difficulties related to the operationalisation of the concept of “linguistic similarity”. He refers to lexicostatistical and dialectometrical research and some of the challenges related to such approaches; challenges that are so big that he chooses to rather intuitively determine the similarity between language varieties above all on the basis of a comparison of content and function words. He repeatedly admits that the distinction that he makes between a high, moderate and low degree of similarity is, as Sinner (2014: 55) notes, *äußerst unscharf* [‘extremely fuzzy’]. However, he also points to the fact that even a very precise description of structural similarities and differences between varieties would still need to take into account the attitudes of language users as well as place- and time-bound political factors (Ammon 2015: 141) that affect the way in which language differences and similarities are perceived and/or instrumentalised for identity and political purposes. This can be interpreted as a plea for a consideration of the role of extralinguistic factors in the categorisation of language varieties as belonging to the same or different languages (a plea that echoes the interplay of *Abstand* and *Ausbau* in Kloss’ work).

When Ammon briefly explains what “roofing” means to him (i.e. the fact that a codified standard variety functions as a point of reference when it comes to correcting the written and oral use of nonstandard varieties of the same language), he also emphasises its impact on community building and identity construction. The fact, for example, that teachers correct their pupils’ language use in the direction of a codified standard variety has an impact on the pupils’ language attitudes, because it feeds the

impression that the variety they use and the standard variety belong to the same language (Ammon 2015: 148), and that the speakers of these varieties belong to the same language community. What is, however, not entirely clear in Ammon's discussion of "roofing" is how it functions when two or more standard varieties of one or different languages play a role in a certain state, a (settlement) area within a state or a transborder area. As far as the situation in Alsace-Lorraine is concerned, Ammon (2015: 136) writes that the nonstandard varieties of German in Alsace-Lorraine are roofed by the standard variety of French in France, yet immediately adds that they are at any rate (*jedenfalls*) more strongly roofed (*viel stärker überdacht*) by that standard variety than by the German or the Swiss standard variety of German (see also Ammon 1995: 8). How this situation of roofing and other situations of *konkurrierende Überdachungen seitens mehrerer Standardvarietäten bezüglich ein und derselben Nonstandardvarietät (Mehrfachüberdachungen)* ['competitive roofing by several standard varieties of one and the same nonstandard variety (multiple roofing)']; Ammon 2015: 111) are to be interpreted, is not all that clear. However, as the next section will show, such forms of "competitive roofing" have been dealt with by some of Ammon's contemporaries. Even today, the terminology developed by them can help to fuel research that prefers a broad take on pluricentricity.

## 4 Multiple roofs, the elasticity of centres and related challenges

As one can infer from the summary above, Ammon's ideas on German as a pluricentric language are characterised by a tension between a broad and a more restricted view on what a language centre is. On the one hand, Ammon in most of his writings – perhaps due to his main focus on Germany, Austria and German-speaking Switzerland – clearly navigates towards a primary and more restricted focus on the form and function of standard varieties of German in what he – on the basis of two criteria (the official status of German and the presence of centre-specific language codices) – labels as full, half and quarter centres of the German language that seem to coincide with states or (settlement) areas within states. On the other hand, he is also extremely generous in sharing research possibilities and invites the research community not to limit the focus on centres as states or (settlement) areas within states, but also to pay attention to transborder areas and to fully consider the dynamic centre-specific interplay between nonstandard and standard varieties of the same or different languages. Such a broad approach (that highlights the elasticity of centres and does not take the existence of pre-identified centre-specific standard varieties of German as a precondition to label an area as a centre) implies that not only the ten states and (settlement) areas mentioned above but also other areas can be considered as centres of German, for example: the area known as "Old Belgium" (i.e. those parts of Belgium outside of

the German-speaking Community of Belgium where German is not officially recognised but where nonstandard varieties of German are still used by an ageing population; see Ammon 2015: 234–235), the settlement area of the Hunsrück in Brazil (i.e. Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, Paraná and Espírito Santo; see Ammon 2015: 372) as well as transborder areas such as the Moselle-Franconian or the Alemannic dialect areas.

Widening the scope of research on pluricentric languages invites one to reflect on a possible adaptation of the conceptual apparatus proposed by Ammon to analyse and describe the relationship between standard and nonstandard varieties. As repeatedly mentioned above, Ammon uses “roofing” to refer to acts of correcting nonstandard language use in the direction of a normative centre-specific standard variety that belongs to the same language. Contrary to Kloss (1978: 60), he does not use the concept of roofing, but the concept of “linguistic similarity” (the counterpart of Kloss’ concept of *Abstand*) to refer to the structural or genetic relationship that exists between a nonstandard variety and a standard variety. However, in view of the analysis and description of the interplay of nonstandard and standard varieties of German and other languages in language contact zones, it could be more convenient to make use of the concept of roofing and to make a distinction, as Goossens (1977, 1985)<sup>19</sup> does, between structural and functional roofing. What is particularly interesting about Goossens’ view is that, unlike Kloss, he believes that a nonstandard variety, if not structurally, can still be functionally roofed by a standard variety that belongs to a different language.

In order to more clearly describe roofing by structurally related and structurally non-related standard varieties, Goebel (1986: 130) introduces the concepts *homogeneous* roofing (a nonstandard variety is roofed by a structurally related standard variety) and *heterogeneous* roofing (a nonstandard variety is roofed by a standard variety to which it is not structurally related). Goebel (1986: 130) also uses the concept of *secondary* roofing (or, alternatively, *auxiliary* roofing) that, if complemented with the concept of *primary* roofing, allows for a more detailed description of functional roofing of nonstandard varieties in the case of both homogeneous and heterogeneous roofing. A standard variety with relatively unimportant functions in a certain area would then constitute the secondary roof, whereas a standard variety that is more important (or has more “weight”) would constitute the primary roof.

Because of the considerable functional weight that a certain heterogeneous roof can have in a particular language contact setting, it hardly makes sense to narrowly interpret functional roofing as the act of (formally) correcting non-standard varieties in the direction of a related standard variety. Functional roofing rather implies that people who in a certain setting use a nonstandard variety in certain situations (are made to, feel obliged to, or spontaneously) refrain from using that nonstandard

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<sup>19</sup> See Muljačić (1989: 256–263) for a more detailed discussion.

variety and switch to the use of a standard variety that is structurally related to it or not. When, why, and to what extent language users change or adapt their language choices depends on (a mix of) many factors (see Coulmas 2013), yet it is obvious that the above-mentioned societal “weight” or “importance” of those varieties plays a role. Inspired by Goebel (1986: 130), one could thus describe the case of the nonstandard varieties of German in Alsace-Lorraine as a case of *heterogeneous primary* and *homogeneous secondary roofing* (the role of the structurally non-related standard variety of French being a lot more important than the role of the structurally related standard variety of German). In settings where two standard varieties of the same language play a role, one could have a case of *homogeneous primary* and *homogeneous secondary roofing* (in which case one standard variety would have a functionally more important role than the other) or a case of *double homogeneous primary roofing* (in which case the role of both standard varieties would be more or less the same). Of course, the use of a slightly more sophisticated roofing terminology does not mean that all the challenges related to the detailed study of the interplay between nonstandard and standard varieties belonging to the same pluricentric or to different languages would cease to exist.

The use of labels such as primary, secondary, tertiary, and potentially even double primary or double secondary roofing, for example, entails that one would need to identify a number of criteria that allow for their transparent and consistent use. Here one would need to think of certain parameters linked, for example, to the status, prestige, degree of institutionalisation and degree of legitimisation of a standard variety that functions as a homogeneous or heterogeneous functional roof of a nonstandard variety in public, semi-public and/or private domains of language use in a certain setting. While this is far from a straightforward challenge in the case of a comparison of standard varieties that belong to a different language, the comparison of the domain-specific importance of two standard varieties of the same language might be even more complicated. Here one is not just confronted with the difficulty of trying to grasp the differences related to the domain-specific use of each of the standard varieties. Above all, one needs to have a clear idea of how to define the contours of the standard varieties that play a role in the centre that one has decided to focus on. As far as the description of centre-specific standard varieties is concerned, Ammon (1995: 516) emphasises the (neglected) role of pragmatics and notes that it would be worthwhile fully considering all linguistic levels rather than primarily concentrating on the lexicon (as he did).

When trying to distinguish standard varieties, it doesn’t suffice to concentrate on lexical, phonological, pragmatic, syntactic, and other features. One also has to take into account the social forces that determine what counts as “standard” as well as the social factors that help to explain the asymmetries between languages centres. If the aim is to analyse and describe differences related to the domain-specific use of standard varieties of the same language in a specific centre, it would make sense to systematically focus on the amplitude of centre-internal and centre-external “social

forces” (linguistic codices, language norm authorities, language experts, model speakers and writers, possible other forces) that function as normative points of reference within certain domains of language use. If the aim is to investigate centre-specific standardisation processes, it would make sense to focus on the specific role of the centre-specific social forces and social factors in such processes, including socio-psychological factors that provide insight into the importance that different social actors attach to a certain (standard) language variety (see Ammon [1995: 517] on the role and the use of *Demonstrationszentrismen*, i.e. centre-specific words or forms that are demonstratively used to mark one’s membership of a certain language community). As explained by Ammon (1995: 517), it would be a missed opportunity if the focus on centre-specific codified normative standard varieties were not complemented by a focus on centre-specific standards of use (*Gebrauchsstandards*). In a similar manner, it would be a missed opportunity if, in language contact zones, no attention were paid to the structural influence that structurally non-related standard varieties have on the use of nonstandard varieties and, possibly, also on their centre-specific homogeneous primary or secondary roof. In the case of German in Alsace-Lorraine, Goebel (1986: 130) reminds us that “the native German dialects are beset to such an extent by the spoken French derived from the French standard *roofing language*, that their inner grammatical structure is becoming constantly more and more contaminated”.

As demonstrated throughout this article, the bulk of the challenges that are densely listed in this last section are, in one way or another, addressed in Ammon (1995, especially in part F). They also shimmer through in Ammon (2015) and it goes without saying that they also play a significant role in the bulk of literature that exists on pluricentric languages and that was (deliberately)<sup>20</sup> not dealt with here (see e.g. Schmidlin 2011, Kellermeier-Rehbein 2014 and Sieburg/Solms 2018 for an overview). Even a quick glance at the HSK volume on German (Herrgen/Schmidt 2019), especially at the contributions in section IV of that volume (*Die Dynamik der arealen Varietäten des Deutschen im Sprachkontakt* [‘The dynamics of the areal varieties of German in situations of language contact’] could already provide some partial answers to some of the challenges mentioned above. On a more personal note, I do think, however, that it would make sense to deal more extensively and systematically with the issues raised both in those contributions and in Ammon’s work (and very briefly also in this article) in a series that – following the example of *Deutsche Sprache in Europa und Übersee. Berichte und Forschungen* [‘German language in Europe and overseas.

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**20** The idea really was to focus on Ammon’s work. That is also the reason why the choice was made to focus on the concept of “roofing” and not on a related concept such as diglossia (both in its traditional Fergusonian sense as well as in the wider Fishmanian sense). As argued elsewhere (Darquennes 2019: 1074) it would make sense to reflect on the added value of “roofing” compared to “diglossia (with or without bilingualism)”. It could be equally interesting to reflect on the link between the concept of “roofing”, on the one hand, and “autonomy/heteronomy” (Chambers/Trudgill 1980: 10–14), on the other (see Ammon [1989: 38–39] for an attempt in that direction).

Reports and research’]<sup>21</sup> – is especially dedicated to an in-depth discussion of German in areas where it is still intergenerationally distributed in the form of nonstandard and/or standard varieties. Such a series would, in fact, allow for a combination of the research interests of the three founding fathers of *Sociolinguistica*: language contact (and conflict), German as a pluricentric language, variation in German, German dialectology and language standardisation. Admittedly, it would also require a good dose of the drive (*Tatendrang*) that marked the three of them.

**Acknowledgement:** I would like to thank Birte Kellermeier-Rehbein (Wuppertal) and Hans Bickel (Basel) for their valuable comments on an earlier draft of this article. Any remaining factual or other mistakes in the text are entirely mine.

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