

Purism – Discourses and Practices of Language Purity

Abstract

Linguistic purism is one of the most important aspects of the European language debate between the 15th and 17th centuries. The quest for a “pure” language, which could be considered prestigious and exemplary, became a guiding concern for European vernaculars. This contribution explores this debate within the closely related linguistic cultures and literatures of Italy, France, and Germany. Its fundamental thesis is that only in the early modern period did purity of language become a “figure of aesthetic reflection,” according to the terminology of the Collaborative Research Center (CRC) 1391. It was during the course of the 16th and 17th centuries, that the rhetorical and stylistic questions of *puritas sermonis* were linked back, through standardization attempts in the vernaculars, to socio-political discourses and institutions. In this way, the demand for and promotion of linguistic purity gave rise to various aesthetics, as well as social attitudes, programs, and practices aimed towards linguistic purification. These were initially carried out systematically by institutions, in particular by language academies and language societies. This contribution describes standardization strategies in the three respective languages and literatures, in order to illustrate the central role and concrete practices and goals of the *Accademia della Crusca*, the *Académie française*, and the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft*. The conclusion examines three documents within the context of the linguistic politics and agendas of the respective academies: the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, Vaugelas’s *Remarques sur la langue françoise* and Harsdörffer’s *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele*.

Keywords

Purity, Language, Rhetoric/Grammar, *Accademia della Crusca*, *Académie française*, *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft*, Normalization, Standardization

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1. Linguistic Purism and a Different Aesthetics

Linguistic purism, the striving for a “pure” language understood as clear and elegant, exemplary and prestigious, informs the development of the linguistic and literary history of European languages.¹ Today, the rejection of expressions from other languages (e.g., Latinisms, Gallicisms, or Anglicisms) is the most familiar and perhaps most salient tendency. However, purity from foreign words is only one of the many complex aspects of puristic language work. This is especially true in the early modern period. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the demand for language purity gave rise to various aesthetic and social attitudes, programs, and practices of language purification. They were for the first time pursued institutionally and programmatically in Italian, French, and German-speaking regions, especially by linguistic academies and societies. And while all of them shared the goal of cleansing their own language of foreign elements, what was promoted as native or resisted as foreign under the banner of language purity could mean different and often contradictory things.² In the process, purification was always preceded by a diagnosis of crisis. The early modern period in particular can be regarded as the apogee and turning point in the history of linguistic purism; purifying efforts and discussions experienced a boom not only in the autological field of specialized discourse. Beyond that, they also informed to an unprecedented degree communicative social practices, whether in administrative correspondence, school and university instruction, the poetics of letter-writing, or the language of book and stage.

While the aesthetic ideal of language purity had a place within stylistics (*elocutio*) in the rhetoric of classical antiquity,³ as the ancient sources (especially Cicero and Quintilian) were rediscovered in the early modern period, linguistic purism underwent a profound transformation. This was induced by the application of rhetorical guidelines to early modern efforts to normalize contemporary vernaculars and their literatures,⁴ so that language purity can be characterized as a figure of reflection in the sense of an open-ended negotiation between language, literature, and social practice. The humanistic program can be taken as the starting point of vernacular debates whose goal was to cleanse Latin from the barbarisms of supposedly medieval Latinity. The debates about

1 Hafner/Kocher 2005; Dessì Schmid/Hafner 2014; Dessì Schmid 2017.

2 Dessì Schmid 2020. Puristic linguistic policies typically defend the traditional against the new (neologisms, foreign words, etc.); they oppose diastatic variety with the “good” and “noble” and in the name of “clarity” and “brilliance” are against dialectalisms and archaisms (although apropos the latter, there are illustrious and very successful exceptions, e.g., the radically archaizing model of the Florentine *trecentesco*). Linguistic purism thus proves to be an enhanced form of humanistic *imitatio* and *renovatio*.

3 On rhetorical terminology and systematics, Lausberg 1998, pp. 220–240 (§ 463–527).

4 Cf. Dessì Schmid 2017; Dessì Schmid 2020. Müller/Robert 2007 offer a phasic model of literary history from the 15th to the 17th century under the aspect of norms and pluralization.

Ciceronianism that began to gather momentum toward the end of the 15th century display a radicalization of this humanistic *imitatio*-poetics and rhetoric.⁵ In the early 16th century, central lines of argument from those debates are carried over into the vernacular languages.⁶ In the process, cultural efforts in various languages follow quite similar principles, often based on one another, but at the same time diverge since what was to be protected in one location was to be rejected as foreign in another.

The following discussion places new weight on comparing three closely related linguistic cultures. The primary aim of this international and intercultural comparison will be to reveal the aesthetic implications of discourses and practices related to linguistic purism. In this way, snapshots of a pan-European development will be sketched out and the present state of research recapitulated. Selected examples will show how the model of a praxeological aesthetics⁷ can be a useful heuristic for addressing the topic of linguistic purism.⁸ The theoretical arguments growing out of the demand for language purity in the 16th and 17th centuries reveal a dynamic interaction between autological and heterological dimensions, an interaction that can be especially well captured by the concept of praxeological aesthetics. Debates on linguistic theory beginning in Italy and spreading to France, Germany, and beyond become the basis for poetological concepts and social practices. Thus, within the framework of the CRC's praxeological model, language purity represents a figure of aesthetic reflection capable of integrating various aspects that up to now have been treated only in isolation – whether heterologically or autologically (among others: modelling efforts at standardization or analyzing the literary-historical, socio-cultural, and institutional conditions of texts and the practices of the academies).

Against this background, the question informing this chapter is this: what are the *aesthetic* implications of the *institutional* efforts to standardize the vernacular languages, and what was their effect on social practices? In order to trace the complicated interrelations between aesthetic, societal, and theoretical linguistic ques-

5 Vitale 1978; Robert 2011.

6 Think of i. a. Toffanin's successful formula of *umanesimo volgare*; cf. Toffanin 1940.

7 Cf. the contribution by Annette Gerok-Reiter and Jörg Robert in this volume, pp. 3–48, here pp. 23–26.

8 We cannot here go into later historical phases. However, we recognize that the history of the effects of purism is not linear. The Europeanism and cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment was followed by an epoch in which national roots were (re)discovered with a vengeance. For instance, in circa 1800 there arises in Italy a puristic linguistic and literary movement *per antonomasiam*, with a counterpart in art (cf. the manifesto *Del purismo nelle arti*, 1842). This movement and early-modern purism share a theoretical rhetorical horizon coming from ancient sources and resting on the principles of *consuetudo*, *imitatio* and *incorrupte loqui* (cf. Vitale 1986, pp. 39–66). This aspect, however, is missing in some later movements also described as puristic (e. g., fascist language policy in various countries). On the aftereffects of purism in Germany, cf. Gardt 2000; Pfalzgraf 2006; Dröse/Robert 2021.

tions, it is especially important not only to interrogate the central programmatic texts of the linguistic and literary debates, but also to include other sources with no apparent connection to questions of aesthetics, but which are deeply rooted in everyday life and influence the speech habits of numerous individuals. For example, in addition to grammars, dictionaries, and linguistic treatises there are the statutes of linguistic academies, administrative documents and legislative texts, schoolbooks, conversation guides, manuals of behavior, and even popular broadsheets. Thus, argumentative patterns of linguistic purism cross boundaries of language and culture and migrate between literary and pragmatic texts. With three examples from the closely allied linguistic and cultural regions of Italy, France, and Germany, we intend to show one such migration. First we will examine the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, then Claude Favre de Vaugelas's *Remarques sur la langue françoise* (1647), and finally Georg Philipp Harsdörffer's *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* (1641–1649). Each of these texts exists in the context of the language politics – or better, language work (*Spracharbeit*)⁹ – of their respective academies: the *Accademia della Crusca*, the *Académie française*, and the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft*. In our examples, the role of these institutions on the one hand and, on the other, the significance of pragmatic text types for the heterological integration of linguistic objectives into social practice will become clear. For the construction of a linguistic norm and a literary aesthetics are closely interwoven not only in scholarly programs but also in the communicative practices of (courtly) society. For instance, while literary texts and rules of poetics adopt puristic argumentation, technical texts on linguistics and works of codification such as grammars, dictionaries, and linguistic treatises invoke literary models (such as Pietro Bembo invoking Petrarch or Johannes Clajus and Martin Opitz invoking Luther) to justify linguistic and literary norms and integrate poetological reflections in their consideration of linguistic objectives. These linguistic norms are then applied to fields of social practice and guide the actions that determine the ideal of courtly communication and interaction (e.g., the ideal of *sprezzatura* in Castiglione).

We shall proceed in three steps: after a discussion of the state of literature and desiderata for further research (2.), we will address purism and linguistic culture and politics in Europe (3.), provide an overview of efforts at standardization in Italy (3.1.1), France (3.1.2.), and Germany (3.1.3.), and discuss three concrete examples (3.2.1.–3.2.3.). A short conclusion collects our results and relates them to the aims of a *different aesthetics* and its heuristic model.

9 The concept of *Spracharbeit* seems to have been coined by Harsdörffer, who used it in the *Schutzschrift für die Teutsche Spracharbeit* (Defense of German Language Work, an appendix to the *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele*).

2. The Current State of Research

In the past few decades, scholars of literature and linguistics have extensively researched efforts – beginning in Italy – to cultivate and standardize European vernacular languages between the 15th and 17th centuries. Literary historians have intensively discussed the elevation of Petrarch as the *modello di lingua* and *modello di stile* for the *volgare*.¹⁰ The rise of Petrarchism / anti-Petrarchism¹¹ takes place in connection with epistemic processes that can be understood as a dialectic of standardization and pluralization.¹² From a linguistic perspective, numerous studies examine processes of norm policy planning and standardization of the vernacular languages¹³ as well as with their variational sociolinguistic modelling.¹⁴ For example, if one assumes with Haugen¹⁵ that the selection and codification of the form of the norm (policy planning), as well as the extension or implementation and elaboration of its functions (language cultivation), are processes that concern two different developmental spheres (society on the one hand and language itself on the other), then the selection of the norm's basis and its extension are speaker-related aspects: communities of speakers either consciously or unconsciously choose a normative model and use it in more and more contexts. On the other hand, the initial fixing of the norm's basis (its codification in grammars and dictionaries) and its elaboration¹⁶ are aspects that concern the language as a system. To be sure, efforts at standardization as such are not necessarily puristic. Standardization in the first instance means selecting and securing, but not automatically also purifying in the categorical sense of expunging what is impure or contaminated. The latter represents a further step that occurs only under certain historical, political, social, and aesthetic conditions.¹⁷

10 Cf. Regn 2004; Mehlretter 2009.

11 Hempfer / Regn 1993; Bernsen / Huss 2011; Robert 2020.

12 Cf. i.a. Hempfer 1988; Hempfer 2001; Hempfer / Pfeiffer 2002; Müller / Oesterreicher / Vollhardt 2010; Nelting 2007; Müller 2019.

13 In Italian Studies, one classically speaks of *questione della lingua*; cf. i.a. Marazzini 1994; Marazzini 2000; Serianni / Trifone 1993/1994 and Vitale 1978.

14 Cf. i.a. Ayres-Bennet 2016; Ayres-Bennett 2019; Dessì Schmid / Hafner / Heinemann 2011; Grübl 2014; Haugen 1983; Kloss 1978; Koch 2010; Lodge 1993; Lüdi 1990; Rey / Duval / Siouffi 2007.

15 Haugen 1983.

16 Elaboration here means the further perfecting of the norm that becomes necessary through newly adopted functions and their growing prestige, e.g., through rules associated with usage in various discursive traditions. On the concept of discursive traditions, cf. i.a. Aschenberg / Wilhelm 2003; Frank 1994; Frank / Hays / Tophinke 1997; Hafner / Oesterreicher 2007; Jacob / Krefeld 2007; Kabatek 2005; Kabatek 2007; Kabatek 2011; Koch 1987 (where the term “discursive tradition” is used for the first time); Koch 1998; Koch 2010; Koch 2023; Oesterreicher 1988; Oesterreicher 1997; Oesterreicher 2009; Schlieben-Lange 1983; Schlieben-Lange 1996.

17 In the early modern period, general tendencies of “normative centering” are confronted contrapuntally with tendencies toward pluralization and diversification; cf. Hamm 2006.

For the linguistic regions of Italian, French, and German, scholarship has documented various situations of diglossia and polyglossia, regional fragmentation (which is not only linguistic), and/or politico-social multicentricity in which puristic discourse develops. Although the pan-European dimension of the phenomenon purism is often emphasized, it is surprising that it hardly ever became an object of comparative study¹⁸ – not even for the cultural and linguistic entities Italy, France, and Germany, which positively invite comparison because of their intimate linguistic, cultural, and literary interactions. The French debate, for instance, is unthinkable without the Italian one, while German positions only begin to take shape by engaging with French and Italian points of view. In this sense, purism can be defined as part of an international debate that aims to standardize language by strategies of selection and exclusion in the code. In the process, questions of language purity stand on the threshold between linguistic and literary history, for language work in the early modern period is not restricted to the construction of “ideal idioms”¹⁹ but influences the foundation of literature and social practice. Linguistic and aesthetic standardization go hand-in-hand.

Beyond the mostly historical and monolingual studies interested in variational sociolinguistics – but only marginally in aesthetic questions connected to purism or other linguistic ideals of beauty – there is a notable lack of approaches to more general models and typologies for the diverse processes of standardization in the pan-European sphere.²⁰ Similarly, there is a lack of more comprehensive studies. Instead, various core problems become apparent within the debate on purism to which some research is devoted, with differing approaches and emphases: a) the historical or exemplary treatment of the problem of plurality in models of linguistic standardization;²¹ b) the role of institutional involvement or takeover of puristic standardization models within the language academies;²² c) the relationship between (puristic) language theory and lan-

18 For an overview cf. Hafner/Kocher 2005, but also, in outline, Burke 2004.

19 Robert 2015.

20 Especially for the German region, we lack a depiction of purism from the perspective of its role in the founding of German literature since the 16th century (cf. the summary in Wolff 1888 [2017]; Gardt 1994; Gardt 1999; Hundt 2000; Conermann 2013; on the 18th century: Kirkness 1975; Orgeldinger 1999). Only the writings of the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* have been made available for the most part thanks to years of editing and research by Klaus Conermann and Andreas Herz at the Herzog August Library in Wolfenbüttel: <https://www.hab.de/fruchtbringende-gesellschaft-die-deutsche-akademie-des-17-jahrhunderts/> (last accessed: October 22, 2024). By comparison, the other language societies and especially the early puristic programs of the 16th century have been researched only selectively and unsystematically, e.g., Johannes Clajus’s grammar. Cf. Robert 2022c.

21 Cf. among many others Chaurand 1999; Marazzini 1994; Rey/Duval/Siouffi 2007; Serianni/Trifone 1993/1994; Vitale 1978.

22 Cf. i.a. Dessì Schmid/Hafner 2016; Hafner/Kocher 2005; Oberto 2016; Rey/Duval/Siouffi 2007; Vitale 1986.

guage practice;²³ and d) the connection between language policy, (courtly) literature, and politics.²⁴ Thus a complete presentation of this complex social dynamic and its role in a *different* history of aesthetics remains an important desideratum. By contrast, there have been repeated scholarly efforts to make a distinction between puristic and classicistic objectives or – especially important in Germany – general linguistic patriotism. Surprisingly, however, even here the secondary literature has very rarely pointed out the variety in European purism.

In this chapter, we intend to highlight that variety. We will trace the transcultural dimension of the language question in Europe in its aesthetic and theoretical manifestations and its place in social and intellectual history. Not least, with the help of the praxeological model we will try to avoid what Oesterreicher²⁵ calls the “original sin” of the traditional historiography of language, namely, to regard individual developments in isolation from their contexts and only from the perspective of those that are in the end successful. Neglecting the plurality of side paths in linguistic history and taking only prototypical texts into consideration are not successful measures against an “inverted teleology.”²⁶ What seems efficacious is to describe purism as an open plurality of coexisting and opposing purisms that evolves between the autological perspective of specialized disciplinary discourses (of grammar, rhetoric, poetics, etc.) and the heterological perspective of societal practices.

3. Purism, Language Culture, and Language Politics in Italy, France, and Germany

3.1. Aesthetic Implications

3.1.1. Italy

Efforts to standardize the vernacular languages in early modern Europe appear in texts that closely link verbal and linguistic, poetological and aesthetic-literary levels, for instance, Baldassar Castiglione’s *Il libro del Cortegiano* (1527), Pietro Bembo’s *Prose della volgar lingua* (1528), and Niccolò Machiavelli’s *Discorso o dialogo intorno alla nostra lingua* (written in 1524/1525, published in 1730).²⁷ These dialogic works present various schemes for standardizing written Italian and in so doing, reflect on the importance of aesthetic qualities (such as *eleganza*, *naturalezza*, and *sprezzatura*) for literary and social

23 Cf. i.a. Ayres-Bennet 2014; Dessì Schmid 2017; Marazzini 2009; Jones 1995; Körver 1992.

24 Cf. i.a. Caput 1972; Caput 1986; Dessì Schmid / Hafner 2016; Grazzini 1968; Nencioni 1982; Trabant 2002; Trabant 2010.

25 Oesterreicher 2007, p. 16.

26 Oesterreicher 2007, p. 16.

27 This section contains many references to Dessì Schmid 2020.

communication and interaction. In the sense of the praxeological model of the CRC *Different Aesthetics*, linguistic ideals – which for their part are based on poetic ideals – are negotiated (think, for instance, of Bembo's Petrarchism)²⁸ and thereby become ideals of interaction and social norms that support or even determine the selection of particular literary forms and traditions.

In the first place, such texts are important locations of the *Questione della lingua*, the early modern learned discussion about the selection of a *single* variety of Italian, a *single* norm from the rich variety of *volgari* available in medieval and renaissance Italy.²⁹ The search was for a conceptually and communicatively precisely defined variety – a transregional and prestigious language for the domain of conceptual writing and communicative distance.³⁰ They strove to establish an elegant, clear, and beautiful language – an ideal language for literature. However, several different options competed in the *Questione della lingua*, all of which were diastatically similar: prestigious and therefore worthy of imitation – the language of the educated upper classes. These models differ on the diatopic level (whether a suggested model was associated with a geographic region or favored eclectic and thus transregional criteria) and on the diamesic level (whether the search was only for a language for conceptual writing or also for speaking, and whether only authors of literary texts or also educated speakers were considered worthy of imitation).

In this discussion, Castiglione's model makes an important option available: the *lingua cortigiana*, a variety close to the language spoken at court and thus eclectic and weakly tagged on the diatopic level. It represents a suggested norm that would not be successful in politically and culturally multicentric Italy, unlike in France where the *one* court in Paris would always play a decisive role in questions of language. Bembo's *Prose della volgar lingua* contains a different suggested norm strongly tagged on the diatopic level and oriented on the *Corone*, the great Florentine writers of the 14th century. In the *Prose*, Bembo advocates (through the figure of his brother) an archaic linguistic model based on the – for him – central principle of an *imitatio auctorum*.³¹ The same diatopic tag also characterizes Machiavelli's suggestion in his *Discorso o dialogo intorno alla nostra lingua*, which, however, privileges the modern, contemporary *volgare fiorentino*. Compared to those of Machiavelli and Castiglione, Bembo's model seems more advantageous with regard to an important pragmatic aspect; since it is rooted in eminent older

28 Cf. on this concept Regn 2004; on Bembo's *Petrarchismo* and in Italy cf. i.a. Hempfer 2001; Bernsen / Huss 2011; Jossa 2015; Kablitz 1993; Nelting 2011; Robert 2001; on Bembo's philological working habits and the topic of canonization cf. Patota 2017; Mehlretter 2009; on the reception of Petrarchism by Du Bellay and in France cf. i.a. Keller 2009; Robert 2012; Nazarian 2013.

29 Cf. i.a. Marazzini 1994; Marazzini 2000; Seriani / Trifone 1993/1994; Vitale 1978.

30 Cf. Koch 1988; Koch / Oesterreicher 2011.

31 Andreas Kablitz 1999, p. 137, emphasizes that Bembo's decision was also a strategy of self-presentation, and thus aimed at gaining authority. Bembo was also following the model he had established for Latin in his correspondence with Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1517), cf. Robert 2001.

texts whose meanings are relatively well defined and not subject to constant historical change, it offers the possibility of simple and speedy reproduction and multiplication. This aspect could not be ignored by Bembo's friend Aldo Manuzio, the Venetian publisher; it proved crucial, especially in an Italy where the book was becoming more and more the virtual location of culture, and thus contributed to curtailing the cultural role of courtly life.³² Parallel to this development, one can observe in the politically fragmented Italy of small cities the decline of the court as a model, whereas at the same time in other places in Europe, courtly life was flowering. Thus on several levels it is understandable that the eclectic, oral, difficult-to-pin-down courtly model of Castiglione (who in his work also provides outstanding insight in other fields of standardization in early modern culture) was less successful, especially in Italy; and why Bembo chose the eminently literary written model of the *Corone*. Bembo recognizes the cultural reach of Florentine literature and urges its elevation to the language of *Italian* literature and the language of Italy *tout court* – a language capable of competing with Latin and introducing to Europe models of classicism and the (Italian) Renaissance.³³

Such works can also be regarded not least as first evidence of the emergence of a genuine – if still very generally defined – puristic discourse in the early modern period. Especially in their dialogic form, performative character, and location at a court, they bear witness to the creation of a new connection between lexical, grammatical, ideological, and societal normative ideas. From the perspective of this social practice and its location, fundamental concerns not just of language but also of aesthetics were being newly formulated. However, to the extent that these are not prototypical poetical or poetological works, they are unusual sources of aesthetic reflection. Bembo's *Prose della volgar lingua* is a treatise on language that includes one of the first and most important grammars of the Italian of the future, while Castiglione's *Cortegiano* is a sort of handbook that contains rules for communication and behavior that lay down “di che sorte debba esser colui, che meriti chiamarsi perfetto cortegiano, tanto che cosa alcuna non gli manchi” (*Il libro del Cortegiano*, I).³⁴ Thus they allow us to pursue questions about the migration of figures of puristic argumentation between non-fictional and literary texts.

3.1.2. France

Texts such as Joachim Du Bellay's *Deffence, et Illustration de la Langue Francoyse* (1549), François de Malherbe's *Commentaire sur Desportes* (1606), and Claude Favre de Vaugelas's *Remarques sur la langue françoise* (1647) can be regarded as the most familiar evidence of an inner-European transfer of puristic discourse in the early modern period. For one

32 Cf. Mehlretter 2009; Trifone 1993, p. 427.

33 Cf. Dessì Schmid 2017.

34 Castiglione: *Il libro del Cortegiano*, p. 9.

thing, they represent the ideal basis for a comparative investigation of various authors and positions in the lively discussion, strongly marked by puristic tendencies, at the court in Paris; for another, they allow us to look beyond the explicit linguistic and literary intentions of such discussions and their institutional representatives to those aspects that aim at social practices and have to do with more or less explicit acts of language purification. The precondition for the relevant inner-European transfer is the absolutizing and ideologizing of Bembo's model of the *Fiorentino arcaico delle Corone* via the lexicographical work of the *Accademia della Crusca* in Italy which, as we will see below, adhered to a linguistic purism based on strict selection of vocabulary. That purism set the pan-European standards and became an export with far-reaching influence – in different ways – in both France and Germany.

From the outset, however, French efforts at standardization were aimed at a different aspect of the dimension of diamesic variation. Unlike in Italy, that language should serve as a norm which was efficient in *all* communicative domains – not just those of communicative distance but also those of immediacy.³⁵ This means that while it was of course in the service of literature – the domain of conceptual writing – it was at the same time close to the pure, prestigious language spoken at court. For a politically important reason, the spoken language of the court – more precisely, of the court in Paris – was to be granted further prestige. For if on the one hand the towering cultural achievements of Italy in art, architecture, and courtly life were acknowledged in France, on the other there were evident difficulties in accepting the political and linguistic Italianization of the French court.³⁶ This could be one of the reasons why the strongly puristic language question in France took on more radical and politically motivated features than the largely learned discussion in Italy and seems to be strongly related to other fields of standardization in early modern culture. The founding of the *Collège de France* (1530) and the *Ordonnance de Villers-Cotterêts* (1539) already testify to an official, royal, and courtly interest in the *langage maternel françois*. Thus, already at an early stage of efforts to normalize and standardize the language, we can speak of a decisive and consistent linguistic policy in France. It is only in this courtly political context, for example, that the court poet François de Malherbe's work on a new language of French poetry and a new aesthetics of literature is imaginable.

Another centrally important institution, created less on purely aesthetic and literary grounds than on the grounds of linguistic policy, was founded only in the second

35 Cf. Koch/Oesterreicher 2011.

36 Cf. Dessì Schmid/Hafner 2016. A similar situation can be repeatedly observed in the course of the history of the two countries, e.g., in the debate on the *génie de la langue*, cf. i.a. Christmann 1977; Dessì Schmid 2003; Gensini 1989; Rosiello 1965.

half of the 17th century.³⁷ Promoted by Richelieu and operated with political intent, the *Académie française*³⁸ carried out the normalization of French as well as its succeeding dissemination in Europe as official (court) goals.³⁹ Here too it is evident that the auto-logical field of linguistic reflection is determined by and integrated into heterological motives. The consistently applied strategy for reaching these goals was extremely puristic, namely, the elimination of impurity, linguistic waste, *ordures*. Like the *Cruscani*, the *Académiciens*, renowned scholars of the era, advocated a puristic conception of language that strove for strict selection as the basis of the norm. However, they opposed the principle of imitating an archaic linguistic model with the principle of *bon usage*, of a “Maistre des langues, celui qu’il faut suivre pour bien parler, et pour bien écrire.”⁴⁰ In Vaugelas’s suggested norm, formulated in his *Remarques*, we can discern the leading features of French linguistic policy: as a normative model, the variety that was regarded in the 17th century as highly prestigious and an indispensable aspect of good manners (*bienséance*). Vaugelas and with him the other academicians considered the purification of the language from *mauvais usage*, i. e., from the dialects of the “lower classes” and of any location other than the incomparable court in Paris, as their primary task.

Written in the form of thematically organized remarks, Vaugelas’s work played a central role in the standardization of the French language, and not just in terms of its contents. It might seem paradoxical that the *Remarques* – one of the most successful codifications in French linguistic history – is, at least formally, so unsystematic and represents a sort of anti-grammar.⁴¹ It is easier to understand if one considers the following: “Vaugelas refusait tout ce qui était ‘grammaire’ en bonne et due forme. Il ne voulait pas être confondu avec ces raisonneurs qui spéculent sans prêter attention à la réalité; pour lui, rien n’était plus important que l’usage.”⁴²

37 To be sure, there were private circles (also in Paris, cf. Brunot 1909, p. 31) devoted to questions of language and literature (and thus concerned for cultivation of the language). As a rule, they were oriented toward Malherbe’s new, clear, and unadorned linguistic ideal.

38 By attaching Valentin Conrart’s circle – from which the *Académie* emerged – to the court, Richelieu succeeded in placing the French language and its (regulated) usage in the hands of the state: “[...] l’amical cénacle va être confisqué par le pouvoir” (Seguin 1999, p. 233).

39 Cf. Dessi Schmid/Hafner 2016.

40 Vaugelas: *Remarques*, p. 67.

41 Marzys 2009, p. 15: “Les *Remarques* sur la langue française ne sont en apparence qu’un recueil décousu d’observations sur des points isolés et parfois infimes de morphologie et de syntaxe, de prononciation et d’orthographe, de vocabulaire et de style; mais elles sont sous-tendues par une doctrine qui, pour être peu voyante et avoir des contours parfois flous, n’en est pas moins très ferme dans ses fondements”.

42 Siouffi 2007, p. 686.

3.1.3. Germany

An international and intercultural perspective is characteristic of the German purism debate⁴³ as well as of German language work⁴⁴ in general. On the autological side, there was broad receptivity of theoretical standardization models in the European literary languages, especially New Latin, Dutch, Italian, and French. On the heterological side, a debate on identity politics gets underway that takes aim at unreflected imitation of French culture, literature, and language. Puristic efforts in the vernacular arise in the mid-15th century with the reception of early Italian humanism in south and southwest Germany.⁴⁵ In the 16th and 17th centuries, a critique of linguistic mixing and the adoption of foreign idioms becomes a broad argumentation system, the so-called “*Alamode-Kritik*.”⁴⁶ As in Italy and France, diastatic arguments and “*Dignitätserörterungen*” (considerations of dignity)⁴⁷ were central. The prestige of the language, the literature, and the nation were at stake. The apology for the vernacular was based on an established system of argumentation going back to humanism and the reception of Tacitus’s *Germania*.⁴⁸ On the other hand, the humanistic discourse on the crisis and decline of eloquence (*corrupta eloquentia*) continued.⁴⁹

Both arguments flow together in Martin Opitz’s early manifesto *Aristarchus sive de Contemptu Linguae Teutonicae* (1617).⁵⁰ Opitz starts with a diagnosis of general linguistic decline that has already infected Greek and Latin. Now German was beginning to lose its authentic nature:

Interim purissima et à peregrino squalore libera hactenus lingua mutat, et in miras loquendi formulas degenerat. Monstra vocabulorum et carcinomata irrepunt occulte, ad quae genuinus aliquis Germanus quandoque vix indignationem, quandoque nauseam vix tenet. Dicas in sentinam durare hanc linguam, ad quam reliquarum sordes torrente promiscuo deferantur. Nulla ferme periodus est, nulla interpunctio, quae non ascititium quid redoleat. Jam à Latinis, jam Gallis, Hispanis etiam ac Italis mutuamur, quod domi nascitur longe elegantius.⁵¹

43 The best comprehensive impression for the early modern era is the annotated anthology by Jones 1995.

44 Hundt 2000; Gardt 1994; Gardt 1999.

45 Bamberger / Robert 2024.

46 Robert 2022a; cf. Pattis / Robert 2025; on the relationship between literature and social practice in the *alamode*-discussion, cf. Ajouri 2020, esp. pp. 229–369 (on Moscherosch).

47 Hafner / Kocher 2005, p. 496.

48 Krebs 2005; Mertens 2004; Müller 2001.

49 Kühlmann 1982, esp. pp. 85–112.

50 Robert 2004; Robert 2007; Seidel 1994.

51 Opitz: Lateinische Werke, vol. 1, pp. 70, 72.

In the meantime, this purest language, thus far free of foreign filth, is changing and degenerating into outlandish expressions. Monstrous and ulcerous words sneak in secretly at which a true German can hardly restrain first his outrage, then his disgust. One can say that this language is a sewer into which pours an indiscriminate stream of other garbage. There is almost no sentence, no punctuation without a foreign taste. Whatever we borrow from Latin, from the French and Spanish too, and from the Italians, originates much more elegantly at home.

Opitz's remarks make clear how the autological field of linguistic reflection is increasingly motivated by heterological considerations. Questions of style usher in fantasies of puristic cleansing.⁵² True elegance lies concealed in the nature of German and does not need to be sought from abroad. Adoption of foreign words even endangers the body of German. Opitz uses the rhetorical form of *declamatio* for a combative paraenesis that concludes with a call to cherish and cultivate German: "How few among us would have the courage to either defend or cultivate this language."⁵³ In his program for reform, Opitz implements such cultivation in two ways. One is with his path-breaking poetics, the *Buch von der Deutschen Poeterey* (Book of German Poetry, 1624).⁵⁴ The other is with his own concrete models of a new poetry which he offers in his *Acht Bücher Deutscher Poematum* (Eight Books of German Poetry, 1625).⁵⁵ To a large extent, they are based on translations from (Neo-)Latin, Dutch, Italian, and French.⁵⁶ The *Buch von der Deutschen Poeterey* reveals the strong connection between language work and poetics. Purism plays a fundamental role; the purity of the language (*puritas*) must precede elegance (*elegantia*):

Die ziehrlichkeit erfodert das die worte reine vnd deutlich sein. Damit wir aber reine reden mögen / sollen wir vns befeissen deme welches wir Hochdeutsch nennen besten vermögens nach zuekommen / vnd nicht derer örter sprache / wo falsch geredet wird / in vnsere schriften vermischen[...].⁵⁷

Elegance requires that the words are pure and clear. But in order to be able to speak purely, we must study how best to follow that which we call High German, and not mix into our writings the language of those places where people speak incorrectly [...].

52 Burschel/Marx 2011; Burschel 2014.

53 Opitz: Lateinische Werke, vol. 1, p. 68.

54 Seidel 2022; Wels 2018; Robert 2007.

55 The collection had been already published in Strasbourg in 1624 by Julius Wilhelm Zinzgref without Opitz's involvement or knowledge.

56 The intercultural difficulties in naturalizing Petrarchism in Germany were usually underestimated, as shown by Opitz's translations of Veronica Gambara; cf. Robert 2019.

57 Opitz: Poeterey, p. 35.

At this point, he deploys parody to expose the mixing of languages:

So stehet es auch zum hefftigsten vnsauber / wenn allerley Lateinische / Frantzösische / Spanische vnnnd Welsche wörter in den text vnserer rede geflickt werden; als wenn ich wolte sagen:

*Nemt an die courtoisie, vnd die deuotion,
Die euch ein cheualier, madonna, thut erzeigen;
Ein handvol von fauor petirt er nur zue lohn /
Vnd bleibet ewer Knecht vnd seruiteur gantz eigen.*⁵⁸

Thus it is most impure when all sorts of Latin, French, Spanish, and Italian words are stitched into the text of our speech, as if I were to say:

Accept the *courtoisie*, and the *devotion*,
Madonna, which a *chevalier* shows you;
For but a handful of *favor* he *petitions* as reward /
And remains your menial and very own *serviteur*.

It is precisely such satirical sorties that reveal how the autological question of “good” style is influenced by heterological motivations. Pure language becomes a figure of aesthetic reflection of linguistic politics. Beginning with Opitz, practices of language work and strategies of language politics establish the basis of almost all subsequent theories of poetry (e.g., by Clajus, Buchner, Schottelius, Harsdörffer).⁵⁹ Opitz’s poems, too, have both an autological and a heterological function. On the autological side, they are prototypes and models of vernacular poetry that lay claim to normative authority, generate *imitatio*, and found literary genealogies. This appears clearly, to name only two examples, in Opitz’s translation of Petrarch’s sonnet RVF 132 (“S’Amor non è”)⁶⁰ and in the Corydon-eclogue.⁶¹ On the heterological side, Opitz’s texts are embedded in various social practices, aspects of everyday life, and discourses. Above all, they promote cultural self-assurance (patriotic discourse), reflection on processes of social differentiation (e.g., critiques of the court and *alamode*-language),⁶² linguistic practice of moral or civil skills and behaviors, or religious edification, comfort, paraenesis, etc.

In general, poetry and language work in Germany, as in Italy and France, were heterologically intertwined. This appears most clearly in discourses of linguistic patriotism, especially in metaphorology, and sometimes in a drastic form. The conviction that the pure, original nature of German was existentially threatened by an inva-

58 Opitz: Poeterey, p. 35.

59 On 17th-century poetics cf. Stockhorst 2008; Wels 2009; Wesche 2004.

60 Aurnhammer 2006.

61 Robert 2016.

62 On the poetological dimension of court critiques, cf. Robert 2020.

sion of foreign words was by no means merely a topos.⁶³ It was a mirror of experiences, fears, and imaginings from immediate, lived reality; the German language debate was both a continuation of the Thirty Years' War and an attempt to overcome the antagonisms of that religious civil conflict by reflection on a common linguistic culture.⁶⁴ With all its contradictions between “Gallopheilia” and “Gallophebia,”⁶⁵ as shown in the *alamode*-debate, the extraordinary scope of interest in and reflection on language and purism is characteristic of the early modern period in Germany and intimately connected to aesthetic and poetological considerations.

3.2. Purism and Praxeology – Three Examples

3.2.1. Lexicography and Aesthetics – The Dictionary of the *Crusca*

Is a norm model already puristic because it is based on a linguistically archaic principle of *imitatio*? Can Bembo's *Prose* be regarded as a puristic work, and if so, to what extent? To this day, these two questions have lost none of their relevance. To approach them with new energy, it helps to regard Bembo's work from two perspectives that stand in a constantly dynamic relation to each other. One is the fundamentally literary concern of Bembo's striving for a more regular, graceful, and pure language (“la fiorentina lingua più regolata [...], più vaga, più pura”),⁶⁶ another is the institutional application of the normative model in his writings and its consequences for literary practice. For the success of Bembo's model of the *Corone*, its adoption into the programmatic writings, institutional practices, and especially the lexicographical work of the *Accademia della Crusca* means at the same time the radical transformation of the model, as we shall see.

Perhaps the most famous and influential academy of the early modern era, the *Accademia della Crusca*, had its beginnings in the meetings of a group of learned Florentine friends, the *brigata dei crusconi* (brigade of brans). The group had no intention of founding an institution, and their meetings cannot be regarded as the first evidence of an incipient academy in Italy.⁶⁷ In Italy – “la terre promise des Académies”⁶⁸ – there indeed existed several more or less learned societies more or less interested in questions of language. They can be regarded as the products of courtly learned discussions and document that such discussion was happening in many sections of the country. The

63 Gardt 1994, pp. 109–115.

64 The interactions between war and literature – *Mars* and *Ars* – are stimulatingly traced by Kaminski 2004.

65 Meier 2011.

66 Bembo: *Prose delle volgar lingua*, p. 32.

67 Cf. on this point Dessì Schmid/Hafner 2016.

68 Charlier 1935, p. 231.

meetings of the *brigata dei crusconi* from 1570–1580 were initially intended as opportunities for playful speeches on *cruscate*, frivolous subjects.⁶⁹ In time, these light-hearted goals would give way to a language academy – accompanied and inspired by its symbol (*il frullone*) and the entire imagery of grain-growing and -processing – that initiated a larger revolution. Beginning with the admittance of Lionardo Salviati to the *Accademia della Crusca* in October 1582, the academy began to separate the bran (the *crusca*) from the flour in questions of language to cleanse and filter the language. Salviati had extensive experience with such puristic philological operations and soon became one of the central figures in the *Crusca*. Even before his admittance, he had been occupied with the *rassettatura* of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, a task which, as Marazzini often stresses,⁷⁰ enters and defines the lexicographical work of the *Accademia*. As a codification effort, work on the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* would prove to be the most important task of the *Cruscani*.

In the *Prose della volgar lingua*, Bembo demands the elevation of the “pure language” – Petrarch's poetry and Boccaccio's prose – to the language of Italian literature. If the *Accademici* adopted his thesis in their work of codification, they went far beyond it under the leadership of Lionardo Salviati. The aesthetic, qualitative principle of selection based on Bembo's norm model, the *imitatio auctorum*, is generalized in a manner and to the extent that one of its most characteristic features, its pervasive Petrarchism, is abrogated.

In his search for linguistic purity, Salviati's generalizing of the *imitatio*-principle, i.e., expanding it from the *Corone* alone to everything written in the 14th century, meant not only the creation of the myth of the *trecento* as a golden age but also a revision of Bembo's fundamental aesthetic-literary concern.⁷¹ Thus we can understand Salviati's work as the birth certificate of a prototypical purism: every linguistic production of the *trecento*, independent of its aesthetic quality and the reputation of its author, is declared to be “pure.”

In the *A' lettori* – the foreword of the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, a text which is an unusual source for aesthetic questions – this radical manifestation of language purism becomes visible:

Nel compilar il presente Vocabolario [...] abbiamo stimato necessario di ricorrere all'autorità di quelli scrittori, che vissero, quando questo idioma principalmente fiorì, che fu [...] dall'anno del Signore 1300 al 1400 poco più, o poco meno: perché [...] gli scrittori [...] dal 1400 avanti, corrompero non piccola parte della purità del favellare di quel buon secolo.⁷²

69 In this regard, the *cruscate* reflect the attitude of the Renaissance and early Baroque toward the comic and grotesque.

70 Cf. Marazzini 2011, p. 118.

71 Cf. Sinn 2025.

72 *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, “A' lettori,” 1612, 6.

In compiling the present dictionary we have regarded it as necessary to have recourse to the authority of those authors whose lives fell in the golden age of the language, that is, from about 1300 to 1400; for authors after 1400 spoiled a not insignificant part of the purity of the language of that excellent century.

The *Accademici* thus consistently included *all* the words of all Florentine authors of the 14th century in their dictionary, not just those of Petrarch and Boccaccio. All other words – not only foreign words or words from other *volgari* but also any that were not *old* Florentine words – were systematically excluded. They were supposedly not pure language, since later authors had done considerable damage to the linguistic purity of the 14th century.

The passage also clearly displays the dynamic interaction between the aesthetic-literary and sociocultural spheres; the formal qualities that result from the requirement of linguistic purity (e.g., clarity, naturalness, delicacy, elegance) as well as the strategies for authorizing this ideal cannot be separated from the prescriptive, selective, and purifying function and the pragmatic dimension of the dictionary. In an analysis using the praxeological model of the CRC *Different Aesthetics*, this dynamic (which can also be observed in the French and German linguistic and cultural spheres, cf. 3.2.2. and 3.2.3.) can be represented as in Fig. 1.⁷³

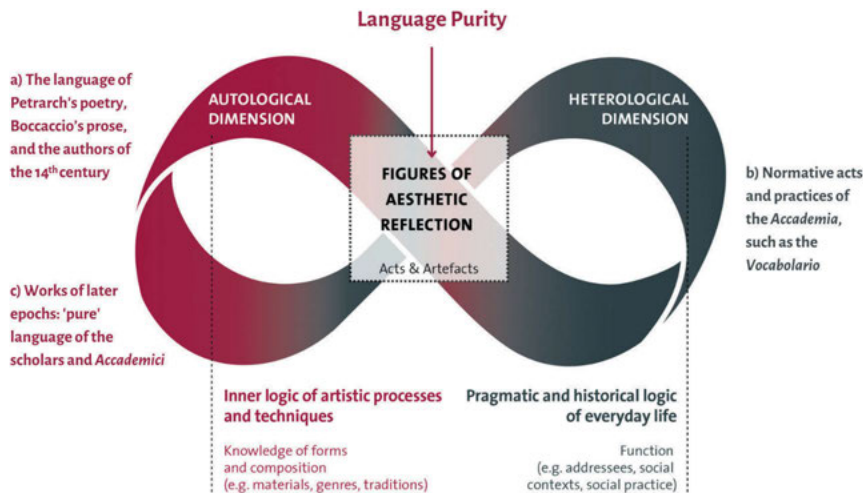


Fig. 1. The praxeological model of the CRC *Different Aesthetics* using the example of the preface to the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*.

73 Cf. the chapter by Annette Gerok-Reiter and Jörg Robert in this volume, pp. 3–48, here pp. 23–26.

Boccaccio's prose and Petrarch's poetry – the “entire” literature of the 14th century, and proclaimed the model – constitute on the side of inherent artistic logic, the foundation for the ideal of linguistic purity (cf. a) in Fig. 1). This takes practical, concrete shape in the normative acts of the *Accademia* – here, for instance, in a dictionary that implements the programmatic linguistic ideals in concrete linguistic practice (cf. b) in Fig. 1). For behind such acts, we recognize the social logic of educated society and, along with it, of political power. It is no accident that the dictionary is dedicated to Concino Concini, a Tuscan nobleman and Maria de Medici's most important advisor at the French court (which already on this level underscores the close connection between Italy and France). Also subsequently, the successful implementation of the *Crusca*'s ideal of linguistic purity evinces a dynamic interaction between the heterological and autological poles; in the artistic design of their works, authors of later epochs (think, for example, of Ariosto's revision of *Orlando furioso*) would align themselves with the pure language that harkens back to the practice of the scholars and *Accademici* (cf. c) in Fig. 1).

This by no means comprehensive but illustrative depiction allows us to observe on several levels the aesthetic implications and the historical relevance and scope of a text such as the *Vocabolario*. A dictionary creates a new connection between grammatical, lexicological, and societal normative ideas. At the same time, precisely from this social practice, fundamental concerns of aesthetics are newly formulated. For in the end, this dictionary – although one would initially hardly imagine it treating genuinely aesthetic questions – influences both the communicative and aesthetically expressive speech acts of numerous individuals, and thus its influence reaches deep into everyday life. In the end, far-flung negotiations had their origin in the discussion about language purity that occurs in this text; precisely by absolutizing, ideologizing, and implementing Bembo's model, which closely linked aesthetic-poetological and standardizing concerns, there arose in Italy by way of the lexicographical work of the *Accademia della Crusca* the linguistic purism, which, as suggested above, set the standard for Europe in general.

3.2.2. (Anti-)Grammar and Aesthetics – Vaugelas's *Remarques*

What we have said about the *Vocabolario* applies equally to the *Remarques sur la langue Française*. We must regard Vaugelas's work from two dynamically related perspectives: one is that of the fundamental aesthetic, communicative concern (in both the language of immediacy and the language of distance) of defining pure language as *bon usage*; the other is that of the institutional applications of the puristic standardization model contained in the text and their consequences – not just for the literary language and practice of future generations. As in Italy (but with different emphases), linguistic purism in France proves to be an inseparable fusion of literary programs and authorities, linguistic reflection and politics, standardizing efforts and the business of the academies.

Thus it serves in an exemplary way as a figure of aesthetic reflection in the sense of the praxeological model.

Vaugelas's principle of *bon usage* – his suggestion for the selection of a variety to serve as the basis for standard French – draws on linguistic and literary (and thus aesthetic) norms that the court poet Malherbe (a central member of the famous and influential cultural circle around the Marquise de Rambouillet) formulated in his commentary on the poetical work of Philippe Desportes, one of the last representatives of the *Pléiade*. Malherbe hoped to clean up and revise several aspects of the language of literature and the court. In particular, he took aim at contemporary authors who continued to be devoted to the generously integrating linguistic expansionism of the 16th century. Everything Du Bellay had recommended for expanding French in his *Defence et Illustration de la Langue Française* was radically rejected by Malherbe: Latinisms, archaisms, dialectalisms, specialized vocabulary, and neologisms. Stylistically and syntactically, he strove for *précision*, *pureté*, *clarté*, *ordre*, and *élégance*. In the name of decency (cf. the ideal of *bienséance*), he especially fought against the use of words and phrases tagged as drastically vulgar (the so-called *mots bas*). Although this was a position that earned Malherbe many opponents, one of his indisputable accomplishments was that he ensured that courtly circles became interested in questions of language and – along with an ambitious bourgeoisie – became vehicles of a new linguistic consciousness.⁷⁴

In the following passage from the *Préface des Remarques sur la langue française*, Vaugelas's version of linguistic purism, which will be typical for France, takes shape. It is not inappropriate to claim, along with Marzys,⁷⁵ that the *Préface* is far from representing only the personal opinion of its author but is instead the best description of the puristically normative linguistic attitude of 17th-century France:

2. Il y a sans doute deux sortes d'Usages, un bon et un mauvais. Le mauvais se forme du plus grand nombre de personnes, qui presque en toutes choses n'est pas le meilleur, et le bon au contraire est composé non pas de la pluralité, mais de l'élite des voix, et c'est véritablement celui que l'on nomme le Maistre des langues, celui qu'il faut suivre pour bien parler, et pour bien écrire en toutes sortes de stiles, si vous en exceptez le satyrique, le comique, en sa propre et ancienne signification, et le burlesque, qui sont d'aussi peu d'estenduë que peu de gens s'y adonnent. Voicy donc comme on definit le bon Usage.

3. C'est la façon de parler de la plus saine partie de la Cour, conformément à la façon d'écrire de la plus saine partie des Auteurs du temps. Quand je dis la Cour, j'y comprends les femmes comme les hommes, et plusieurs personnes de la ville où le Prince reside, qui par la communication qu'elles ont avec les gens de la Cour participant à sa politesse.⁷⁶

74 Cf. Dessì Schmid/Hafner 2016, pp. 386f.

75 Marzys 2009, p. 16.

76 Vaugelas: *Remarques*, p. 68.

2. Doubtless there are two kinds of *usage*, one good and one bad. The latter includes the great majority of persons and is in almost no respect the best one. The good one, on the other hand, does not comprise many voices but represents an elite, and it is truly the one that we call the master of languages and must follow if we want to speak well and write well on all levels of style – except for satire, comedy in its genuine and ancient definition, and burlesque, which are after all so uncommon that very few people are occupied with them. This is the definition of good usage.
3. It is the way the most distinguished part of the court speaks, which corresponds to the way the most distinguished contemporary authors write. When I speak of the court, I mean both men and women as well as many persons from the town in which the king resides who, after all, based on their communication with the court, have adopted its courtly manner.

The dynamic interrelation between aesthetic-literary and sociopolitical – autological and heterological – spheres is especially obvious in this passage. The formal qualities that follow from the requirement of purity (e.g., linguistic *pureté* and *netteté*) as well as the strategies of authorization for this ideal (*le bon usage* at court) cannot be separated from the strictly prescriptive function and the linguistically pragmatic dimension of the *Remarques*. The linguistic and literary criteria suggested in Malherbe's commentary on Desportes constitute on the side of inherent artistic logic the basis of the ideal of purity that Vaugelas strives for (cf. a) in Fig. 1). This idea is concretized in the *Remarques* and in many subsequent standardizing acts of the *Académie* that implement the programmatic linguistic ideals in concrete linguistic practice (cf. b) in Fig. 1). Vaugelas's principle of *bon usage* is characterized by its embeddedness in the heterological sphere; the main role in this development is played by the Paris *cour* at which pure language can ideally flourish. For that is where the linguistic variety is both cultivated and, above all, *used* which – thanks to typical courtly linguistic contact – displays a high diastratic value as well as a diaphasic manifestation, and dispenses with both vulgarisms and technical jargon as well as anything tagged as diatopically “foreign.” Thus it is no surprise that Vaugelas's model of *bon usage* finds its way into the institutional practices of the academy, which for its part is linked to the power of the court and thereby also enjoys great success in the practice of individual authors.⁷⁷

In subsequent years, the successful implementation of Vaugelas's idea of language purity displayed a dynamic interaction between the heterological and autological poles. It is well known that the literary creations of 17th-century authors such as Corneille, Racine, and Colletet were strongly influenced by Vaugelas's standardizing model (cf. c) in Fig. 1).

Further study is needed, however, to determine whether that *bon usage* in fact corresponded to the language spoken at court, or if it was more influenced by the forms and traditions of literary writing (“conformément à la façon d'écrire de la plus saine partie

77 Marzys 2009, p. 14: “Le succès du livre fut considérable: une vingtaine d'éditions en moins de soixante ans, plus d'innombrables commentaires et imitations. Toute la littérature grammaticale de la seconde moitié du XVII^e siècle prend Vaugelas pour modèle, ou du moins pour repoussoir”.

des Auteurs du temps”).⁷⁸ Much has already been said in general about this question,⁷⁹ but few works have attempted a systematic verification of this influence on the level of either linguistics or aesthetics, i.e., with the question whether all or only some (and then, which?) of the *Remarques* were applied in linguistic practice.⁸⁰ This remains a desideratum.

The aesthetic implications and historical scope of this technical text are evident: a grammar that does not follow the formal characteristics of that genre establishes a new relationship between grammatical and lexical, ideological and societal normative concepts. Then fundamental aesthetic concerns are reformulated under the influence of exactly this social practice, for the *Remarques* influence the linguistic behavior of numerous actors both in their communication and their artistic creations and penetrate deep into everyday life.⁸¹ Finally, we again discover in this work’s discussion of language purity aesthetic negotiations between autological and heterological dimensions. In the very implementation of Vaugelas’s puristic linguistic model, led by the court and its loyal *Académie*, a further form of language purity comes into being that has different, diamesic emphases.

3.2.3. Language Academy and *Gesprächspiel* – Georg Philipp Harsdörffer and the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft*

The *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* (Fruitbearing Society) – later called the *Palmorden* (Order of the Palm) after its symbol, the coconut palm – was founded in Weimar in 1617.⁸² In the beginning, it comprised little more than its founder and benefactor Ludwig von Anhalt-Köthen (1579–1650) and his entourage.⁸³ The *Palmorden* would become the model for subsequent organizations such as the *Aufrichtige Tannengesellschaft* (True-Hearted Society of the Fir Tree, founded in 1633 in Strasbourg), the *Deutschgesinnte Genossenschaft* (Patriotic German Association, founded in Hamburg in 1642/1643), and the *Pegnesischer Blumenorden* (Pegnitz Flower Society, founded in 1644 in Nuremberg).⁸⁴ From its inception, the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* pursued the goal of language purity. At the intersection of language work (the autological sphere) and cultural politics (heterological sphere), linguistic purism became a figure of aesthetic reflection. The society’s programmatic *Bericht* (report) of 1622 emphasizes

78 Vaugelas *Remarques*, p. 68, continues: “4. Toutefois quelque avantage que nous donnions à la Cour, elle n’est pas suffisante toute seule de servir de règle, il faut que la Cour et les bons Auteurs y concourent, et ce n’est que de cette conformité qui se trouve entre les deux, que l’Usage s’établit”.

79 Cf. Ayres-Bennet 1987; Blochwitz 1968; in general Chaurand 1999; Rey / Duval / Siouffi/2007.

80 Cf. Braun 1933; Aulich 2017.

81 Cf. Fezer 2025.

82 Hundt 2000, pp. 108–120.

83 Cf. Pattis 2025.

84 The best overview is still Otto 1972, pp. 14–33.

daß man die Hochdeutsche Sprache in jhrem rechten wesen und standt / ohne einmischung frem-
bder ausländischer wort / auffß möglichste und thunlichste erhalte / und sich so wol der besten
aussprache im reden / als der reinesten und deutlichsten art im schreiben und Reime-dichten
befleissige.⁸⁵

that as far as possible and doable, one preserve the High German language in its correct nature and
state, without intrusion of foreign words, and thus cultivate the best pronunciation in speaking as
well as the purest and clearest manner in writing and versifying.

The passage identifies four closely related goals: (1) a conservative consciousness of the immutable nature of German, which one must (2) cleanse of external influence, or better, preserve in its purity. This goal should be (3) diamesically valid for both oral and written communication, but also and especially (4) for literary production, which would become the decisive motor of the society's language work.

At this point, it is important not to misinterpret the patriotic tone. Paradoxically, the German purism debate combined appropriation and rejection. It was not a question of excluding outside influences (i.e., the hegemonic French culture, language, and literature) but of their effective appropriation, translation, and adaptation. The *Bericht* refers explicitly to the “unterschiedene[n] Academien, die in frembden Landen zu [...] nützlicher ausübung jedes Volcks Lands sprachen auffgerichtet [worden seien]” (the various academies established in foreign countries for the fruitful use of each nation's language).⁸⁶ Therefore, in Germany too one sought to bring into existence a “sothane Gesellschaft [...] / darinnen man in gut rein deutsch reden / schreiben [propagieren wolle]” (such a society in which one would propagate speaking and writing in good, pure German).⁸⁷ Language work proves to be part of a process of cultural negotiation. The idea of preserving the purity of the German language was itself “basically an import from Italy.”⁸⁸ During his grand tour in 1600, Prince Ludwig himself was admitted into the *Accademia della Crusca* and dubbed “the Inflamed” (*l'Acceso*).⁸⁹ Ludwig and his entourage (esp. Diederich von dem Werder, Tobias Hübner, and G. Ph. Harsdörffer) made a concerted effort to naturalize Italian fashions, models, forms of communication, and institutions (like the *Accademia della Crusca*). Translations constitute an important medium for their practical language work, and theoretical reflections on translation find their way into grammars (e.g., Schottelius's *Ausführliche Arbeit Von der Teutschen Haupt-Sprache* [Comprehensive Work on the Primary German Language]) and works on poetics (Opitz,

85 Jones 1995, p. 66.

86 Jones 1995, p. 65.

87 Jones 1995, p. 65.

88 Dünnhaupt 1978, p. 521.

89 Otto 1972, p. 16: His motto was “La stoppia che arde,” his emblem included the verse: “Fecemi ardendo pensar mia salute.”

Harsdörffer). Prince Ludwig translated, among others, Giovanni Battista Gelli's *Capricci del Bottaio* (1619) and Petrarch's *Trionfi* (1643) into German, edited numerous Italian texts, and translated Wolfgang Ratke's/Ratichius's *Grammatica universalis* into Italian.⁹⁰ Diederich von dem Werder translated Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (1634) and Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* (1626) into German.⁹¹

Some Italian impulses, however, went unfulfilled. The idea of a German dictionary was not realized. During his sojourn in Florence, Ludwig participated in work on the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*. In 1647 Georg Philipp Harsdörffer planned a "Teutsches Dictionarium oder wortbuch,"⁹² but it was never completed. Caspar von Stieler's *Der Teutschen Sprache Stammbaum und Fortwachs / oder Teutscher Sprachschatz* (Genealogy and Development of the German Language, or German Vocabulary) did not appear until 1691. The work on German grammar and orthography was more successful. Christian Gueintz's *Deutsche Rechtschreibung* (German Spelling, 1645) and Justus Georg Schottelius's *Teutsche Vers- und Reimkunst* (The Art of German Verse and Rhyme, 1645) were more or less officially commissioned by the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft*.⁹³ This is less true of the important grammars by these two authors because of the limited institutional status of the *Gesellschaft*, which was more a forum for discussion than a rigidly structured academy.⁹⁴ Although regular meetings were held – for instance, for the induction of new members – there were no official conferences or plenary sessions except for a meeting in 1645, when the question of orthography was on the agenda. Other practices of language cultivation were more strictly regulated: according to their bylaws, before being printed, all publications had to be submitted to the leader, Prince Ludwig, who then circulated them to the circle of experts for review. Letters were the primary medium for the concrete business of the society – the performance of language work.⁹⁵ Extensive correspondence followed the appearance of Gueintz's *Deutscher Sprachlehre Entwurf* (Outline of German Grammar, 1641) and Harsdörffer's *Specimen Philologiae Germanicae* (1646).

The most important literary personality among the the members of the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* was Georg Philipp Harsdörffer (1607–1658), who was inducted in March 1642 and given the name *Der Spielende* (The Player).⁹⁶ By 1650, he had brought in more than fifty new members, making him "the most important public relations worker

90 Dünnhaupt 1978.

91 On Ariosto, cf. Aurnhammer / Zanucchi 2020; on Tasso Aurnhammer 1994.

92 Hundt 2000, p. 118.

93 Hundt 2000, pp. 109 and 115.

94 Hundt 2000, p. 118: "The FG was more than just a loose collection of men interested in language and literature who came together because it was a prestigious thing to do. But it was also less than a centralized, active institution."

95 Hundt 2000, p. 117.

96 The best overview is in Keppler-Tasaki 2021; from the extensive Harsdörffer-research cf. Keppler-Tasaki / Kocher 2011; Battafarano 1991; Zeller 1974.

of the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft*.⁹⁷ He is a prime example of how networked and mutually transparent the various levels, forms, and discursive traditions of German language work were. With his *Specimen*, Harsdörffer presented the basic principles of German linguistics and language policy.⁹⁸ His *Poetischer Trichter* (Poetic Funnel, 3 vols., 1648–1653) displays the intimate connection between language work and poetics. Harsdörffer's numerous translations from Italian, French, and Spanish promoted language formation and the knowledge of international literature.⁹⁹ With regard to a praxeological aesthetics, the eight volumes of the *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* (Conversations with Women) are especially significant.¹⁰⁰ An enormously popular and frequently imitated collection of exemplary dialogues on a variety of topics,¹⁰¹ aimed at the refinement of bourgeois conversational culture on the Italian model. From the point of view of praxeological aesthetics, they are an ideal example of the interrelation between autological and heterological aspects: purification of the language serves the cultivation of manners, which are not just *thematized* but *performed* by the dialogic form. Harsdörffer defines *Gesprächspiel* (literally “conversation-game”) as an “artige Aufgab / so zu nutzlicher Belustigung einer einmütigen Gesellschaft beliebt / und auf manche Art beantwortet werden kan” (polite exercise, popular for the beneficial entertainment of a congenial company, which can be responded to in several ways).¹⁰² The protagonists of all three hundred conversations (fifty per volume in vols. 1–4 and twenty-five each in vols. 5–8) are a matron, two young unmarried women, a courtier, a soldier, and a student (who is later promoted to noble courtier). A two-page copper engraving that serves as the frontispiece for the first volume (beginning with the second edition of 1644) shows how Harsdörffer imagines the heterological contexts, the concrete situation of a *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiel* (Figs. 2a and 2b).

We see the six participants gathered in social conversation in a pleasant, rural setting. Harsdörffer communicates the rules of behavior for 16th-century courtly society (*honnêteté*, *civilité*, and *sprezzatura*) to new, bourgeois-patrician circles. The title page is addressed to all “honor- and virtue-loving associations.” Harsdörffer takes his topics and materials “from Italian, French, and Spanish writers,” as the title page clearly states. They range from the “new” sciences, mathematics, and geography; to the arts, numismatics, horticulture, and even such hermetic themes as chiromancy, oneiromancy, and

97 Hundt 2000, p. 114.

98 Cf. esp. Banneck 2012; Hundt 2000, pp. 71–83.

99 Cf. Robert 2011.

100 Harsdörffer 1641–1649 (1968ff.). In what follows, FZG with volume and page number.

101 *Gesprächspiele* is the German equivalent of “dialogue”. On genre continuity cf. FZG I2, p. 348 (= *Schutzschrift*, p. 5): “The *Gesprächspiele* are not to be counted among new inventions, but rather renewed ones, insofar as they are usual in Italy, and Plato, Lucian, Vives, Erasmus Majolus, and others make use of their like in their writings.”

102 FZG III, p. 135.



Figs. 2a and 2b. Unknown artist: FrauenZimmer Gesprächspiele. j. Theil., in: Georg Philipp Harsdörffer: Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele [...], Erster Theil, Nuremberg: Wolfgang Endter, 1644 (VD17 23:234616Y), frontispiece. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Sign: M: Lo 2622:1.

astrology. The *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* belong to the Italian tradition of instructional literature on behavior and conversation for courtiers. Harsdörffer refers explicitly to Castiglione's *Cortegiano*.¹⁰³ Other sources are Scipione Bargagli's *Delle lodi dell'accademia* (1569), Girolamo Bargagli's *Dialogo de' giuochi che nelle vegghie sanesi si usano di fare* (1574), and Stefano Guazzo's *La civil conversation* (1574). On his study tour, Harsdörffer had become personally familiar with the conversational culture of the *Incogniti* (Venice), *Intronati* (Siena), and *Oziosi* (Naples), and corresponded with Gian Francesco Loredano (1607–1661), the founder of the *Incogniti*. He also suggested to Prince Ludwig that he be named an official linguistic diplomat to the *Accademia della Crusca*, but the attempt foundered on questions of protocol.¹⁰⁴

The collective efforts of the members of the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* – especially Prince Ludwig and Georg Philipp Harsdörffer – show how seemingly purely autological aspects of language work were always embedded in heterological concerns – on the one hand in the social practice of communication itself and on the other in the web of *other* discourses (e.g., politics). Harsdörffer's *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* aim to provide not just autological linguistic knowledge but also practice in performative civil skills, on the level of both spoken language and body language.¹⁰⁵ The emphasis on “einmütig” (congenial) conversation connects the traditional, autological form of the dialogue to its heterological purpose: to pacify and civilize the participants in the midst of the final decade of the Thirty Years' War. It should be clear that the model of a praxeological aesthetics offers the possibility of illustrating this dynamic interplay more precisely than has been possible with the means of the older social history of literature.¹⁰⁶

4. Summary

This chapter explored linguistic purism and the concept of purity of language in the early modern period. We have been at pains to show the close interrelations between autological and heterological perspectives, i.e., between the linguistic knowledge of the experts and aesthetic-literary, institutional, and social practices. The diversity of concepts, forms, and characteristics of pure language – its historical and intercultural variation – became clear. The aesthetic and political implications and potentialities of puristic argumentation can be found in a broad spectrum of texts and text types in the early modern period. The topic of purity of language migrated between literary and pragmatic texts, and both constituted and crossed genre boundaries. In analogy to re-

103 FZG III, p. 101.

104 Hundt 2000, p. 119.

105 On this performative aspect cf. esp. Tonger-Erk 2012, pp. 167–179.

106 A discussion of the praxeological model in relation to social-historical approaches in Robert 2022b, pp. 11–18.

search on intertextuality, one can distinguish the levels of *thematization* and *performance*: in Harsdörffer's *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele*, linguistic purism is an explicit theme, and at the same time his dialogues themselves follow the principle of language purity – e.g., by avoiding foreign words – and demonstrate how this can be realized in the practice of educated conversation. The same is true, with regard to the dialogic form, of Pietro Bembo's *Prose della volgar lingua*, which promotes linguistic purism both programmatically and performatively, and of Vaugelas's *Remarques*, in which performativity goes hand-in-hand with the ideal of *bon usage* (the spoken language of the Parisian court). Literary texts integrate reflections on language purity or are even based thereon (this is true of both Petrarchan and anti-Petrarchan poetry as well as of dialogues); conversely, non-literary texts – grammars, dictionaries, and treatises on language, but also statutes, legal codes, schoolbooks, and encomia – take up aesthetic questions or codify norms and models with the help of texts (e.g., Petrarch's poetry, Boccaccio's prose) and apply them to fields of social practice. The authorization of the archaic Florentine variety of the *Corone* through the “quarta Corona” by Pietro Bembo¹⁰⁷ is confirmed and universalized by the lexicography of the *Crusca*. Thus strategies for enforcing a pure language are to be found in ceremonials and courtly oral and written communication, but also in literary works, the theater, as well as in scholarly, academic, juridical, and political discourse.¹⁰⁸ In the early modern era, the expansion of the function and influence of linguistic purism – its penetration into all social realms and its increasing relevance driven by theological, philosophical, sociological, and political impulses – assumes an unprecedented dimension.

In pan-European perspective, however, the *imitatio veterum* is only *one* possibility to establish linguistic norms. Especially in Germany, the lack of a classic vernacular canon insured a plurality of authoritative options, some of which coexisted, others overlapped with or contradicted one another.¹⁰⁹ The French purists developed a distinct classicism, which, though oriented on the Italian model, still protected itself against Italianization. The result – especially in the German discussions – is ambivalent movement in opposing directions, whereby the exclusion of foreign linguistic elements is associated with an adherence to common principles of standardization. Our textual examples clearly reveal the common objective as well as the individual historical and cultural strategies of establishing and implementing norms. Pure language is not just always beautiful, it is also a proof of distinction.¹¹⁰ All of this testifies to the fact that in the early modern

107 Cf. Patota 2017.

108 On performance and staging in the Renaissance, cf. esp. Hempfer/Pfeiffer 2002.

109 On this plurality, the fundamental work is still Josten 1976.

110 This social dimension of the language question and courtly communication strongly fueled so-called anti-Petrarchism. As a collateral phenomenon, it teased out in satiric and parodistic style Petrarchism's intentions and ulterior motives. Cf. the texts collected by Höhle 1970. On the heuristic value of literary satire for a praxeological aesthetics cf. Robert 2020.

era, the constitution of a vernacular norm was not restricted to learned circles but penetrated deep into the communicative practices of society, hence the return to the realm of expert knowledge. Between certain puristic normative models' absolute demand for language purity and perfection on the one hand and the heterogeneity of linguistic theory and practice, poetics, as well as political and societal practices on the other, there develops in the early modern period a powerful dynamic that is constitutive of aesthetic artifacts in the sense of the CRC *Different Aesthetics*. In the relations between the puristic programs and the practices of different linguistic and cultural regions of Europe, one can discover similarities and filiations – whether openly acknowledged, only alluded to, or even erased, unacknowledged, and concealed.

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