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Schlussbericht

Idee suisse: Sprachpolitik, Sprachnorm und Sprachpraxis am Beispiel der SRG SSR

Prof. Daniel Perrin (project leader), Prof. Vinzenz Wyss, and Michael Schanne
Zurich University of Applied Sciences

Prof. Marcel Burger
University of Lausanne

Aleksandra Gnach, and Mathias Fürer



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This short final report presents the key concepts and outcomes of the research project “idee suisse: Language policy, norms, and practice as exemplified by Swiss Radio and Television“. The project was funded from 2005 to 2007 by the Swiss National Science Foundation. It is part of the National Research Programme 56, “Language Diversity and Linguistic Competence in Switzerland“. As intended by the Swiss National Science Foundation, the short final report is addressed to a wider audience, including interested non-linguists and non-academics.

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1 Problem

In the project, we investigated the interplay of language policy, norms, and practice of Swiss Radio and Television (SRG) as a multilingual broadcasting company – whether and how SRG should, actually does, and could fulfil language policy demands. Based on this analysis, we have developed, implemented, and evaluated measures to systematically improve the organizationalⁱ language awareness related to the remit of promoting public understanding.

As this remit of promoting public understanding is formulated very vaguely, we first had to develop a concise representation of it (1.1), with a clear view

of possible addressees and beneficiaries (1.2) and of the key concept “public understanding“ (1.3). This led to the research question (1.4).

1.1 Language policy between social remit and market forces

Public service broadcasting companies are among the most important broadcasting companies in Europe. In Switzerland, there is one such company: SRG, the broadcaster with the highest ratings.

As a public service institution, SRG has a federal, societal, cultural, and linguistic remit to fulfill.ⁱⁱ We reconstructed this remit, from a socio-linguistic perspective, as the remit to promote social integration by promoting public understanding

As a media enterprise, though, SRG is subject to market and competitive forces. Losing audience would mean losing public importance. Therefore, the remit presupposes: to reaching the public to promote public understanding.

1.2 A closer view of speech communities

“Promoting public understanding“ in a highly multilingual country means, at first sight, promoting discourse across the language boundaries: discourse between the German, French, Italian, and Rumantsch parts of Switzerland.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, however, the “language boundaries“ concept has to be refined. Urban and rural, poor and rich, lay persons and experts, immigrants and residents, ... different speech communities speak different linguistic varieties and interact with different views of the world.ⁱⁱⁱ

Promoting public understanding means linking speech communities with other speech communities, both between *and* within the German-, French-, Italian-, and Rumantsch-speaking parts of Switzerland.

1.3 Public understanding via public storytelling

Speech communities are knowledge communities – their languages and varieties are related to different worlds and conceptualizations of worlds. Biochemists and lay people, politicians and managers, young and old, German and French speakers do not just use different words to refer to the same world; they refer, with their varieties, to different experiences and conceptualizations of world.

Communication between these communities needs a common ground, distinct from community-specific (e.g. professional, scientific) knowledge and logic. This common ground consists of basic everyday experiences related to basic emotions. One of the core global means of sharing these experiences is by

telling stories, variations of basic narratives.^{iv} We therefore expected “promoting public understanding“ to emerge as public storytelling.

1.4 Main question

However, the various stakeholders of public broadcast regulation might not share a corporate view of the societal and linguistic remit. In fact, we assumed that politics, management and journalists interpret the remit in different and partially contradictory ways, due to partial ignorance and according to specific interests. Thus, our interest in these stakeholders’ practices focused on promoting public understanding is: How do they do and how do they want to do what they have to do?

To determine this ethnography of practices, we identified practices with which the whole organization could respond to the seemingly contradictory expectations of the different stakeholders in an integrated way. For this reason “how *could* they do what they have to do“ has to be added to the main question.

2 Research

Investigating this main question requires an inter- and transdisciplinary approach.^v We combined scientific knowledge from two academic disciplines – linguistics and sociology – to investigate language use in a particular professional discipline, journalism. This complex approach is reflected in the research theory applied and developed, the research process, the project modules, the methodology (see the paper version of the final report) – and the data corpus:

The resulting data corpus includes three types of data: First, it comprises documents such as conference protocols or copies of text products, which merely had to be collected. Second, it contains transcriptions of interviews and verbal protocols of journalist’s retrospective comments about their text production processes; they were obtained for the purpose of the research project.

However, the most important part of the corpus encompasses data from tracing natural text production processes: video recordings of newsroom conferences and workplace conversations and keystroke loggings of writing processes in the newsroom. In order to record these data, the researchers and the project participants had to solve major organizational, legal, technical and psychological problems:

The organizations and individuals under investigation had to agree to the computer logging of production processes; privacy and data security had to be assured; the computer editing systems had to be prepared for continuous and non-intrusive logging. For the case of the “idee suisse“ project, this preparation phase took about a year. – An overview of the corpus is provided in a Figure below:

project module and focus	data source						corpus amount
	document	interview	text product	writing process	verbal protocol	conversation	
A media politics – societal remit							– documents (144) ^{vi} – guided interviews (23) ^{vii}
B media management – broadcasting company SRG							
C media production – TV news of SF and TSR – 3 news programs – 5 journalists per newsroom – 1 week per journalist							– editorial policies (3) – guided interviews (15) – news reports (120) – logfiles (120)
D production discourse – 1 case per journalist							– s-notations (15) – progression graphs (15) – verbal protocols (15) – workplace talks (9) – editorial conferences (20)

Fig. 1 The four project modules and their data

3 Findings

We reconstructed the politicians’, managers’, chief editors’ and journalists’ explicit and implicit knowledge of promoting public understanding in a knowledge map (3.1). Then we moved deeper into the journalists’ knowledge and practices – the journalists are the direct performers of the SRG organization, which is committed to promoting public understanding (3.2). By analyzing the journalists’ situated activity, we were able to identify *good practices* and *critical situations* (3.3).

3.1 Knowledge map of “promoting public understanding“

The key concepts and relations for the map were generated primarily top-down, by deducing state-of-the-art theories of organizational text

production^{viii} and our conceptualization of “promoting public understanding”. However, the contents were generated and the key concepts were reshaped bottom-up in the research cycles, by inductively encoding propositions of versatile forms of organizational discourse.

With the key concepts and relations, the knowledge map shows that the remit of promoting public understanding (1) involves agents, (2) needs resources, (3) produces impacts, (4) provokes evaluation, and (5) emerges in practices. The map is produced using *hyperresearch* and *semantica* software, and we think that using this software is the most promising way to explore such a knowledge map.^{ix} Nevertheless, static insights can be presented with a written text as well: insights into how the knowledge of politicians, managers, chief editors and journalists differs in terms of density and depth, and where their knowledge complements and contradicts each other’s.

A closer view to one detail of the map: The knowledge map shows, as the agents of promoting public understanding via public media, (a) the individual journalist, embedded in concentric layers of (b) a project network or a peer group of editorial staff, (c) an economic organization such as the media enterprise or a professional organization such as journalists’ association, (d) a domain like media or journalism, and (e) a society which contains other subsystems, e.g. subsystems in direct contact with the media, such as audiences, sources, or media politics. According to most media politicians under investigation, the remit of promoting public understanding commits media in general and SRG in particular; according to SRG managers, it commits media other than SRG or actors other than the media.

3.2 Focusing on practices

Journalists are subject to conflicting expectations: In the interest of the media enterprise, they should achieve high impact at low cost but in the public interest still address socially relevant topics in a nuanced way. Or they have to be ready every day to respond to the unexpected while working within rigid production structures. Such conflicting demands lead to problems in balancing the basic practices of journalistic text production: the more one of the six basic practices is realized, the fewer resources there are for other practices and expectations.

The practices are:

- a Optimize factual recency and relevance by limiting the topic.
- b Optimize discursive authenticity by finding the sources.
- c Optimize author's uniqueness by taking own position.
- d Optimize symbolic conventionality by staging the story.
- e Optimize accessibility by establishing relevance for the audience.
- f Optimize production costs by holding to space and time restrictions .

The first basic strategy in the knowledge network, as an example, consists of limiting the topic as a reconstruction of parts of public reality. With this practice the journalist responds to key questions like: Which topic and which aspects of a topic should I choose, and how much detail should I go into?

In producing an item about Guatemala and Venezuela competing to be elected to the UN Security Council, a "Tagesschau"-journalist questions whether he should integrate political background information into his off-camera commentary (file sf_ts_061018_1300_strub_sicherheitsratabstimmung_verbal, line 0066-). If he does, the off-camera commentary will not match the pictures available and the item will fail professional and organizational style conventions, which would lead to a conflict with practice (d). However, if he does not embed the most recent events into some political background information, he can expect many of the audience not to be able to access the news, which would lead to a conflict with practice (e). Short and snappy versus informative and long-winded seem to be the journalist's choice in this case.

3.3 Identifying good practices and critical situations

The conflicts between factuality, authenticity and accessibility on one hand and uniqueness, conventionality and costs on the other seem to reflect the incompatibility of public and market demands. However, looking more closely at the situated activity of the journalists under investigation allowed us identify emerging practices – ways out of the conflicts, towards language use meant to meet both public and market expectations. We identified these *good practices* and their most important counterpart, the *critical situations*.

Whereas *critical situations* denote exemplary findings of which circumstances could lead to failure in promoting public understanding, good practices stand for potential success in terms of the journalists', chief editors', managers', and politicians' criteria reconstructed in the knowledge map.

a The background-recency split – an example of good practice

One example of good practice is what we call the *background-recency split*. It emerges in the UN elections case. Here the journalist is a professional with over 20 years of experience as a foreign correspondent and news editor for Scandinavian and Swiss print media and television. He criticizes the loss of influence of journalists in the newsroom, feels underestimated by his boss and colleagues, and dares to do the forbidden (such as closing a news item with a quote) if he thinks this will enhance the quality of the news.

In the UN elections case, he first views the video sources at his workplace and takes notes by hand. The language of most of his sources is English. Then he takes the pictures to the cutter's workplace, they compile the videos together, and then he writes the text. He jots down notes of quotes from the video sources by hand while he composes the news on the computer. Between writing phases, he reads the expanding text aloud. Before he starts writing, he has a clear idea of how to start – and he counts on having ideas for the rest while writing.

This clear idea consists of splitting the story. The idea and the corresponding practice emerge when the journalist tries to contextualize the recent events – as can be seen from of the retrospective verbal protocol:

```
0076 und was ich jetzt da versuche ist eigentlich die geschichte
0077 die schlicht mal einfach eine wahl ist in den sicherheitsrat
sozusagen
0078 in den kontext zu setzen

0092 das sind zwei verschiedene geschichten
0093 die man da erzählt
0094 und mit den bildern
0095 kann ich natürlich die zweite geschichte schlecht erzählen
0096 das sind konkrete bilder
0097 auf denen man den wahlablauf sieht
0098 wo die quotes sind
0099 die sich wohl nur indirekt auf das beziehen
0100 das heisst in der moderation muss ich jetzt versuchen
0101 den kontext sozusagen zu umschreiben
0102 und weil wir ja sehr aktualitätsbezogen sind
0103 muss ich irgendwie schauen
0104 dass es eine aktualität hat

0113 chavez das ist noch schwierig in zwei drei sätzen
0114 für leute die nicht wissen
0115 was chavez für eine rolle spielt
```

Fig. 2: Excerpts of verbal protocol (sf_ts_061018_1300_strub_sicherheitsratabstimmung_verbal)

b Concise writing strategies

The analysis of the verbal protocol leads to the description of the repertoire of the journalist's writing strategies. These strategies are propositional reconstructions of what a writer aims to do under specific circumstances. The propositional format is: [to do X because Y is true] or [to do X to achieve Y]. The circumstances (the Y part) are left out if the person under investigation did not specify them or the researcher cannot infer them from contextual information. The journalist's strategies with respect to the split practice are:

- Distinguish between two stories: the recent story and the background story.
- Tell the recent story in the news text, because it fits the recent pictures available.
- Tell the background story because not all of the audience is up-to-date on this item.
- Tell the background story in the anchor text because there are no pictures.

c Writing down what started as clear ideas

Having researched the core sources and decided to split the story, the journalist sees one clear thematic focus for each of the two short stories he will write. This writing can be analyzed in detail in the s-notation^x of the first writing process, where he produces the introductory moderation for the anchorwoman. S-notation marks two types of revisions and their sequence in the writing process: Deletions are marked with [square brackets] and insertions with {curly braces}. The small numbers indicate the order of these revisions. Vertical lines indicate where the author stopped in his writing flow to move the cursor to perform a revision. The s-notation shows that the journalist writes down his ideas fluently and in the reading/listening order:

```
Auch gestern nacht endeten alle Abstimmungen über den 15. Sitz im
UNO-Sicherheitsrat ohne Resul1[tt. |1]1tt. 2[weder|2]2Weder Venezuela
noch Guatamal3[ |3]3a vermochte 4[das|4]4die nötige
Zweidrittelsmehrheit zu erreichen. Der Zweikampf zwi5[wchen|5]5schen
diesen Staaten ist zu einem Duell zwischen 6[Amerik|6]6,7{amerika-
feindlichen und }7|8amerika-freundlichen8{9[ DStz|9]9
S10[D]10|11taaten|10}8 11{geworden - mit den Freunden Wa12[h|12]12shingtons
leicht im 13[voirteil |13]13Vorteil.14[ ]14|15}11|1415[und am]15 |7
```

Fig. 3: Excerpt of S-notation
(sf_ts_061018_1300_strub_sicherheitsratsabstimmung_keylog_1_snot)

d Hidden knowledge detected

To sum up, the background-recency-split practice emerged in the journalist's conflict of basic practices when he had to bring together recent pictures with the need to provide background information. He decided not to compromise, he decided not to overburden the pictures with inappropriate text and the audience with incomprehensible information, but to reach two goals properly in two texts. For the news item itself, he takes into account recency, the market, and the pictures available. For the introductory moderation for the anchor woman, he keeps to the background information he expects to be useful for the less informed of the audience. This is how he practices promoting public understanding.

This practice goes against widespread practices in his newsroom. Normally, the journalists leave writing introductory moderations up to the anchor. Thus, the practice is part of the journalist's hidden knowledge: a good practice of an experienced, but isolated professional. It deserves to be detected and to be transferred to the whole media organization, as a situational alternative to the widespread practice of leaving the production of the introduction to an anchor who might have less thematic competence.

4 Interpretation

A knowledge map, journalists' practices, and cases of critical situations and good practices – the interpretation of such findings leads us first to a clear view of common ground and discrepancies (4.1), then to the question of how to evaluate the discrepancies and good practices (4.2) and finally to the reconstruction of situated knowledge abstracted from specific case studies: the toolbox of workplace techniques (4.3).

4.1 Common ground and discrepancies

Media politicians, media managers, chief editors, and journalists – for all four groups of stakeholders under investigation, norms and policies in the context of the remit of promoting public understanding seem to be important. However, we have found strong discrepancies within and between the groups.

The greatest discrepancies can be found between management and politics: Managers' statements contradict national policies. Managers' statements tend towards the following propositional reconstructions: "Public media are not the institutions to solve social and pedagogical problems"; "Programming has to attract audience share in an increasingly competitive market"; and "Public media need autonomy, not regulation of any kind".

4.2 Framing the results

How should we understand and frame these results? We chose the *hidden knowledge* approach as our realist social theory basis for the knowledge transfer part of the project. With this approach, we assume that an organization succeeds if it wants to do and is able do what it has to do; in other words, that in general an organization's situated activity only can be internally functional if it is externally functional. Such a framing of the results is prerequisite for systemic knowledge transfer. This can be explained by contrasting the chosen *hidden knowledge* frame with its opposites:

Interpretation of the findings as ...		externally functional	
		-	+
internally functional	+	Hypocrisy frame "double faced but adequate"	Hidden knowledge frame "promising"
	-	Consonance/dissonance frame "failure"	Functional dysfunction frame: "irritating but adequate "

Fig. 4: Matrix of approaches framing divergences in an organizations' situated activity

a Consonance/dissonance

In the *consonance/dissonance* frame, all of the units and levels of an organization should focus on the same target. In this frame, SRG would more or less fail to do what it says it will and what it is expected to do. By being externally dysfunctional, it is also internally dysfunctional. The global interpretation of the project findings would be "failure" – difficult, if not impossible to change.

b Hypocrisy

In the *hypocrisy* frame, political organizations such as SRG only survive due to their inner "hypocrisy"^{xi}: these organizations are exposed to contradictory expectations from their environments. To survive, they have to respond to all of these contradictory expectations – with integrative talk but contradictory outputs, and with actions far removed from talk, provided by different organizational units and roles. From an internal point of view, nothing would have to be changed, as long as no external stakeholder really commits the organization to do what it is expected to.

c Functional dysfunction

In the *functional dysfunction* frame, disappointing communication is seen as an excellent trigger for meta-communicative follow-up communication – and communication is what communities are built on. The apparent paradox, in

other words, is that even by violating public expectations, the media in general and public media in particular contribute to public discourse and integration. From an external point of view, nothing would have to be changed, even though it might be less than motivating to work (or to pay public funds) for a media organization whose output quality does not matter.

d Hidden knowledge

In the *hidden knowledge* frame, single exponents succeed in doing what they have to do. Based on seemingly contradictory social settings, they develop emergent situated activity corresponding to internal as well as external expectations. For the case of SRG this means that exponents such as experienced journalists develop and apply sophisticated strategies of language use to meet both organizational and public needs at the same time. In doing so, they fill the slots left open by the management. Locating and transferring this knowledge to the whole organization would augment organizational success in terms of both market pressure and political demands.

4.3 Reconstructing knowledge in stories

How to reach the public and promote public understanding – the language awareness needed to address both market forces and public demands could be located in the text production strategies of some experienced journalists. To make this experts' knowledge accessible to more of the SRG, media in general and the public, we reconstruct it as a toolbox of workplace techniques. The techniques are presented in short texts with narrative elements. They outline what works in which situations and according to which criteria. The toolbox of techniques is built upon the theoretically-based empirical findings about the relation between writing situations, writing practices, and evaluations in quality follow-up discourse in the case studies.

5 Transfer

A toolbox of workplace techniques is not yet knowledge transfer. Prior to any efforts of transferring anything anywhere, we have to explain why linguists and sociologists should be able to allocate knowledge for media professionals. Then the knowledge has to be presented to the addressees in a form they can handle, and finally, the transfer processes between academic and non-academic professional communities have to be organized.

The practical aims of the “*idee suisse*“ project were to develop, implement, and evaluate measures to systematically reinforce the organizational language awareness related to promoting public understanding. According to a) the transdisciplinary architecture of the project, b) the *emergent practice* and the *hidden knowledge* approach and c) systemic models of consulting,^{xiii} this

knowledge transfer part of the “*idee suisse*“ project consists of transferring the organization’s *own* knowledge back to the organization.

Since we located the crucial knowledge (of how to meet market forces and public demands at the same time) at the bottom of the organization, we call the knowledge transfer that we now have to promote a *knowledge transfer from the bottom*.

We have tested first drafts of *good practices* and *critical situations* in the individual feedback to the journalists under investigation – a two hours session with each journalist. In early 2008 we will discuss an anonymized version of the results with exponents of the SRG management, and finally we will publish a synopsis in the linguistically-based interactive research and transfer publication designed as the core dissemination platform of the project, in which analysis and optimization of media discourse are systematically related.^{xiii}

The strategic aim of such transfer is to synchronize the corresponding organizational language awareness in journalism, management, and politics. The operative aim is to implement cycles of quality, which are continuous processes to enhance the language awareness needed to promote public understanding. We start with narrative approaches – storytelling in the organizations and about journalists as agents of good practice. The theoretical and empirical basis is being developed now.

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Daniel Perrin. (project leader), Michael Schanne and Vinzenz Wyss are affiliated with the University of Applied Sciences in Winterthur; Aleksandra Gnach, and Mathias Fürer with the University of Bern; Marcel Burger with the University of Lausanne. This project group was supervised by the project steering committee: Iwar Werlen, University of Bern (chair); Hans-Jürgen Bucher, University of Trier; Werner Kallmeyer, University of Mannheim; Caja Thimm, University of Bonn; Jean Widmer, University of Fribourg.

ⁱ On the impact of media language on public discourse c.f. Herring, 2003. For further discussion refer to the knowledge database to be presented online (www.medienlinguistik.net) by the end of 2008.

ⁱⁱ “Konzession“ 2007, article 2 (programming mandate), paragraph 2: “In ihren Programmen fördert sie [SRG] das Verständnis, den Zusammenhalt und den Austausch unter den Landesteilen, Sprachgemeinschaften, Kulturen, Religionen und den gesellschaftlichen Gruppierungen. [...]“

“Konzession“ 1992, revised 2003, article 3 (programming mandate), paragraph 1: “In ihren Programmen fördert sie [SRG] das gegenseitige Verständnis, den Zusammenhalt und den Austausch zwischen den Landesteilen, Sprachgemeinschaften und Kulturen [...]“

On the relationship between politics and society in terms of politics formulating the societal, cultural, and linguistic remit c.f. Busch, 2006. For further discussion refer to the knowledge database to be presented online (www.medienlinguistik.net) by the end of 2008.

- iii On the relation between world, conceptualization of the world, and language c.f. Byrne, 2002. For further discussion refer to the knowledge database to be presented online (www.medienlinguistik.net) by the end of 2008.
- iv On the relation between communication, common ground, and basic narratives c.f. Garretson, 2007. For further discussion refer to the knowledge database to be presented online (www.medienlinguistik.net) by the end of 2008.
- v On the relation between inter- and transdisciplinarity c.f. Defila, Di Giulio, & Scheuermann, 2006. For further discussion refer to the knowledge database to be presented online (www.medienlinguistik.net) by the end of 2008.
- vi After negotiations with the head of SRG SSR idee suisse administration, Rainer Keller, it was possible to gain indirect access to documents from the SRG SSR idee suisse archives: The archivist selected the documents herself based on the organization’s key terms. Therefore, the selection cannot be considered systematic.
- vii The selected interviewees all are intermediaries of media politics and media management, having had important roles in both domains and having been or still involved in the privatization of broadcasting since 1984. However, they were interviewed in their most recent important role: as a media politician *or* manager *or* expert.
- viii For an overview of research on organizational text production see Jakobs & Perrin, 2007 in preparation. For further discussion refer to the knowledge database to be presented online (www.medienlinguistik.net) by the end of 2008.
- ix For hyperresearch see <http://www.researchware.com/hr/index.html>, for semantica see <http://www.researchware.com/hr/index.html>, both visited on 2008-01-14.
- x S-notation was developed by Kerstin Severinson Eklundh and Py Kollberg. For an introduction see Severinson-Eklundh & Kollberg, 2001.
- xi For the concept of the hypocrisy of organization see Brunsson, 1995, for a discussion of the concept related to media organizations see Wyss, 2008. For further discussion refer to the knowledge database to be presented online (www.medienlinguistik.net) by the end of 2008.
- xii For a discussion of systemic approaches of consulting and coaching related to media competence c.f. Perrin & Ehrensberger, 2008 in preparation. For further discussion refer to the knowledge database to be presented online (www.medienlinguistik.net) by the end of 2008.
- xiii This dissemination platform consists of a book (Perrin, 2006) and an internet application (www.medienlinguistik.net). It was launched in early 2006 and presently contains Perrin, 2006) an introduction to theoretical and practical key concepts as

well as tutorials and training courses based on empirical data recorded since 2000 and used for the preliminary studies for the “idee suisse“ project.