

# The Interconnectedness of Self, World and Language.

A reinterpretation of Lamdacism in West Central German and *bringen-*variation in Rhine Franconian considering linguistic representations.

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[slide 1]

Thank you very much for the kind introduction.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues!

What I am dealing with today is in general the role of the speaker in their world, which I call 'language worlds' and I hope that - during this talk even though I will not refer to that pretty much explicitly - I can make clear why. I will start with three questions, and three corresponding theses.

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I propose that these three questions along with the three theses as first solutions should be considered for an adequate variationist linguistic explanation.

The first question is indicated in the title of my talk: How do we as human beings interact with the world around us including all the things in it? For an answer, I claim that we should look at three different perspectives: First, the perspective of the self who is present. This I call the presence. Second, the status of the world, which presents to us. I call that the presentation of the world. And third, what we make of the things presented to us. I call that representation.

The second question deals with language. I ask: Why do we represent language? I answer that by addressing the speaker as affected by language.

And finally, my third question is: How does this representation work? I use the framework of the recognize-as-relation to answer that question.

So, my talk is divided as follows:

**[slide 3]**

Firstly, I will give some general remarks on the character of linguistic representations. After that I will outline a new term of linguistic representations. This work is in progress, so I will not be able to discuss all the details. I would be happy to answer questions after my talk. The theoretical thoughts are then substantiated by means of two examples: the lamdacism in West Central German and the *bringen*-variation in Rhine Franconian. What I will not do is reject existing approaches to interpretation and explanation. Rather, my aim will be to supplement them, to put them into perspective in a new way and to subject them to a theoretical foundation. In doing so, I will start from a phenomenological paradigm.

**[slide 4]**

I will take a brief look at what the research says about representations to this point. Representations in general show an imagelike character, i.e. they show a similarity relation with the things they represent. Due to this similarity relation they have an asymmetrical relation to the things in the world. They change in the course of acquisition and learning processes, i.e. in the lifespan. They are intentional in Brentano's sense, i.e. they are directed towards an object and they have a content. In the literature, one finds a wide variety of terms for representations, including: Memory traces, schemata, categories and concepts.

The research on representations in general and on linguistic representations in particular, however, has two central gaps which I would like to fill approximately in the following: On the one hand, the relations to the world and its things are not determined and, on the other hand, the human being, as the one who represents, is not sufficiently included in the considerations. These are my starting points for the following remarks.

**[slide 5]**

So let me very briefly outline the theoretical framework before moving on to an adapted definition of representation.

At the center of the considerations is the triad of presence - presentation - representation, which also occurs in this way in Oswald Schwemmer's work, who is a German philosopher of the 20th century. I adapt it to a certain extent for linguistic contexts. Since I only have 20 minutes here, I can only briefly touch on the meaning, but I hope that everything will become a bit clearer when I relate it to concrete data later on.

To start with the symbolic nature of language and its meaning for us as human beings would certainly go beyond the scope of this talk, so I will limit myself to the triad of presence - presentation - representation: We as human beings are present in this world, dear colleagues. We perceive what is happening around us. We participate, shape the world, make thoughts, optimize the world, sometimes probably too much. We interact with the world in an essential way. The reason for this is that we want to survive and are blessed with intelligence to be able to adapt not to the world, but the world to us. That this is also accompanied by dangers is self-explanatory. That is - in a nutshell - the essence of being present. We must first learn to be present in the world.

The world, on the other hand, presents itself to us. It shows itself in all its diversity, it provides impressions that we can absorb. That is the presentation.

And so we come to representation, which can function linguistically, but admittedly does not have to function linguistically. However, I would like to put a special focus on language. The impressions that the world presents to us are processed in the black box, the cognitive apparatus, and lead to expressions, i.e. to actions, whether linguistic or not. I call this process representation: impressions,

cognitive processing, expressions. The fact that language is of central importance for us humans when we want to express ourselves hardly needs explanation.

This in turn leads us directly to a first definition of representation:

**[slide 6]**

"Representation is a cognitive process (of humans) of processing information about the world and finding one's way in it (realization). The processing metaphor does not legitimise a mechanistic-behaviouristic interpretation; rather, processing here means reflection on and understanding of something as something (as-relation). In other words, processing is accompanied by interpreting and finally understanding (from a certain perspective) (consciousness)."

If we look at linguistic representations in particular, we can state the following as a definition:

"Linguistic representations are the cognitive equivalents of basic linguistic categories (e.g. phone(me), morphe(me), lexemes). They are a necessary prerequisite for solving real-life problems with the help of language."

So much for the theory. Thank you for listening to me up to this point. I would now like to take the theoretical thoughts to a slightly different level with the help of two examples and put them to the test in practice.

The first example is the Lamdacism in West Central German.

**[slide 7]**

In case not all of you, dear colleagues, are firm in German dialect geography, I have brought you a map to help you locate it. You see here the German territory including Austria and Switzerland. We are located in the west of Germany. South of Frankfurt near the cities of Mannheim and Heidelberg, to be exact: somewhat north of Mannheim and Heidelberg.

### [slide 8]

Basically, the phenomenon discussed here is about the following: It "refers to a historical substitution phenomenon in which - in the wcg. area of interest here - germ. P or ohg. d are represented as dialectal l" (Lameli 2015: 66, own translation). Specifically, this means that the standard linguistic *Bruder* (here in the southern area) is opposed by the dialectal *Brurer* (with a apical r which I can unfortunately not produce) in the northern area. In a border area, an intentional adoption of the dialectal form now takes place, but fails, so that the people there produce *Bruler* instead of *Brurer* (recognizable here in the tightened area).

### [slide 9]

We can ask here: But why is that? 1. why do people try to adopt the dialectal variant at all? 2. why do they not succeed? And 3. what are the consequences of the failed adoption process?

In this regard, I would first like to briefly refer to Lameli's answer.

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Even if the conditions of formation have not yet been fully clarified (cf. Lameli 2015: 66), some approaches can be traced back to the linguistic-geographical situation. In the northern study area, apical r allophones are predominant, while uvular r variants prevail in the more southern part (cf. Lameli 2015: 66). Lameli interprets the existence of lamdacism with reference to Wenker (2013/1886: 942) as an "effect of an intentional acquisition process [...] in which speakers of the uvular r region strive for an imitation of apical rhotacism" (Lameli 2015: 66-67). Lamdacisms, Lameli shows, are all "directly at the rhotacism boundary" (Lameli 2015: 67), except for a few exceptional cases, so that it can be assumed that this is a language contact phenomenon (cf. Lameli 2015: 68). In addition to this linguistic-systematic explanation, Lameli also offers a sociolinguistic approach. Metapragmatically, the

phenomenon is subject to processes of evaluation; speakers are stereotyped and lamdacism is evaluated negatively (cf. Lameli 2015 with reference to Post 1992: 94). This, in turn, is also accompanied by a social positioning and demarcation of the speakers from the rhotacism or standard-equivalent region, which is an identity-securing measure of the speakers outside the lamdacism region. It is all the more astonishing, however, that although the lamdacism variant is the subject of negative evaluations, there are nevertheless no synchronization processes that lead to the adoption of the d or r variant.

I will now take this explanation as the occasion for a continuing interpretation that places the speakers themselves at the center of the considerations and reflects on their situation.

### [slide 11]

I would now like to add the three aspects from my theses from the beginning to this already very plausible explanation, which I think then allow a good overall picture of the situation.

**(1) The human being as affected by language:** The human being in his function as speaker of a language is affected by it, i.e. language is close to the human being (cf. Schmitz 2015: 157), from which certain action dispositions and options follow.

If a person as a speaker is affected by the presence of two conflicting variants in opposition, namely *Bruder* and *Brurer*, then this is initially a purely individual phenomenon they can not distance from: "The facts of being affected are not objective, but so particular that at most the affected person himself - very often no one - can state them, although others can speak about them" (Schmitz 2015: 158). Thus, as a speaker of *Bruder*, I can be affected by the *Brurer* variant (e.g. as insecurity, emotional closeness/distance, or social prestige, or all of the above), can myself ideally also express this affectation and make a at least vague statement

about it, while other speakers who already substantively exhibit a distance from my affectation, can basically and abstractly speak about insecurities, emotional closeness/distance or social prestige, but not about my feelings in a certain situation, in which only I can make a statement about myself (I feel (not) comfortable with this way of speaking/expression here now due to individual reasons.).

**(2) Presence - Presentation - Re-presentation:** Affective involvement in language is a direct consequence of human presence in the world. The world presents itself in its structures and situations, in meanings, which are then re-presented by the affected person and cognitively capable speakers. Re-presentations can thus be considered, as addressed earlier, as the ability of human beings to process information about the world and to find their way in it. In the case of the lamdacism example, this means that the two variants *d* and *r* are presented (or present themselves) in the world, and the present speakers perceive and thus re-present this presentation; the variants represent impressions (or *inputs*). The processing sequences, the reactions of the speakers (e.g. social-indexical positioning practices or communicative acts like the preference of a variant and the synchronization attempt) are correspondingly expressions (or *outputs*). The impressions are related to social information (How do I want to appear in general? How do I appear when I use *Bruder* or *Brurer*, respectively?); finally, in the case of lamdacism, the consequence is a synchronization attempt in favor of *Brurer*, which, however, fails due to the different *r-production sites* (*uvular* vs. *apical*). The maintenance of the emergent *Bruler* variant is then due to identity construction.

**Third, we come to the as-relation of cognition:** The as-relation of cognition is the general case of the as-relation of understanding. This differs in its hermeneutic understanding from the formal one of valency grammar: the valency of

understanding here is not two but three (someone understands something *as* something). In the same way, the *as*-relation of recognizing is also a three-digit one: I recognize something *as* something. This differentiation of the general (*recognizing*) from the particular (*understanding*) is relevant for the lamdacism example: The speakers do not merely recognize a variant (e.g. *brother*), they *recognize it as* a specific variant among other possible variants (e.g. *Brurer*). Speakers do not merely understand the variant, they *understand it as* regionally or socially indexical. Thus, the existence of two variants is not merely concise (recognition), but relevant (understanding). [17:00 Minutes]

**[slide 12]**

Let's move on to the second example, the variation of standard language *bringen* in Rhine-Franconian. For this, we are still moving in the greater region south of Frankfurt am Main, near Mannheim and Heidelberg - but now a bit more west near Kaiserslautern. You can trace the region here on the map.

**[slide 13]**

In their standard work on language dynamics, Schmidt and Herrgen (2011: 153-167) analyze in detail the three inflectional classes of German *bringen*, namely weak, strong, and mixed inflection. After introducing the phenomenon and the explanations in a first step, a second step provides a theoretical foundation against the background of the lines developed here and with special attention to linguistic representations. With the analysis that Schmidt and Herrgen present for the verb *bringen*, the linguistic-historical development "can be traced and explained precisely for the first time for large dialectal areas over a century on the basis of empirical data" (Schmidt & Herrgen 2011: 154). This is why this example is so interesting for looking at speakers.



In the Wenker map of 1880, the dialectal variant *brung* is documented for the standard language participial formation *gebracht*, among others, in Rhine-Franconian. These forms "are highly salient for speakers of standard language and other dialects and are mockingly commented on" (Schmidt & Herrgen 2011: 155). However, a real-time comparison of different data sets shows "that the highly salient *brung* forms do not degrade" (Schmidt & Herrgen 2011: 156) and this despite the fact that this feature, as a primary dialect feature, should actually degrade rather quickly. Even more: Schmidt & Herrgen (2011: 156) show that the feature not only does not degrade, but on the contrary even spreads. The special thing here is that the "later-born [...] have thus changed inflectional class with *(ge)brung(en)* (= strong inflection) compared to their ancestors and have thus morphologically distanced themselves from both the old dialect and the standard language" (Schmidt & Herrgen 2011: 156). We can again ask: But why?

**[slide 14]**

According to the authors, the explanation for this phenomenon is quite simple. The initial situation is that standard linguistically *bringen - brachte - gebracht* with the diminutive of *i* to *a* in addition to the dental suffix represents a single case (cf. Schmidt & Herrgen 2011: 159). In child language acquisition, before the standard linguistic variant of the participial form with dental suffix is produced, either *gebringt* or *gebrungen* are used (cf. Schmidt & Herrgen 2011: 160). Since the standard variant is a singular exception, it takes a long time until it is mastered without errors. The spread of the different *(ge)brung(en)* variants can now be explained by the fact that there is no "correction of *brung* forms in child dialect acquisition in the language area in question" (Schmidt & Herrgen 2011: 161). The speakers clearly now afterwards, what their own variant and what a foreign variant is. Therefore the *brung* variant does not spread beyond structural boundaries, e.g. into Mosel Franconian.

**[slide 15]**

I want to come back to the three aspects of a linguistic explanation which I used already to explain the first example.

With regard to affective involvement, it was stated above that language is close to people, from which certain dispositions for action follow. If one takes the "regionalization of communication relations" (Schmidt & Herrgen 2011: 161) as a basis and follows the premise that people are affected by language and cognitively capable of reflecting on actions, then the "failure to correct *brung* forms in childhood dialect acquisition" (Schmidt & Herrgen 2011: 161) is a direct consequence of affectivity and subsequent reflection. In other words, people have an interest in preserving and handing down the forms; it is part of their identity. Since comprehension is not a problem anyway and, moreover, the variant is positively valued in Rhine Franconian as part of the regional language identity, a stabilization of the variant as part of the regional language knowledge takes place. However, it is also important here that affection is by definition initially something subjective. I myself am bodily affected, I establish this and recognize my affectedness, it becomes concise. By comparing my situation, i.e. my being affected by *brung*, with other speakers and noticing that they are also affected (but possibly differently), I understand my own situation against the background of social structures, the use of *brung* becomes relevant.

Condition for the process described here is the triad presence - presentation - representation: Man is present in the world, the world presents itself to man, man represents the world. Through the use of different variants of *bring* (in the diverse inflectional classes), these are not only present, they are also presented, since they affect the speakers. Because the forms are not only salient for the speakers, but also pertinent, relevant to the life-world, they are cognitively realized, i.e. re-presented. However, it is not an identical representation of reality that takes place, but a

realization, a processing that is also accompanied by changes and attributions of meaning (e.g., with evaluation patterns, social indexing, etc.).

Unfortunately, I cannot go into the recognize-as-relation again due to lack of time.

[23:17 Minutes]

**[slide 16]**

I now turn to a summary and discussion of the thoughts.

We have seen that in order to be able to explain phenomena of linguistic variation in a well-founded way, we have to look back at their relevance to the life world. There is no question that speakers play a central role in this process. However, they do not stand in isolation, but interact with the world by taking in the impressions that the world provides, i.e. presents, and processing them into expressions. Thus, they take in the variant *brurer*, evaluate it, situate it against the background of their knowledge of language and the interests they have as speakers, and they try to produce this variant as well. This fails, however, and the lamdacist variant *bruler* emerges.

**[Slide 17]**

If we look back to my questions and theses from the very beginning, I hope to have shown, that taking the speakers into account, offers great perspectives for explaining variationist linguistic phenomena. Therefore it is not enough to just call the speakers by their names, but we need a holistic model that reflects their position in the world, you could call that the cultural or social sphere, but also we need to reflect the mental processes underlying the former. This I haven't done in this talk, but we are working on that in big project in Marburg. So, we'll keep you updated in the following months and years.

**[slide 18]**

And this is, why I would like to thank all my collaborators. This work was done in the context of a Research Training Group at the University of Marburg and is funded by the German Research Foundation. I would also like to thank all of you of course.

**[slide 19]**

Thank you for your attention. [24:55 Minutes]