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SUMMARY

This paper looks at some aspects of the theoretical contribution of Žarko Muljačić to sociolinguistics. After introducing the ‘relativistic model’ of comparative standardology, as Muljačić called his own approach to the sociology of language, developing and refining ideas and categories established by H. Kloss, special attention is paid to the notions of *ausbausprache* and *ausbauization*. We show how the definition of the terms *Ausbau(sprache)* and *Abstand(sprache)* in Kloss gave rise to different interpretations by different authors: some emphasize the value of *Ausbau* as a general sociological property of languages, others (with a somewhat mistaken overlap between *ausbauization* and *abstandization*) stress its character of a planning process promoting a dialect to a (full) language through interventions on its form.

In his many works (more than 70) dedicated to these problems, Muljačić deals with *Ausbau* in a dynamic way, outlining four phases in the passage from a ‘pure’ dialect to an *ausbausprache* and vice versa. In a far-reaching perspective, he combines the dimensions *Ausbau/Abstand* with other dimensions, *i.e.* the position of a linguistic variety in a repertoire (High, Middle, Low) and its relative autonomy/heteronomy. Such matching can however lead to some controversial issues: the paper discusses these critical points, making manifest how the ideas of Muljačić have contributed significantly to an improved understanding of the categories and to the advancement of research in sociology of language.