Is *language* a countable noun?

"A language is not a fixed system. It varies in usage over speakers, places, and time"

Ellis, N. 2009. 'Optimizing the input; Frequency and sampling in usage-based and form-focused learning' in Long, M. & Doughty, C. (eds.) *The Handbook of Language Teaching.* Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, p. 139.

You and I may both be speakers of language X but your grammar and mine at the descriptive level will not be identical… We both appeal to different sets of rules …

Davies, A. (1991) *The Native Speaker in Applied Linguistics,* Edinburgh University Press, p. 40.

In public discourse, language often becomes inseparably associated with a territorially bounded identity … This common-sense understanding of the relationship between language and nation ignores the diversity and variety of language(s) spoken within many states.

Blackledge, A. & Creese, A. (2010) *Multilingualism: A Critical Perspective,* London: Continuum, p. 26.

If one draws a straight line between Kashmir and Kanyakumari and marks, say, every five or ten miles, then one will find that there is no break in communication between any two consecutive points.

Pattanayak, D.P. (1984) 'Language policies in multilingual states', quoted in Canagarajah, 2013.

It is important to appreciate that all language use –
among whatever combination or grouping of native
and non-native speakers – is situated, variable, and
subject to hybridizing influences.

Sewell, A (2013) 'English as a lingua franca: ontology and ideology', *ELT Journal,* 67/1, p.6

The translingual language practices of metrolingualism, polylingual languaging, or plurilanguaging are not the occasional language uses of exceptional communities but rather the everyday language practices of the majority world.

Pennycook, A. 2010. *Language as a Local Practice.* London: Routledge, p. 133.

[Research using brain imaging techniques shows that] similar brain regions are active even when the languages are typologically distant, such as English and Mandarin Chinese, and when L2 is acquired later in life.

Simmonds, A.J., Wise, R.J.S. and Leech, R. (2011) Two tongues, one brain: imaging bilingual speech production. Frontiers in Psychology, 2:166, http://www.frontiersin.org/language_sciences/10.3389/fpsyg.2011.00166/full accessed 13/09/2013.

Linguistic competence is not stored in the mind in neat compartments with clear boundaries; rather, a more appropriate image is that of a mass with no clear divisions among parts. Nor is linguistic competence in different languages stable over time as there is constant bleeding between and among languages as well as additions and losses in terms of repertoires.

Block, D. (2003) *The Social Turn in Second Language Acquisition*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p. 39.

The 'monolingual orientation'

- Language = community = place
- 1 language = 1 identity
- Language as a self-standing system
- Languages as pure and separated from each other
- The locus of language as in the mind, rather than in the social context
- Communication as based on grammar rather than practice

After Canagarajah, S. (2013) *Translingual Practice: Global Englishes and Cosmopolitan Relations*, London: Routledge, p. 20.

There is no such thing as *a* language…. because

1. It varies over time.
2. It varies from place to place.
3. It varies from person to person.
4. It varies within individuals.
5. It borrows from and merges with other languages.
6. It doesn't exist as a homogeneous entity in the brain.

None of us speaks "a language" as if this were an undifferentiated whole. We do not learn languages as if these were discrete listings of syntax and lexicon (despite what years of schooling and tests may try to tell us). Rather, we learn how to do certain things with words, and with varying success....

Pennycook, A. (2012) *Language and Mobility: Unexpected Places,* Bristol: Multilingual Matters, p 98.

The separation of languages with different labels needs to be problematized. Labelling is an ideological act of demarcating certain codes in relation to certain identities and interests.

Canagarajah, S. 2013. *Translingual Practice: Global Englishes and Cosmopolitan Relations.* London: Routledge, p.6.

If 'labelling is an ideological act' so is:

- choosing what items to put in a dictionary
- selecting the items for a syllabus
- testing these items
- error correction
- selecting teachers on the basis of their 'native-ness'
- mandating the language of the classroom

Any attempt to name and describe the patterns of language involves a selection process that is inevitably simplifying and idealising. Meanwhile, the language system keeps changing so that any description can only be provisional and incomplete anyway.

Larsen-Freeman, D. and Cameron, L. (2008) *Complex Systems and Applied Linguistics,* Oxford: Oxford University Press,   p. 81.

"The very idea of a standard implies stability and this can only be fixed in reference to the past. But language is of its nature unstable. It is essentially protean in nature, adapting its shape to suit changing circumstances".

Widdowson, H. (1993) 'The ownership of English', reprinted in Jenkins, J. (2003) *World Englishes: A resource book for students,* London: Routledge.

Ideas of 'English' will continue to evolve as the language becomes increasingly decentred. […] During this evolutionary process, an artificially polarized debate between essentialized 'varieties' of language—native speaker and non-native speaker, or ELF and non-ELF—is likely to be counterproductive.

Sewell, A. (2012) 'English as a lingua franca: ontology and ideology,' *ELT Journal*, 67/1, 3-10.

The challenge for language teaching is to theorize and implement approaches that acknowledge the variability of language while still making it accessible and acceptable for actual contexts, classrooms, and learners.

Sewell op. cit. p.

Learning a language is not a question of acquiring grammatical structure but of *expanding a repertoire of communicative contexts*…. A language is not a circumscribed object but a loose confederation of available and overlapping social experiences.

Hopper, P. J. (1998). 'Emergent language'. In Tomasello, M. (ed.) *The New Psychology of Language: Cognitive and Functional Approaches to Language Structure.* Mahwah, NJ.: Lawrence Erlbaum, p. 171.

We have repertoires of linguistic resources which we use locally […] Our goal as language educators might be better understood as developing resourceful speakers rather than some vague notion of native competence.

Pennycook, A. (2012) *Language and Mobility: Unexpected Places,* Bristol: Multilingual Matters, p. 100, 170.

Language learning involves an alignment of one's language resources to the needs of the situation, rather than reaching a target level of competence.

Canagarajah, S. (2007) Lingua franca English, multilingual communities, and language acquisition. *Modern Language Journal*, 91 Focus Issue, p. 928.

Becoming a *resourceful speaker* is what we are surely aiming at, an idea that embraces both the ability to accommodate to others and to manipulate different resources.

Pennycook, A. (2012) *Language and Mobility: Unexpected Places,* Bristol: Multilingual Matters, p. 172.