Research directions in the study of language standardization

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In the introduction we have commented on a number of themes or *leitmotifs* of standardization which can be observed across the individual case studies collected in this volume. The existence of persistent historical commonalities between standard languages has been a central motivation for the construction of cross-linguistic models and the general interest in a comparative, synthetic approach to the study of language standardization. In this concluding section we would like to outline some broad directions for further research in the field of "comparative standardology".

Language standardization as creation and convergence

In the popular imagination the history of standard languages is intricately connected to the activities of individuals and institutions. Indeed, the popular linguistic pantheon is filled with the names of the "standardizers" who set out to regulate and codify their native language, and standardization is — at least in part — seen as the direct consequence and result of the rational, goal-oriented actions carried out by these individual and collective social actors.[1] Not only is it necessary (as already noted in the introduction) to carefully consider the various and sometimes conflicting motivations of these actors (e.g. cultural aspirations, administrative unification, economic advantage, political strategy, etc.), but their complex and manifold national and also trans-national interactions and collaborations deserve further attention. In this context it is worth mentioning the approach of De Groof (e.g. 2002b) which attempts — with regard to Belgian language history — a systematic cross-tabulation of the goals and motivations of a large number of social actors, as well as Watts' (1999) more ethnographically inspired reconstruction of the "discourse communities" of eighteenth century English grammarians.

The fact that French has functioned as a cultural model for the standardization of other languages has been noted repeatedly (cf. Haugen 1972; Joseph 1987; Jansen 2002). However, we still lack detailed cross-national studies of how the various aspects of the French model (e.g., the "one nation — one language" rhetoric, the idea of a language academy as a prescriptive institution which co-ordinates and shapes the codification process) were "translated" into national standardization discourses, and to what extent their application was reshaped by the specifics of the sociolinguistic and historical context (cf. the seventeenth century debates about a language academy in Britain and finally the rejection of the idea, as discussed by Nevalainen, this volume).

While the process of language standardization has been shaped to a large extent by the planned and organized activities of individuals, language societies and governments (their linguistic creativity or *Schöpfung*, cf. Scaglione 1984), a comprehensive view of the history of standard language norms should also pay due attention to the complex and multifaceted processes of inter-dialect accommodation and convergence which supported the formation of well-defined and — to use the terminology of Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) — " focused" sociolinguistic norms in heteroglossic speech communities. Joseph's (1987) notion of "language standards" is useful in this respect (cf. also Jespersen's 1925: 51ff.). Language standards (or "protostandards" as Nevalainen, this volume, calls them in her discussion of the standardization of English) are relatively uniform linguistic varieties which function as a measure (or standard) against which an individual's speech is evaluated. However, since language standards lack the overtly codified norms which are characteristic of standard languages, they tend to be linguistically more variable. They are characterized by what Smith (1996: 65–66, following Le Page and Tabouret-Keller) has called "focus", i.e. the existence of a relatively uniform, collective norm towards which speakers orient themselves in their linguistic performance. Standard languages, on the other hand, are characterized by "fixity", i.e., by a set of highly prescriptive rules "from which any deviation is forbidden" (ibid.). Moreover, while standard languages are learned through explicit and institutionalized teaching practices, the norms of language standards are acquired primarily through exposure to and imitation of model texts and model speakers (see the comments on medieval chancery standards in the introduction to this volume; see also Hansen, Jacobsen and Weyhe, this volume, on the spoken Faroese language standard).[2]

An important challenge for standardization research is to clarify the historical interactions and, in particular, language contact phenomena that occur between such pre-existing language standards and the emerging standard language. While the former emerged via dialect accommodation and linguistic focusing in local and professional networks (cf. Lenker 2000 for a case study), the latter is largely the result of the purposeful linguistic interventions and elaborations of individual and collective actors. An understanding of standardization as a special type of language contact was also outlined by Haugen (1972: 247), who commented on the complex sociolinguistic interactions between the formal, written standard norm and the spoken language. According to Haugen, contact between speech and written language would eventually lead to the emergence of "new [spoken] norms … that are an *amalgamation* of speech and writing" (our emphasis). In other words, the spoken standard combines structural and lexical elements of two different linguistic systems and the precise origin of individual items remains diffuse: "one is often hard put to say whether a given form has been handed down from its ancestor by word of mouth or via the printed page" (*ibid.*).

A broad language contact perspective was more recently also adopted by Van Marle (1997) who argued — with reference to Dutch — that from the nineteenth century onwards the previously "unspoken" norms of the written standard formed the basis for the development of a spoken standard norm. This spoken standard, according to Van Marle, is best conceptualized as a type of "hybrid" language as it is simultaneously oriented towards the "fixed" norms of the written standard and the more variable sociolinguistic conventions of the spoken language.

From a broadly conceived language contact perspective two central processes of linguistic interaction can thus be distinguished in the history of standard languages:

(a) Contact (and convergence) between pre-existing, focused (written and spoken) language standards and the emerging written standard language.
(b) Contact (and convergence) between the written standard, the emerging spoken standard norm (as represented in the speech of "model speakers") and the spoken dialects. The locus where this interaction takes place is the bi-dialectal and literate individual.

Processes of destandardization, which are currently in progress in a number of standard language speech communities, constitute a special case of (b). Standard-dialect contact in the spoken domain therefore does not necessarily lead to the structural erosion of dialects under the pressures of the (prestigious) standard, but can also support the formation of regional spoken standard norms which command local prestige and which are used in semi-formal situations.

A research perspective which pays attention to these contact dynamics would help to overcome the somewhat teleological orientation of traditional standardization models. The careful investigation of the various overlapping selections from different linguistic systems at different historical times would contribute to a better understanding of the role of language standardization in a general theory of language change.

Alphabetization, mass literacy and the diffusion of the standard language

Selection and codification are not the only aspects of the standardization process which have traditionally been interpreted as a result of the actions of relatively exclusive, powerful as well as socially and educationally privileged groups within a speech community. A focus on elite activities also informs, for example, Cooper's (1989: 183–184) assessment of the conditions under which language planning decisions are successfully implemented and diffused:

> Language planning may be initiated at any level of the social hierarchy, but it is unlikely to succeed unless it is embraced and promoted by elites and counterelites … Neither elites or counterelites are likely to embrace the language planning initiatives by others unless they perceive it to be in their own interest to do so … Elites influence the evaluation and distribution of language varieties within a speech community … Whereas it is in the interest of established elites to promote acceptance of a standard, it is in the interest of counterelites to promote acceptance of a counter standard.

While elite involvement and elite conflicts are an important feature of many standard language histories, the traditional elite-oriented perspective has more recently been augmented by studies which carefully trace the implementation and diffusion process across different social and economic groups (cf. Mattheier 1986 for an early discussion). Much of this research concentrates on the "long nineteenth century" (c. 1789 to c. 1914) when mass alphabetization and a general education system contributed not only to a significant increase in literacy levels, but also facilitated access and exposure to the norms of the standard language.[3]

The careful description and analysis of the writing practices and language use of what one might call (following Fairman 2000) the "minimally" or "intermediary schooled" classes has, from the late 1990s, developed into an important area of historical sociolinguistics and standardization research (e.g. for German: Elspaß 2002; Klenk 1997; Mihm 1998; for English: Fairman 2000, 2002; Gracía-Bermejo Giner and Montgomery 1997; cf. also the variationist work by Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1996, 2003; for Dutch and Afrikaans: Vandenbussche 2002; Deumert 2001). The documentation of the gradual and often only partial adoption of standard language norms by members of the traditional working classes and the petty bourgeoisie has provided new insights into the complex relationship between stratification, social identity formation and standardization, and has shown that non-standard written norms coexisted with the standard norm in many early standard language speech communities. The systematic sociolinguistic description of the gradual transition of ever larger parts of the speech community towards the written (and later also spoken) norms of the "schooled" standard allows language historians to complement the more traditional standardization histories "from above" (socially speaking) with a parallel history "from below", an idea which underlies, for example, Elspaß's (2002: 48) aim to "*reconstruct ordinary people's route to the written standard variety*" (italics in the original).

The traditional "from above" or elite perspective is also implicit in Kloss' (1978) model of language standardization as genre elaboration. Standardization or *Ausbau*, according to Kloss, progresses linearly along the categories of "popular", "refined" and "learned" texts, and an early focus on High culture domains is generally typical of the activities of most "standardizers" (cf. Gellner 1983; Joseph 1987). Language standards, on the other hand, appear to be located more strongly in the domain of popular culture (this includes, but is not limited to, traditional folklore; see, e.g., Schiffman 1998 on the popular culture domains of Spoken Standard Tamil, including cinematic "social drama", radio and TV sitcoms as well as talk shows). The High culture focus of standardization activities shaped the social meaning these linguistic codes carry in society. In particular during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, standard languages developed into symbols of "educatedness" and "refinement". This process has been documented in some detail for nineteenth Germany, where members of the educated bourgeoisie (*Bildungsbürgertum*) used standard-oriented linguistic strategies quite self-consciously to define and confirm their social position, and to distinguish themselves from other social groups (most importantly the aristocracy and the working classes; cf. Mattheier 1991; Linke 1996; Schikorsky 1998).

A writer's readiness and eagerness to adopt the standard norm is, however, not simply the result of his or her aspired social identity, but also a function of access to the institutions which defined and reproduced the sociolinguistic norms and practices of "schooled", "educated" society (e.g. classrooms, books, libraries, etc.). In this context, Elspaß (2002: 45) has listed a number of sociolinguistic and pragmaphilological questions which have so far received only sporadic and unsystematic attention in standardization studies:

> In what way did people learn the written standard? Which grammars did they use? Did they use grammars at all? If not, which "norm authorities" could they rely on? Did teachers master the standard variety? To what extent, and for how long, did regional influences prevail in their actual written language production and their teaching? What language levels were mostly affected by regional variation?

This catalogue of questions could easily be extended, and the careful, socio-historical reconstruction of the diffusion process should pay detailed attention to, for example:

(a) the various places of learning (schools, family, professional organizations, churches);

(b) the styles of learning inside and outside of the classroom (cf. Deumert 2003a on traditional classroom practices such as rote learning, teacher-centred corrections and formulaic question-answer sequences);
(c) social differences in education practices (ranging from aristocratic private tutoring to pauper education) as well as,
(d) the extent of passive exposure to the standard norm (through the regular or sporadic consumption of books, plays, periodicals, speeches and sermons).[4]

The acquisition and adoption of the standard variety must be distinguished from the equally important acquisition of the technical ability to write (i.e. the ability to make marks on a surface, to leave a visible record). In his discussion of the Indian sociolinguistic situation Schiffman (1998) criticizes the conventionally made distinction between literacy/writing and orality (e.g. Goody 1987). Schiffman suggests that it would more appropriate to distinguish writing as a *cultural technique* from literacy which reflects a *social practice*, based on the general idea of the fundamental normativity of text production. Based on evidence from India, Schiffman considers oral literacy (i.e., the commitment to memory of large bodies of text) as an aspect of literacy (on literacy as a social practice, see also Fairman 2000).

The historical record indicates that writing was often — at different times for different social groups — perceived as a necessary skill, which did not, however, imply or require an awareness or application of the norms of the standard to be effective (cf. Vandenbussche 2002 on the apparently "chaotic" spelling systems characteristic of many early texts). The writer's choice to conform to the orthographic standard norm appears to have constituted a different and far more ambitious practice than merely committing language to paper. Adoption of the written standard reflected an awareness of the sociolinguistic distinctions and identities which were transmitted through the institutions of a rapidly modernizing society. However, as noted above, since schooling and classroom practices were limited for many, access to the norms of the standard was equally restricted. It remains to be investigated whether historical documents representing what Mihm (1998) has called an "intended standard", i.e., a written (and possibly also spoken) variety which did not meet the linguistic and stylistic requirements of the standard norm but which was nevertheless intended to fulfil its functions, is a general diachronic and social aspect of the diffusion process, a common feature of all standard language histories.

Carefully designed diachronic text corpora would allow the systematic and comprehensive study of many of the questions raised in this section (on principles and guidelines for historical corpus design see Biber, Conrad and Reppen 1998; see Mattheier 1998 and Deumert 2003b for a discussion of corpus design in the specific context of standardization research). As regards the coverage of genres, corpora should pay particular attention to the inclusion of documents by the "minimally schooled" classes (including, e.g., soldiers' letters and other private correspondences, written testimonies in juridical files, pauper requests for financial support, meeting minutes from lower class associations, diaries, etc.; see, for example, the published collection by Grosse, Grimberg, Hölscher and Karweick 1989 for German). To base standardization research on socially inclusive and stylistically comprehensive corpora would not only allow the investigation of many of the so far neglected stratificational aspects of the process, but would also create a firm empirical basis for the description and analysis of co-existing non-standard varieties as well as the various approximations of the standard norm which have been reported in the literature.

Ideology, discourse and social practice

The symbolic meaning of the standard variety as a badge of a specifically middle class social identity has already been mentioned in the preceding section. The power, value and attraction of standard languages is a result of complex processes of ideology formation. These processes involve not only the well-documented articulation of a so-called "standard language ideology" (according to Milroy and Milroy 1991 a set of beliefs about language correctness and a general intolerance towards non-standard variants and varieties), but also the instrumentalization of the standard as a vehicle for far-reaching political and socio-cultural aspirations: religious identity (cf. the opposition against "heathen, Protestant" Northern Dutch in "Catholic" Flanders; cf. Willemyns 1997), social emancipation and political strategy (cf. the case of Nynorsk described by Jahr, this volume) as well as nationalist identity politics (cf. the arguments for Afrikaans as the "true" language of the Afrikaner nation as described by Roberge, ibid.).

Case studies of the interactions of these social and political ideologies in a given society, and, in particular, their relationship to the above mentioned Milrovian "standard language ideology" would be of great interest to the study of language standardization. Ideally such an analysis would be based on a comprehensive corpus of secondary sources, including the programmatic texts in which the "standardizers" outline and defend their proposals (e.g. the prefaces to "codification documents" such as grammars and dictionaries), meta-linguistic commentaries published by language academies and other institutions as well as documents reflecting aspects of the public discussion (such as, e.g., "letters to the editor"; for present-day studies also the web pages of populist language movements such as, e.g., the strongly puristically-oriented *Verein Deutsche Sprache e.V.*, http://vds-ev.de). In other words, historical corpus design should pay attention to primary documents — thus allowing one to trace the formation as well as diffusion of the standard norm as a sociolinguistic system — as well as to secondary sources. The latter will allow for the comprehensive reconstruction of the discourses of standardization, and the debates and counter-debates that characterize most standard language histories (cf. also Blommaert 1999 on what he calls the "historiography of language ideologies"; cf. Milroy and Milroy 1991 on the "complaint tradition", and also De Groof 2002a for a case study in the Belgian context). Linn's (1998) suggestion to study the "stylistics of standardization" draws attention to a specific aspect of these discourses and debates, i.e., the more narrowly stylistic presentation of texts and, in particular, the documentation of the considerable amendments and revisions which occured in subsequent editions of codification documents.

However, ideology is not only a matter of discursive representation ("that which is said"), but is also enacted through individual and institutional practices (cf. Althusser's 1971 notion of "lived relations", i.e. the production and reproduction of social structure and power relationships through social practices and interactions; "that which is done"). In the context of a strongly ethnographic approach to the study of language standardization, Deumert (2003a) has suggested that the "fixation" of the socio-symbolic meaning(s) of standard norms is achieved and reaffirmed through a variety of ritual-like performances and practices which are regularly enacted by members of the standard language speech community (examples include pedagogical rituals, socio-communicative rituals and also large-scale ceremonies such as language festivals; cf. also Ziegler 2002).

The ideological link between language standardization and the projection of national unity is a highly salient feature of several of the language histories reported in this volume and deserves further language-specific and cross-linguistic study. Social historians have repeatedly pointed to the "invented", "constructed" or "imagined" aspects of cultural nationalism (including language), as well as to the role played by print capitalism (i.e., the expansion of the book market and the commodification of print products), mass education and socio-economic transformations (including urbanization and industrialization; cf. Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1983; Anderson 1991). Yet, compared to the detail and breadth of historical, economic and political debates, sociolinguistic attention to the linguistic repercussions of nationalist movements has been somewhat more limited, and important theoretical contributions to the debate about nationalism and the vernacularization of languages have come from historians and political scientists rather than linguists (cf. Deutsch 1966 on the socio-communicative aspects of nationalism, and Deutsch 1968 for a broad overview of nationalist language manipulations; cf. also Smith 1982; see, however, Fishman 1972 for a model of the interaction of language and nation from the perspective of the "sociology of language", and Barbour and Carmichael 2000 for a recent collection of case studies). In the general context of nationalism, a number of interesting questions are raised by the language histories collected in the present volume:

(a) How is the relationship between language and nation re-conceptualized in the context of pluricentric languages (i.e. languages which have different national centres of standardization, cf. Kloss 1978)? Cf., for example, the German distinction between *Kulturnation* and *Staatsnation*.

(b) What role did (and does) linguistic purism play in the context of standardization and the formation and reproduction of national communities? The theme of purism occurs in an impressive number of the articles, not only as a historical phenomenon, but also in the specific guise of the present day opposition against the growing presence of the English language.[5]

(c) Do different (or changing) nationalist regimes correspond to different (or changing) language ideologies? (cf. Fishman 1972 for an early discussion of this question) More specifically, do different types of nationalism correspond to different types of standardization projects and language policies? Delanty and O'Mahony's (2002) typology of nationalism (including, e.g., state nationalism, reconstructive nationalism, secessionist nationalism, religious nationalism, cultural nationalism, trans- or pan-nationalism) could provide a useful starting point for such a project.

(d) And finally, do languages which are not directly linked to the existence of a state territory (e.g. "state-less" and/or "multi-state" languages such as Yiddish) exhibit a fundamentally different path to a standard language which is accompanied by equally different ideological strategies?

Standardization as a tool for language maintenance?

As noted by Milroy (2001: 539), language standardization "is not a universal" and the languages of many speech communities do not exist in a standardized form. Language anthropological work in, e.g., the Pacific region suggests that unstandardized varieties exist in a fundamentally different language ecology when compared to standard language cultures. In these speech communities, languages appear not to be conceived of as relatively well-defined objects which can be described, codified and preserved; they are neither clearly separated from one another, nor are they unambiguously separated from non-linguistic cultural phenomena (a folk-linguistic perspective somewhat reminiscent of Roy Harris' integrationalist project, cf., for example, Harris 1980; on the Pacific region see the references and review provided in Milroy 2001; see also Mühlhäusler 1996). Although we should be careful not to fall prey to a naive Rousseauesque picture of some kind of a primordial sociolinguistic state, there is little doubt that language standardization has contributed to the "progressive reification, totemization, and institutionalization of a language" (Le Page 1988: 33) which is at the heart of many popular and also scientific conceptions of "what constitutes a language" (Milroy 2001: 541). The processes of objectification which accompany language standardization are also visible in present-day standardization efforts which often take place in the broad context of language endangerment (cf. Langer and Hoekstra, this volume). Such activities raise questions about the relevance of standardization for language maintenance and survival. Standardization is often employed as a "default strategy" to increase the functional value of a language by providing it with a clear linguistic identity (which often replaces a diffuse and highly variable dialect continuum, and which allows the channelling of language attitudes towards the standard norm), a "modern" lexicon and a supra-regional, written norm. However, given that the speech communities in question are typically small, the language's functional value will necessarily be restricted and "can usefully serve only sharply limited purposes — in addressing groups of strictly 'local consumers'" (Malkiel 1984: 69). In certain cases, especially when language loss has already affected the informal domains, standardization may indeed be unable to restore these fundamental functions of language use because of its necessarily formal, writing-oriented and expert-transmitted nature (cf. Fishman 1993 and 2000 for a theoretical model and a collection of case studies, as well as our comments earlier on the High culture identity of standard languages). It is also possible that standardization — especially if it is not carried out with the active participation of speakers and close attention to their needs and interests — might actually accelerate the gradual disappearance of the complex spoken language ecologies which keep unstandardized languages alive (cf. the papers in Bradley and Bradley 2002 for a discussion of some of these issues and concerns). Further research regarding the possibilities and limits of standardization as a tool for language maintenance and revival are highly desirable in the current context of accelerated language loss, and are relevant to a number of languages described in this volume.

Concluding comments

As noted in the introductory chapter ("Standardization: Taxonomies and Histories"), the initial motivation for editing this volume was to provide a comprehensive and comparative introduction to the standardization histories of the various Germanic languages, which would allow for the systematic identification of similarities as well as differences across a wide range of historically and socially diverse language histories. Haugen's four-step model of standardization offered a useful and pragmatic basic structure for the individual chapters. While broadly based on the Haugen model, each article simultaneously transcends the model and moves the discussion of what constitutes standardization into new directions. As argued above, two research areas stand out: (a) standardization as a type of linguistic change, and (b) standardization as a type of socio-cultural change. Future research should therefore concentrate on the systematic (diachronic as well as synchronic) analysis of the more narrowly linguistic aspects of the standardization process (including linguistic convergence and variant reduction, syntactic elaboration and expansion, changes in derivational morphology, etc.). Ideally, such work should be based on comprehensive language-historical corpora. In addition, the careful consideration of the larger socio-cultural and political contexts (e.g. mass alphabetization, the formation of nation states, standardization as a tool of language promotion), as well as the ideological climates in which standard norms crystallized and diffused (e.g. the social symbolism of standard norms and the ideologization of linguistic correctness), deserve systematic attention — not only with reference to the history of individual languages, but also cross-linguistically (thus contributing, e.g., to recently formulated ideas of a European language history which focuses on language contact and cultural diffusion across language borders; cf. Dury 2001, Mattheier 1999). In order to understand the highly intricate and multi-faceted nature of standardization as a socially and historically contingent process, interdisciplinary collaboration with social historians and historical anthropologists will be vital. As such, standardization studies remains a growing research area which offers exciting and challenging prospects for future research. The editors hope that this volume will provide both a contribution to the present day debate on these issues, as well as encouragement and inspiration for new studies and research directions.

Notes

1. Well-known "standardizers" include e.g. Samuel Johnson and Noah Webster, Cardinal Richelieu and the *Académie française*, the so-called *Taalhelde* ('language heros') of the first Afrikaans language society, Martin Luther as well as the poets and writers of seventeenth century language societies in Germany, the Norwegian dialectologist Ivar Aasen, the Institute for Jewish Research (YIVO) and the work of Max Weinreich. Cf. also Jespersen (1925: 51): "In earlier times it was the general belief that each of the great national languages had been formed by some particular great writer, Italian, for example, by Dante, English by Chaucer, German by Luther and Danish by Christiern Pedersen."

2. According to Haugen's (1972: 243) "functional definition" of the language-dialect distinction, both language standards and standard languages are classified as "languages": they constitute supra-dialectal norms which differ from the "first and ordinary language" of their speakers. Processes of large-scale dialect accommodation as well as standardization do not occur in a vacuum but are centrally shaped by the larger socio-historical context. They are tightly bound up with a range of socio-economic and socio-cultural changes which are usually grouped under the heading of "societal modernization" (cf. also Jespersen's 1925: 51 discussion of "unifying forces" in language history). Political centralization, administrative expansion and economic diversification, urbanization and migration, improved transportation and communication technologies as well as supra-regional markets for print products and cultural performances (theatre, opera) are social changes which from the fifteenth century onwards established not only the conditions for intensive dialect contact, but also created the need for a unified, non-local relatively stable and multifunctional medium of communication.

3. Largely independent of these developments in historical sociolinguistics, a number of historians have developed (from the late 1980s onwards) a research program for the study of the "social history of language" which also shows a strong focus on non-elite sources, in particular documents from popular and pauper culture (cf. Burke and Porter 1987, 1993, 1995).

4. In this context it would also be important to investigate to what extent the standard norm was actually reflected in printed texts, and whether popular access to the standard norm differed across countries and speech communities.

5. The presence of purism in the Germanic language area was the theme of a recent conference organized by Nils Langer, Winifred Davies, Patrick Honeybone and Maria Barbara Langer at the University of Bristol (April 9–11, 2003).

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