Standardization in diversity: Lessons from the case of Dutch in Belgium (1794-1914)

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• ‘Standard Germanic’ Conference (2001 – Sheffield)
• Relationship between traditional accounts of standardization and linguistic reality
• ‘Comparative standardology’ (Joseph 1987)
• 12 standard languages
• + Low German /Scots
• + Carribean & Pacific Creoles
• Comparative rationale
• Haugen’s scheme for standardization
Haugen’s standardization model

• Four central dimensions along which standard languages develop:
  • 1. norm selection,
  • 2. norm codification,
  • 3. norm implementation, and
  • 4. norm elaboration.
• The model was first introduced in Haugen 1966a and 1966b.
Comparative standardology

• 1. string the case studies together as a kind of Canterbury Tales

• 2. build bridges between the individual studies in order to construct a model of one ‘single... extraordinarily complex process’

• 3. aim for a pan-chronic, typological classification, throwing into relief certain recurrent circumstances – political, economic, intellectual, etc. – that either favour or block the rise of a national standard.
• no straightforward clear patterns of common standardization acts

• four major standardization waves through time in the Germanic language area

• little codification before 1500

• ‘big’ languages were standardized earlier than ‘smaller’ ones
- typical standardizers across all language histories
- ideological value of standardization for the creation of social identity
- assumed social power of standardization
The standardizers...

1. Printers
2. Centres of political power
3. Commerce and trade
4. Literary authors
5. Schools
6. Language planning instances
7. Academics
8. Media
Flaws in the model...

- Where is John Doe? Where are the speakers?
- Large parts of the language communities hardly ever appear in the traditional accounts of standardization
- “Standardization ideology” omnipresent
- Motivation is hard to assess through Haugen’s model
- Destandardization tendencies remain largely invisible in Haugen’s model
Lessons learned...

- Forget about the ‘tunnel view’

In the introduction to Watts and Trudgill (2002a), we argued that the major reason for editing a collection of alternative histories of English was our concern that ‘the’ history of English, as it is presented in almost every introductory book on the subject, automatically leads novices in the field to the belief that a history of English is equivalent to a history of the standard language. We called this approach the ‘tunnel view’ of the history of English, a metaphor which projects from a source domain of the restriction, unidirectionality, and perhaps even darkness of passage through a tunnel onto the target domain of the abstract concept of language history. The ‘traveler’s’ view is focused on the return of light at the end of the tunnel and the only possible enlightened goal of a language history is, according to this view, the standard language. In addition, the darkness of the tunnel can be interpreted as the lack of awareness of a world beyond the walls of the tunnel and a predefined narrow focus on emerging from the tunnel into the light. There is an implied teleology here that standard languages are the only valid objects of study for a language history, and that teleology depends on an ideological discourse driven by language myths. But there is another way of conceptualizing the history of a language, viz. as a funnel rather than a tunnel. In the ‘funnel view,’ the... log in or subscribe to read full text

(Watts 2012)
Lessons learned...

• Forget about the ‘funnel view’

“in which a number of varieties are poured in at the wide top of the funnel […] and Standard English comes out of the narrow neck around 1700”

(Watts 2010: 315)
Lessons learned...
Lessons learned...

- Forget about ‘lower class writing’, ‘Arbeitersprache’, ‘pauper’s English’ as *varieties in their own right*

- Writing according to a standard remained irrelevant to individuals across social class barriers up until late in the Early Modern Period
Lessons learned...

- Forget about ‘generally accepted truths’ on stratification / spread / knowledge / use of varieties and languages (even from contemporary writers!)

⇒ accounts of total functional loss of Dutch and French omnipresence were false...

...but served socio-political goals
Lessons learned...

- Forget about ‘language deterioration myth’

  => accounts of lacking standardization of Dutch in Belgium were false...
  ...but (once again) served socio-political goals
Lessons learned...

- Be prepared to take a few blows!
  (from colleagues)
  (from ‘neighbouring sciences’)
  (from politicians)
  (from ‘believers’)
From ‘Language history from above’ to ‘Language history from below’ - a new approach

- Change focus

- from mechanisms/ systems of standardisation to social context
- from effect to motivation
- from minority (elite) to majority language use
- from standard languages to language standards
- from norms, theories and traditions to linguistic reality, language use and linguistic innovation

- in an open scholarly mindset
From mechanisms/systems of standardisation to social context

- E.g.: fixed spelling norms
- the idea that a spelling system should be invariable is a post-18th century notion... (Milroy 1999: 34)
- Elite: ± 1800
- Middle class: ± 1850
- Working class: ± 1920

=> Social value of norm adherence
From effect to motivation

- (Dennis Ager)
- ex.: particularists in Flanders
- Linguistic insecurity
- Hidden religious agenda
- ex.: Norway
- Linguistic insecurity
- Social motivation
From minority (elite) to majority language use

- E.g: *Arbeitersprache*

- Variety is much more representative for everyday language use

- Variety illustrating real norms

- Variety illustrating the the general accepted idea of rapid an progressive standardisation is not (entirely) right
From standard languages to language standards

- Do uso escrito à norma’
- ‘Pre-norms’
- Not imposed but spontaneous instead
- Variable norms
- Natural vs. cultural norms
- Developed within the language community
From norms, theories and traditions to linguistic reality, language use and linguistic innovation

- Primary sources
- Integrate all writing layers of the population
- Attention to teaching practices
- Role of uniform spelling for the creation of a social
- “Back to the roots of (historical) sociolinguistics”
Perspectives

- Interdisciplinarity (cf. Burke)
  social history, historical pedagogy, sociology, social geography,…
- Multi-dimensional linguistic approach
  (critical discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, historical pragmatics,…)
- Comparative research on international scale
New defeats

- history of literacy attainment
- role of functional literacy
- writing as a social practice
- role of literacy for social identity
- writing as ‘cultural capital’ for different classes (cf. Bourdieu)
- standard literacy as cultural – social – political capital
Historical sociolinguistics

SOCIOLINGUISTICS
- sociology of language
- social dialectology
- interactional sociolinguistics

HISTORY
- social & cultural history
- economic history annotation
- population history, etc.

CORPUS LINGUISTICS
- corpus compilation
- corpus data management

HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS AND PHILOLOGY
- paleography
- text editing
- genre studies, etc.

(from: Nevalainen: 2006)
Ongoing plea for a language history from below

- A language history which does not focus on the written production of a numerically small elite, but on the actual real life language written by the very large segment of the lower ranks of society.
- A language history that is explicitly embedded in a larger European context
  => writing quality/literacy as a function of societal developments and requirements ("social practice")
- A language history that is fundamentally trans-disciplinary in nature
- A language history free from splendid isolation, acknowledging and integrating the white spots, uncharted territory and elephants in the rooms of language histories
• 2014 Conference: **Historical Discourses on Language and Power** (Feb 6-8), University of Sheffield, organised by Kristine Horner, Catharina Peersman & Susan Fitzmaurice

• 2014 Conference: **Mobility, variability and changing literacies in modern times** (June 11-13), Utrecht University, organised by Anita Auer (Utrecht) & Mikko Laitinen (Linnaeus University)

• 2014 HiSoN Summer School (July 27 - August 3), University of Agder (Kristiansand).

• 2014 Conference: **Reading and Writing from Below: Exploring the Margins of Modernity** (August 20–22), University of Helsinki, organised by Anna Kuismin e.a.
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http://homepages.vub.ac.be/~wvdbussc/ (publications available in pdf for downloading)

Historical Sociolinguistics Network (HISON)
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www.hison.ac.uk