

Germanic Standardizations. Past to Present

edited by Ana Deumert, Wim Vandenbussche,

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1. The book *Germanic Standardizations*, edited by Ana Deumert and Wim Vandenbussche, and printed in 2003 by John Benjamins, is a collection of articles by different authors on the history and recent situation of standard Germanic languages.

As the editors claim,

The volume's focus on Germanic languages is, of course, not meant to imply that there exists a Germanic type of standardization which would mirror the linguistic relationship of these languages. [...] To restrict the comparative approach to the Germanic language family is partially motivated by traditional discipline boundaries which still shape the communication and dissemination of knowledge (p. 2).

In other words, the editors agree that there is no particular reason to select the description of a specific (Germanic) group of languages except for the tradition. Evidently, the traditional taxonomy of the history of Indo-European languages is based on the knowledge of the history of sounds. But this taxonomy is quite accidental in the case of a written language and especially so in the case of a standard written one.

The editors also mention a tradition of speaking about the standardization of Germanic languages, giving examples such as a book by Heinz Kloss, *Die Entwicklung neuer germanischer Kultursprachen seit 1800*¹ (p. 1–2), as well as the *Standard Germanic* conference which took place in Sheffield (UK) on January 4–7, 2001 and was organized by Andrew R. Lynn and Nicola McLelland (p. 11). This is very true. I could add that attempts to speak about standardization of a group of related languages (Slavic) are also present in the book edited by Riccardo Picchio and

1 Cf. the book by Heinz Kloss, *Die Entwicklung neuer germanischer Kultursprachen seit 1800*, Second, ex-

panded edition (first edition 1952), Düsseldorf: Swan, ²1978.

Harvey Goldblatt, *Aspects of the Slavic language question*², or *Национальное возрождение и формирование славянских литературных языков*³. In all these cases, the concept of a comparative study of standard languages is very attractive, since there are only a few studies of a similar nature as yet (while there is an impressive number of books and articles written on a single standard language history).

Deumert and Vandenbussche have prepared a very valuable comparative book. Selection of Germanic standard languages permitted the editors to remain not only in the traditional sphere of Germanic scholarship and scholars, but also not to be flooded by the “indefinite” numbers of standard languages to compare. The book is certainly a very ample work even given its Germanic boundaries, and crossing this border might have made the task unachievable.

2. In the context of comparative standardology, *Germanic Standardizations* is a pathbreaking volume in the sense that it is the first attempt to compare certain standard languages according to a single theoretical model created by Einar Haugen, one that is generally quite popular in the research of many separate standard languages.

The contributors to this volume were asked to structure their chapters based on Haugen’s four-step model of language standardization (p. 4).

Thus, they had to analyze and describe their target languages according to:

four central dimensions along which standard languages develop: 1. norm selection, 2. norm codification, 3. norm implementation, and 4. norm elaboration (p. 4).

The book consists of 16 articles on separate languages: Paul T. Roberge, “Afrikaans” (p. 15–40); Hubert Devonish, “Caribbean Creoles” (p. 41–68); Tore Kristiansen, “Danish” (p. 69–92); Roland Willemyns, “Dutch” (p. 93–126); Terttu Nevalainen, “English” (p. 127–156); Zakaris Svabo Hansen, Jógvan í Lon Jacobsen and Eivind Weyhe, “Faroese” (p. 157–192); Eric Hoekstra, “Frisian” (p. 193–210); Klaus J. Mattheier, “German” (p. 211–244); Kristján Árnason, “Icelandic” (p. 245–280); Nils Langer, “Low German” (p. 281–302); Peter Gilles and Claudine Moulin, “Luxembourgish” (p. 303–330); Ernst Håkon Jahr, “Norwegian” (p. 331–354); Peter Mühlhäusler, “Pacific Pidgins and Creoles” (p. 355–382); Marina Dossena, “Scots” (p. 383–404); Ulf Teleman, “Swedish” (p. 405–430); and Rakhmiel Peltz, “Yiddish” (p. 431–454). There are also two articles by both editors—the introductory “Standard languages: Taxonomies and histories” (p. 1–14) and the closing text “Research directions in the study of language standardization” (p. 455–470). It is important to see how different authors interpreted and applied Haugen’s four theoretical dimensions.

2 *Aspects of the Slavic language question*, eds. Riccardo Picchio, Harvey Goldblatt, *Yale Russian and East European publications* 4a–4b, New Haven: Yale Concilium on International and Area Studies, 1984.

3 *Национальное возрождение и формирование славянских литературных языков*, ред. С. Б. Бернштейн, Л. Н. Смирнов, Г. К. Венедиктов, Москва: Наука, 1978.

3. NORM IMPLEMENTATION (ACCEPTANCE). As an example, I will compare the ideas of some of the authors about the dimension of norm acceptance. This will allow us to see, to a certain extent, the way authors interpreted this given theoretical framework. By the way, the editors (and the authors) use both terms *norm implementation* and *norm acceptance* synonymously, although the editors at least prefer the first one (which is evident from their introductory article and from the “Index”, where *acceptance* is explained only as “see *implementation*”, p. 471).

3.1. GERMAN. Mattheier writes about the acceptance of the German standard as a process that “refers to the language-historical development towards general validity and use of the standard norm within the speech community, in other words, a situation where the standard language is used by all members of the speech community in a wide range of functions” (p. 234). So, theoretically Mattheier understands *norm acceptance* as a development towards “general validity” and as the language which is “used by all”. Practically he comes to the conclusion:

It can nevertheless be maintained for around 1900 that the German written standard language was accepted in the entire German speech community as a model norm (p. 236).

Mattheier does not give an exact date, however, for the spoken standard. He claims that the “group of speakers within the German speech community whose members no longer acquired the dialect in their youth” today comprises about twenty percent of the speech community (p. 237–238). Since today “a more or less regionally accented variety is commonly used” (p. 238), we can understand that for Mattheier the spoken standard norm is still not accepted by the society (the condition “used by all” that he has set is still not fulfilled).

3.2. SWEDISH. Teleman does not reveal his theoretical interpretation of the *norm acceptance* in Swedish. He writes about “the effect of language cultivation upon actual usage” (p. 422), “implementation of the recommendations” (made by language cultivators; p. 423), “general school system” (p. 423), “language-political measures” (p. 423), “linguistic debate” (p. 424), “printing offices” (p. 424), etc. Thus, it seems evident that Teleman does not have a clear concept of norm acceptance (implementation). What he discusses in the chapter called “Norm acceptance” is merely certain facts regarding Swedish standardization activities. He also does not make a distinction in this chapter between the acceptance of written and spoken standard varieties. In the introduction to his article Teleman only mentions that “In the nineteenth century the codified orthographical and morphological standard was effectively implemented by the schools” (p. 407). But there is no explanation as to what he means by *implementation*. It seems that Teleman could have in mind the implementation of norm in books (grammars, manuals), but not in the speaking society.

3.3. DANISH. Kristiansen's article about standard Danish does not give the reader a theoretical definition of norm acceptance, either. From his text we can deduce that he has in mind primarily competition with other standard languages:

A hundred years later (1827) [...] Danish had been accepted as the main written and spoken standard language in Denmark and had replaced Latin, French and German (p. 83).

Thus, norm acceptance for Kristiansen is first of all the refusal of other standard languages in the territory of Denmark or the termination of their domination in the Danish speech community (which could better denote another Haugen's aspect—elaboration, expansion of the standard Danish, not the acceptance)⁴. He does not, however, write about numbers of speakers or question whether all or only a certain part of them accepted (wrote? read? spoke? understood?) the norm. However, he gives the date 1827 as the boundary when standard Danish was accepted (p. 83). This makes it seem much earlier than the acceptance of the standard German language (the written German standard has been accepted since around 1900, according to Mattheier) and thus demonstrates more a difference in the theoretical interpretation of the concept of norm acceptance rather than an actual temporal difference.

When Kristiansen writes about the acceptance of written norm, he discusses orthographical reforms. Thus, he interprets acceptance as a linguistic, not as a societal (acceptance *by* society) feature. He writes about "positive attitudes developed towards Danish speech" (p. 85), but not about members of the speech community learning it and speaking it. In neither case is Kristiansen concerned with either a more precise time or the layers of society that guaranteed the norm acceptance.

3.4. ENGLISH. Nevalainen wrote the chapter "Norm selection and acceptance" of English. Describing the written language, he mostly discusses the time of King Henry V and the Chancery Standard and ends with this (p. 132–134). The reader is prompted to accept the hidden suggestion that norm selection and acceptance in the history of standard English is the same matter. Really, selection and acceptance are quite similar processes. I would say, however, that the *norm selection* is the initial recognition of an incipient standard by the elite group of those who can read and write, and that *norm acceptance* is the final "recognition" of the codified, elaborated standard by the majority of a speech community. Thus, the similarity between the two is in "recognition", and the difference is in the number of those who accepted the standard—an elite group alone, or a larger group consisting of the entire speech community.

4 While writing about the standard French, Anthony R. Lodge (*French: from Dialect to Standard*, London, New York: Routledge,

1993) described competition with other standards in the chapter on elaboration ("Elaboration of Function," p. 118–152).

3.5. ICELANDIC. Kristján Árnason's description of the acceptance of standard Icelandic is similar to that of Nevalainen's description of English. He claims that "Perhaps the most important event for the linguistic development was the acceptance of the norm by the church" (p. 267). Both Nevalainen and Árnason interpret norm acceptance as a very similar process to norm selection (this approach is also used by Dick Leith⁵).

3.6. DUTCH. In the description of standard Dutch, Willemyns relates Haugen's four categories in yet another manner. One of his chapters is titled "Twentieth century: Elaboration and implementation". Willemyns maintains that between 1920 and 1940:

Hollandic variety has won acceptance and has subsequently been implemented through the educational system as well as through the influence of existing (news-papers) as well as the new media (radio) (p. 110).

Since Dutch is described as a pluricentric language, Willemyns also explains the situation in Belgium. The implementation of the standard norm was much more complicated there and "it was only after World War II that substantial success could be expected and actually occurred" (p. 110). On the other hand, Willemyns does not separate written and spoken varieties very clearly. But when he claims that "For the most part, the amount of variation which is allowed within the confines of the norm is not theoretically specified, presumably because there is no way of describing or delineating it" (p. 113), the reader is urged to understand that there it is impossible to speak about the implementation of a spoken norm since nobody exactly knows what it is.

3.7. Even this small comparison of the interpretation of *norm acceptance* persuades us that the theoretical approach to every category may vary significantly. This variation may seem to be an obstacle to the comparison of standard language histories. But then again, this book *Germanic Standardizations* made it expressly evident that such differences do exist. It is an important first attempt to present the views of many linguists to a concrete theoretical frame of problems (based on different standard Germanic languages). Hopefully this book will inspire new research on the comparative history of standard languages.

4. NOT "MATURE" STANDARD LANGUAGES. There are certain languages that did not go through all the stages of development (and most often norm acceptance is conceived as the last). Deumert and Vandenbussche write about the Germanic languages that are different from the "mature" ones:

⁵ Dick Leith, *A Social History of English*, London, Boston, Melbourne, Henley: Routledge et Kegan Paul, 1983, 32, 40.

this volume includes not only the language histories of the so-called “mature” Germanic standard languages (Afrikaans, Danish, Dutch, English, German, Icelandic, Norwegian, Swedish), but also the standardization-in-progress of Germanic pidgin and creole languages, the partial and on-going standardizations of Frisian, Scots, Luxemburgish, Yiddish and Faroese, as well as a chapter on the absence of standardization in the case of the Middle Low German lingua franca (p. 2).

These “partial and on-going standardizations” deserve special attention.

4.1. SCOTS. Marina Dossena seems to discuss norm selection of Scots (chapter “The standardization of Scots: Norm selection”, p. 385–389). But what the reader actually learns from her article is that there are different dialects of Scots (continuum of dialects?) and that “Scots lexis and syntax may be employed unselfconsciously [...] or deliberately” in Scottish Standard English “for special stylistic effect” (p. 386–387). Thus, there is no norm selection described for the Scots language (no dialect is described as more prestigious), only the selection of lexical and syntactic scotticisms that are included in another language—Scottish Standard English.

In addition, there is no evidence given of a unifying codifying process of the separate standard of Scots. Even if dictionaries are mentioned (*Concise Scots Dictionary*, 1985–1996; *Scottish National Dictionary*, 1931–1976; p. 385) they seem to be the registration of dialectal data rather than codifying works of standard Scots.

Generally, if there is a dialect selection and codification for Scots, it is still in the future. An attempt to put Scots into Haugen’s framework is an effort to use the Procrustean bed. This does not mean that Dossena’s article is not well written, on the contrary, it only means that Haugen’s schema works the best with “mature”, standard languages, those which have selected their norms earlier, at least in the Renaissance.

4.2. LUXEMBOURGISH. A similar situation is described by Peter Gilles and Claudine Moulin in regard to Luxembourgish. The first sentence of the article says: “Luxembourgish (*Lëtzebuergesch*) is the national language of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg” (p. 303). Still later, the authors explain that there are at least four smaller dialect areas (p. 310–312) of Luxembourgish, that “Instead of koinéization in its proper sense [...] only dialect levelling is taking place” (p. 312), that “the variety spoken in the large central area is spreading into the surrounding southern, eastern, and northern areas” (p. 312), and that this leveling process is far from complete (p. 312). This “on-going process can thus be described as standardization of the spoken form of Luxembourgish, which is far from complete” (p. 312). But “compared with the spoken domains, it is true that Luxembourgish only has limited relevance within the domain of writing” (p. 313). And “nearly all of these written domains belong to or are connected with private life” (p. 313–314). In other words,

even if there is a certain amount of standardization, there is no clear norm selection (geographical or social) carried out as yet.

The orthography of Luxembourgish became official in 1975, but “there is a great need for further codification today (lexicon, grammar, syntax, pronunciation)” (p. 317).

Compared with the long lasting history of the standardization of English or German, Luxembourgish is at a relatively early stage. For that reason, norm elaboration has not been a central issue yet (p. 321).

The same is valid for the norm acceptance (p. 321).

Even having Haugen’s framework in front of them, Gilles and Moulin managed to demonstrate the early stage of the development of the language they describe. This essay on Luxembourgish gives a good example of how the change of historical and cultural environment might influence the development of a standard language. We are accustomed to think that early dialect selection languages (those that selected their norm-dialect in Renaissance or slightly later) were developing more or less circumstantially, with no clearly evident interference by language planners. Late dialect selection languages (mostly those of the nineteenth century—the Romanticism period) are known as being much more influenced by the conscious efforts of cultural activists, writers, linguists, and other language planners.

New developing languages like Luxembourgish are influenced by active linguistic planning to an even greater scale. For instance, Luxembourgish has no codified grammar or pronunciation, but since 1999 it possesses an orthography that “is official by law and is compulsory for schools” (p. 321). People of Luxembourg don’t have a standard language *per se*, but they are proud to value Luxembourgish as a national treasure. It seems that nowadays the idea of one’s own standard language comes much faster than before; national languages get protected by law before they become standard.

4.3. LOW GERMAN. One more example of an “immature” standard language is Low German, which was characterized by the “absence of standardization” (p. 2). Nils Langer comes to the conclusion that:

the history of Middle Low German in general and Lübeck Middle Low German in particular is only partially compatible with the Haugen model of standardization. There was no standardized Middle Low German in the technical sense at any given point in time because it was never codified or monitored (p. 297).

Langer does not try to describe Low German development according to Haugen’s framework; *vice versa*, he demonstrates clearly how and why this model is not applicable to Low German.

However, it was used supra-regionally and internationally across the Hanseatic League and included a prestige variety based on the language of the economic and

political centre—ideal conditions for a standard language to emerge. That this did not happen was a historical development almost entirely due to political and economic events, i.e. the decline of the status of Lübeck and the importance of the Hanse, rather than linguistic events *per se* (p. 297).

Since many of the authors in *Germanic Standardizations* who write about “partial standardization”, “standardization-in-progress”, or “absence of standardization” are very inventive in describing their languages according to Haugen’s framework (or denying the need to use it), the obligation to conform to this model diminishes to the value of a symbol.

5. There are many other important aspects that could not be included in my brief review. For instance, one can trace different attitudes toward the development of the written or spoken standard varieties; some authors describe them as separate processes while others make no evident difference between them. From *Germanic Standardizations* we can develop a better understanding of what standard languages were influenced or overshadowed by other, dominant standard languages (German was dominating and competing with Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Luxembourgish, and Dutch; French was used in Denmark, Belgium, and Luxembourg along with other languages). One can also find information on the influence of the Bible, schools, academies, etc., on the development of standard languages.

I was impressed by the scholarly quality and theoretical validity of most of the articles, especially those by Mattheier on German, Gilles and Moulin on Luxembourgish, and Langer on Low German. The book *Germanic Standardizations*, edited by Ana Deumert, Wim Vandebussche, and printed in 2003 by John Benjamins has certainly accomplished its goals. It demonstrates that comparing many standard language histories according to a sole theoretical model is possible and gives important results. There is hope it will inspire further research.

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