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Linn, A.R.

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Vernaculars and the idea of a standard language

Andrew R. Linn

1. Ideas

The greatest and most important phenomenon of the evolution of language in historic times has been the springing up of the great national common languages—Greek, French, English, German, etc.—the “standard” languages.

So wrote Otto Jespersen in 1946 (p. 39), and the idea of a standard language has undoubtedly been one of the most seductive in the history of European linguistic thought. It has resulted in some of the most heated of debates on language matters, drawing in both academic and non-academic actors, and ranging from the learned *Questione della Lingua* in Italy around the turn of the sixteenth century (see below; also Engler 1993; Vitale 1960) to nineteenth-century debates on how best to standardise a newly independent Norwegian (Haugen 1966; Linn 1997), to the ongoing and often passionate discussions in homes and in bars throughout the modern world about “right” and “wrong” usage. The notion of a standard language has underpinned language teaching and learning since the Middle Ages, based as language teaching is on the acceptance that there is a right form of a language and a wrong form, that there is a “gold standard”. The belief in a standard has motivated much of the grammar and dictionary writing and has also been a central ideology in the emergence and reinforcement of the modern European nations. In the period following the Renaissance,

national pride was expressed through the notion that the European vernaculars were as rich and as ordered as the Classical languages. Under the influence of Romanticism this idea of the richness of the 'national common languages' was increasingly linked to a sense of there being some sort of natural relationship between a people and their language, and indeed the perceived link between language and nation, for better or for worse, remains a strong one (cf. Wright 2000).

The key word in the title of this chapter is *idea*. As Milroy and Milroy (1991: 23) put it, it is most appropriate to speak of 'a standard language as an idea in the mind rather than a reality—a set of abstract norms to which actual usage may conform to a greater or lesser extent'. A standard form by its very definition denies variation, striking an artificial line between forms in actual use when a language is spoken. A standard language does not exist in isolation from the processes which have brought it into being or the values which drive those processes. Standard languages, language standards, and the process of standardisation have been subject to much theoretical scrutiny over the past 50 years. Until the rise of sociolinguistics, and specifically the work of Uriel Weinreich (Joseph 1987: 14) and Einar Haugen, standard languages had been largely treated as cultural givens, possessing the easy self-confidence of the big nineteenth-century dictionaries (the *Duden*, the *Littré*, the *OED*, etc.) and the cultural elite associated with them. Sociolinguistic analysis soon demonstrated that the standard languages were not cultural monoliths, there in perpetuity, but they were rather the result of *processes* carried out by people intervening in the natural development of languages, of standardisation, and, more than that, the standard languages served to perpetuate traditional and often outmoded social structures. The European elite classes had determined that their own usage was the most desirable and that it should therefore constitute the standard to which all should aspire, and the educational system throughout Europe conspired to reinforce the status quo by sanctioning the language of the elite as correct and other usage as incorrect or sub-standard. The political ideologies inherent in the idea of a standard language have been thoroughly investigated (e.g. Crowley 1991, 2003; Sledd 1986), at least for English, and it is no longer possible to

be as triumphalist about the creation of standard languages as Jespersen was able to be in the 1940s. Joseph (1987: 43) sums up more recent thinking thus:

The interaction of power, language and reflections on language, inextricably bound up with one another in human history, largely defines language standardization.

What is involved in standardisation as a generalisable phenomenon of language (although only a handful of the languages of the world have undergone standardisation, and Bailey 1986 maintains that English is not amongst them) has also been theorised rather extensively. In 1963 Ray wrote that 'the operation of standardization consists basically of two steps, firstly, the creation of a model for imitation, and secondly, promotion of this model over rival models' (Ray 1963: 70). The first theory (1959) of language standardisation, and (despite avowed limitations) the most productive, was however Haugen's four-stage process, involving successive stages of 1) norm selection, 2) norm codification, 3) norm implementation, and 4) norm elaboration. It has remained a helpful view of the process by which a language is transferred from existing in a series of dialects to having one or more formally agreed and codified written forms, and indeed e.g. Deumert & Vandebussche 2003 and Lodge 1993 base their analyses of the standardisation of a range of languages on this model. The idea of a standard language is culturally very much a European one (Joseph 1987: x), but the challenge of creating a standard in the 20th century migrated beyond the established nations of Europe to parts of the world where debates about language as *capital* (Bourdieu 1990) or the ideologisation of language (cf. Blommaert 1999) are very much secondary to practical language planning (Le Page 1964). During the past decades much has been written about *norms* in language (e.g. Bartsch 1987; the papers in Bédard & Maurais 1983 and Omdal & Røstad 2009), and since Haugen coined the term *language planning*, the study of the process of intervention in and nurturing of language according to political and cultural ideology has developed into a subdiscipline all of its own (Language Policy and Language Planning). In this chapter we are concerned with such

intervention in the past, the development of the idea that there is such a thing as a standard language and that it is something to aspire to. We cannot do this without first being aware of the view of 21st-century linguistics on the topic, that there is on the contrary no such immutable thing as a standard language and indeed that it is *not* something to aspire to. Without losing sight of this view, though, we now need to move back into European history and to look at the development of these ideas which, only in the course of the past half century, have been so radically deconstructed.

While the idea of a standard language and the belief in language standards (norms of acceptability) may be social constructs, a *vernacular language* is something rather less culturally conditioned. In the context of this chapter, the vernacular languages are to be understood as those languages (and their later developments) which were spoken natively in medieval and Renaissance Europe, and which were felt by their speakers to be different from Latin. Latin was the language of education, of scholarship, of government and of religion, but the language of the home and the private space was something else; it has been suggested that Latin and those local spoken languages were in a diglossic relationship with one another (Fishman 1967). For different reasons and at differing rates, the local languages began to be afforded a degree of prestige (*High* status in terms of diglossic relationships), and with prestige came a sense of pride and a commitment to studying, codifying and teaching them, and so began the process of intervention delineated by Haugen. If the existence of vernacular languages alongside Latin may be more or less a verifiable fact in the history of European languages, and thus untroubled by linguistic ideologies, as soon as they were seen as something special and associated with particular social groups, they became bound up with ideologies and power struggles.

Mattheier (1988: 4) writes:

Die Herausbildung von Nationalsprachen bzw. die Sprachstandardisierung sind in diesem Zusammenhang gesellschaftliche Prozesse von erheblicher soziokommunikativer Bedeutung, die auf der grundlegenden Veränderung im Kommunikationsbedarf einer Gesellschaft basieren.

It has been suggested that the development of the vernaculars vis-à-vis Latin is the clearest sign from a linguistic point of view of the move from the Middle Ages to 'the Modern Era', and that 'developing a written standard is one of the most fundamental institutional achievements of a society' (Schaefer 2006: 3). The existence side by side of various written and spoken languages during the European Middle Ages is a historical fact, but I would agree with those excitable commentators we have cited above who see the manipulation of this situation as something of great cultural importance. Put another way, one might suggest that once people started to plan languages, that was the point at which it all started to go wrong, imposing a pressure on peoples and on languages, pressures which in earlier times were seen by those who promulgated them as social benefits, but which now, in our more ecologically minded times, we would regard as social ills.

2. Emancipation from Latin

During the European Middle Ages, the serious study of language meant the study of Latin. Latin was taught at the elementary level via the method established by Donatus in his *Artes Grammaticæ* and later via the medium of Priscian's *Institutiones Grammaticæ* (see chapter X, this volume), and in the majority of situations it was simply unreasonable to suggest that other languages might be worthy objects of study. Classical Latin was of course the standardised language par excellence and remains so. As Milroy & Milroy (1991: 22) observe, 'the only fully standardised language is a dead language', and an unchanging standard for, say, English or French, is as unrealistic as it would be to deny language change. The challenge for medieval teachers was not to codify Latin but to teach a language which was more-or-less foreign to all Europeans, and an array of strategies were devised in the ongoing push to teach Latin more effectively. Allan (2010: 12) suggests that Donatus's and Priscian's position in the history of linguistics is as precursors to the field of applied linguistics. One strategy for teaching Latin more effectively was to do so via the students' own mother tongue, and it is in this context that we encounter perhaps the first example in the history of linguistics of a

European vernacular being explicitly preferred to Latin in a domain where Latin was hitherto entirely dominant.

The motivation is still very much the teaching of Latin—there is no sense in which English should or could be studied as an end in itself—but the *Excerptiones de Arte Grammatica Anglice* by Ælfric (fl. 987—1010) does at least allow the possibility that grammar might be something relevant to a language other than Latin. Ælfric was steeped in the monastic tradition; he lived and worked throughout his life in the South-West of England, studying at Winchester and later becoming the first abbot of the Benedictine monastery at Eynsham, west of Oxford. The grammar was based on a 10th-century edition of Priscian (see Porter 2002) and is, as far as we know, the first vernacular Latin grammar to be produced in Europe (see Law 1997). It was accompanied by a glossary, noteworthy for its onomasiological rather than alphabetical structure, and a colloquy, designed to help students improve their spoken Latin. As well as taking his pedagogical responsibilities seriously Ælfric was committed to the development of English as a literary language, and his homilies (Godden 2000) and hagiographies, together with other writings on religious topics, make him the most prolific writer in Old English; valorisation of the language involved more than just seeing its potential as a pedagogical tool. Ælfric did not teach English or suggest that the vernacular might be ranked alongside Latin as a scholarly language—indeed he was apologetic about using the vernacular—but in his own practice he opened the minds of readers to the possibility that the vernacular might be worth a look.

Elsewhere in Europe there were those who felt that their own daily language was worth even more than that. From the 11th century Occitan, the Romance vernacular of southern France and the northern parts of Spain and Italy, was developing an independent tradition of lyric poetry, associated with the troubadours, travelling performers in this rich genre (see papers in Akehurst & Davis 1995; Gaunt & Kay 1999). The classical period of Occitan is generally taken to span the later Middle Ages (1100-1350), and in 1240 a grammar of the language was produced by one Uc Faidit, assumed to be the prolific writer of songs and of more scholarly prose works, Uc de Saint Circ (fl. 1217—1253). Uc

Faidit's *Donatz Proençals* (Provençal Donatus) is written in both Latin and Occitan (the Latin version apparently by another author (Marshall 1969: 65)), and there are perhaps two principal observations to make about it. The first is that it followed Donatus's model very closely. Even though Occitan and Latin were both Romance languages, there were of course differences, points where Donatus's rules did not work, but of course Uc had no other model. Grammar was Donatus and Donatus was grammar, and, if someone was going to write a pioneering grammatical description, it was going to be a *Donatus*. Donatus would remain a model for grammar writers as late as the 18th century (cf. the anonymously published *Danish Donatus* of 1761 by Nicolai Engelhardt Nannestad (Anon. 1761)). What was distinctive about Donatus's grammar was its pedagogical method, its question and answer structure, but for Uc this was not the key motivation, as this text was not intended for children but for other would-be troubadour poets, as was the case with the slightly later (14th-century) and more ambitious Occitan *Leys d'Amors* (Anglade 1919-1920). The second observation is a general one, namely that grammar-writing is motivated by extra-linguistic needs. No-one writes a grammar just for the fun of it but rather to respond to some societal imperative. This has often meant a new pedagogical context, but, as with Uc, that is not always the case, and in fact nor was it the case with the two other pioneering vernacular grammars of the late Middle Ages.

The context for Uc's grammar was a proud and independent literary tradition on the southern edge of Europe. Similarly proud and independent literary traditions were also to be found on the northern and western margins of the European area. Ireland and Irish scholars were at the forefront of Christian scholarship and of the Christianisation of other parts of Europe during the Middle Ages, but at the same time heir to a rich vernacular literary tradition dating back to the very beginning of the medieval period but associated perhaps most with bardic verse. It should not be surprising therefore that Irish scholars took a pride and interest in their language and that they saw it both from native, non-Christian and also Latin perspectives. The *Auraicept na n-Éces* [The Scholars' Primer] (Ahlqvist 1982) is said to date back to the 7th century, which would make it the oldest surviving treatment of a European vernacular, but the text continued to be developed (rather like

the *Technē Grammatikē* of Dionysius Thrax—such was the fate of manuscripts) over the course of the following centuries, and the oldest surviving manuscript is from around 1160. The *Auraicept* tells the story of the creation and superiority of the Gaelic language (according to the text the first language to be created after the destruction of the Tower of Babel), and it is also a good example of an *exegetical grammar*, consisting of excerpts from Donatus to which are added lengthy commentaries (Poppe 1999). Pride in the language and (usually spurious) arguments for its superiority above other languages are a common thread in the tradition of vernacular linguistics.

Iceland in the later Middle Ages also constituted a centre of literary activity, remote from the linguistic imperialism of the Roman Empire and its legacy, where a pride in the native language could develop along with a sense of its difference from Latin. It was precisely the sense of difference, of the vernacular being something special ('because languages are all unlike one another, ever since they parted and branched off from one and the same language...' (Haugen 1972: 13)), which led an anonymous Icelandic scholar to attempt a revised orthography for Icelandic sometime in the mid-12th century. The manuscript of this orthographical treatise (the *Codex Wormianus*) is from a century later and contains the *Prose Edda* of Snorri Sturluson, a guide for poets, i.e. the same context as for the Occitan and Irish works. The *Codex Wormianus* also contains three other writings on language, and these four language treatises are simply referred to as the Four Grammatical Treatises, although only treatises three and four are on grammar proper and, inevitably, based closely on Donatus's *Ars Maior*. The *First Grammatical Treatise* (and its author, named, by extension, the First Grammarian) is the one which has captured the imagination of modern linguists (especially since its greater accessibility in editions by Haugen (1972) and Hreinn Benediktsson (1972)). The First Grammarian proposes an independent symbol for each meaningful sound in Old Norse, and he identifies the meaningful sounds by the use of something which to modern eyes looks like a commutation test, altering one sound in a word to see if another word of the language results, thereby confirming the phonemic status of the altered sound.

So these medieval skirmishes into languages other than Latin demonstrate a number of tendencies, characteristic of pioneering studies of the vernaculars and indeed going all the way back to Dionysius Thrax, in whose tradition they lie. Language studies serve a social or cultural need, and in all these cases the need is to preserve and teach the prized vernacular to subsequent generations. The language of a classical literature provides the data—there is no sense yet that the spoken language per se is worth studying or teaching. The model of Donatus and the spectre of Latin are never far away, and significantly it is those languages most closely related to Latin which are the first to be standardised as we enter the Renaissance. Up to this point treatments of the vernaculars have not had a specifically codifying agenda.

3. The Renaissance and the Emergence of Standards

The cultural movement of the Renaissance spread slowly across the countries of Europe and was characterised by a collection of cultural shifts (some of them linguistic) rather than by particular events. In the history of linguistics we observe that countries have their day, dominating approaches to the study of language internationally for a while, so it might be suggested, for example, that the 19th century was predominantly German and the 20th predominantly American. The dominant cultural force of the European Renaissance was Italy, and it is therefore no surprise that the vernacularisation of culture which is a feature of developments in Europe from the 14th to the 17th century should have found its inspiration here. Indeed the figure perhaps most associated with the start of the Renaissance, Dante Alighieri (1265—1321), expounded strong views on the vernacular and provided the intellectual basis for later debates on the standardisation of Italian.

Dante, inspired by the Occitan poets' regard for their language, wrote his *De vulgari eloquentia* [On the Eloquence of the Vernacular] in 1304, although (significantly) it only became widely read after it

was printed in Italian in 1529. In it he distinguishes between the first language (*locutio prima*), acquired naturally in childhood, and the secondary or *grammatical language* (in practice Latin), which not all people manage to acquire. While the grammatical language would generally have been regarded at the time as the nobler, Dante takes the opposite point of view, that the:

Vulgar Tongue is the nobler, as well because it was the first employed by the human race, as because the whole world makes use of it [...] It is also the nobler as being natural to us, whereas the other is rather of an artificial kind; and it is of the nobler form of speech that we intend to treat. (Ferrers Howell 1890: 2)

After surveying the properties of the different dialects of Italian, however, Dante concludes that none of them is appropriate for literature and that the poets must elaborate an appropriately literary standard themselves, and of course Dante practised what he preached in this respect. Along with the other great Tuscan poets of the fourteenth century, Petrarch and Boccaccio, Dante provided a prestigious model for other Italian writers to follow, a potential standard, but one of the few things that can be confidently stated about language standards is that they will provoke disagreement amongst users, who all have some form of vested interest, and the model of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio provoked the Italian Language Question of the 16th century (Hall 1942).

Italy was not politically unified at the start of the sixteenth century, and the close link between language and identity meant that there were conflicting claims to be made in the choice of a standard language. Under the influence of Humanism, Latin had continued to develop as a written language at the expense of the Tuscan dialect elaborated by the 14th-century poets, and Latin had a strong claim as a viable standard, given its closeness to the contemporary Italian dialects. Other modern dialects (and indeed older forms of the language) had a claim too, but, no matter which variety would be selected, there were further problems, like what to call the standard (Florentine, Tuscan or Italian?). These are questions which recur with local nuances wherever the need for a standard has been debated. The loudest voice in the debate was that of Cardinal Pietro Bembo

(1470-1547) who, in his *Prose della volgar lingua* (published in 1525, but written in the first years of the century), championed the use of the Tuscan of Petrarch and his contemporaries. This form had been used for scholarly (as opposed to literary) writings as early as the 1440s in the work of Leon Battista Alberti (1404—1472) who also wrote the first grammatical sketch of Italian, the *Regole della volgar lingua fiorentina* in around 1443. This grammar was based on the view, not shared by all, that the common language did indeed possess rules and could therefore be subject to grammatical analysis (Grayson 1963).

Just as other new cultural currents were spreading out from Italy, so was pride in the vernacular, the view that it should be developed as the medium for serious forms of discourse and the belief that it could be described and codified in grammars and dictionaries. In 1530 the Spanish theologian Juan de Valdés (ca 1509—1541) moved to Naples (a Spanish possession at the time), apparently to escape the Spanish inquisition, just five years after the publication of Bembo's *Prose della Volgar Lingua*, and his first work to be written here was essentially a Spanish counterpart to that work, the *Diálogo de la Lengua* (ca 1535, but only published in Madrid in 1737). For Valdés there was no distinction to be made between superior and inferior languages; it was through literary use that a language gained status and prestige. Indisputably the leading Spanish linguist of the period, and arguably the most ground-breaking linguist of the whole Renaissance, was, however, Antonio de Nebrija (1444—1522). Nebrija's *Gramática castellana* [Castilian Grammar] of 1492 was for a long time assumed to be the first modern grammar of a European vernacular, but this was to ignore Alberti's grammar, which was not available in a modern edition until 1908. While the pioneering vernacular linguists (like Alberti) tended, inevitably and often for strategic reasons, to base their descriptions and discussions on existing models, Nebrija (like the First Grammarian with Old Norse) looked at Castilian with fresh eyes. As well as the famous *Gramática castellana*, he also wrote grammars of Latin, both with Latin and with Castilian as the metalanguage. He wrote bilingual dictionaries and dictionaries of professional terms as well as orthographical and phonological studies of several languages; in short he was a true "Renaissance man". In the *Gramática castellana* Nebrija really does treat Castilian as

something *sui generis*, devising a native (as distinct to Latin-derived) grammatical terminology (also a feature of the work of other nationally minded linguistics, e.g. the Dane Rasmus Rask (1787—1832)) and including treatments of syntax and of Castilian for foreigners. A fate of such pioneering work may often be initial neglect or even hostility, and Padley (1988: 164-165) questions:

why even his contemporaries and immediate successors did not see fit to reprint a work that is now seen to be of such primary importance in the history of west European thought about language [...] indeed, a generation was to elapse before the *Gramática* received any attention, whether friendly or hostile.

Some comfort, I suppose, to those who feel that their work is yet to be accorded its full recognition!
(For more on the history of linguistics in Spain, see Quilis & Niederehe 1986.)

Working our way west across southern Europe we come next to France, and it may be surprising to learn that the first treatments of French grammar were actually carried out by English writers. This was because there was during the late Middle Ages a local need for French grammars in England, where French was in use as an indigenous foreign language. This tradition of responding to opportunities presented by the peculiar position of French in England was continued in the late sixteenth century by the Protestant refugees from the Low Countries, who spotted a market opportunity to provide French↔English language teaching during their period of exile in flight from the Counter-Reformation (Fernandez & Cormier 2010; Howatt 2004: ch. 2). However, as early as the beginning of the fifteenth century practical guides to French for speakers of English were appearing, such as the *Donait François* [French Donatus] of 1409, commissioned by John Barton (Merrilees 1993; Merrilees & Sitarz-Fitzpatrick 1993). As well as being the first (surviving) grammatical treatment of French, this work uses French rather than Latin (or indeed English) as its metalanguage, but note that again Donatus is the model and the motivation is practical ('applied' rather than 'theoretical'). The first complete (and immensely long) grammar of French was also written in England by an Englishman, John Palsgrave (c. 1480—1554) (Stein 1997), who was tutor to various

members of the royal family, bearing out another generalisation of early studies of the vernaculars, that they were often serendipitous undertakings by individuals qualified to undertake a linguistic analysis only by the fact of their being well connected (cf. e.g. the first grammar of English to be written in Denmark (Linn 1999)). Palsgrave's *Lesclaircissement de la langue françoise* of 1530 was dedicated to King Henry VIII. It was not long, however, before the wind of enthusiasm for the French language was blowing through the fields of France, an image pursued in the first appeal to 'mettre & ordonner par Reigle nostre langage François' (the evidence of it being as good as the "ruled" language of Latin), the *Champ fleury* [Flowery Field] by Geoffroy Tory (c. 1480— 1533), printed the year before Palsgrave's grammar (Smith 1993). The study and description primarily of the morphology was then unleashed with a rash of grammars of French both as a first and second language appearing in the course of the subsequent decades. Tory's pride in the language led him, well connected as he was in his capacity as royal printer, to advocate the printing of French texts (as opposed to Latin ones) and to advocate orthographic reform for French, also a key concern of the first grammarian of English. (For more on the early studies of the French language see Kibbee 1991.)

There are several reasons why the desire to advance the vernacular and to create a standard variety of it has not been the preserve of "trained linguists". The principal reason is that the scholarly study of the modern languages did not become possible in most of Europe until the middle of the nineteenth century and the emergence of the "new" philology (see this volume, ch. ??), so there were no professional pundits for the vernacular languages until that time. Another reason is that gate-keeping for the language was quickly established as a cultural duty rather than a scholarly pursuit, a job for (self-appointed) culturally elevated people, those for whom (like Tory) language was a professional tool rather than object. So, when, for example, there was a call for an English dictionary in the mid-eighteenth century, it was to the essayist and literary man-about-town, Samuel Johnson (1709—1784) (see, e.g., Lynch & McDermott 2005), who had famously failed to complete a university degree, that publishers turned. Even since the emergence of linguistics as a profession in the twentieth century there have been few linguists willing to judge on and standardise the

vernaculars. In fact the unwritten code of professional conduct for many practitioners of linguistics means that straying into prescription is as professionally suicidal as being caught with your trousers down at the office Christmas party.

The gauntlet for English was picked up by proud Englishman, William Bullokar (c. 1531—1609). Bullokar was a former mercenary who in his later years turned to the ennoblement of his own language as a sort of national duty akin to that shown in his former career. His explicit aim was to demonstrate that English was ‘a perfect ruled tongue, conferable to grammar art as any ruled long’ (from ‘W. Bullokar to the Reader’ [of his *Bref Grammar for English*], reprinted in Robins 1994). To this end he based his codification of English grammar on the official Latin grammar approved for use in schools by Palsgrave’s dedicatee, King Henry VIII, the one attributed to William Lily (1468?—1522). Consequently some grammatical categories were treated because they were part of the established structure of Latin, even though on an objective analysis they could not be shown to exist in English. For example, Bullokar states unequivocally that ‘a substantiue is declined with fiue cases in both numbers’, and he sows confusion in the 1586 *Pamphlet for Grammar* in his treatment of the vowels by identifying <l>, <m>, <n> and <r> as half vowels which then allows for a category of triphthongs (as in *holm* or *elm*). Reading Bullokar, as is the case with all these pioneer treatments of the vernacular, one is struck by both the challenge and the excitement of embarking on uncharted seas. The modern reader faces the additional challenge with Bullokar’s text of his revised spelling system, characterised by a series of digraphs and accents. Just as prescription (for the history of prescription in a range of languages, see the papers in *Histoire, Épistémologie, Langage XX*) has tended to be the preserve of the well-meaning armchair linguist, so has the tradition of spelling reform. The desire to reform spelling systems is fired by worthy cultural aims (e.g. facilitating learning by non-native speakers, saving money, increasing social mobility) but rarely receives the official support required to drive it through, although there have been some high-profile exceptions (for German, see Johnson 2005; for Turkish, Lewis 1999). Bullokar’s reformed English metalanguage was a revolution too far, and on into the following century English grammars tended still to be

written in Latin, even when formally they had broken away from Latin (e.g. Wallis 1653¹). (For more on the history of English grammars, see Linn 2006; Michael 1987).

After pedagogical requirements and admiration for a classical literature, it is religious motivations that have been the strongest driving force behind the description of the vernaculars and their standardisation. Missionaries have been responsible for numerous pioneering grammars and orthographies. The broader standardising impact by missionaries on indigenous cultures has not always necessarily been a force for social good, especially where it has ironed out local customs or stigmatised practices which have not fitted in with the specifically Christian world-view. However, as Nowak (2006: 167) writes:

it is well known that most of the indigenous languages of North America and Australia today are at the verge of extinction or are already extinct. Sometimes their documentation by missionaries is the only one bearing testimony, providing today's scholars with invaluable information that otherwise would no longer be available.

Of course many of the missionary grammars are limited by the western linguistic training of their authors. There was always a danger that typologically very different languages would be described as if they were Latin, but, as we have seen, this is no different to the early fate of the European vernaculars. The issue motivating particularly Protestant missionaries was the translation of the Bible, "the Word", into the languages of the communities in which they proselytised, thus, e.g. John Eliot's 1663 translation of the Bible into the now extinct Massachusett language, followed up in 1666 by a grammar, *The Indian Grammar Begun: or, An Essay to Bring the Indian Language into Rules, for the Help of such as desire to Learn the same, for the Furtherance of the Gospel among them* (Eliot 1666). Another well attested example of the linguistic impact of missionaries is the establishment of the Vietnamese orthography by the Jesuit missionary Alexandre de Rhodes (1591?—1660) through

¹ For the major ongoing project on the work of John Wallis (*Harmony and Controversy in Seventeenth-century Scientific Thought*), see: <http://www.ling-phil.ox.ac.uk/wallisproject/> [accessed 4 February 2011].

his trilingual Vietnamese—Portuguese—Latin dictionary of 1651, published under the auspices of the Roman Catholic missionary organisation, the Propaganda Fide. Missionary linguistics has become a recognised subdiscipline of the broader historiography of linguistics and has been the subject of several conferences and publications (see e.g. the papers in the special issue of *Historiographia Linguistica* 36:2/3 (2009); also XX this volume??).

The Protestant Reformation also had a significant impact on the valorisation and standardisation of the vernaculars of northern Europe. The first printed translation of the Bible in German dates from 1466, but the sixteenth-century translations by Martin Luther (the New Testament in 1522 and the complete Bible in 1534) are the ones with the real impact, both religious and linguistic. The Northern European Reformation was very much a linguistic event, with the use of language as one of its key concerns. One of Luther's objections to the centralised power of the Roman Catholic Church was that the word of God, couched as it was in Latin, was incomprehensible to ordinary people, and in his translation of the Bible into High German Luther worked hard to use a variety of the language which would resonate with ordinary speakers and a style which was natural and comprehensible. As we have seen in the context of several languages, there was in the early days of vernacularisation a general scepticism that the vernacular languages possessed the "rules" of the Classical languages and so could be used for elevated discourse. The fact that the Bible, the most elevated text of all in a strongly Christian world, could be expressed in the vernacular without its being diminished was a major step forward in the reinforcement of the vernaculars. It is no accident that the first German grammar, the *Teutsche Grammatica* by Valentin Ickelsamer (c. 1500—1541) should have appeared in the same year as Luther's Bible translation and that it should have been inspired by pride in the status of German as a literary language, although this was less a grammar than a practical guide to usage. The first grammar proper, the *Teutsch Grammatick oder Sprach-Kunst* by Laurentius Albertus (c. 1540—1585) followed in 1573, and the most successful German grammar of the 16th century, the *Grammatica Germanicæ Linguæ* of 1578 by Johannes Clajus (1535-1592), explicitly took the language of Luther as its model. The existence of a Bible in the vernacular also went hand-in-hand

with the production of language works in the other countries which were feeling the wind of religious change at the Reformation. The preeminent Danish-language Bible, for example, used throughout the kingdom of Denmark-Norway, was published in 1550 under the auspices of Christian III who brought the Reformation to that country. The translation was the work of Christiern Pedersen (1480—1554) who was also a lexicographer (author of a Latin—Danish dictionary), grammarian (of Latin), and printer. (Grammars of Danish didn't appear until a century later, the first being the *Introductio ad Lingvam Danicam* from the early 1660s by Laurids Olufsen Kock (1634—1691) and the *Grammatica Danica* of 1668 by Erik Eriksen Pontoppidan (1616—1678)—see Hovdhaugen et al. (2000:67-75); Linn (2005: 168-171)). Likewise, the first authoritative treatment of Dutch, the *Twe-spraack van de Nederduitsche Letterkunst* of 1584 by Hendrik Spiegel (1549—1612) was part of that same movement of growing cultural and linguistic confidence which included the first complete translation of the Bible into Dutch inspired by Luther's model.

While it would be overstating the case to suggest that the appearance of the Bible and the resulting prestige of the northern European vernaculars led directly to standardisation, there was undoubtedly a close link between the various cultural facets of the Reformation—religious independence, printing, translation, increased commercial wealth—and the codification of the national languages. We note again that standardisation is not first and foremost about the language. It is about the reinforcement of a cultural idea. (For more on the history of linguistics in the Germanic languages, see the papers in Schmitter 2005; for more on the standardisation of the Germanic languages, see Deumert & Vandenbussche 2003; Linn & McLelland 2002. For an overview of vernacular grammar-writing in Europe from the Renaissance onwards, see Padley 1985; 1988.)

4. Prescription and Institutions

Much of the early work in the history of European vernacular linguistics was done by individuals, in many cases inspired by patriotic or reforming zeal. However, in the post-Renaissance / post-Reformation world, it was not long before the maintenance of the language came to be seen as a corporate cultural duty. Correct standard language could not be left up to any old armchair language planner to cultivate. Standards had to be prescribed, and they had to be prescribed by those who knew where the boundaries of the norms lay. Hendrik Spiegel's 1584 Dutch grammar, the 'popular and influential grammar [...] usually seen as the real beginning of a tradition of prescriptive grammars in Dutch' (Willemys 2003: 98) and which we have just mentioned, was published under the watchful eye of the *rederijkerskamer 'De Eglantier'*. A *rederijkerskamer* was a form of literary society, and the notion that maintenance of literary standards went together with the maintenance of linguistic standards, that standard and correct language was to be found in literature, has been a common view from the 17th century onwards.

In France, the *Académie Française* was founded in 1635 by Cardinal Richelieu with the task of rendering 'the French language not only elegant, but also capable of handling all the arts and sciences' (translation from Lodge 1993: 160). The *Académie* was formally required by its founding statutes to produce a dictionary, a grammar, a rhetoric and a poetics of French, in short the cornerstones of a standard literary language, based on the usage of the powerful and the prestigious. Known internationally as the prescriptive body par excellence, the *Académie's* influence on the language has perhaps been more symbolic than actual. The official grammar of the *Académie* only appeared in 1932 and was not well received. While the official dictionary (first edition 1694) has had greater standing, it should be noted that the *Académie's* standards are only advisory and have no legal foundation. The 21st-century tendency towards destandardisation (see next section) can only serve to loosen its grip on the language even further.

The *Académie Française* was in turn based on the Italian *Accademia della Crusca*, established in 1585 with the explicit intention of separating good language from bad. Early on it focused its attention on

the production of a dictionary of “good” Italian, rooted in the usage of the fourteenth-century Tuscan poets, and, more than anything else, the 1612 *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* served to standardise Italian and provide a model for an institutionally produced standardising dictionary. In England the Royal Society was set up in 1660 in parallel with the French *Académie*. Much of the early work of this scientific institution was in fact linguistic, fuelled by the needs of Empiricism and the desire to create a new universal philosophical language, as exemplified above all by the *Essay towards a real Character and a Philosophical Language* of 1668 by John Wilkins (1614-1672) (Subbiondo 1992). Attempts to create universal languages represent the standardising spirit taken to its extreme, espousing as they do the belief that all linguistic variety might be whittled down to one universally understood language. The paradox of the universal language, the impossibility of the pure standard, is summed up in the 1663 *Ballad of Gresham Colledge*, mocking the activities of the new Royal Society:

A Doctor counted very able [i.e. Wilkins]
Designes that all Mankynd converse shall,
Spite o' th' confusion made att Babel,
By Character call'd Universall.
How long this Character will be learning,
That truly passeth my discerning. (Stimson 1932: 115)

While the Royal Society has remained the national institution for the sciences, there have been subsequent proposals in Britain for a dedicated language academy, along the lines of the French model. Serious proposals were advanced in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries by some of the leading literary figures of the time. Daniel Defoe (c. 1660—1731), author of *Robinson Crusoe*, wrote of the need to ‘establish Purity and Propriety of Stile’ in the face of ‘all the Irregular Additions that Ignorance and Affectation have introduc’d’ (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2006: 241), and Jonathan Swift, the author of *Gulliver’s Travels*, took up the baton in his 1712 *A Proposal for*

Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue, bemoaning in the third paragraph the fact that ‘our Language is less Refined than those of *Italy, Spain or France*’ (Swift 1712). National pride mixes with a sense of shame in eighteenth-century England, and anxiety about the perceived debasement of the language results in a call for clear prescriptions about language use.

Prescriptivism is nothing new in treatments of the vernaculars, of course, but in 18th-century England, this prescriptive undercurrent becomes a tidal wave, resulting in Johnson’s Dictionary and in the grammars of Robert Lowth (1710—1787) (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2011) and Lindley Murray (1745—1826) (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 1996).

While British English may have failed to get a language academy to legislate and police its standard variety, and Bailey (1986: 81) takes the view that ‘the success of English as a world language is due in no minor way to the fact that it has never been standardized’, it is highly unusual in this respect. The great linguistic task of the Modern period, the valorisation, codification and advancement of the spoken vernaculars, has resulted in the majority of cases in institutionalisation, and this is the case outside Europe too, where the European model has been followed. The language regulatory bodies internationally are too numerous to mention, but they are often linked with movements for purism or revival. (On the role of academies in language standardisation, see Joseph (1987: 111 ff.)

5. Standardisation and destandardisation

The *idea* of standard languages has become established as a practical reality in most parts of the world, reinforced by official institutions, whether these be language planners or the stifling presence of big official repositories of language, typically dictionaries and grammars. In the quotation which opened this chapter Jespersen writes of ‘the *springing up* of the great national common languages’, but this is really the wrong image. The development of the standards has been a protracted process, a story of the gradual triumph of certain sets of values over others, of certain classes of people over

others, and the practical reality this has created is something to which language users have been taught to cling. Standards are not simply enshrined in formal books and pronouncements, but they also loom large in the popular imagination (Davies & Langer 2006). Consequently, when the standard appears to be slipping, this can be a cause of anxiety and concern, and of course a standardised variety will always be in a state of slippage as it becomes out of sync with change in the spoken varieties, hence the existence of usage guides to try to shore up the idea of unchanging language standards.

The story of standardisation, 'a grand narrative of modernization' (Deumert 2010: 245), seemed by the mid-twentieth century to be complete, allowing the linear, teleological picture of the process set out by Haugen. It has been argued, however, that the grand narrative is now in reverse, that in practice there is an increasing move towards the acceptability of language variation in a process, driven from below, of *destandardisation*, of the debasement of the capital of standard languages. The idea of language destandardisation has been discussed for a range of languages (e.g. Erfurt & Budach 2008) and indeed in respect of periods other than the most recent (e.g. Hagland 2005), suggesting that standardisation and destandardisation may be cyclical processes. However, the "death of the standard" in the late 20th/early 21st century can be viewed as characteristic of the period which Bauman calls *liquid modernity* (Bauman 2000). The standard language is not the only cultural monolith to have been pulled apart. The notion that marriage is a permanent contract between a man and a woman, that spirituality just means the acceptance of an official religion, that education is a process complete by young adulthood, that employment means one job for life, these are all ideas forged by the standardising fetish of modernity, but ones which have been deconstructed in practice very rapidly. It is no surprise in the social world of the current century, where songs can be shuffled on your MP3 player and friends shuffled on your Facebook page, that scant regard should be paid to the dull presence of a standard language. Deumert (following Beck 2002) sees standard languages as *zombies*, the living dead, no longer real but nonetheless haunting

‘the minds of speakers (and those linguists who believe in languages as unitary, well-defined, and countable objects)’ (Deumert 2010: 258).

While standards continue to haunt both language users and the gatekeepers of languages (planners, teachers, publishers, journalists etc.), they are real enough, and it is too soon to kill them off. How, anyway, do you go about killing something that is already dead? To end on a slightly less fanciful note, the history of Western linguistics has been driven by debates surrounding the use and teaching of standard languages, and a vast corpus of work has been produced in the service of standard languages and language standards. Consequently the idea of the standard is absolutely central to our understanding of the history of Western linguistics.

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