

# Getting a data-based grip on (changing) standard language ideologies in contemporary Europe

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## *Panel topic & relation to conference theme*

In Europe, the development of standard languages played a pivotal role in the shaping of nation states. The construction – through selection, codification, elaboration and implementation (Haugen 1966) – of one language variety as the "best language" turned all other varieties into "bad language". Issues of national space and linguistic diversity were negotiated in terms of standard language ideologies (SLIs) based on ideas about linguistic purity and homogeneity, embodied in a special relationship between a people and its language. In this panel, we focus on how SLIs are involved in the negotiations of transnational space and multilingual encounters that are on the agenda of contemporary Europe. We investigate what has happened, or is currently happening to SLIs as we pass from the constructive age of nation state building to the deconstructive age of democratisation and globalization (which is dubbed "Late Modernity" by sociologists such as Giddens (1991)).

Before one embarks on a study of standard language change, it is essential to realize the double denotation of the concept "standard language". On the one hand, the standard language is a variety of speech. In reality, the best language typically is the "sociolect of a specific group" (De Vries 1987: 130), drawn primarily "from the spoken language of the upper middle class" (Lippi Green 2006: 64). On the other hand "standard language" designates a normative ideology imposed by institutions such as (formal) education and the media, but maintained by (silent) agreement between the language users. SLIs are typically conservative, static, and strongly inclined towards uniformity and against variability.

If SLIs represent a "rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" – as Silverstein (1979: 193) puts it – then how do SLIs reflect and construct the increasing variability in today's European standard languages? Standard Danish, for instance, is witnessing a rapid spread of "low Copenhagen" speech features (Gregersen 2009), and Standard Dutch is increasingly characterized by "regional flavouring" in the form of accent variation (Smakman 2006, Adank et al. 2007, Grondelaers et al.: in press).

Are SLIs strengthened, or rather relaxed (or even abandoned) as a result of the (massive) substandardization tendencies which characterize Europe's standard languages (Deumert & Vandenbussche 2003)? Or should the causality between language use and language ideology be reversed, because it is "relaxing SLIs" which allow the standard to become more variable?

#### *Panel structure and overview*

This panel confronts various types of empirical data to answer these questions. The panel (duration: 3 hours) consists of five regular papers and a final discussion session featuring **Wim Vandenbussche** as a discussant. In the first introductory paper, **Tore Kristiansen** outlines the panel theme and reviews, on the one hand, evidence for an awareness dependent existence of two opposite evaluative hierarchisations of Danish varieties, and, on the other hand, evidence for an evaluative-dimension dependent existence of two "best languages": one for the school and one for the media (as revealed, respectively, on dimensions of 'superiority' and 'dynamism' in young Danes' subconsciously offered evaluations of speakers). **Helge Sandoy** reports data from conscious and subconscious attitude investigations in the western part of Norway. The results, like in Denmark, show speakers of the 'central' part of the country to be upgraded in subconscious conceptualizations, whereas consciously offered perceptions are in favour of the speakers' local dialect. On the basis of diachronic interview data, **Anne Fabricius** emphasizes the importance of individual constructs for the description of RP-ideologies in the UK, whereby "constructs" are cumulatively updated personalized ideologies (as opposed to "static, national" ideologies) about what constitutes good language. **Stefan Grondelaers and Roeland van Hout** report experimental evidence in support of the idea that the perceived *aesthetics* of language varieties (still) plays a central role in Netherlandic Dutch SLIs. In the panel's final regular paper, **Marie Maegaard** paves the way for the ensuing debate by challenging Kristiansen's (this panel) "double standard" view of modern Danish SLIs.

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*Possible issues for discussion include*

1. The relationship (and tension) between centrifugal and centripetal tendencies in Europe (i.e. the move towards a 'European identity' versus regionalist/nationalist tendencies) and the current language ideological debates in the individual European language communities
2. The (changing? constant?) role of a standard language for the formation of national and social identities in present-day-Europe
3. The evolution of standard language ideologies in Europe over the past twenty years (i.e. since the 'fall of the Wall')
4. Transnational tendencies in the case studies under discussion
5. The decreasing impact of centralised/'elitist' language planning authorities vs. 'language communities at large taking possession of their language-ideological debates'
6. The link between destandardisation, dialect loss and standard language ideologies

*Abstracts*

**What is happening to the “best language”?**

*Tore Kristiansen*

The evaluative hierarchisation of varieties, which singles out a ‘best language’, makes it appropriate to talk of “standardisation as an ideology, and a standard language as an idea in the mind” (Milroy and Milroy 1985). Decisive social forces behind the omnipotence of this ‘idea in the mind’ have been the school and the complaint tradition (Milroy and Milroy 1985, Kristiansen 1990). Until the 1960s, the evaluative hierarchisation of language varieties was constructed in absolute aesthetic and moral terms. This way of thinking is still very strong, although the official discourse (e.g. in guidelines for teachers) since the 1960s has built the evaluative hierarchisation on the notion of appropriateness (Kristiansen 1990, Fairclough 1992); now the standard language should be seen as a socially neutral, common code that secures communicative effectiveness in the public domains of society, which is something any modern society needs; standardisation would be a good and necessary ‘thing’ if only we could learn to think rationally and not emotionally about it.

In contemporary Europe, the standard language strengthens its position as a common code at the level of use, while at the same time a number of features from (previously) substandard varieties are frequently heard in an important public domain like the media. (Coupland 2007). Standardisation and/or destandardisation? (Mattheier und Radtke 1997). It is an interesting issue what correlates this development may have at the level of ideology. Have people begun

to think 'rationally' about language use? Or has the SLI fortress – the idea of a 'best language' – begun to crumble? Based on extensive empirical studies, this paper argues that young Danes operate with two 'best' languages, one for the media and one for the school, while the notion of 'best' language as such remains intact (Kristiansen 2009).

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## **Subconscious attitudes – a driving force? The Norwegian case.**

*Helge Sandoy*

A characteristic of the Norwegian language situation is high tolerance for dialect variation in public life. Over the last three decades dialects have extended their domain and are now accepted in media, in Parliament, in lectures, on the pulpit etc. Today only one area is preserved as a "standard language zone", that is news reading in media.

Despite this situation there are "centripetal" tendencies both in the pattern of accommodation and in the hierarchy of prestige, in which the upper-class dialect of the national capital is on top. In an on-going project – which will be reported in this talk – we collected data from five West-Norwegian localities about conscious attitudes towards language varieties with respect to personal preferences and to what people think *the others* look upon as prestigious. We also collected subconscious attitudes on the basis of a matched guise technique.

So far it seems that subconsciously offered preferences rank the dialect of the national centre highest, and the local rural community lowest, which in fact means the opposite of the consciously offered personal preferences.

If this turns out to be the dominating trend in all localities, the interesting fact is that the widespread tolerance in language practice does not correspond to subconscious attitudes, and the question is whether attitudes are remnants of previous practice or an indicator of future tendencies in dialect change.

A widespread interpretation of dialect change is that there is a prevailing levelling in the direction of the centripetal forces, i.e. the dialect of Oslo. Linguistic data do not fully support this view, and the Norwegian case provides an empirical basis for discussing the complexity of driving forces.

## **Standard Language Ideologies and the 'construct': the case of RP**

*Anne H. Fabricius*

This paper will explore one way in which the double denotation of the term “standard language” has been operationalized in a study of variation and change in RP in the UK: the notion of “construct” (which can be extended to any standard language situation), introduced in Fabricius 2000 and 2002. ‘Construct’ in those works was used to ‘carve off’ certain aspects of the social situation of RP which stood in the way of empirical investigations of the variation and change-in-progress observed in recordings of native RP speakers. The ‘native-RP’ versus ‘construct-RP’ dichotomy was key to opening up the sociolinguistics of standard language varieties.

I see ‘construct’ versions of standard languages as natural consequences in attitudinal terms of speakers’ experience of growing up within a heterogeneous speech community wherein overt normative standards operate and are transmitted through channels such as formal education and media. Each individual may potentially gradually build up his or her own (more or less conscious) ‘construct’ notion of what constitutes ‘standard’ (or ‘good’ or ‘better’) forms of language, alongside competence in their vernacular variety, whether a standard or non-standard vernacular. Generational change can be observed in patterns of the ‘construct’: just as empirical examination of patterns of production can show change over time, so patterns of the acceptance or rejection of certain pronunciations or grammatical structures, for example, can change. Examples of the overt expression of ‘construct’ notions from interview data gathered in 1998 and 2008 will be presented and discussed here.

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## **Beauty is not in the eye of the beholder. The ideological status of language aesthetics in Netherlandic Dutch**

*Stefan Grondelaers & Roeland Van Hout*

Standard Dutch is the everyday language in a wide range of usage contexts for all the Dutch (Smakman 2006: 34). As a result of this general acceptance, which was achieved before World War 2 (Stroop 2000), standard language ideology (SLI) in The Netherlands has always been relatively non-dominant when compared to SLIs in, for instance, England and France.

Faced with the massive substandardization tendencies which characterize contemporary Standard Dutch (see Smakman 2006: 41-46), the Dutch SLI manifests conservative as well as progressive tendencies. Whereas the refusal of the Taalunie – the highest linguistic authority in the Dutch-speaking world – to support minority and regional varieties of Dutch (Van Hout 2007) embodies a conservative ideology, the acceptance of regional flavouring in Standard Dutch in the media (Van de Velde et al. 1997), and the decreasing willingness of educators and professional linguists (Bennis 2003) to uphold one “best” language is indicative of a more tolerant “laissez faire, laissez passer” inclination.

If the Dutch language “is no longer the exclusive property of an elitist upper class of the Dutch population”, and if “the norm-imposing establishment is us all” (Bennis 2003), it should somehow find its way into lay perceptions of standard language. This paper focuses on the central role of the evaluative concept “beautiful” in native speakers’ private conceptualizations of varieties of Standard Dutch (following Woolard (1998: 16), we consider such conceptualizations as “socially derived, intellectualized or behavioral ideology”). Two speaker evaluation experiments are reported in which listener-judges were asked to rate accent varieties of Standard Dutch on a number of belief scales and aesthetic evaluation scales. Although the perception of beauty has been considered to be one of the most truly individual experiences since the romantic era, our experimental findings reveal that the aesthetic evaluation of accent varieties of Dutch is strongly dependent on *nationally shared* beliefs about the norm status and the “euphony” of these varieties and the prestige and integrity of their speakers. Beauty, therefore, is not in the eye of the beholder, but in the grip of ideology.

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## **How many standards? On experimental methods for studying de-standardisation and multiple standards in late modernity**

*Marie Maegaard*

Changing from the strictly structured social world of modernity, late modernity is often characterised in terms of fluidity, complexity and fragmentation. This new interpretation of society has important sociolinguistics consequences since the creation of social meaning can no longer be said to draw on fixed social categories. In the same vein, the ‘standard’/‘non-standard’ distinction, which has been crucial throughout the history of sociolinguistics, has to be reconsidered if it is to be interpreted within the frame of late modernity (Coupland 2009).

Studying social meaning experimentally may seem to be incompatible with common ‘late modern assumptions’ of social meaning as negotiated in situated discourse. In my paper, however, I will argue that experimental methods are useful in studies of standard ideologies in late modernity.

The starting point of my talk is Kristiansen's (2001) claim that the late modern Danish speech community operates with two standards. By drawing on Coupland's discussions of the concept of 'standard' in late modernity, and the results of a speaker evaluation experiment among Copenhagen adolescents (Maegaard: forthcoming), I raise the question whether the "double standard configuration" is an appropriate model for the sociolinguistic situation in late modernity and, especially, whether it can account for the linguistic diversity among urban youth and the associated evaluations. It seems that the double standard model functions well in discussions of macro-level social meanings and dialect levelling, but when it comes to understanding the sociolinguistic situation in a specific community of practice, it can not be easily applied.

This leads to questions of de-standardisation versus multiple standards, which is an important theoretical issue that has crucial methodological consequences.

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