Matthias Hüning, Ulrike Vogl and Olivier Moliner (eds.): Standard Languages and Multilingualism in European History (Multilingualism and Diversity Management)


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In this volume, the authors frame their exploration of the “standard language culture” (Milroy 2001)—that is, a community in which there is general subscription to the ideology of one correct, or canonical form of language—through the optic of multilingual practice in Europe, both historically and synchronically. Among the overarching goals of the volume, the contributors seek to assess how far standard language ideology pervades very disparate European cultures, by assessing the extent to which changing multilingual practices have been shaped by the standard language culture. The scope of the subject matter is therefore very broad, and attempts to portray an often dynamic picture.

The introductory chapter sets the scene by defining the working parameters of multilingualism and standard language ideology. Vogl begins with the state of play for multilingualism as a linguistic field of research, and demonstrates how various typologies for conceptualizing multilingual practices in Europe have often diverged substantially with EU policy. The latter and more substantial part of the chapter then chronicles the dawn of the standard language culture, exploring first the pre-standard-language context, before detailing the emergence of mass language codification, and, ultimately, a biunique relationship between language and state. The standard language cultures explored in the volume are classified according to early, middle, and late periods, which correspond to the socio-historical context in which they emerge. It soon becomes apparent that standard language ideology is found to be variably pervasive across Europe. The chapter ends with a discussion of how perspectives surrounding the standard language culture rarely represent actual linguistic practice.

Following the broad subject matter of the introductory chapter, the volume is dissected thematically into two sections. First, the reader is presented with a collection of papers that provide the theoretical considerations and historical context. Davies’
contribution explores the systems of belief that surround standard language ideology. His argument, framed within the context of German, describes how tolerance towards variation has been minimized over time by aspects of standard language ideology, such as the complaint tradition. Among the themes explored here, the discussion benefits in particular from a brief overview of the context of German in Switzerland, where the “ideology of the dialect” (p. 49) is shown to compete with the standard language culture. These distinctions between language and dialect are described as arbitrary, Eurocentric, and ideologically loaded, representing systems of belief that wield substantial influence over the perceived prestige associated with one variety over another. Peled’s paper grounds the material of the volume firmly within a historical context, by presenting an overview of key political philosophy responsible for shaping standard language ideology in twenty-first-century Europe. Focus is placed on three philosophers—Herder, Rousseau, and Stuart Mill—who, it is argued, should be seen as “the core intellectual history of the political theory of language in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe” (p. 76). In providing a review of their contributions to the basis of subsequent linguistic nationalism, the chapter is well placed to draw attention to the political ethics of the past and the ways in which they inform policy in the present. Lastly, Haarmann’s paper makes the link between standard language ideology and social identity, by exploring language and ethnicity. He suggests that, while the democratic process in Western Europe allows for the safeguarding of minority varieties and cultures, in Eastern Europe, the balance that must be struck in integrating often disparate ethnic groups into new nation-building projects can be very divisive. The implication for multilingual practice is clear, as such projects will rarely take account of the full picture of linguistic usage.

The latter section is devoted to a number of detailed sociolinguistic case studies, grouped according to a three-way typology, that serve to explore the themes highlighted above. Greek (Mackridge) and Icelandic (Haselow) are classified here as undisputed standard languages, in that regional variation is not acknowledged in official discourse, and where both cases constitute examples of extremely rigid standard language cultures—i.e. the prestige associated with the standard far outweighs that of other varieties. Saari’s contribution on Finnish is also to be found under undisputed here, for, although both Swedish and Finnish are the official national languages of Finland, Swedish has lost significant ground “in psychological, sociological and political terms” (p. 195) in recent years, to English and other majority national languages. Contributions on French (Lüdi) and Spanish (Anipa) fall under undisputed pluricentric standard languages, as both are cases where the language is spoken in different nation-states with more than one national standard variety. Concepts such as language restandardization and destandardization are therefore explored. De Caluwe’s paper on Standard Dutch spoken in Flanders also features here. While the adoption of Standard Dutch has for some time been the “corner stone of Flemish language policy” (p. 279), De Caluwe presents evidence to suggest that this model now conflicts with newly emerging multilingual practices, as a result of immigration patterns. Given the widespread use of non-standard forms of Dutch in informal communication, along with English as the undisputed lingua franca, De Caluwe suggests that Flanders is re-defining its adherence to the Dutch model. The final two papers on the Caucasus (Haarmann), and Macedonian and