

# Standard languages

## Taxonomies and histories

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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 which have driven out, or are on the way to drive out, the local dialects. (Otto Jespersen, *Mankind, Nation and Individual from a Linguistic Point of View*, 1925, p. 45)

The idea that standardization constitutes a specific type of sociolinguistic change which is best investigated on the basis of systematic, historical comparisons is not a new one. However, it has rarely been explored systematically on the basis of comparative analysis. The aim of this book is therefore to provide a comprehensive and comparative introduction to the standardization processes of the Germanic languages. The field, which Joseph (1987: 13) has called “comparative standardology”, was outlined by Jespersen (1925: 46) who suggested that it would be worthwhile for language historians to try and identify

the most important factors which — though in rather different ways and especially with different degrees of strength in different countries — have operated everywhere where a standard language has arisen.

The availability of comprehensive collections of case studies is a necessary basis for the realization of such an approach. Kloss’ *Die Entwicklung neuer germanischer Kultursprachen* (1978), Scaglione’s *The Emergence of National Languages* (1984), Haas’ *Standard Languages: Spoken and Written* (1982) and Fodor and Hagège’s *Language Reform: History and Future* (1983–1984) all stand in this broad comparative tradition and provide, in the form of case studies, extensive material for standardization research. However, the volumes edited by Scaglione, Haas as well as Fodor and Hagège are not strictly comparative since contributors approached

the question of language standardization from a variety of perspectives. This makes it difficult to trace differences and similarities systematically across language histories. Kloss' *Germanische Kultursprachen*, on the other hand, is explicitly comparative in its approach; however, it is limited to the period after 1800 and is also, by now, outdated with regard to the information it provides.

Like Kloss' monograph, 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. 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. Also, the comparative approach is not meant to minimize the importance of the socio-historically specific conditions under which each of the different standard languages emerged. 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. Both editors (as well as many of the contributors) work within an area which is commonly known as "Germanic philology", and thus share a strong sociolinguistic interest in the historical developments of the languages belonging to this group. That there is a perceived need among Germanic philologists to acquire a better knowledge of the histories of other Germanic languages was noted by Linn and McLelland (2002: vii) who remarked on:

the lack of diffusion of standardization studies across subject boundaries, defined largely by the boundaries of nation-states. Working within our own areas — Norwegian and German — we had at best a nodding acquaintance with developments in one or two of the remaining dozen or so Germanic languages, despite the close historical ties and the strong structural similarities among them.

Although one can rightfully argue that standardization is first and foremost a socio-political phenomenon and should therefore not be approached from a perspective of language families and shared philological histories, on closer investigation the restriction to the Germanic group appears to be theoretically promising. The individual chapters collected in this volume illustrate both socio-historical differences as well as persistent similarities across a variety of language histories. The Germanic languages provide a wide range of highly diverse standardization scenarios, including

- medieval chancery and literary standards (e.g. Swedish and Icelandic) and nineteenth century national standards (e.g. Afrikaans, Bokmål and Nynorsk)

- and examples of standardization-in-progress (e.g. the Pacific and Caribbean pidgin and creole languages as well as e.g. Luxembourgish and Scots);
- “big” (e.g. English, German), “intermediate” (e.g. Dutch, Afrikaans) and “small” (e.g. Frisian, Faroese) speech communities (see *The Ethnologue* 2002 for current speaker numbers; [www.ethnologue.com](http://www.ethnologue.com));<sup>1</sup>
  - almost purely matrilectal speech communities (e.g. Icelandic, Faroese) and speech communities characterized by significant numbers of L2 speakers (e.g. English but also Luxembourgish and the Pacific and Caribbean pidgin and creole languages);
  - “mature” (e.g. English, German), “partial” (e.g. Luxembourgish, Frisian) and “incipient” (e.g. Pitcairn Norfolk, Jamaican Creole) standard languages;
  - colonial (e.g. Afrikaans) and post-colonial (e.g. Tok Pisin) standardization processes.

Moreover, following Haugen’s (1972 [1968]) outline of a comparative study of the Scandinavian languages, it can be argued that just as the Scandinavian languages show “elaboration (what Kloss calls *Ausbau*) in the context of minimal language distance (*Abstand*)” (1972 [1968]: 265), the Germanic languages in general show elaboration or *Ausbau* in a context of varying language distance, ranging from maximal through intermediate to minimal distance. Moreover, standardization took place in diverse, yet comparable and interdependent contexts of linguistic competition (e.g. the role of Latin in the case of seventeenth century standardization efforts across European societies; the role of English today which has a significant influence on on-going lexical elaboration), and was shaped by parallel socio-cultural developments such as economic and political unification, urbanization, and religious movements (e.g. the Reformation, Counter-Reformation and also missionary work).

Finally, since language standardization is always also a linguistic process of variation reduction it is worthwhile to consider the “offspring” of a common linguistic root together in order to investigate how the different linguistic selections and other standardization-linked processes interfered at different historical times with the linguistic material available, and thus shaped the process of linguistic change within this group of languages (cf., for example, Stein 1997 on the de-selection of *do* as an aspect marker in a number of Germanic languages; see also Van Marle 1997 on pronominal case systems and the lack of “drift” in standard languages, and Scaglione 1984 and Kohlen 2001 on the influence of the Latin norm on vernacular standardization in Europe). In this context, it is necessary to take note of Haugen’s (1972: 246) comment that “it is a significant and probably crucial requirement for a standard language that it be written” — it is precisely the written form which allows not only to establish fixed, prescriptive models “across time and

space”, but writing also facilitates the planning and composition of texts and thus fundamentally shapes the very process of language production (with possible structural repercussions, e.g., decrease of lexical and grammatical polysemy and the development of complex hypotaxis on the syntactic level; cf. Garvin 1991). Spoken standard norms may then be established on the basis of the written model (cf. Scaglione 1984: 13–14).

The comparative approach to language standardization describes not only (synchronic) similarities in the form and function of standard languages, but also (as already indicated by Jespersen) relates these to language history and development. Descriptive frameworks, which outline the salient structural aspects of the process, provide taxonomies for the description of language standardization across societies and countries; they identify axes along which standard languages develop, and thus allow researchers to focus on those fundamental aspects of standardization which are believed to exist across individual language histories. Descriptive frameworks have been suggested, for example, by Haugen (1966a/b), Kloss (1969), Joseph (1987), Cooper (1989), Haarmann (1990) and, more recently, Ager (2001). The contributors to this volume were asked to structure their chapters based on Haugen’s four-step model of language standardization. Haugen’s model has the advantage that it is broad as well as detailed enough to function as a frame of reference for the description of highly varied standardization histories. At the same time, it is an appropriate frame of reference for the strong comparative orientation of this volume. Haugen’s well-known model defines four central dimensions along which standard languages develop:

1. norm selection,
2. norm codification,
3. norm implementation, and
4. norm elaboration.

The model was first introduced in Haugen 1966a and 1966b. In later publications, most notably those of 1972 and 1987, Haugen provided further comments and slight revisions of the standardization model.

Language standardization always begins with the possibility of choosing or selecting between a number of linguistic alternatives. Two main types of selection can be distinguished: monocentric selection and polycentric selection.<sup>2</sup> Monocentric selection refers to the selection of an existing (or also archaic) regional or social dialect as the basis of the emerging standard language. Although some standard languages show a relatively clear regional or social provenance (cf., for example, the “Copenhagennesness” of Standard Danish as discussed by Kristiansen, this volume; or the upper-class identity of nineteenth century Dano-Norwegian as described by Jahr, *ibid.*), polycentric selection seems to be rather more common in language history.

Most standard languages are composite varieties which have developed over time, and which include features from several dialects. The histories of, for example, Standard German (Mattheier, this volume), Standard English (Nevalainen, *ibid.*) and Standard Dutch (Willemyns, *ibid.*) were shaped by on-going and multi-directional selection processes which occurred gradually over time. The result was a complex recombination of features from various dialects and a standard norm which is structurally different from its dialectal substrate. A special sub-category of poly-centric selection refers to what Haugen calls the “comparative” approach, i.e., the deliberate reconstruction of a hypothetical mother tongue on the basis of current dialects, such as is the case for Nynorsk (as discussed by Jahr, this volume; cf. also Hoekstra, *ibid.*, for a discussion of a similar attempt in the history of Frisian).

Although the role played by medieval chanceries is commonly acknowledged in the discussion of the selection stage and the early development of many European standard norms, the lasting impact of these “chancery standards” across language histories remains an intriguing issue. The cases of Low Middle German (Langer, this volume) and Frisian (Hoekstra, *ibid.*) are particularly interesting in this respect. Both Old Frisian and Low Middle German constituted relatively well-defined, supra-regional written varieties — in the case of Low German we can indeed speak about a written (and possibly spoken) *lingua franca* of the Baltic region. However, neither of the two written standards developed into a standard language *sensu stricto* as their norms were never codified in grammars and dictionaries. In both cases the incipient written standard was lost. In northern Germany the Low German standard was replaced by the High German standard language after 1500. The situation was different in Frisia where a new standard norm developed from the eighteenth century based on Middle Frisian literary texts. However, there was no continuity with the linguistic tradition of Old Frisian. An interesting and rather different situation exists in Iceland (Árnason, this volume) where the official language policy explicitly maintains a linguistic “tradition that goes back to the beginning of writing” in the eleventh century.

The selection process is often accompanied by conflicts and debates over what is the “best usage” and thus the “best” basis for the new standard variety. In the context of the history of Italian this has been discussed under the label *questione della lingua* — a debate which reflects a complex combination of issues about language and power, about code identification and differentiation, about local and national norms (Goldblatt 1984). The non-linguistic aims of the “standardizers” (e.g. national unity, scientific or economic advancement, decolonization) are most visible in this stadium of the process. Not all standard language histories, however, involve debates about competing standard language norms. As the contributions to this volume show, Standard English (Nevalainen), Standard Icelandic (Árnason) and Standard Swedish (Teleman) appear to have emerged amidst relative calm,

while the histories of, for example, German (Mattheier), Norwegian (Jahr) and Yiddish (Peltz) were characterized by extensive debates about competing norms: “Luther-German” vs. “common German”, Dano-Norwegian vs. Nynorsk (and later also Samnorsk), and on-going debates about the dialectal basis for a Yiddish standard pronunciation.

Codification typically follows the selection process and firmly establishes an explicit and normative linguistic codex through the creation of a range of reference works: grammars, dictionaries, spelling manuals and style guides. In Europe, the grammatical description of the vernacular languages gained momentum from the last quarter of the sixteenth century (the first German grammar was published in 1573, the first Dutch grammar in 1584 and the first English grammar in 1586). Codification activities continued throughout the seventeenth century when the written norms of the European standard languages were consolidated and numerous descriptions appeared for the native as well as non-native market (cf. Langer 2002 on German foreign language grammars of the seventeenth century). Codification activities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were supported by the idea of romantic nationalism, affecting both already established standard languages (cf. Mattheier, this volume, on the German *Reichsgründung* and spelling unification), as well as emerging standard languages such as Nynorsk and Bokmål, Luxembourgish, Yiddish, and so forth. The post-1800 standardization movements have been described admirably in Kloss’ *Entwicklung neuer germanischer Kultursprachen* (1978).

In those cases where there exist two or more closely related norms, codification typically involves *Ausbau*, that is, the identification (or even creation) of significant differences between the competing norms. This process is clearly visible in the on-going standardization of Germanic pidgin and creole languages in the Pacific and the Caribbean (see the chapters in this volume by Devonish and Mühlhäusler). The English-oriented pidgin and creole languages spoken in these regions exist in contact and competition with local forms of standard English. This is illustrated by Devonish’s discussion of the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* which attempts to provide norms for a local High variety based on what Devonish calls “Internationally Acceptable English”, and by Mühlhäusler’s comments on the on-going attempts to replace the local pidgin and creole languages in the Pacific region with Standard English. Competition with an existing standard language under conditions of intermediate distance also characterized the history of Afrikaans (Roberge, this volume). Early advocacy for an Afrikaans standard language was contested by those who supported the maintenance of the colonial Dutch standard. A situation of norm competition in the context of intermediate *Abstand* or distance exists in Luxembourg (Gilles and Moulin, this volume) and Frisia (Hoekstra, *ibid.*), and questions of divergence and convergence are relevant in the case of Scots where standardization has interacted with processes of “anglicization” (Dossena, *ibid.*).

The sociopolitical realization of the decisions made at the stages of selection and codification is referred to as implementation, that is, the gradual diffusion and acceptance of the newly created norm across speakers as well as across functions. The implementation stage is the “Achilles heel” of the standardization process: acceptance by the speech community ultimately decides on the success or failure of a given set of linguistic decisions made at the stages of selection and codification. Implementation or acceptance has been explained as the result of rational decision making (e.g. adoption of the language favoured by the authorities in order to achieve rewards such as power or position) as well as of social influence exercised in social networks (cf. Deumert 2002). In addition, the novel forms of elementary national education which emerged from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in most European countries, and which provided prescriptive language education to large numbers of speakers, were a central force in the diffusion of standard languages and the formation of a standard/dialect diglossia. That the development of such a standard/dialect diglossia is a complex and gradual process is emphasized by Mattheier’s (this volume) comments on what he calls a “proto-standard”, i.e. a written variety “based on rudimentary knowledge of the written norm to precisely that extent to which it is taught in the primary school classroom”. In this written variety “one frequently finds formalized reminiscences of middle-class writing culture” and “a clear spoken-language imprint”. In other words, the realities of elementary education supported the development of early transitional varieties which included standard as well as dialect features (see also the conclusion to this volume).

Finally, norm elaboration (or modernization) refers to those activities which are aimed at extending the functional reach of the standard variety as well as changes within the existing standard to adapt it to new functions. This involves the on-going terminological, orthographic, grammatical and stylistic development of the codified standard to meet the demands of modern life and technology. Elaboration processes are triggered by the development of new text genres as a result of social change (e.g. the expansion of the administrative domain which was characteristic of societal modernization, cf. Mattheier, this volume) as well as by the gradual replacement of an existing (written) norm with the new standard language (e.g. the replacement of Latin in the case in post-Renaissance Europe; Dutch in the case of Afrikaans).

The lexicon has typically been the focus of language elaboration activities. Four main elaboration strategies were outlined by Kloss and McConnell (1978: 63):

The modernizers may choose to:

- a) draw on the native *word stock* of their own language, by means of compounding, adding prefixes, suffixes, infixes, or by lending additional meanings to existing words;

- b) tap the international Greek-Latin-English word pool;
- c) borrow from some other language not closely related to their mother tongue so that loanwords as a rule are easily recognizable and not as easily integrated;
- d) borrow from either a closely related language, for example, from Danish into Icelandic, from Bengali into Nepali, from Tamil into Malayalam, or from some older stage of the language, for example, from classical Arabic, Bengali, Tamil, into the respective modern varieties of these languages, or from Latin and Sanskrit into French and Bengali.

While the Greek-Latin word pool has been generally influential, the recent increase of loans from English has largely been evaluated negatively throughout the non-English speaking world and has given rise to new purist movements. Examples of this are numerous and include the formation of populist language societies in Germany, official responses by the Swedish Language Council or, outside of the Germanic world, the on-going purification efforts of the *Académie française* in France and the *Office québécois de la langue française* in Canada.

Among the donor languages within the Germanic family one should also note the special role of German in Scandinavia. As several chapters in this volume show, German played an important role, for example, in the histories of Danish (Kristiansen) and Swedish (Teleman) in the guise of first Low Middle German and later High German. Anti-German language purism is attested for both language histories. Influence from Standard German also plays a role in past and on-going norm debates about Yiddish standard norms (cf. Peltz on the notion of *daytshmerish* and the position of High German as a “hidden standard” in the elaboration of Yiddish), as well as in Luxembourg where there exists a complex historical and linguistic relationship between Standard German, the Frankish dialects of Germany and Luxembourgish (Gilles and Moulin). Low German also played a role in the linguistic histories of Frisia, Iceland and the Faroe Islands.

Within the Scandinavian language area the role of Danish is also worth mentioning. Haugen (1972 [1968]: 267) suggested that “The Rejection of Danish” might well be a fitting title for a history of the Scandinavian languages:

Danish is the ugly duckling of Scandinavia, with humble beginnings under the shadow of Latin and Low German, with tremendous potentialities for becoming the standard language of all Scandinavia ... it has suffered a continual restriction of area and rejection by its neighbors (*ibid.*)

In Norway, the leitmotif of the “rejection of Danish” led to the development of two standard norms whose relationship remains problematic (cf. Jahr, this volume, on the failure of the Samnorsk, ‘common Norwegian’, language policy). The avoidance and rejection of “Danicisms” was a hallmark of language elaboration in



Iceland (Árnason, this volume), and an ambivalent relationship to the co-official standard of Danish still characterizes the situation on the Faroe Islands (Hansen, Jacobsen and Weyhe, *ibid.*).

The contact languages included in this volume also provide interesting information on elaboration strategies. The competition with Standard English which defines the sociolinguistic context in the Caribbean (Devonish) and the Pacific (Mühlhäusler) has led to the formulation of official language policies which support elaboration and lexical innovation based on native word stock, while, at the same time, borrowing from English is common and widespread in spoken and written registers. In the case of Afrikaans (Roberge), on the other hand, adlexification from Dutch was a central and generally accepted strategy of norm elaboration, while the socio-political confrontation with English as the dominant and politically powerful language gave rise to what has been referred to as *anglismejagtery* (“anglicism hunt”). The Afrikaans case provides an instructive counter-point to the situation in the Caribbean and the Pacific as it illustrates that it is not the linguistic relatedness to the lexifier language (and thus the need to maintain *Abstand*) which leads to a rejection of borrowing as a means of elaboration, but that issues of power and dominance are central to these decisions.

The general clarity of Haugen’s model has contributed much to its popularity. However, the model is not exhaustive, and there remain a number of aspects of the standardization process which are not sufficiently covered. Haugen (1987: 63) himself acknowledged that the main flaw of his model was that it was ill-suited for the description of the motivations and non-linguistic goals of the “standardizers” (e.g. individuals such as Ivar Aasen in Norway, language societies such as the *Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft* in Germany, academic research institutes which played a central role in, for example, the history of Yiddish, or governmental institutions such as the various Scandinavian language councils). The question of motivation has been dealt with extensively by Ager (2001). The individual language histories collected in this volume show that standardization efforts are motivated by various interests and beliefs, and that these motivations shape the direction of the standardization process. Motivations for standardization can be found in the power structure of society (e.g. the *questione della lingua* is typically a socio-cultural reflection of a political elite vs. counter-elite conflict); motivations also involve aspects such as social mobility and social advancement as well as religious (e.g. Reformation and missionary work) and political ideologies (e.g. nationalism). Moreover, any discussion of motivations must be careful to allow for changes in motivations across time. In other words, what “standardizers” had in mind in the seventeenth century differs from their goals during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Broadly speaking, the focus of attention shifted from grammar and orthography to orthoepy and lexicon, from codification to diffusion, from

developing a supra-regional written norm for administrative ease and literary expression to constructing and popularizing a symbol of national and political unity. In recent years there has been something of a “cultural turn” in language planning and standardization research, and attention has been drawn to the observation that standardization is a central aspect in the formation and negotiation of “cultural identity” (cf. Haarman 1997). Schiffman’s (1996) concept of “linguistic cultures” — which is echoed in the Milroys’ (e.g., L. Milroy 1999) discussion of “standard language cultures” — suggests that the description of standardization processes needs to pay due attention to the beliefs and attitudes, shared practices and discourses which shape and support the historical development.

Another important dimension of standardization which remains outside of the Haugen model concerns processes of destandardization which from the 1950s have begun to affect several of the languages discussed in this collection. The “standardization cycle”, as outlined, e.g., by Greenberg (1986) and Ferguson (1988), describes a circular historical development characterized by “a succession of periods of focus with standardization and periods of diffusion with dialect differentiation” (Ferguson 1988: 121). In other words, a relatively uniform language develops into several dialects which then form, at a later stage, the basis for a common, uniform standard language or koiné. In the course of time this standard language will again split into regional and social varieties, and the cycle will start again (cf. in this context also Bakhtin’s views on language change as an on-going interaction of diversifying and unifying forces; for an outline of Bakhtin’s views see Crowley 2001). The idea that standardization is a circular movement, an on-going spiral of centripetal and centrifugal forces, is difficult to reconcile with Haugen’s rather teleological model which is also implicit in his discussion of Scandinavian language history (1972 [1968]: 265ff.). Haugen outlines a progression from unification (“Common Norse”; third to tenth centuries) through dialectalization (“Old Norse”, eleventh to fifteenth centuries) to standardization (six Scandinavian standard languages; sixteenth to twentieth centuries).

The investigation of the emergence of new regional or local norms (through standard/dialect as well as dialect/dialect convergence, cf. Mattheier and Radtke 1997) and of sub-cultural non-standard norms (cf. Androutsopoulos 2000), is a promising direction for future sociolinguistic work and central to our understanding of the nature of language standardization. Explicit discussion of such destandardization developments is found in the chapters on Danish (where Kristiansen comments on the existence of two spoken standard norms, a High and a Low variety), English (where Nevalainen discusses the hypothesis of the “dialectalization” of English), German (where Mattheier approaches destandardization from the perspective of a general theory of language change), Dutch (where Willemyns relates destandardization to dialect loss) and Swedish (where Teleman notes the gradual

disappearance of the “narrow standard”). Only in the case of Dutch are these varieties identified by names: *Poldernederlands*, *Verkavelingsvlaams* and *Schoon Vlaams*. The German notion of *Regionalstandard* (‘regional standard’), on the other hand, remains elusive and open to multiple interpretations (cf. Auer 1997). The chapter on the dual standardization of Norwegian (Jahr) raises the more specific question whether the norm variability in modern Norway (e.g. the fact that Bokmål is described as a “standard with three varieties”, i.e. conservative, moderate and radical) can be interpreted as reflecting a general process of destandardization, or whether we are dealing with a sociolinguistic phenomenon that is peculiar to Norwegian history and society.

Although Haugen’s four stage model has certain shortcomings, it remains an important point of reference for comparative standardization studies as it systematically draws attention to several central aspects of the process, not all of which have so far received equal attention from language historians. Thus, for many languages only limited information is available on the diffusion process across speakers and language functions, the relationship between spoken and written language, the relative importance of literary, scientific/technological and administrative usage for the standardization process, the emergence of a spoken standard norm (orthoepy), the discourses and counter-discourses of standardization and the effects of standardization on the linguistic system. The chapters collected in this volume not only provide an introduction to the individual language histories, they also provide many new perspectives on standardization and illustrate reoccurring themes (or *leitmotifs*) which are not covered by the Haugen model. The “cultural turn” of standardization research is noticeable in all contributions. As one compares the case histories provided by the authors in this volume, standardization emerges as a complex process whose many facets (linguistic, social, cultural, educational, political) we still do not fully understand, and which warrant further research from comparative, case-study and interdisciplinary perspectives.

The publication of this volume would not have been possible without the help of many people. The concept of this book emerged during intensive and lively discussions between the two editors at the *Standard Germanic* conference which took place in Sheffield on January 4–7, 2001. Many thanks to the organizers of the conference, Andrew R. Linn, University of Sheffield, and Nicola McLelland, Trinity College, Dublin, for creating an environment which was truly conducive to academic debate and discussion. We would like to thank our contributors for their willingness to work with us on this project, and for their patience with our many questions and comments. Thank you also to Maria Novrup for her translation of the Faroese chapter. We are grateful for financial assistance from the Fund for Scientific Research (Flanders). We would also like to thank Kees Vaes from Benjamins and the editor of IMPACT, Annick De Houwer, for their support and

also their patience when the volume was submitted later than originally intended. Carel van Gend deserves a big thank you for his invaluable support in the proof reading phase. Family as well as colleagues in Australia, Belgium, Germany and South Africa had to put with our distractedness during the time in which this project took shape. Many thanks to them as well.

## Notes

1. The relevance of the size of the speech community for the on-going elaboration of the standard was recently reaffirmed in the debate between Microsoft and the Norwegian government. Microsoft had initially refused to translate its Office software into Nynorsk (a translation into Bokmål which is the majority variant of the Norwegian standard language is available). Only when Norwegian high schools threatened with a boycott did Microsoft agree to the translation (cf. BBC, 30.12.2002; available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/2615363.stm>, accessed April 26, 2003).
2. Haugen (1972[1968]) discussed these two approaches under the headings of “the unitary thesis of selection” and the “compositional thesis of selection”.

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