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Wal, M.J. van der

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The Cambridge Handbook of Language Standardization

Marijke van der Wal

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Notes on contributor

Nicola McLelland is Professor of German and History of Linguistics at the University of Nottingham, with a particular interest in the history of teaching and learning languages.

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Nicola McLelland

University of Nottingham, United Kingdom

 Nicola.mclelland@nottingham.ac.uk

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The Cambridge Handbook of Language Standardization, by Wendy Ayres-Bennett and John Bellamy (eds), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021, xv + 802 pp., £120 (hardback), ISBN 9781108471817

Language standardisation is a major research topic shared by historical linguists and historiographers of linguistics. The interest in language standardisation dates from the 1950s to 1970s, the period in which Einar Haugen's influential standardisation model was presented. During more than seven following decades, publications and research in the field diversified from a mainly eurocentric and monolingual focus on top-down, conscious processes of standardisation to a broadening of focus to other standardisation processes and multilingual contexts around the globe. The diversity of approaches and the present-day state-of-the-art are reflected in the elaborate *Handbook of Language Standardization*.

The first three chapters of Part I *Revisiting Models and Theories of Language Standardization* are highly relevant for readers in order to understand the topic of language standardisation and to become familiar with the approaches, methodologies and key issues in language standardisation research. Chapter 1, which gives an overview of the most widely used models of standardisation, is followed by chapters 2 and 3, which highlight the processes of language standardisation 'from above' and language standardisation 'from below', respectively.

Chapter 1, *Modelling Language Standardization*, presents not only a clear and detailed view of the development of models of standardisation but also assesses 'the extent to which they are able to account for the complexities of the standardization process and its different manifestations in diverse linguistic, historical and sociocultural contexts' (27). Haugen's model, characterised by the familiar stages of selection (of norm), codification (of form), elaboration (of function) and acceptance (by the community), is not exhaustive and was refined (twice by Haugen himself) and criticised. Nevertheless, the model remained popular and is frequently used: 'It is striking how many studies of standardization still begin by pointing out the problems associated with

Haugen's model whilst continuing to use it' (51). Other key notions such as pluricentric standards, corpus and status planning became established in the 1990s. However, the existing models of standardisation were and are challenged by various trends emerging from the 2000s to present, viz. increasing interest in non-Western and multilingual countries (versus European monolingual societies), minority or minoritised varieties (versus national standard languages), in the agents of standardisation (versus processes) and standardisation from below (versus standardisation from above). Therefore, the chapter closes with revisiting Haugen's model and listing possible modifications and revisions to address its limitations and meet the mentioned challenges (pp. 51–55).

Quite a few historiographic publications have dealt with codification of various languages by examining grammars, dictionaries and other metalinguistic texts, which could be considered examples of standardisation 'from above', the imposing of language norms on their readers. It is important to note that the authors of chapter 2, *Language Standardization 'from above'*, differentiate between stages of selection and codification from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries and the social and regional diffusion of the codified standard variety in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In their view, the standard language ideology, originating in the eighteenth century and linking *language* and *nation*, is a typical characteristic of the standardisation 'from above', the process that moreover addressed the whole language community and not only members of particular social groups such as the higher ranks and literary authors. Standard languages 'were elite varieties, not only promoted among the elite, but also imposed on the lower ranks' (71), mainly through the educational system. In terms of the Haugen framework, *implementation*, the alternative term for *acceptance*, resulted in top-down language planning activities including, in the Dutch case, educational reforms, language laws, the publication of an official orthography and grammar of Dutch, and the institution of university chairs in the national language and literature. The effects of implementation are argued to be first of all effects at the discursive level: 'what has spread downward from the upper ranks of society, is first and foremost the standard language ideology, not so much or to a considerable lesser extent the standardized variety itself' (77–78). The possible effects on actual language use are still an issue of debate for which we have to take into account various aspects such as the chronology of normative and usage patterns, the nature of the variable (orthographical norms, for instance, spread and find acceptance more easily than grammatical norms), its complexity and indexical values.

Complementing the familiar standardisation from above is the *language standardization in a view 'from below'* (Chapter 3), a view related to the language history from below approach which has flourished since the 2000s in historical sociolinguistics. The language history from below approach is characterised by a shift from the focus on the language use of experienced writers from the upper classes to the language use of the lower ranks of societies and a shift from a focus on selected texts and text genres in formal registers to a focus on 'historical orality' in informal registers. In order to arrive at a full picture of standardisation processes, the concept of 'standardization from above' is complemented with a view from below which 'rests on the assumption that potentially all members of a language community and all of their forms of verbal interaction have contributed to the standardization processes of this language' (94). These shifts in focus have methodological implications for building corpora appropriate for standardisation studies that include both the from below and the from above perspective. Such corpora should comprise 1) texts from different registers, ranging from formal printed to formal handwritten to informal handwritten texts (to cover diaphasic variation); 2) texts from members of all ranks of society, measured by class

and/or breadth of schooling (diastatic variation); 3) texts from all regions (diatopic variation); 4) texts from all phases of the standardisation period (diachronic variation). An additional requirement would be, if possible, 'a sufficiently balanced number of texts from women and men to allow for an investigation of gender-related variation' (102). The chapter closes with illustrative case studies for standardisation processes from below in German, Dutch, English and French, and directions for future standardisation studies that mainly rely on the four corpus requirements.

Apart from these three 'basic' chapters, Part I consists of contributions that deal with the multilingual contexts of India (chapter 4), Africa (chapter 5) and China (chapter 6). Other thematic sections of the handbook also comprise chapters that focus on non-European regions and minority or endangered languages. Part II *Legitimacy, Authority and the Written Form* deals with familiar topics in language standardisation research such as language policy and planning (France and USA, chapter 7) and the role of language academies or state-appointed institutions (Spain, chapter 8). Chapter 9 presents different phases in the evolution of metalinguistic texts types such as grammars and dictionaries and, discussing their influence, argues that 'Their importance lies chiefly in their role in creating and maintaining a standard language ideology' (263), a similar conclusion as found in chapter 2. How present-day commercial dictionaries deal with language variation is being discussed in chapter 10. Chapter 11 concentrates on the role of literature in the complex process of standardisation in Italy, a context with the absence of political unity and of a widespread spoken language. Breton and Irish figure in chapter 12, and Creoles and standardisation in chapter 13.

Part III *Norms, Literacy and Education* consists of five chapters on endangered languages, indigenous languages and education in a multilingual context (chapters 14–18). Part IV *Beyond the National: Borders and Boundaries* comprises contributions on complexities of standardisation such as linguistic pluralism (chapter 19, but also discussed in chapter 16), centre-periphery dynamics (chapter 22), and the standardisation of languages across state boundaries, not only in Ukrainian (chapter 20) and Romani (chapter 24) but also in non-European languages and regions (the Chinese character sphere, chapter 21; Mayan languages, chapter 23). Part V *Standardization in Late Modernity: Beyond Traditional Standardization* discusses mainly recent developments and phenomena such as destandardisation (chapter 25), digital and online technologies (chapter 26), new urban vernaculars (chapter 27), renegotiating language norms in minority contexts (chapter 28, Irish) and sign language standardisation (chapter 29).

In their introduction, the editors Wendy Ayres-Bennett and John Bellamy mention that the 'rich diversity of approaches to linguistic standardization is at once stimulating and challenging' (p. 2). Reviewing the handbook, I have found that they met this challenge in an excellent way. The 29 chapters in total fully cover the kaleidoscopic diversity of the field with contributions dealing with a broad range of languages from various time periods (even more languages than explicitly mentioned in this review). The chapters are well written by renowned experts (their names are omitted within the word limits of the present review) and offer elaborate references for further exploration. *The Cambridge Handbook of Language Standardization* definitely is a most welcome 'landmark in the study

of language standardization' (cover quote) and an indispensable tool for researchers and students interested in linguistic standardisation.

Marijke van der Wal
Leiden University Centre of Linguistics (LUCL), University of Leiden
 m.j.van.der.wal@hum.leidenuniv.nl

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