

# Language ideologies and the consequences of standardization<sup>1</sup>

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This paper explores the effects of the standard language ideology on attitudes to language of nonlinguists and of language specialists, and considers how far linguists themselves have been affected by – and have contributed to – this ideology. The primary definition of standardization is taken to be *the imposition of uniformity upon a class of objects*. Attitudes to language within *standard language cultures* are then reviewed and contrasted with unstandardized situations, in which the boundaries of languages are indeterminate. It is therefore suggested that determinate languages, such as English, may be defined more by ideologies than by their internal structures. Some effects of standardization on the work of linguists are then reviewed. This is followed by a discussion of the importance of the process of legitimization in contributing to the standard language culture, and of the contribution of language specialists themselves to this process. Finally, certain matters arising are reviewed.

KEYWORDS: Standardization, elaboration of function, correctness, ideology, legitimization, historicity

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is about the **ideology of the standard language**. Certain languages, including widely used ones such as English, French and Spanish, are believed by their speakers to exist in standardized forms, and this kind of belief affects the way in which speakers think about their own language and about ‘language’ in general. We may say that speakers of these languages live in **standard language cultures**. In Section 2, below, I will try to specify the chief characteristics of speakers’ beliefs about language in such cultures, drawing attention to differences between these beliefs and those of linguistic specialists.

Despite what seems to be an opposition between specialist and non-specialist views, however, it must also be borne in mind that languages such as English have played a very large role in providing the data on which linguistic methods and theories are built. Therefore, since these languages are often referred to in their ‘standard’ varieties, there is a likelihood that the standard ideology has been felt in linguistics and language analysis.

We will consider the fact that standardization of language is not a universal,

and note the importance therefore of considering what an unstandardized universe of language might look and feel like, as this gives a perspective on what constitutes a 'language', and enables us to envisage the kind of situation upon which processes of language standardization may subsequently take effect. In such situations, language states are much more open-ended and indeterminate than in the more familiar standard language cultures. Throughout the paper there will be comments from time to time on the influence of the standard ideology on some aspects of professional linguistic thinking, and in Section 4, specific examples of this are discussed. In Section 5, the main focus is on the extent to which language scholars themselves have actually contributed to building up the standard ideology. Here we will focus in particular on the idea of the **legitimacy** of the standard language.

Although ideological studies are not a central part of linguistic theorizing at the moment, some scholars have given much attention to the influence of ideologies. For some of these, linguistic theorizing is permeated by ideological influences, and the 'scientific' objectivity usually claimed for the enterprise is for this reason highly suspect. Much of the argumentation in this paper is sympathetic to this view. In their discussion of linguistics, Joseph and Taylor (1990: 2) put it in this way: 'It is our belief that any enterprise which claims to be non-ideological and value-neutral, but which in fact remains covertly ideological and value-laden, is the more dangerous for this deceptive subtlety'.

This charge of covert ideological influence apparently applies here to the whole of linguistics; yet, without necessarily going quite this far, we may well suspect that there are covert ideological influences on some aspects of linguistic thinking and that many of these are not recognized or acknowledged. Further, some of these influences flow from the fact that, as we have noticed, a number of major (i.e. widely used) languages that possess written forms are believed by their speakers to exist in standardized forms. Our reliance on the standard languages of nation states may therefore have distorted our understanding in some ways.

With these points in mind, we need first to attempt a broad definition of what standardization is. This is a necessary first step because, like some other relevant terms such as *prestige*, the terms *standard* and *standardization* are used in a variety of ways by linguists, sometimes without overt acknowledgement of the differences. In respect of the internal form of language, the process of standardization works by promoting **invariance** or **uniformity** in language structure. We can therefore suggest a primary definition, which is non-ideological and which relates to the internal structure or physical shape of standardized objects: **standardization consists of the imposition of uniformity upon a class of objects.**

Notice that this definition assumes that the objects concerned (including abstract objects, such as language) are, in the nature of things, *not* uniform but variable. Therefore, uniformity has to be *imposed* on such classes of objects, and uniformity, or invariance, then becomes in itself an important defining characteristic of a standardized form of language. There are, however, other

commonly used meanings of 'standard', one of which is roughly 'measure of achievement'.<sup>2</sup> In this usage a value-judgement is normally involved, as the standard here is a measuring rod or yardstick used to measure relative levels of achievement (as in 'examination standards', 'keeping up standards', etc.). Like other possible characterizations of 'standardization', therefore, this one is not value-neutral and can be regarded as relevant to the ideology of standardization, rather than to the process. I take uniformity as basic, and notice here in passing that much of linguistics has depended for input on uniform idealizations: therefore, there has been a general likelihood that the states of language postulated in theoretical approaches will be identical with the most standardized forms, these being the most uniform, and that 'non-standard' variability, even when it can be shown to be structured, will be relatively neglected. Indeed, the neglect of 'orderly heterogeneity' by language theorists is a major theme of Weinreich, Labov and Herzog (1968) and is one of the basic motivations for undertaking quantitative variationist studies.

One social category that is often used to characterize a standard variety is excluded from the above definition. This is the category of **prestige**. Commonly 'standard variety' has been equated with 'the highest prestige variety', rather than with the variety that is characterized by the highest degree of uniformity. Notably, this identification of 'standard' with 'prestige' is found in quantitative sociolinguistics, and it is also usually assumed in historical descriptions of English and other languages. However, if it does happen to be true in a given case that the standard variety is identical with the highest prestige variety, it does not follow that high prestige is definitive of what constitutes a 'standard'. This is particularly clear if we step outside of linguistics for a moment: it is not sensible to apply the notion of prestige to sets of electric plugs, for example, although they are plainly standardized, and many things that are unstandardized, such as hand-made suits, may actually be the ones that acquire the highest prestige.

In fact, it is not difficult to argue that varieties of language do not actually have prestige in themselves: these varieties acquire prestige when their *speakers* have high prestige, because prestige is attributed by human beings to particular social groups and to inanimate or abstract objects, such as Ming vases and language varieties, and it depends on the *values* attributed to such objects. The prestige attributed to the language varieties (by metonymy) is **indexical** and involved in the social life of speakers. Indeed, the doctrine of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign would appear to require structural linguists to believe that prestige is not a property of language, as it is a socially evaluative category. *Uniformity, however, is a property of the language system, not of the speakers.*

This does not prevent scholars from stating that a form used by a high-prestige group, such as British Received Pronunciation (RP, as in Gimson 1970), is a *standard* form of language (even though the RP accent is not widely used). Even in quantitative sociolinguistics, some of the interpretations of variation recently offered are not clear on the relation of 'standard' to

prestige. Variation in the speech community has been interpreted on a scale of prestige, which derives from the socio-economic class of speakers, but this scale is frequently interpreted as though it were identical with a scale of 'standard' to 'non-standard'. Labov's model of linguistic change is clearly predicated on a speech community organized in this single dimension. For example, according to Labov (1994: 78), *changes from above*, 'are introduced by the dominant social class, often with full public awareness'. In his interpretation of language differences according to sex of speaker, 'standard' and 'prestige' are closely associated – perhaps identical: 'men use more non-standard forms than women, less influenced by the social stigma against them; or, conversely, women use more standard forms, responding to the overt prestige associated with them (Labov 1990: 210)'. The assumption here is that speaker-responses are graded on a scale from 'standard' to 'non-standard', which is presented as identical with a scale of prestige – and differences according to sex of speaker are to be understood as taking place within this standard / non-standard class-based universe of language. Although it is often true that prestige becomes associated with forms of language that can be otherwise defined as 'standard', these two categories cannot be lumped together in this way without causing some confusion and inconsistency in interpretation. To the extent that quantitative sociolinguistics uses *prestige* in this way, its interpretations of findings appear to be at least partly dependent on the standard ideology.

More generally, it has been quite usual in sociolinguistics to use the 'standard' or 'prestige' or 'careful style' variant as the unmarked term in labeling well-known variables in English; for example: *copula deletion*, *final stop deletion*. Speakers of AAVE and other varieties are thus represented as carrying out acts of 'deletion' of the standard form, when absence of the stop or the copula is presumably the unmarked form in their vernacular. So it could reasonably be called *copula-insertion*, etc. In this characteristic also, the standard ideology seems to be present somewhere in sociolinguistic thinking. We shall return to these matters in section 4 of this paper.

Prestige as a criterion is not the only potential source of confusion. An additional one that is prominent in the history of discussions about standardization is the tendency to use *formality* or *carefulness* as a criterion, often implicitly and without explanation. Indeed, most of the senses in which the term *standard* has been understood, excepting only the idea of uniformity, are evaluative, and are best seen as consequent of the standard ideology itself rather than as definitive of the process of standardization. Thus, if we take the notion of invariance in structure as definitive, 'prestige' becomes a property that a (relatively) uniform variety may, or may not, acquire from the perceived status of its speakers, in a continuum from 'lower' to 'higher', and it is excluded from our definition. That is to say that in this account 'prestige', although involved in the standard *ideology*, has nothing whatsoever to do with the process of *standardization*. It is also important to note that in the history of

standardization, uniformity of usage has been *institutionally* imposed on pre-existing convergent states of language.

If invariance is taken to be primary in the definition, a number of consequences flow from this – in particular, it becomes contradictory to speak of *variation* in a standard ‘variety’ of language, as a standardized variety must be invariant. But in practice many linguists do speak of variation in the ‘standard’. We can avoid seeming contradictions here by observing that, according to our primary definition, there cannot be in practical use any such thing as a wholly standardized variety, as total uniformity of usage is never achieved in practice. Uniformity in the structural parts of language, however, can be seen as an immediate linguistic *goal* of standardization as a process. This is what is aimed at, and it is quite clear for English as far back as the early eighteenth century, when Jonathan Swift wrote his famous *Proposal* (reprinted in Bolton 1966: 107–123) aimed at fixing the language in a stable and invariant form for all time.

In view of these things, I will not try to define in linguistic terms what are ‘standard’ and what are ‘non-standard’ *varieties* of language. Indeed, the standard / non-standard dichotomy is itself driven by an ideology – it depends on prior acceptance of the ideology of standardization and on the centrality of the standard variety. Plainly, dialects cannot be labeled ‘non-standard’ unless a standard variety is first recognized as definitive and central. In this conceptualization, the dialects become, as it were, satellites that have orbits at various distances around a central body – the standard. Therefore, partly to avoid the ideological baggage that gets attached to recognizing discreteness of varieties, I will treat standardization in this paper as a **process** that is continuously in progress in those languages that undergo the process.

Standardization affects many areas of life besides language – coinages, weights and measures, electric fittings, even cans of tomato soup. Factory-made goods generally are standardized in that all tokens of any class are identical, and in these cases uniformity is obviously desirable for social and, particularly, economic reasons. There is an economic imperative involved. Thus, in so far as languages have economic values, those that are most affected by standardization (essentially those that are said to have ‘standard’ varieties) have higher values than those that are less affected or not affected at all (and the metaphor of the ‘linguistic market’ has been used in this connection). Standardization leads to greater efficiency in exchanges of any kind. The social and economic goal of the drive toward uniformity is to facilitate what Haugen (1966) has called *elaboration of function*. In modern European history, progressive standardization of monetary systems, weights and measures, and of factory-made goods generally, has gone hand in hand with the rise of international trade and capitalism, and progressive standardization of language has developed alongside standardization of these other things. Many (historians of language in particular) have treated standardization as though its primary goal was literary – to make great literature available to a wide reading public. In the present account, this is not what we

assume. The immediate goals of the process are not literary, but economic, commercial and political.

As for the involvement of standardization in linguistic change, historical linguists, e.g. Lass (1997: 352–369) generally hold that language change is in general not ‘functional’ or purposeful. Standardization, however, in so far as it involves conscious human intervention in language maintenance and language change, is functional and purposeful. The drive toward uniformity, as we have seen, has social and economic goals. Yet, standardization as an historical process is also involved in the history of change in English and other languages; therefore, it certainly is involved, and has been involved, in linguistic change. It intrudes into the non-purposeful, non-teleological history of a language, and there are now descriptions in the historical literature of successful language changes that arise from overt planning of language (e.g. Jahr 1989: 99–114).

The involvement of standardization in language change is not generally acknowledged as important, or even relevant at all, by historical linguistic theorists, and some sociolinguists do not acknowledge it either. It may be suggested here that their silence on this matter flows from a very important distinction that is almost axiomatic in linguistics – the distinction between **internal** and **external** accounts of language. Standardization, it seems, is considered to be socio-political and therefore external to linguistic analysis – even though it can affect linguistic form. These scholars are probably also affected by the related belief that linguistic analysis should be blind to whether the variety analyzed is ‘standard’ or ‘non-standard’ (because a value-judgement may be thought to be involved in making that distinction). We shall return below to the time-honored internal/ external dichotomy in linguistics and the effects of this, as this is very highly relevant to our topic, but first – to place our discussion in context – we must consider the general effects of language standardization on the attitudes of speaker/ listeners.

## 2. THE STANDARD LANGUAGE CULTURE: POPULAR ATTITUDES

An extremely important effect of standardization has been the development of consciousness among speakers of a ‘correct’, or **canonical**, form of language. In what I have above called standard-language cultures, virtually everyone subscribes to the ideology of the standard language, and one aspect of this is a firm belief in **correctness**.

This belief takes the form that, when there are two or more variants of some word or construction, only one of them can be right. It is taken for granted as **common sense** that some forms are right and others wrong, and this is so even when there is disagreement as to which is which. Usually, there is no disagreement: the utterance: *I seen it*, for example, is *obviously* wrong, and *I saw it* is – equally obviously – correct. For the majority of people in standard language cultures who give attention to language – this is just how it is: *no justification is needed* for rejecting *I seen it*, and when justification is given (e.g.

that *seen* is the participle, not the past tense) it is post hoc. Indeed all prescriptive arguments about correctness that depend on intra-linguistic factors are post-hoc rationalizations, and there are many of these in the history of attitudes to English, in handbooks of correctness and even in descriptive histories of English. But an intra-linguistic rationalization is *not the reason why* some usages are believed to be wrong. The reason is that it is simply *common sense*: everybody knows it, it is part of the culture to know it, and you are an outsider if you think otherwise: *you are not a participant in the common culture*, and so your views can be dismissed. To this extent, linguists who state that *I seen it* is not ungrammatical are placing themselves outside the common culture.

It is important to realize how powerful the appeal to common sense actually is. To call it 'common sense' implies that any debate on the matter is superfluous: everyone must surely know that the view expressed is the correct – responsible, decent, moral – view. Those who might disagree cannot be taken seriously: they are likely to be eccentric, irresponsible or, perhaps, dishonest. For example, it is noted by Milroy and Milroy (1999: 135–136) that 'common sense' was the banner under which the British Education Secretary, Kenneth Baker, in 1989 rejected the recommendations of a committee of educationists and linguists on English language teaching in the new 'national curriculum' (for an important discussion of this, see Cameron 1995: 78–115). As these experts were by implication lacking in common sense, their views could confidently be rejected.

The 'English Only' movement in the U.S.A. can also be cited as an example of this. It can be claimed to be common sense that English should be declared to be the official language of the U.S.A. as it is the major traditional language and the majority language; hence the 'English Only' position has great persuasive power and will be accepted by many well-meaning people who do not realize that it is cover for specific political attitudes (often xenophobic ones).

Now, although common sense attitudes are ideologically loaded attitudes, those who hold them do not see it in that way at all: they believe that their adverse judgements on persons who use language 'incorrectly' are purely linguistic judgements sanctioned by authorities on language, and this belief is itself partly a consequence of standardization. People do not necessarily associate these judgements with prejudice or discrimination in terms of race or social class: they believe that, whatever the social characteristics of the speakers may be, these persons have simply used the language in an erroneous way and that it is open to them to learn to speak correctly. If they do not do this, it is their own fault as individuals, whatever their race, color, creed or class: there are plenty of models for them of 'good' speech. Indeed, the general public, including those who make judgements about correctness, are often willing to admit that they themselves make mistakes and are not competent in their own knowledge of the language. They require the guidance of privileged authorities. This last comment makes a point that is crucial for understanding the effects of the standard ideology and the

differences between most linguists and the general public on this matter, so let us consider it a little further.

The ideology requires us to accept that **language (or a language) is not the possession of the native speakers**: they are not pre-programmed with a language faculty that enables them to acquire (or develop) 'competence' in language without being formally taught (if it is conceded that they are equipped with such a faculty, this is treated as unimportant). What they do acquire in an informal way before school age is not reliable and not yet fully correct. In this general context 'native speaker intuition' means nothing, and grammatical sequences are not products of the native speaker's mind. They are defined externally – in grammar books, and school is the place where the real language learning takes place. It is common sense that children must be taught the **canonical** forms of their own native language, mainly at school (for many examples of this assumption, see Cameron 1995) by those who know the rules of 'grammar', correct meanings of words and correct pronunciation, and these rules and norms all exist outside the speaker. The (usually unnamed) authorities on whom speakers (and their teachers) depend have privileged access to the mysteries of language and have something of the status of high priests (Bolinger's *shamans*, 1981). If we put it in terms of right and wrong, we can perhaps also notice in passing that for many the matter is not only a social one, but a *moral* one also (see further the views of Marsh 1865, noted in Section 5, below).

As a result of all this, everyone becomes capable of knowing that *it's me*, for example, is wrong, *regardless of how often it is actually used* ('Yes – I actually say *it's me* – but I know it's wrong!') If individuals do not know this kind of thing, they identify themselves as not belonging to the community that can distinguish right from wrong. The canonical form of the language is a precious inheritance that has been built up over the generations, not by the millions of native speakers, but by a select few who have lavished loving care upon it, polishing, refining and enriching it until it has become a fine instrument of expression (often these are thought to be literary figures, such as Shakespeare). This is a view held by people in many walks of life, including plumbers, politicians and professors of literature. It is believed that if the canonical variety is not universally supported and protected, the language will inevitably decline and decay. The apocalyptic vision is clear in the following citation, which is only one among many to the same effect:

It should not be forgotten that care and decision have operated in the development of a language. There is not much of a future for any language if it is left exclusively in the hands of the careless and the ignorant. Or worse, in the hands of those powerful minorities who exploit degraded forms of language for their own ends. (Bernard Richards, Oxford, quoted in the *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, January 25, 1998, cited in Milroy and Milroy 1999: 43)

'It should not be forgotten . . .': this implies that it does not need to be proved that 'care and decision' have operated in the history of the language. Everyone



knows this – it is *obviously* true. It is also of interest that the context of this quotation includes an attack on professional linguists (on which see Milroy and Milroy 1999: 43), so we may suspect that ‘linguists’ are part of the powerful and subversive conspiracy ‘who exploit degraded forms of language for their own ends’. This is an aspect of what we have called (Milroy and Milroy 1999) *the complaint tradition*, which goes back for centuries. It has an important role in standard language *maintenance*.

I have considered this matter at some length, not to argue that these views are foolish or paranoid, but to point out that there is a discernible logic in them. Therefore, it is a mistake to dismiss them as paranoia. Some linguists have attempted to engage in debates about these matters, usually pointing out that such views are wrong, and it seems that they have not always fully understood the power of the ideologies of language that drive public opinion on these topics. A basic component of the reasoning here arises from the belief that language is a *cultural* possession analogous to religion and legal systems, rather than part of human mental and cognitive faculties. There is much that strikes me as ‘theological’ about it. Yet, in so far as language actually *is* a cultural object, these views can hardly be said to be entirely misguided, and they are not in this sense irrational either. Thus, they have to be to that extent respected and taken seriously. Public opinions are deeply and sincerely held and are widespread in society, however ill-informed linguists may consider them to be. They are also manifestations of deeply ingrained ideological positions and beliefs, and we ignore this at our peril. If we tell people things about language that they firmly believe to be untrue, they will mistrust us and reject what we say.

In view of all this, it will be clear, I hope, that linguists who try to persuade lay persons directly that all forms of language are equal and that language discrimination is unfair, have misunderstood the nature of the dialogue. It is not about language structure as linguists understand that: it is ideological, and if linguists claim that all language varieties are ‘grammatical’ (which of course they are), their views will be interpreted as ideological, not linguistic. This will be partly because, when they express their views, these linguists do indeed have an ideological agenda – to alter public opinions on language use. They are not at this point disinterested scientists, and the public is correct to perceive this. This is true even of perfectly correct statements about the linguistic equality of different dialects, such as arguments for the recognition of ‘Ebonics’ (AAVE: African American Vernacular English) as a form of language in its own right: these are necessarily ideologically-oriented statements that will attract ideological responses not mainly based on linguistic form and structure. Sometimes, of course, these responses are bigoted and shameful and have little to do with language, but that is not my point here. As for the views of Mr Baker noticed above, these, together with the imposition of the national curriculum, constitute part of the process by which the standard language is maintained and through which **legitimacy** is conferred on it (we shall consider the idea of

legitimacy below). Mr Baker had for a time become a functionary in the process of standard language **maintenance**.

As we can see from the above, it is not merely the standard language that must be maintained: it is the language as a whole, and in the non-professional mind the idealized standard is the same thing as the language as a whole. It is a reified entity with a canonical form that is uniform throughout. It is the form that is believed to be 'educated' or 'careful', which is also the form that has been legitimized by long tradition. It cannot be, for example, a lower-class Brooklyn form, or 'Cockney' (London dialect), or AAVE. These varieties have not been *legitimized*: their internal structures deviate from the lawful structure of the language. Grammars and dictionaries are authoritative accounts of the 'language', which is enshrined in them almost as a tangible thing, rather than as the abstraction that it actually is. What has been called the 'hegemony' of the standard, however, also constitutes a difficulty for those linguists (often variationists) who have pleaded for tolerance of language variation.

This is because such linguists usually argue the case for the equality of different varieties in terms of an overt opposition between 'standard' and 'non-standard', and we have commented above on this conceptualization of sociolinguistic 'space'. Michael Silverstein (1996: 284) points out that when the debate is focused in this way 'in terms of The Standard versus whatever purportedly polar opposites, then the fact that the situation is conceptualized in terms of The Standard indicates . . . its hegemonic domination over the field of controversy *no matter what position is taken with respect to it*' (my italics). But this is how the debate is usually focussed in much of sociolinguistics and among those who try to communicate with the public on these matters, and to that extent such linguists can be said to be (unconsciously) in thrall to the standard ideology (see also Coupland 2000: 627).

But this is a sophisticated point, and many linguists do not even get this far: they do not consider it important to think about standardization at all and take no account of the ideological embedding of their own work in a standard language culture. If in fact linguistic theory has been largely dependent on, and modeled on the properties of, uniform and standardized varieties, this may, or may not, matter in particular instances, but what is now clear is that the idea of what *is believed to* constitute a 'language' can hardly escape the influence of the standard ideology. We now turn to this.

### 3. LANGUAGE IN AN UNSTANDARDIZED UNIVERSE

Standardization of language, as we have noticed above, is not a universal. Some languages do not possess forms that are recognized as standards, and some cultures are not standard language cultures. It is reported that some language states are not conceived of by their speakers as particular definable states with clear boundaries, marking them off as distinct from other language states. We might suppose that theoretical approaches to linguistics should aim

to account for these indeterminate and unstable states of language, as well as those that are clearly defined by learned authorities in highly developed nation-states. If we were to consider these indeterminate states as basic, we might well have to think rather differently about language – for example, we might have to think to a greater extent of language as a dynamic process, rather than as a fixed object – a stable synchronic finite-state idealization. There might be consequences for some Saussurean principles or axioms, such as the synchronic / diachronic and the internal / external dichotomies. But I'm not concerned here with what *might* happen – only with the fact that many languages are not standard languages and, partly for that reason, they do not have definable boundaries and may not be readily describable in the ways that are conventional in language description.

Some scholars have studied these language situations closely. Among them, George Grace (1990, 1991, 1993) has written extensively about difficulties in defining what constitutes knowledge of language and knowledge of *a* language, and about difficulties in dealing with certain Austronesian languages in neogrammarian and structuralist terms. The boundaries of given languages seem frequently to be indeterminate or undeterminable, and in one instance Grace (1990: 169) is led to suggest that 'the language as a whole had no truly separate existence in the mind of its speakers'. Later, he notes: 'One of the things I found puzzling was that in some areas the people seemed to have no conception of what their language is and no sense of belonging to a linguistic community' (Grace 1991: 15). Peter Mühlhäusler discusses similar questions at some length, alluding to Grace and citing (1996: 334), amongst other things, a comment by Heryanto (1990: 41): 'Language is not a universal category or cultural activity; though it may sound odd, not all people have a language in a sense of which this term is currently used'. Where there is no centralization and standardization, it seems, to judge by these remarks, that 'languages' are much more fluid and unstable entities than linguists seem to have believed and are not always reified by their speakers: they do not easily fit into the structuralist account of whole languages as coherent systems of interdependent parts. If these views can be held by careful scholars, it is worth considering that we may have been forcing languages into greater states of orderliness and definitiveness than they actually possess *qua* languages. Certainly, Grace's idea (1981: 263–264) that 'each individual conceives of the immediate linguistic reality in terms of *pools of linguistic resources* (my italics)', and not as a complete finite-state 'language', could offer an attractive basis for a truly sociolinguistic theory of language (which in my view does not yet exist), and I hope to say more about this elsewhere.

Mühlhäusler (1996: 328) also lists a number of beliefs that in his view underlie conventional linguistic approaches. Two of these are: *the belief in the separability of languages and other non-linguistic phenomena*; and *the belief in the existence of separate languages* (my emphasis). He adds that '[n]one of these beliefs, in my view, has been particularly helpful in the study of the traditional

languages of the Pacific area'. Maybe the 'languages' cannot always or consistently be separated from one another or from their social contexts.

Of course, it is important to be clear on whether we are dealing with *language* as a whole or with specific 'languages'. To keep these separate can be difficult, as we plainly need data from 'languages' to back up any theory of 'language'. Given these indeterminate situations, we can contemplate the possibility that it may not be a linguistic universal that *language* necessarily splits up into different *languages* as part of its intrinsic nature as language (and to an extent many theorists might agree with this), and – additionally – that in so far as separate languages are known to exist, this is largely (or possibly, wholly) a result of social, geographical, ideological or cultural factors, and not mainly of an internally driven necessity within *language* (I have been inclined to this view for some time). If this point of view is to be taken seriously, it raises the difficulty that, in order to say what languages are, and what the grammars of these entities are, *we have to define what they are in the very terms that Saussure excluded from the remit of linguistics as a subject*. These are the characteristics that he defined as *external*: 'My definition of language', he stated, 'presupposes the exclusion of everything that is outside its organisation or system – in a word of everything known as external linguistics' (tr. Harris 1983: 20; see also Crowley's 1990 excellent discussion of this dichotomy). Among these external factors (which include, for example, connections between language and social, political or cultural history), language standardization stands out as crucially important in defining what constitutes a language. Now, as I have associated language standardization with standardization of other things, let us put these arguments into a wider perspective by considering further what an unstandardized universe might look and feel like (recall also that the imposition of standardization on particular objects, including language, implies that such objects are in the nature of things not uniform but variable).

Standardization, as we noted above, applies to many things besides language. The implementation of standardization for these things has been relatively recent and, in some ways quite gradual, and economic historians have had something to say about it. Heilbroner (1999: 22) cites a report of the difficulties encountered by a German businessman around 1550:

Andreas Ryff, a merchant . . . [is] . . . troubled by the nuisances of the time; as he travels he is stopped approximately once every ten miles to pay a customs toll; between Basle and Cologne he pays thirty-one levies . . . Each community he visits has its own money, its own rules and regulations, its own law and order. In the area around Baden alone there are 112 different measures of length, 92 different square measures, 65 different dry measures, 163 different measures for cereals and 123 for liquids, 63 special measures for liquor, and 80 different pound weights.

Today, we may find such a situation difficult to imagine, but it must have been the norm for long periods of history and may still be the norm in some parts of the world. As late as the sixteenth century (and probably even later), small

communities were still clinging to localized norms in coinage and weights and measures, and identifying themselves by this conservatism as different from other communities. These differences in weights, measures, and money are indexical of belongingness despite the difficulties they cause. In many areas of life, changes that might lead to a simpler situation, and to economic advance, can be, and usually are, fiercely resisted. In current European politics, the resistance to the *euro* as a common European currency is a case in point. It was important to these small sixteenth-century communities that they should maintain indexical differences that distinguished one community from another. Standardization, as it is imposed from above, is normally resisted.

The unstandardized universe of language is essentially the same as this. We are not told about the dialects of these German communities, but we can be reasonably certain that these were as divergent as the coinages. Standardization of language has been gradual in history, and many have clung to localized norms and resisted innovations that penetrate from outside, including standardizing influences. The written dialects of Middle English (1100–1500) were often grossly divergent from one another, and many written texts from the period also exhibit substantial internal variability – chiefly in spelling and morphological endings (J. Milroy 1992a). We can get an idea of this unstandardized diversity by noting that in Middle English about 500 different spellings occur for the word *through* (Smith 1996: 76) alone. By the sixteenth century (as is generally recognized), a phenomenon now called standard English was in the process of development, depending largely on the written channel, but it was not far advanced in some respects (especially in pronunciation), and very divergent local dialects of English were enjoying a flourishing life. One way of looking at this is to say that the natural tendency of language (if we can accept that there is any ‘natural’ tendency) to diverge regionally and socially had not at this point been to any extent *arrested* by institutionalized standardization. In general, however, as language is much more complex than coinages, etc, standardization of language, at all levels and in both channels of transmission, is never fully achieved, and the standard is always in a process of being maintained. Even some aspects of linguistics and language study have the effect of legitimizing and justifying canonical varieties: conventional histories of English and French come to mind as codifications that legitimize these languages by historicizing them, and we will discuss this topic more fully in Section 5. But if there are no serious discontinuities in language transmission, standardization is progressive – English has developed over time higher and higher levels of standardization in the various phases of this process, and, within the culture, there has been greater and greater acceptance of the ideology of standardization.

The Pacific languages referred to above are fluid and highly variable: it is not clear where one ends and another begins. They have not entered the process of standardization, which would *inter alia* impose on them greater uniformity and more definite boundaries. Mühlhäusler (cited above) has suggested that our

ideas about what constitutes a language are eurocentric or 'Western', and that linguistic theories based on these ideas are eurocentric (neogrammarian theory, structuralism, generative grammar, etc.), but, whether this is true or not, the major languages that have provided traditional models for language description have been affected by standardization. The state of non-standardized Pacific languages is comparable with sixteenth century weights and measures in Germany and similar to the English dialect situation in 1300 or so. English, French, German and other languages can be said to have by now undergone all the phases of standardization (Haugen 1966; Milroy and Milroy 1999) and to exist, at a highly idealized level, as standard languages. But from this point of view, they are not *vernaculars*, and no one speaks them exactly: the standard ideology decrees that the standard is an idea in the mind – it is *a clearly delimited, perfectly uniform and perfectly stable variety* – a variety that is never perfectly and consistently realized in spoken use.

But of course if we say that a standard language exists at an idealized level, we must also accept that other definable varieties can also exist at an idealized level. This seems to be the point at which linguistic approaches to standard English run into difficulties. Linguists who insist on internal analysis as criterial (with external factors excluded) can also insist that standard English is merely one 'dialect' among many – a view that goes back to Henry Sweet (1845–1912), if not before. If we reify all these dialects as static, uniform states, the standard dialect simply takes its place as one of them, and this is what many linguists will say: in internal structure standard dialects can be neither better nor worse than any other dialect, as socially-based value judgements are not part of linguistic science. Ideologically, however, the standard language is not merely a dialect, and if we do not recognize this and regard standardization as worthy of investigation for its own sake, we will be deficient in our understanding of the nature of language in use in society – in particular the indexical functions of variant forms. Since 'society' is the only locus in which language is used, it must be in some way involved in our understanding of what language is. Standard varieties in so far as they can be clearly characterized have properties over and above those of so-called non-standard dialects (in so far as *they* can be clearly characterized), and our discussion has strongly suggested that languages that have standard varieties are in some respects different animals from those that have not. The process of language standardization builds on the unstandardized universe of language that we have discussed. We have noticed in Section 2, above, some of the effects of this on popular, non-professional, attitudes to language; in Section 4, we consider some aspects of the effect of standardization and its ideology on the work of professional linguists.

#### 4. STANDARDIZATION AND THE LINGUIST

It is indisputably true that much of descriptive and theoretical linguistics, together with much of historical linguistics, has depended on, or modeled its

methodology on, the study of major languages (i.e., widely used ones) in standard language cultures – in which a language has been regarded as existing in a standard, classical, or canonical, form. Nineteenth-century historical linguistics, for example, was in practice based on ancient languages that had been handed down as fixed and largely invariant entities. Modern theorists have also depended on uniform-state accounts of languages and have sometimes been explicit about reifying particular languages (chiefly English) in their standard form, just as non-specialists have. Chomsky and Halle (1968), for instance, stated rather emphatically that they were content to use a Kenyon-Knott account of English as the reference point for their proposals about English phonology and phonological theory.

There is of course no reason why accounts of standard English should not be relied on for various purposes, provided that arguments are put forward to justify the use of the standard, and not other forms, in some given instance, and so long as we can be assured that it is appropriate to do so in such an instance. But little or no attempt is ever made to do this; it is usually simply assumed or asserted that the standard variety is adequate for particular purposes. Chomsky and Halle simply made an assertion, and Chomsky and others went on to assert that differences among dialects of a language in phonology and grammar are superficial and not deep-lying, without demonstrating their case by in-depth analysis of different varieties, including on an equal basis whatever is taken to be the standard variety. Thus, these generative approaches are clear examples of reliance on what Silverstein (1996) has called the hegemonic standard. It becomes the central reference point, and other 'grammars', which are not studied directly or adequately described, are conceived of as surface-structure derivatives of it. I presume that I need not point out in detail how woefully inadequate this is as a basis for studying variation in English, but see, for example, J. Harris (1985).

I have elsewhere (J. Milroy 1999: 24–26) pointed out some grammaticality judgements that show the influence of the standard ideology, and I notice these briefly here. Sometimes there seems to be no good reason for describing a given construction as ungrammatical. In one case (Creider 1986), sequences containing double embedded relatives with resumptive pronouns (e.g. *It went down over by that river that we don't know where it goes*) are said to be 'hopelessly and irretrievably ungrammatical'. The criteria for this judgement appear to be partly literary, as such sequences are said to be 'grammatical' in Spanish and Norwegian, seemingly because they occur 'in serious literature' (1986: 415). Creider's second criterion for grammaticality relates to the idea of *legitimacy*, which we discuss in Section 6, below. This resumptive pronoun construction is recognized as a named type in Danish and Norwegian grammar-books, so it is *codified* and *legitimized* in these languages. Plainly, this version of grammaticality has nothing to do with 'native speaker intuition': the criteria are of the same kind as those of the non-specialist: they are purely cultural. In one way or another, this seems frequently to be the case.

In the early days of transformational grammar, it was fairly common to see sentences that were grammatical in regional varieties and casual styles marked with an asterisk as – simply – ungrammatical in English, with no explanation as to why they were ungrammatical. Some of these linguists seem to have had rather limited powers of observation: they appear to have been unaware of the structural forms of varieties other than the literary standard. Thus, for example, sentences of the type: *the eggs is cracked*, with plural NP followed by a verb that would be singular in the standard, were sometimes marked as ungrammatical, even though such sentences are regular (i.e. rule-governed) in many regional varieties. Similarly, sequences like *they've done it last year* or *he did it already* have been said by British linguists to be ungrammatical, even though they certainly occur regularly in either British or American English. I presume that this tendency for theorists to rely on a single variety (as codified) is well enough known, and that I need not give numerous examples to make my point here. Notice, however, what all this implies: sequences that are grammatical in the formal styles of standard, literary English are said to be 'grammatical', whereas regularly occurring sequences in other varieties are definitely grammatical only in so far as they coincide with the (formal, literary) standard; otherwise, they are liable to be 'ungrammatical'. It is hard to see any difference *in principle* between these views of grammaticality and those of the general public, and they seem to be equally dependent on the standard ideology. For some decades, assumptions about the lawful input to linguistic analysis were implicitly supportive of the superior status and high salience of standard English and may even have contributed something to the *maintenance* of this variety.

In selecting a uniform, well-defined variety for analysis, language theorists may wish to show that they are exclusively concerned with the internal properties of language, and not with social or ideological matters, which might get mixed up in the analysis. But when a standard variety is explicitly selected, or when it hovers in the background of the analysis, it seems that assumptions about social matters are necessarily involved, because, although the key internal property of a standard is uniformity, it is externally characterized by numerous social and ideological criteria: it is used in writing, it has 'educated' status, it has literary functions, it has acquired 'prestige'. Thus, when the standard variety is selected, it is difficult to avoid smuggling into an internal linguistic account a set of unanalyzed assumptions that are conditioned by the standard ideology. Apart from ideas of prestige and correctness, the most general assumptions that are conditioned by the ideology are that languages are uniform in structure, that they are stable and that they are finite-state entities. However, these are arguably not properties of real *languages* either – they are properties of idealized states of languages, and they are, especially, properties of standard languages.

It should not surprise us that social evaluations may get involved in what is believed to be objective internal linguistic description, as language in use is necessarily a social phenomenon. It is difficult to banish everything that is social



from an account of language, even when efforts are made to do this – and often they are not. As for language in use, it cannot be empirically observed *except* in social and situational contexts, and even idealized data extracted from these observations must be based on real data observed in social contexts. To separate internal factors from external factors may therefore be a great deal more difficult than has been assumed, because, if we are to exclude external factors from language description, we will have to be explicit about what these external factors are, so we will have to describe them adequately. To extract language from its context may therefore require more knowledge about social matters than language theorists normally possess.

Ideally, a sociolinguistic analysis of language could accomplish this principled separation of internal from external criteria and explain the functions of the external criteria; however, I do not think that work in the quantitative paradigm has as yet been able to do these things very well. Sometimes the quantitative method, following Labov, is applied routinely and uncritically, and in general less attention is given to the social side than to the linguistic side of the enterprise. The quantitative paradigm, as a methodology, lies squarely within linguistics and is dedicated primarily to the internal analysis of language, rather than of society.

Some time ago, I expressed the view (1992b: 357) that ‘sociolinguistics can benefit greatly from work in other social sciences’, but it is still largely true that the social analysis in quantitative sociolinguistics is relatively shallow. Frequently, there is no explicit recognition that social class analysis depends on a theory of social class, for example, and terms like *class* and *status* are used almost interchangeably, not to speak of *standard* and *prestige*. Labov’s distinction between *change from above* and *change from below* is predicated on two criteria, which are not entwined around each other and which get confused: the idea of speakers’ conscious awareness of the variants, and the idea of superior and inferior social classes (which is totally different). It is problematic for this reason and for the reason that speech communities are not exclusively based on social class differences anyway (see J. Milroy 1998: 44–46); yet, it is often taken over by other researchers as a means of classifying changes. Other social categories, such as ethnicity, are not always analyzed as fully and carefully as they might be and can be used simply as category labels. Thus, the social shape of the speech community as envisaged in the quantitative paradigm is simpler than a real community is likely to be. However, what is most important here is the fact that the methods of quantitative sociolinguistics are based, not on any social theory at all, but on internal structural analysis of language. Many of the key concepts and methodologies, such as the linguistic variable, are based on structural linguistics.

There are other limitations in the methods we have used, including the fact that virtually all quantitative investigations have been carried out in standard language cultures and, moreover, mainly in monolingual situations. This kind of language situation is not envisaged as a pool of language resources (as Grace

1981, proposes), but is assumed to consist of a coherent system of interdependent parts in which even variability is claimed to be structured. Changes are described as taking place in monolingual situations within this single structured entity, and in the classic version of the methodology, bilingual situations are not systematically investigated. The idea of the chainshift, which figures prominently in Labov (1994), together with related notions such as the symmetrical shape of phonological space, is also overtly structuralist. Now, while it certainly does not follow from all this that the quantitative paradigm is enslaved by the standard ideology, it is in fact quite uncritical of some aspects of that ideology. Although the language situations investigated by sociolinguists are fluid, dynamic and open-ended, the (structuralist) conceptualization of language that lies behind the subject treats language as static and determinate. Indeed, it is not clear that we could actually have a structuralist theory of language at all unless we assumed the theoretical existence of finite and stable language states – these being standard languages or having the characteristics of standard languages. Thus, in rather convoluted ways, quantitative sociolinguistics is more affected by the standard ideology than perhaps it should be, and these effects can be subtle and pervasive. More needs to be said about the influence on linguistics of the standard ideology, but I hope to discuss this more fully in the future. Here, I must pass on to consider an essential characteristic of the ideology itself – the need for the standard language to be shown to be the *legitimate* variety of a language. This is one of the most interesting aspects of the ideology, largely because this legitimacy has been built up, not simply through consensus in the general population, but by the efforts of academic linguists themselves.

## 5. LEGITIMIZING THE LANGUAGE

The establishment of the idea of a standard variety, the diffusion of knowledge of this variety, its codification in widely used grammar books and dictionaries, and its promotion in a wide range of functions – all lead to the devaluing of other varieties. The standard form becomes the **legitimate** form, and other forms become, in the popular mind, illegitimate. Historical linguists have been prominent in establishing this legitimacy, because, of course, it is important that a standard language, being the language of a nation state and, sometimes, a great empire, should share in the (glorious) history of that nation state. Indeed, the language is commonly seen as part of the identity of that nation state. The standard variety of English, known to Wyld (1927: 16–17) as the ‘Received Standard’, was to him and to Henry Sweet before him the most important ‘dialect’ and the variety on which the writing of the history of English must be based: other dialects, it was openly claimed, could be ignored except in so far as they had contributed to the history of the Received Standard. To that extent, these ‘dialects’ had a degree of legitimacy, but in England these legitimate dialects were the *rural* dialects only, as Victorian

dialectologists had demonstrated that these rural forms might be useful in reconstructing early stages of English. These dialects, therefore, *had histories*, and historicization is a key factor in legitimacy. With urban vernaculars it was quite otherwise.

Urban forms of English, although probably used by a majority of the population at that time, were at the bottom of the pile. These were not 'dialects' at all: they were seen by Wyld (doubtless in agreement with general opinion) as vulgar and ignorant attempts to adopt or imitate the standard and were therefore illegitimate, not representative of 'language' at all and not part of the legitimate study of any particular language. Furthermore, they were dangerous: they threatened to vulgarize and contaminate the 'language'; therefore, in its standard form it had to be protected from their influence. Most important, *they did not in this view have independent histories of their own*, and that is largely what made them illegitimate in the minds of language historians. To undertake a study of an urban variety for its own sake was, until as late as the 1960s, a grave risk to the future career of any young scholar in Britain, and it is significant that one of the earliest urban studies (of Cockney: Sivertsen 1960) was carried out by a Norwegian, who did not require employment in the British university system.

These points, I hope, make it clear just *how* illegitimate some varieties were, how far the professional establishments in these cases shared the attitudes of the general public, and how powerful in practice these views were. They were, of course, 'common sense', but this was backed up by the 'scientific' findings of historical linguists (in this connection see especially Crowley's (1989: 174–204) discussion of Wyld).

I have discussed these matters elsewhere (J. Milroy 1999, 2000) and in forthcoming work. What I wish to make clear here is that the practice of writing histories of English has been strongly affected by the attitudes of Sweet, Wyld and other prominent scholars. These histories have until quite recently almost always been designed as histories of the internal structure of one variety – the standard language (often associated with literary history and with formal written styles), with occasional nods in the direction of 'the dialects'. They are largely *codifications* of the history of the standard language. More importantly, *these codifications are themselves part of the process of the legitimization of the standard language in its function as the language of the nation state*. In the case of English, there are two especially prominent nation states, and several others.

When the language is given an authoritative (almost 'official') history in this way, this assures us that it has not merely sprung up overnight like a mushroom, and it becomes important to trace it as far back as possible. A recent popular account (Claiborne 1983: 7) claims that 'the story of the life and times of English, from perhaps eight thousand years ago to the present, is a long and fascinating one'. The claims of language professionals are more muted than this, but of the same kind. The historicization of the language requires that it should possess a

continuous unbroken history, a respectable and legitimate ancestry and a long pedigree. It is also highly desirable that it should be as pure and unmixed as possible (although it is possible to boast that a language that accommodates borrowings from other languages is flexible and enriched by the process, in my reading of language history this is secondary). For English, the learned scholars of the nineteenth century provided all these things in abundance, and their authority continued to be effective well into the second half of the twentieth century. Walter Skeat, for example, emphasizes the continuity of English:

. . . eyes should be opened to the Unity of English, that in English literature there is an unbroken succession of authors, from the reign of Alfred to that of Victoria, and that the English which we speak *now* is absolutely *one* in its essence, with the language that was spoken in the days when the English first invaded the island and defeated and overwhelmed its British inhabitants. (Skeat 1873: xii, cited by Crowley 1990: 46)

According to this, the Germanic dialects spoken by the fifth-century settlers of Britain miraculously became 'English' as soon as they set foot on British soil. The English language as a single entity is also given 1500 years of unbroken continuous history here, despite the fact that Old English (Anglo-Saxon) is not accessible to modern readers without special training and could hardly have been distinguishable in 450 AD from related Germanic dialects on the European continent. But the ideologies of the times required continuity, and there were repeated claims that Old English is actually the same language as Present English and the property of the English nation, even though it looks very different and is not the same language by any normal standards of comparison. To establish this continuity it was necessary to make the English (and American) youth aware of their 'Saxon' heritage. A late Victorian history of English (Toller 1900) of 284 pages, published in a textbook series for students, does not arrive at the Norman Conquest until page 203.

Toller's history, together with many others, is largely devoted to establishing the Germanic and Indo-European lineage of English – as a background to the later development of modern standard English. The fact that English at first sight appears to be less 'Germanic' than other Germanic languages makes it particularly important to establish that it is indeed a legitimate Germanic language. It may appear to be hybridized, but these scholars could demonstrate by learned arguments that it really is not. It is not of course anywhere near to self-evident that English is pure and unmixed, or that it has an unbroken history, and even its Germanic family membership can be questioned (Bailey 1996). But by these tendentious means Victorian scholars helped to confer legitimacy on the English language. We can also see in Skeat's remarks a tendency to equate language with race and nationhood, and many of the comments of Victorian scholars were quite racist. 'It is evident', said George P. Marsh (1865: 153) 'that unity of speech is essential to the unity of a people'. These were the 'Saxon' people (British and American) – the speakers of the Saxon language.

This precious heritage also had to be protected from corruption and decay. Many influential nineteenth-century scholars had been quite explicit about the corruption of language by ignorant speakers, and claimed to be able to distinguish legitimate linguistic changes from mere 'corruptions'. Amongst these, Marsh (1865: 458) was again prominent. In his lectures, he warned against 'positive corruptions, which tend to the deterioration of a tongue' and distinguished these from linguistic changes 'which belong to the character of speech as a living semi-organism connatural with man, and so participating in his mutations'. Corruptions, but not changes, arise from 'extraneous or accidental causes' (notice how this distinction anticipates twentieth century resistance to social, i.e. 'extraneous', explanations for linguistic change and legitimizes the idea of internally triggered change). For Marsh, many of these corruptions were of course the work of the vulgar and ignorant, but some were due to the meddling of grammarians (1865: 461). The underlying aim of all this, as I have tried to show elsewhere (J. Milroy 2000), was to cleanse and purify the language, and medieval scholars, such as Skeat, did this by applying the doctrine of correctness retrospectively. It was common to emend the 'mistakes' of the original scribes – on dubious grounds – to make their language uniform and acceptable to the Victorian sense of propriety.

Interestingly, Marsh objected to the passive progressive as in *the house is being built*, which, he said, was 'an awkward neologism, which neither convenience, intelligibility, nor syntactical congruity demands'. He preferred *the house is building*, which was probably almost obsolete by 1859, and went on to show the historical legitimacy of this form all the way back to what he called 'Saxon'. The importance of this example is that it demonstrates how particular forms could be legitimized by historicization. *To give a history to a form was by the same token to legitimize that form*. As for *being built*, Marsh believed that to resist such corruptions was a moral duty: 'To pillory such offences . . . to detect the moral obliquity that often lurks beneath them, is the sacred duty of every scholar'. The lawfulness of correct English is supported here by morality, as it still often is.

There are no objective (non-ideological) criteria for distinguishing between 'corruptions' and 'changes'. It is clear, however, that later nineteenth century scholars, many of whom claimed to be objective observers of language and believers in a science of language, were much affected by the dominant ideologies of the time – chiefly an elitist theory of social class and, sometimes, a discernible racist/nationalist element also. Purity is purity – whether it is purity of language or purity of race.

Although such ideologies are now supposedly banished from linguistics, the concern with purity and legitimacy still seems to linger in some areas, including interpretative aspects of historical linguistics. Thomason and Kaufman (1988: 263–342) present a case-study of the history of English that assumes 'genetic' descent from Germanic and direct descent from Anglo-Saxon, and advocates a long continuous history with no breaks and (relative) purity. English, they

claim, is not a 'mixed' language. For several reasons that are not relevant here, their case-study is flawed and is badly chosen as a support for the arguments of their book, but what is relevant is that it can be seen as a continuation (in different terminology) of the traditional position on the lineage of English (on this see also J. Milroy 1996). There is a very similar argument by William Smith in his edition of Marsh (1865: 37–38). Under the page-heading 'English not a mixed tongue', Smith discussed the influence of other languages, but concluded that English 'still remained essentially a German (*sic*) tongue'. Thus, we have suitable labels for English: it is *Germanic* and it is *unmixed*. These labels are argued for in terms of internal linguistic structure, which is believed to be decisive in the argument – however, in so far as it is not self-evident that modern English is Germanic and unmixed, the labels are ideological. An underlying purpose of all this is to support the ancient lineage of English and the idea of unbroken history from Anglo-Saxon.

More generally, the reification of languages that are independent of speakers and society still enjoys a continued life in many approaches to historical linguistics and language change. If Roger Lass's characterization of historical linguists, for example, is correct, we do need to consider very seriously the relationship between the standard ideology and the manner in which languages have been reified as abstract entities, independent of speakers and societies. This is what he says: 'Linguists have, I would maintain, normally treated language as if it were an autonomous natural object (or an autonomous formal system): 'language changes' – it is not (necessarily) speakers that change it' (Lass 1980: 120). Somewhere, there exists an abstraction, or idealization, that has clear boundaries, definable and determinate structure, and the ability (within itself and independently of speakers) to transmute itself from one state to another. This entity does not look like the Pacific language situations that we noticed above: apart from its miraculous ability to transmute itself without the intervention of speakers and society, it looks much more like a standard language.

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this discussion, I may appear to have strayed some distance from our central concern with standardization, but it is important to consider the idea of legitimacy of a language and the importance of history as a legitimizing factor. I noted above, for example, that English rural dialects were to an extent legitimized by dialect research because they were given histories, but that urban vernaculars remained illegitimate. We can suggest that the process of legitimization is now being extended more widely – to varieties that have been traditionally stigmatized, including urban varieties, certain southern U.S. varieties and AAVE. The historicization of AAVE, in particular, is a very active area of research (see, for example, Poplack 2000). Its lineage is currently being discussed and disputed, and an authoritative version will in due course become conventionally accepted.

The beginnings of this legitimization did not occur until the publication of Labov's (1966) work on New York City and his studies of 'Black English Vernacular' (1972). After 1966 it became possible to progress professionally by studying urban varieties: they had acquired *academic* legitimacy. According to the kind of reasoning that I have been using, this may in time feed into popular attitudes to non-prestige varieties, and greater tolerance of language variation may just possibly come about. If it does, it will have come about as a result of academic research. The very act of carrying out and publishing the relevant research is part of the legitimizing process. Of course, this is not necessarily what is consciously intended. On the contrary, quantitative sociolinguistic methods are felt by most researchers to be objective, scientific and accountable to the data, and to have no ideological purpose or effect.

We might therefore expect quantitative sociolinguists to avoid subscribing to the standard ideology. We might also expect that they would see the whole question of standardization as something that they must investigate and clarify. After all, the languages that they have chiefly worked on are those that have standard forms, and these languages may have sociolinguistic characteristics that differ from those of unstandardized language situations. Therefore, one might expect the question of language standardization to be quite central in the subject. I have argued above, however, that practitioners have not always been very critical about matters relating to social prestige and standardization, and work in the subject has to some extent perpetuated the confusion and ambiguities that have surrounded these notions in the past. To understand why some linguists who are avowedly interested in society should appear to neglect important social matters, we need, I think, to return to the Saussurean separation of internal from external accounts and its rejection of external accounts from linguistics as a discipline (I will avoid any speculation here as to whether this dichotomy is itself ideological).

In this context, as we have noticed, quantitative sociolinguists normally see their subject as a branch of linguistics and not of any other social science. Its goals are linguistic and not social and are approached by analysis of patterns that are internal to language. Social patterns are adduced only in so far as they may elucidate patterns of language by exhibiting co-variation with linguistic variables. In other words, the Saussurean dichotomy seems to be silently accepted as axiomatic: internal analysis is the serious business; external factors are not of central concern. I have been trying to show in this paper that the time may have come for us to re-examine the dichotomy and reconsider its influence on linguistics – specifically on the quantitative paradigm and on theories of language change. Quantitative sociolinguistics, like other branches of linguistics, is influenced to some extent by unanalyzed assumptions about society, and one of these unanalyzed assumptions relates to standardization. As the language situations studied have been chiefly in standard language cultures, and as the definition of what constitutes a language is at issue, one might expect the study of standardization to be

quite central in sociolinguistics; yet, as long as the Saussurean dichotomy remains axiomatic, and as long as internal analyses are quite strongly biased in favor of linguistic, rather than social, phenomena, the quantitative paradigm will be to that extent impeded in its attempts to explain the social 'life' of language and the social origins of language change.

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## NOTES

1. This paper is a considerably revised version of a paper delivered to the Chicago Linguistic Society on April 28, 2000 and published in their proceedings. I am grateful for the comments of participants there, and especially grateful for helpful comments by Allan Bell, Nikolas Coupland and two anonymous reviewers on this earlier version. I am of course wholly responsible for the views expressed in this paper.
  2. Nikolas Coupland has called my attention to an additional commonly used characterization of 'standard', which is 'unexceptional'. This is roughly the position of Randolph Quirk (1968) – for him the standard is the variety that calls the least attention to itself. This can only be true for the élite or the highly educated members of a society; for a regional dialect speaker it is the standard that is the marked, or exceptional, variety. Thus, this definition is itself conditioned by the standard ideology, and it is rejected here.
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