

## BOOK REVIEWS

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NIGEL ARMSTRONG & IAN E. MACKENZIE, *Standardization, ideology, and linguistics*.  
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Armstrong & Mackenzie's study is divided into six chapters; the first four and the final two are thematically quite distinct. Ch. 1 studies the ideology of standardization, Ch. 2 the idea of grammaticality as it relates to standardization, Ch. 3 the phenomenon of prestige, and Ch. 4 the problem of language change. As a unit, they provide an outstanding illumination of ideology and arbitrariness in the generativist configuration of grammar. Chs. 5 and 6 then turn sharply to the sociopolitical determination of standardization and offer distinct assessments of standardization processes in UK English and metropolitan French.

The authors configure standardization as a persistent background motif that organizes our taxonomies. They remind us that "it is only fairly recently that non-prescriptivism became the norm in linguistics" (11) and hold that the specter of prescriptivism continues in the ideology of standard, which reflects "a hierarchical, as opposed to egalitarian, view of how society should be ordered" (6), but in transparent form: "it is in the nature of hegemony to present itself as unmarked or 'naturalized'" (17). The authors observe that national literacy and language standardization movements coincide with industrialization and the management of workers. Standard languages are "socially dominant varieties that have succeeded in establishing their dominance." Oddly, this phenomenon persists "in the contemporary period when arguments overtly claiming social superiority are no longer acceptable" (26).

In Ch. 2, they hold that "grammaticality is merely a projection of standardization" (29) and demonstrate this with examples from Romance reflexives and WH-movement in Romance and English. They illuminate a double standard for grammaticality: if a string is ungrammatical in the standard but grammatical in the dialect, is it grammatical or ungrammatical? For example, one hears frequently "grammatical in northern working-class English" but very seldom "ungrammatical in northern working-class English" (34). Should notions of grammaticality be more fluid in dialects than in the standard? Should they change along the dialect

continuum? The authors discuss studies of Spanish impersonal *se* constructions, in which the verb agrees in number with its prepositional object (*se alimentaron a las gallinas*). Although stigmatized in the normative manuals, the practice comprises 38% of the samples in the data reported and is used at all registers.

Similarly, examples of *that*-tracing in English (e.g. “Who did you say that likes Bill”), which is categorized as ungrammatical, received a very low rejection rate in a recent American survey (46–47). Data show that a “structure is thus deemed not to belong to the standard language, despite being productive at all sociolinguistic levels” (54). This indicates an arbitrariness in the litmus test of “native speaker intuition.” Some L1 intuitions are acceptable; others are not. The authors also point out that the putative naturalism in L1 judgments themselves may be contaminated by a retrofitting of acceptability based on a normative rule that the L1 speaker learned in school. Grammaticality is not always judged empirically, but by an a priori notion of standard that arbitrarily excludes some variations and accepts others. Grammaticality is thus “ultimately defined by fiat” (54).

Ch. 3 makes excellent use of the concept of grammatical virus, “a device that can read grammatical structure and affect it” (58). They illustrate this with convincing examples of hypercorrection in French (strengthening of postvocalic /l/, spelling pronunciation, /h/-dropping, and erratic and intrusive liaison), along with intrusive intervocalic /d/ in Spanish. They illuminate cases where normative intervention has generated phenomena that eventually pass as a natural part of the syntax. An excellent example is French participle-object agreement, which “is licensed by a virus and hence is primarily an epiphenomenon of standardization” (89). The authors indicate Clément Marot as the instigator of the virus in 1538 and see him as a kind of syntactic Typhoid Mary. Even Maurice Grevisse regards it as artificial, and it is certainly further complicated by the prescriptive nonagreement of *laisser* and *faire* as past participles. They also include forced nonstranding of prepositions in English, which has generated doubling (e.g. “10 stores from which to sell from,” p. 75). Viruses are blind to larger structural contexts. Extremely localized, they produce phenomena that problematize the integrity of a unified grammar.

Ch. 4 illuminates the dynamics of language change that also contravene the generativist model. Nonstandardized languages do not exhibit a consciousness of clear language boundaries; their speakers conceive instead of “pools of linguistic resources” (109). Similarly, the authors note three distinct parametric permutations for WH-movement in French, which would necessitate, in the generativist paradigm, three distinct grammars; the authors prefer to see these instead as “a totality of linguistic resources” (152) deployed differently in different social spaces. They hold that systemic change is gradual, not sudden, as is held in the generativist view. They support this with diachronic data on enclisis of Spanish *le* on preterite verb forms and hold that the abruptness assumption is “covertly ideological” (117). They also see phonetic change as related to social factors and effectively argue that so-called endogenous phonetic change must be propelled by exogenous speaker-based social influences.

Ch. 5 shifts abruptly into a sociological focus. Having related standardization to hierarchy, the authors then discuss recent phenomena of social mobility and blurring of class distinction in the US and UK. They also include postmodern convolutions of high and low culture. They see a persistence of elitism into current democracy that has replaced older aristocratic modes with newer managerial ones that feign popular social awareness while maintaining socioeconomic stratification. A “caste-based” system in the UK gives way to an “elective oligarchy” (205).

The authors hold that no substantive changes have taken place recently in the distribution of wealth and income in the UK and US, and that economic differences have actually been widening rather than narrowing. There have been, however, “very important symbolic social changes” (180) that serve as simulacra of democracy. This has generated a form of “downward leveling,” in which fashion transgresses former class boundaries. This is clearly visible in phenomena such as reverse chic (the upper bourgeoisie wearing distressed jeans) and also in modes of interpersonal interaction and speech register, where one sees fashionable modes of “informalization” (191). They note a corresponding increased glottalizing in RP (Received Pronunciation): “It has become unfashionable to flaunt a privileged background in the form of a ‘public school’ accent” (196); thus cultivated speakers will ironize their accents in an act of apology for class. They see “an ideological framework that implicitly undermines the conventional standard ideology ... and yet it nevertheless appears to be ideological in character” (206).

In this context, the authors discuss an odd and nonhomogenous leveling phenomenon: the use of supralocal forms that are not standard. In Tyneside, for instance, the regional variant of /o/ is [ø:]; the variant for the north of England is [o:], while the standard is [ou] or [əu]. However, [ø:] is yielding to [o:], and not to the standard. This is a phenomenon of not wanting to sound local, but not wanting to sound standard either. The authors term this “leveling as anti-standardization.” They see a “recession of localized forms in favour of more widely distributed (but not standard) features” (199).

Ch. 6 expands the study further into the political economy of language. The authors compare the UK and France from the perspective of centralized statist government and official language academies. They see linguistic centralization originating with the prescriptive *Académie française* and continuing to the *Loi Toubon* of 1994, which suppressed anglicisms in official documents: “in sharp contrast to the UK, the French governing class has a vested interest in maintaining in state schools teaching methods that emphasize the transmission of the canon, including its linguistic element” (217). In France, political and linguistic centralization has leveled pronunciation and limited regional variation to style and lexicon. The authors invoke the “totemic character of the language ... the French language is an institution in a way that other standard languages are not” (228). In the UK, however, a more pluralist ideology allows more linguistic variation.

The correlations proposed by Armstrong & Mackenzie may seem overextended and tenuous to some readers. Nonetheless, the authors very effectively demonstrate

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the social contingency of grammaticality and standardization and their relation to the dynamics of power in postwar capitalism, which has generated a freeplay of class signifiers, a convoluting and even carnivalization of high and low, creating a paradoxical and simultaneous obfuscation and instantiation of class. Further work could include the studies of Peter Stallybrass & Allon White in *The politics and poetics of transgression* (1986) and those of Pierre Bourdieu in *Language and symbolic power* (1991), which could help illuminate how symbolic mobility itself reinforces stratification. Bourgeois anxieties create a covert prestige of mobile class markers, a delicate interplay of *différence* that controls the language of fashion. “Leveling as anti-standardization” could also be viewed in this context. The empowered class is adept at manipulating such symbols so as to most subtly allude to status. (The Swiss author Max Frisch once said that Americans can show their wealth even in a bathing suit.) Subtleties of syntax, lexicon, and pronunciation can be likewise manipulated.

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Gerard Van Herk’s *What is sociolinguistics?* is the first in Wiley-Blackwell’s “Linguistics in the world” series, which features textbooks that assume little prior knowledge in introducing foundational topics of language. Accordingly, Van Herk’s text provides firm sociolinguistic footing for beginning students. Readers with no previous knowledge in sociolinguistics will have little trouble following, as Van Herk explains technical terms in clear lay language and illustrates with well-chosen examples that do not presuppose familiarity with concepts presented. Beyond its informative value, Van Herk’s entertaining prose makes this an enjoyable read. The book is sprinkled with personal anecdotes that are funny and relatable, and help make it accessible to the most beginning student.