

## WRITTEN STANDARD AND SPOKEN STANDARD

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1. The object of my article is *standard* language. Standard language is a specific sort of human language, the origin of which is dependent both on natural circumstantial development and on human efforts (engineering).

In this article I make an attempt to describe the relation of the written standard to the spoken one<sup>1</sup>. I take historical patterns of what we call standard languages and try to determine some rules of their development.

2. THE WRITTEN STANDARD IS PRIOR TO THE SPOKEN. It is widely accepted that the development of a standard language begins with the selection of a dialect for the future standard<sup>2</sup>. This is the period of every developing standard language when spoken dialects make a strong impact on script. However, after a dialect is selected and a written form gets standardized more and more, the opposite direction of influence usually takes place: the written language begins to have an impact on speech, corrections of speech are made according to the written form. Thus, we can speak (a) about the strong influence of *spoken* language on the written one in the period of *pre-standardization* and (b) about the evident impact of *written* language on the spoken one during the period of *standardization*.

In accordance with this model many scholars maintain that any standard language is primarily a written code. Jaap van Marle writes about the Dutch standard: "The standard language functioned primarily as a written code."<sup>3</sup> Dick Leith expressed his ideas on the English standard in the following way: "the concept of standard English makes most sense when we are referring to

<sup>1</sup> Similar issues are also discussed in the article by Rūta Birštonaitė: "Anglų, lietuvių ir slovakų šnekamųjų kalbų istorijos" (Histories of English, Lithuanian and Slovak Spoken Standards), which will be published in *Archivum Lithuanicum* 3, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Einar Haugen, *The Ecology of Language*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1972, 252.

<sup>3</sup> Jaap van Marle, "Dialect versus standard language: nature versus culture", *Taming the Vernacular. From Dialect to Written Standard Language*, ed. Jenny Cheshire, Dieter Stein, London, New York: Longman, 1997, 14.

the written word.”<sup>4</sup> Einar Haugen says: “It is a significant and probably crucial requirement for a standard language that it be written.”<sup>5</sup> John Earl Joseph claims: “much of what we think of as ‘standard spoken’ language entails complete or partial retransferral from the visual channel.”<sup>6</sup>

We can come up with a linguistic rule that any standard (written) language supposedly begins at a historical moment, when one version of written language takes over the competing ones. In other words, this happens when a speech society chooses one written form as the best for its needs; when the prestige of that written language overcomes the prestige of all other competing varieties.

Thus, *prestige* is no doubt one of the catalysts that enables a written standard to maintain a relative stability and importance. Only after the prestige of written norms gains power does the spoken language receive a model to shape its standard form after.

Haugen depicts a theoretical model of the origin of a spoken standard: “the written standard has been influential in shaping new standards of speech. This is not to say that writing has always brought them into being, but rather to say that new norms have arisen that are an amalgamation of speech and writing. This can of course take place only when the writing is read aloud, so that it acquires an oral component” (Haugen 1972, 247). Thus, according to Haugen the spoken standard is a combination of written standard and speech. The impact direction *written standard* → *spoken standard* seems to be evident. Historically it is crucial that the spoken standard is almost always a follower, an imitator of the written standard.

3. INTERDIALECT THEORY. Nevertheless there are scholars who speak about the interdialect nature of a spoken standard. E.g. in Akhmanova’s Russian Dictionary of Linguistic Terms *interdialect* is described as “Диалект, служащий средством междиалектного общения” (a dialect, which

<sup>4</sup> Dick Leith, *A Social History of English*, London, Boston, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge et Kegan Paul, 1983, 33–34.

<sup>5</sup> Einar Haugen, *The Ecology of Language*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1972 (1966), 246.

<sup>6</sup> John Earl Joseph, *Eloquence and Power. The Rise of Language Standards and Standard Languages*, London: Frances Pinter (Publishers), 1987, 39.

serves as a means of interdialect communication).<sup>7</sup> In other words, it would seem that interdialect is a standardized spoken variety which has not undergone the influence of a written standard.

Other Russian scholars also apply interdialect theory to their research. For instance, A. G. Shirokova and G. P. Neshchimenko describe the origin of the Czech standard: “Боязнь расшатать норму образцового литературного языка XVI в. не позволила Й. Добровскому и его последователям опереться на живой разговорный язык, хотя, вероятно, в конце XVIII в. уже существовал интердиалект, который впоследствии перерос рамки интердиалекта и в настоящее время, в XX в., проявляет тенденцию стать общенародным нелитературным разговорным языком (obecná čeština).”<sup>8</sup> First, the authors speak about the interdialect which *was not* based on any written standard in the eighteenth century; secondly, this interdialect appears to be the common (standard) spoken language of the whole Czech nation at present.

The question has to be posed whether there is any theoretical possibility of transforming a dialect into an ‘interdialect’ under the impact of any spoken variety (not under the influence of a written standard). Haugen claims: “There is some analogy between the rise of [...] spoken standards and that of pidgin or creole languages [...]. The latter comprise elements of the structure and vocabulary of two or more languages, all oral. They have usually a low social value, compared to the oral standards, but the process of origin is comparable” (Haugen 1972, 247). It means that pidginization of a language (languages) is a process similar to the formation of a spoken standard, except that spoken standard language is based on the written standard, while pidgin takes its form from the spoken one.

In *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics* the term *pidgin* is defined as “a simplified form of speech as a medium of trade, or through other extended but limited contact, between groups of speakers who have no other language in common: e.g.

<sup>7</sup> Ольга Сергеевна Ахманова, *Словарь лингвистических терминов*, Москва: Советская энциклопедия, 1966, 179.

<sup>8</sup> А. Г. Широкова, Г. П. Нещименко, “Становление литературного языка чешской нации”, *Национальное возрождение и формирование славянских литературных языков*, Москва: Наука, 1978, 28.

the simplified forms of English, French, or Dutch which are assumed to be the origin of creoles in the West Indies.”<sup>9</sup> True, these pidgin (creole) languages were shaped under the influence of spoken (not written) forms of European languages, but it is evident that only those spoken languages which were prestigious enough and which were supported by a prestigious written (standard) counterpart could make such an impact. A model spoken language carried over the prestige of an influential, prestigious written language. Again, prestige appears to be important and probably the most crucial factor in the determination of the formation of pidgin (creole) languages. Thus, it is very difficult to find any theoretical basis for accepting Shirokova’s and Neshchimenko’s attitude that the Czech language had formed (chosen?) a spoken interdialect before the standard written language could emerge (or that it could have emerged independently of a written standard).

I can define a rule that, for a spoken language to become a standard (standardized) one, the other contact language (be it written or spoken) must have reached the status of a prestigious variety. *Spoken standard* language is most often shaped under the influence of the written standard. In support of this statement I will quote another Russian linguist L. N. Smirnov, who wrote about the Slovak standard language that “своеобразная языковая формация интердиалектного характера [...] складывалась в Западной Словакии в XVI-XVIII вв. на базе чешского литературного языка и местных словацких говоров. Этот ‘культурный язык’ (‘западнословацкий культурный интердиалект’) выступал в наддиалектной функции, употреблялся в среде словацкой интеллигенции (сначала в разговорной, а затем и в письменной форме).”<sup>10</sup> The existence of this Slovak interdialect (preceding the written standard) seems possible only if Czech written and spoken standards had had a prestige influential enough to impact on the natural development of the spoken Slovak language.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Matthews, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 281.

<sup>10</sup> Л. Н. Смирнов, “Формирование словацкого литературного языка в эпоху национального возрождения (1780-1848)”, *Национальное возрождение и формирование славянских литературных языков*, Москва: Наука, 1978, 104.

For sixteenth and seventeenth century Lithuanian, Zigmas Zinkevičius claimed that “iš ano meto LDK raštų kalbos, atmetę autorių gimtųjų šnektų elementus ir tą įvairavimą, kuris susijęs su ekstralingvistika, galime retrospektyviniu metodu nesunkiai rekonstruoti dvi minėtas antdialektines formacijas – šnekamuosius interdialektus.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, Zinkevičius also presupposes the existence of interdialect formations before any Lithuanian standard language emerged. Haugen, in describing the history of the Danish standard language, depicted an opposite chronology: “the new written norm [of Danish] became the basis of a supralocal speech norm that eventually grew into standard spoken Da[nish]”<sup>12</sup>. Theoretically Haugen’s opinion on the Danish spoken standard is much more acceptable than Zinkevičius’ view on the Lithuanian interdialekts.

**4. THE TIME OF EMERGENCE OF A SPOKEN STANDARD.** Some scholars believe that a spoken standard emerges approximately at the same time as the written one does (or with only a brief delay thereafter). A representative of this attitude is John Honey who says: “a standard variety of English, both spoken and written, was recognised as existing before the end of the sixteenth century.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, he claims that standard spoken language was in existence by the end of the sixteenth century. Additionally he explains that standard spoken English was called by different names, e.g. *King’s English* in 1553, *Queen’s English* in 1592, *common dialect* in 1619 (Honey 1997, 76, 78). The symbolic beginning of standard written English is the year 1417,<sup>14</sup> and we can see that Honey finds standard spoken English approximately one century after the written one had emerged. In Honey’s words: “The influence of London speech on the emergence of what was coming to be thought of as a standard way of *pronouncing* English was much slower, but even so, it is clear that by the first half of the sixteenth century ‘there was already a clear idea that there was a correct way of pronouncing

<sup>11</sup> Zigmas Zinkevičius, “Dar kartą dėl lietuvių XVI–XVII a. raštų kalbos kilmės”, *Baltistica* 24(2), 1988, 201.

<sup>12</sup> Einar Haugen, *The Scandinavian Languages*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976, 325.

<sup>13</sup> John Honey, *Language is Power. The Story of Standard English and its Enemies*, London, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1997, 75.

<sup>14</sup> John H. Fisher, *The Emergence of Standard English*, Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996, 122.

English” (Honey 1997, 73). Honey tends to see the beginning of written and spoken standards relatively close to each other in time.

A similar attitude prevails in the work of Joseph M. Williams who claims that “By 1650, the velar spirant [[x]] seems to have disappeared entirely—in standard London English.”<sup>15</sup> This means that the author has no doubts about *the existence of a standard spoken (London) English by the middle of the seventeenth century*. He states further: “The voiceless spirant was very likely lost to Standard London English at least by the end of the sixteenth century” (Williams 1975, 351). Williams seems to be certain that two hundred years after the emergence of written standard English its spoken (London) counterpart is present.

Honey and Williams were not theoretically investigating the issue of a spoken standard. They had other goals and their assumptions about the beginning of a spoken standard are not substantially discussed. What they call *Standard English* is at most a prestigious (i.e. gaining in prestige) spoken dialect.

Many other historians of the English language claim that it was only the end of the eighteenth century (or even the nineteenth century) that saw an emergence of standard spoken English. For instance: “Until the end of the eighteenth century, everyone in England spoke a local dialect. Pronunciation was considered an inherent trait” (Fisher 1996, 147). Van Marle makes similar claims about standard Dutch: “the language that was standardized and cultivated was by and large a written language. For centuries, to put it differently, standard Dutch was an ‘unspoken language’ [...]. It was only in the course of the nineteenth century that a *spoken* standard gradually developed” (van Marle 1997, 15). Thus, these scholars disagree with Honey and Williams and claim that there was a long period in standard language history with no spoken standard.

Different European languages chose a dialectal basis for their written standards in different periods. The origins of some standards lay in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, e.g. Danish, Dutch, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish. Users of other standard languages made

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<sup>15</sup> Joseph M. Williams, *Origins of the English Language. A Social and Linguistic History*, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Singapore: The Free Press, 1975, 335.

their dialect selection much later, during the period of Romanticism or even afterwards: Belorussian, Bulgarian, Estonian, Faroese, Finnish, Croatian, Lithuanian, Nynorsk (New Norwegian), Serbian, Slovak, Slovene, Ukrainian. Such different origins make it possible to discern two groups of European standard languages according to the time of selection of a dialect: *early* or *late selection*.

Returning to the ideas of Fisher, van Marle, and others, a rule can be formulated: languages of early dialect selection had a long period (several centuries) of written standard with no spoken standard. Their spoken standards were gradually developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

On the other hand, standard languages of late dialect selection did not as yet have spoken standard. It is assumed that final dialect selection for the Lithuanian written standard was accomplished at the end of the nineteenth century. During that century a lack of appreciation of the concept of a spoken standard is often evident. For instance, Lowland bishop Juozapas Arnulfas Giedraitis (ca. 1757–1838) declared in 1813 that everyone should write in the Highland Lithuanian dialect but pronunciation may be kept Lowland: authorizing people to write in one dialect and read in other means carelessness about the uniformity of speech, about the spoken standard as well.<sup>16</sup> Lithuanian standard language engineers of the nineteenth century, Simonas Daukantas (1793–1864) and Jurgis Ambraziejus Pabrėža (1771–1849), did not express any understanding of a spoken standard.<sup>17</sup> Even such a late formulator of standard Lithuanian as Kazimieras Jaunius (1848–1908) modeled a standard written Lithuanian that would have permitted everyone to read it in their own dialect. This attitude also demonstrates a lack of awareness of the nature of a spoken standard.

Lithuanian, though, began to develop its spoken standard very soon after the society had conceived an extant written standard. There is some historical evidence noted by Petras Jonikas to support this: “J. Tumas sakosi nuo 1888 metų,

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Giedrius Subačius, *Žemaičių bendrinės kalbos idėjos. XIX amžiaus pradžia*. Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidybos institutas, 1998, 210.

<sup>17</sup> Giedrius Subačius, “Three Models of Standard Written Lithuanian Language in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: J. A. Pabrėža, J. Čiulda, S. Daukantas”, *Lituanus* 43(1), 1997, 24.

susidurdamas su inteligentais, ėmęs kalbėti rašomąja kalba”<sup>18</sup>. Also: in 1898 an anonymous writer (signature A.J.) explains: “daug geriau būtų, jei kiekvienas kunigas lietuvis gerai išsimokytų rašomąją kalbą ir ta kalba visur skelbtų Dievo žodį, nesirūpindamas išlaikyti vietinės parapijiečių tarmės ypatybių” (Jonikas 1987, 339–340). This means that those people tried to adapt their speech to the written form, to the written standard. Further, the distance in time between the emergence of standard written and standard spoken language is only a decade or less, not centuries, as in the case of early dialect selection languages.

The generalizing rule runs as follows: although the emergence of a written standard was either early (Middle Ages, Renaissance) or late (Romanticism and later), i.e. a difference of four or five centuries as between English and Lithuanian, the difference between the formation of the spoken standard varieties in Europe is much less. This means that the spoken standards of all European languages are to be described as quite a new phenomenon.

Yet the question of why it took so long for the early dialect selection languages to form their spoken standards and why the analogous process was so rapid for the late dialect selection ones remains unanswered. Beside the social reasons, an important linguistic reason can be traced as well. The early selection written standards were developed along the pattern of written Latin, a language that possessed only a written (though a prestigious) standard. It took centuries for those languages to develop the idea of a spoken standard. When the late dialect selection languages modeled their standard, they had as a pattern not only written Latin, but also many languages having both written and spoken standards to look to. Imitation of the developed idea of a spoken standard was a much easier process than the creation of the idea itself; this is why it went much more smoothly.

**5. THE STRUCTURE OF A SPOKEN STANDARD.** Thus, historically a spoken standard is partly a copy of a written standard. We can admit to some extent that it is a translation of the visual variety of language to the oral one. But this would be true only in part.

<sup>18</sup> Petras Jonikas, *Lietuvių kalba ir tauta amžių būvyje. Visuomeniniai lietuvių kalbos istorijos bruožai*. Čikaga: Lituaniistikos instituto leidykla, 1987, 352.



John Honey claims that “The usages of standard English, which were thus available to be spoken and written, constituted an identifiable standard English” (Honey 1997, 75). But other scholars are afraid to lay claim to a similar attitude. Tony Crowley writes: “Honey’s use of ‘standard English’ to refer to both writing and speech, without clarification, is a common error. Its danger lies in the presupposition that there is in some sense standard (written) English and standard (spoken) English and that they share a common structure.”<sup>19</sup> True, most recent research of spoken standard English shows that the structure of the written standard differs partly from the spoken. Crowley admires the research done by Jenny Cheshire and agrees that “the dominance of the model of formal written English constitutes in itself an important reason for our ignorance about the structure and syntax of spoken English” (Crowley 1999, 273). In other words, the spoken standard is partly overshadowed and a differentiated structure for it can be deduced only in part.

**6. CONCLUSION.** Spoken standard language is an amalgam of the written standard and speech (dialect/dialects). Hence, a certain part of the spoken standard is a copy of the written standard, but certain features of that spoken standard are structurally different from its written counterpart. This part of the spoken standard is described by some prescriptivists as substandard speech, even though it is used by educated speakers.

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<sup>19</sup> Tony Crowley, “Curiouser and Curiouser: Falling Standards in the Standard English Debate”, *Standard English. The Widening Debate*, London, New York: Routledge, 1999, 272.

## KOPSAVILKUMS

# Rakstu valodas un runātās valodas standarti

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Šai rakstā mēģinātas noteikt literārās rakstu valodas (rakstu standarta) attieksmes ar runāto literāro valodu (runas standartu), balstoties uz dažādu literāro valodu vēstures piemēriem.

Runātā literārā valoda ir runas sajaukums ar literāro rakstu valodu. Runātais standarts rodas imitējot rakstīto. Tātad noteikta runātās literāras valodas daļa ir rakstu valodas kopija, un vēsturiski runas standarts ir jaunāks un sekundārs.

Vienlaikus zināmas runātās literārās valodas īpatnības strukturāli atšķiras no rakstu valodas. Šīs no rakstu valodas atšķirīgās runas valodas īpatnības daži perskriptīvistī uzskata pat par nestandarta (neliterāru) valodu, kaut arī to lieto izglītoti runātāji.

Atšķirīgas vēstures un daļēji arī atšķirīgas lingvistiskās struktūras dēļ varētu runāt nevis par vienas literārās (standarta) valodas formām: rakstīto un runāto, bet par divām atšķirīgām literārajām valodām vai lingvistiskajām struktūrām un standartiem.