



Cover picture from *Saturday Review of Literature*, June 23, 1951, p. 14.

“Due to hundreds of requests the General has added a creative-writing course to the curriculum . . .”

Workshop “Beyond the tyranny of writing”

26-28 May 2014
Campus Walferdange

Workshop description

In his latest book *Writing and Society* (2013), Florian Coulmas recalls Saussure's (1916) and Bloomfield's (1933) arguments against writing. Turning towards speech as *natural* language and away from comparative and historical philology, Coulmas relates, these two fathers of modern linguistics denounced writing as an object of study for the new linguistics. Writing, Saussure argued, is an imperfect, distorted image of speech and obscures our view of language and its structure. This is what Saussure called the "tyranny of writing" (*la tyrannie de la lettre*): the fact that linguists until then studied language only indirectly through writing and that people considered not their speech but writing the good, or correct language. This perspective subsequently shaped a modern general linguistics that no longer "follow[ed] the written language slavishly" and instead took speech as its primary object.

Writing re-emerged as an object of linguistic inquiry, and as part of living language this time, with work studying literacy and orality as distinct modalities of language and the social effects of writing (e.g. Goody & Watt 1968; Ong 1982). In reaction to this, the New Literacy Studies (Street 1984; Heath 1982; Gee 1990) build up a theoretical programme situating reading and writing in ideologies and social practice while a related field of study focused on literacy as multimodal textual practice (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996). Other strands of research continued to explore conceptual and generic aspects of language use on a continuum of orality and literacy in terms of *Nähe-/Distanzsprache* (Koch & Oesterreicher 1994), *Orat/Literat* (Maas 2010) or continua of biliteracy (Hornberger 1989). A wide range of approaches to literacy are now central in the fields of socio- and psycholinguistics (e.g. Cook & Bassetti 2005; Sebba 2007; Blommaert 2008) even if remaining somewhat peripheral in general linguistics.

Sociolinguistically, the tyranny of writing worked through these scientific paradigms and remained powerful in various everyday language ideologies and hierarchies. Writing has been the primary instrument of language policies and the creation of imagined communities (Anderson 1991) through language *Ausbau* and *Abstand*

(Kloss 1967). Language standards and standard languages have been defined on the basis of writing, introducing fixity and stability in language in contrast to the fluidity and variability of speech. Variation came to be defined as deviation from that written norm and language change as an aberration or degradation from those standard norms. This turned vernacular forms of language such as dialect into “sub-standard” or abnormal language and innovative youth language into degraded versions of the standards. These norms and their ideologies spread through schooling.

The last two decades have seen an increase of research on vernacular or non-standardised forms of language in writing, especially among youth. This development coincides with the emergence of new media and communication technologies such as mobile phones and the Internet which created new – unmonitored and unpoliced – spaces for writing. Such non-orthographic forms of writing (*Andersschreibungen* in German) can be liberating and empowering in the sense that they allow writers to produce writings that break out of the tyranny of writing. These *Andersschreibungen* (alternative literacies) (Schuster & Tophinke 2012) are often multilingual and/or multiscriptal or otherwise distinctive from the conventional monoglot standard.

The two-and-half-day workshop brings together literacy researchers from various traditions to explore issues of (de-)standardization and (re-)vernacularisation in written language. Guided by the notion of “tyranny of writing”, the workshop focuses on the uses and ideologies of vernacular writing from contemporary and historical perspectives in various social settings and diverse cultural and linguistic contexts.

Workshop Programme

Monday, 26 May 2014 (building II, room Vygotsky)

17.00

Words of welcome

Florian Coulmas *German Institute of Japanese Studies, Tokyo*

Chair:

Revisiting the tyranny of writing

Constanze Weth

Jean-Jacques Weber *University of Luxembourg*

Luxembourg's language-in-education policy in limbo: The tension between spoken and written Luxembourgish language use

18.45

Welcoming drink

Tuesday, 27 May 2014 (building VI, room 111)

9.00 – 11.00

Constanze Weth and Kasper Juffermans *University of Luxembourg*

Opening and introduction of the conference

Chair:

Kasper Juffermans

Manuela Böhm *University of Kassel*

The tyranny of dictation: Multilingualism, orthography and school culture at the end of 19th century in France

Ulrich Mehlem *Goethe University Frankfurt*

The tyranny of writing and the German movement of education reform before World War I

11.00 – 11.30

Coffee break

11.30 – 13.00

Melanie Wagner & Luc Belling *University of Luxembourg*

Private literacy then and now: A diachronic analysis of changing practices of written Luxembourgish

Chair:

Gabriele Budach

Mikko Laitinen *Linnaeus University*

"Tyranny of writing" and English corpus linguistics: What to do with the new mediated and vernacular genres?

13.00 – 14.30

Lunch

14.30 – 16.00

Lucas Duane Bernedo *University of Luxembourg*

Orthographic ideological debates in the Balearic Islands: De-standardizing local vernacular(s) in Facebook

Chair:

Daniel Bunčić

Jos Swanenberg *Tilburg University*

Greetings from Braboneger: Linguistic variation in digital communication

16.00 – 16.30

Coffee break

Tuesday, 27 May 2014 – Continued

16.30 – 18.00

David C.S. Li *Hong Kong Institute of Education*

Writing Chinese: A challenge for Chinese and South Asian Hongkongers

Chair:

Ulrich Mehlem

Colette Noyau *University Paris-Nanterre*

Learning to read and write in two languages with different writing systems.
Which ways to biliteracy for Mauritanian primary school students?

19.00

Dinner

Wednesday, 28 May 2014 (building VI, room 111)

9.00 – 10.30

Friederike Lüpke *SOAS, University of London*

The norm as deviation: actual and prescribed literacy and transcription practices in West Africa

Chair:

Mikko Laitinen

Daniel Bunčić *University of Cologne*

How to spell a birch-bark letter in medieval Russia

10.30 – 11.00

Coffee break

11.00 – 12.30

Xuan Wang *Maastricht University*

Engaging with normativity and innovativity: (re)writing Chinese in a global era

Chair:

Melanie Wagner

Gabriele Budach *University of Saarbrücken*

The social meanings of writing in an urban Inuit community

12.30 – 14.30

Poster session with lunch buffet

14.30 – 16.00

Joop van der Horst *Catholic University Leuven*

The rise and fall of a European language culture

Chair:

Constanze Weth

Florian Coulmas *German Institute of Japanese Studies, Tokyo*

Final discussion: Beyond the tyranny of writing

Constanze Weth & Kasper Juffermans *University of Luxembourg*

Closing session and farewell

Abstracts

Florian Coulmas, German Institute of Japanese Studies, Tokyo: *Revisiting the “tyranny of writing”*

The study of language, as the study of any subject, is dependent on writing because the scientific enterprise is. The scientific world view assumes that the things and events that constitute the universe are understandable. Another fundamental assumption is that knowledge accumulates and progresses, that is, that we know more now than people knew in Aristotle’s time. In the absence of writing people are not ignorant, but for science as we understand it, writing is indispensable. It enables scientific insights to be given permanence, separating message from messenger, text from author, judgement from judge, sentence from speaker. And it allows us to critically assess, take issue with, and build on the knowledge of our forebears. This paper discusses the question of what writing means for the study of language, taking as its point of departure Ferdinand de Saussure’s critique of spelling conventions and its consequences for the evolution of modern linguistics. As in other scientific disciplines, in linguistics, too, writing is a major tool. However, what distinguishes the role of writing in linguistics from other fields of scholarship is that it relates to the object of investigation in complex ways concerning both the scientific analysis of language and the social conditions of its use. In literate society it is imperative to understand what the “tyranny of writing” meant for the study of language when Saussure first used this term a century ago, and what it means today.

Jean-Jacques Weber, University of Luxembourg: *Luxembourg’s language-in-education policy in limbo: The tension between spoken and written Luxembourgish language use*

The Luxembourgish school system is one of those that most directly reproduce social inequalities. In this paper, I explore the role that the language-in-education policy and the Luxembourgish language in particular play in these processes. Luxembourgish is a small language that is frequently perceived as endangered and, as a way of defending it, it has been constructed as the language of integration. As in Catalonia, official discourse has changed in response to the accelerated migration of

the 1990s and early 21st century: it has shifted its emphasis from Luxembourgish as national symbol to Luxembourgish as a means of social cohesion and integration (cf. Pujolar 2010). This correlates with an ongoing shift in the perception of Luxembourgish from a primarily oral means of communication to a both spoken and written one.

In this paper I look at the tension between these discourses as it is played out in the area of education. In particular, I analyse a recent language-in-education policy document published by the Ministry of Education and show how it refracts a double discourse that both presents Luxembourgish as iconic of national identity and commodifies it as linguistic capital. This policy seems to have bolstered the position of the Luxembourgish language but has failed to open up new educational spaces for migrant students. The discussion suggests that a more flexible multilingual education would be a better way of moving towards the elusive goal of educational equity in our late modern age of globalization, migration and superdiversity.

Manuela Böhm, University of Kassel: *The tyranny of dictation: Multilingualism, orthography and school culture at the end of 19th century in France*

Le processus de la standardisation et codification de l'orthographe française est à la fin du XVIIIe s. pratiquement achevé. Imposée de manière 'top-down' notamment par l'Académie Française, diffusée et popularisée par les écoles primaires, l'orthographe française entre, dans la deuxième moitié du XIXe s., en époque décisive en ce qui concerne son rôle socioculturelle car elle représente une sorte de « cause nationale », de « grand débat de société » (que les Français adorent jusqu'à présent d'ailleurs). A la fois concept idéologique et pratique scolaire, la dictée devient, dans le contexte scolaire de l'alphabétisation et de l'apprentissage de l'orthographe, à partir des années 1850 le moyen d'entraînement et de contrôle par excellence.

L'exposé, sur la base de dictées faites dans les années 1870 par des enfants des écoles primaires dans différentes régions plurilingues (notamment de la Bretagne, des Pyrénées et du Sud) lors des inspections générales de l'instruction primaire se focalise sur deux aspects : D'une part il est centré sur l'analyse des graphies non-standard réalisées par des élèves plurilingues ; graphies qui reflètent en quelque sorte le processus

d'acquisition du savoir orthographique. D'autre part l'exposé s'intéresse aux attitudes et évaluations linguistiques menées par des inspecteurs générales, qui s'avèrent critiques face à ces graphies non-conformes.

Ulrich Mehlem, *Goethe University Frankfurt: The tyranny of writing and the German movement of education reform before World War I*

While modern linguistics in the last decades of the 19th century removed from their own script based philologist traditions, the 'tyranny of writing' was already under attack in another cultural environment, the German Movement of Education Reform. Beginning with Rudolf Hildebrand's (1867) essay on German language teaching, written language was criticized for being 'cold', 'dead' and 'abstract', not compatible with everyday experience of the dialect speaking students. The systematic approach of grammar was first rejected in the name of language history and the feeling of belonging to a German nation (Gogolin 1994). Under the influence of the psychological language theory of Heymann Steinthal (1871), the famous educational reformer Berthold Otto (Oelkers 2005, Scheibe 1969) called into question the dominance of written language, against which he claimed the pedagogical importance of child language (Kindesmundart) growing naturally from its beginnings to mastery (Otto 1908). The importance of mutual intellectual intercourse between child and adult was also defended in the name of subjectivity and spontaneity which could only be secured by oral language. This did not prevent Otto to use 'Kindesmundart' in writing according to the norms of Standard German, but the priority given to spoken language was seen as a prerequisite of the child oriented pedagogy of the new age. The paper will focus on this 'myth of orality' typical for German Education Reform before World War I but still influential in some concepts of contemporary pedagogical thought (Oelkers 2005).

Melanie Wagner & Luc Belling, University of Luxembourg: *Private literacy – then and now. A diachronic analysis of changing practices of written Luxembourgish*

Luxembourgish is often perceived as a spoken rather than a written language and although this may be true with regard to official domains, this certainly cannot be affirmed for the private domain where Luxembourgish has been written over the last hundred years and its use is growing in the area of the new media. In this paper we will present a comparative study of private literacy practices stemming from two sets of corpora, namely a collection of Second World War letters and a selection of Facebook posts. After considering the medial differences and their implications on literacy events, we will investigate the similarities of content and communicative practices. This diachronic study will provide an insight into the changing ideologies with regard to writing Luxembourgish.

Mikko Laitinen, Linnaeus University: *Tyranny of writing and English corpus linguistics: What to do with the new mediated and vernacular genres?*

This presentation discusses ongoing research that focuses on exploring grammatical variability in advanced L2 uses of English in the expanding circle, i.e. in countries in which English does not have an official role but where it is widely used as a linguistic resource in today's globalized world. This research is corpus-based, and my presentation focuses on the sources of evidence using the notion of "tyranny of writing". For instance, up to today, most of the existing corpus materials from the expanding circle consist of learner corpora which are collections of short written essays collected from institutional settings. They are excellent tools but exclude a wide range of new mediated and vernacular genres. Similarly, the corpora from the inner core varieties of English, i.e. American and British English, contain materials from a variety of formal written genres, covering texts types of news, academic and fiction, etc. This presentation discusses how to make use of these best practices in English corpus linguistics to create a set of corpora of English use in the expanding circle. These new corpora should ideally represent not only formal written genres but also a wide range of vernacular genres, such as

blogs, news-letters, Twitter messages, where English is used, but at the same time, these new sources of evidence should be comparable with the existing corpora in order to ensure diachronic comparisons.

Lucas Duane Bernedo, University of Luxembourg: *Orthographic ideological debates in the Balearic Islands: De-standardizing local vernacular(s) in Facebook*

Recent language policy changes in the Spanish region of the Balearic Islands, where Castilian and Catalan are both official languages, have triggered intense language ideological debates. Part of these changes are an implicit reflection of a linguistic differentiation debate between the Catalan standard and Balearic vernaculars explicitly surfacing in new media. Analysis of Balearic individuals' writing in Facebook show different degrees of acceptance and of challenge to the Catalan written standard along with their arguments and motivations to comply, or not, with the standard. These orthographic ideological debates reveal the Balearic Islands as a remarkable minority language setting in which to analyse ongoing processes of (de-?)standardisation and to explore current shifts in the standard language ideology in the context of late modernity.

Jos Swanenberg, Tilburg University: *Greetings from Braboneger Linguistic variation in digital communication*

The increased use of social media, particularly Internet forums, text messaging and social networking sites, has given dialects new modes of expression. Modern means of communication have triggered freer use of linguistic repertoires, also drawing upon dialects, in writing. Language use on social media and in other online environments has been the subject of investigation in various domains of linguistics and communication studies, but its role in dialect revitalization needs more attention.

Steven Brunswijk, a standup comedian from Tilburg (in Brabant, the Netherlands) uses dialect in his performances, and also does this on Twitter and Facebook. His artist name is Braboneger, the “negroe from Brabant”. He tweets e.g. “heeeeeeeey luitjes, witte gullie wie er op 20 en 21 december in de nieuwe vorst in tilburg buikpènt uitdeelt?? jazeker

ikke ja!!” (hi guys, do you know who will give you a stomach ache in Tilburg’s theatre? Yes, I will, for sure). This text contains remarkable and recognizable dialect features and voices the image the artist is aiming to portray.

David C.S. Li, Hong Kong Institute of Education: *Writing Chinese: A challenge for Chinese and South Asian Hongkongers*

Effective governance cannot take place without a citizenry being reasonably literate in the designated national and/or regional language(s). In Hong Kong, where over 93% of the population is Cantonese-dominant ethnic Chinese (2011 census), the postcolonial language-in-education policy after 1997 came to be known as biliteracy and trilingualism: the ability to read and write Chinese and English, and understand and speak Cantonese, English and Mandarin (Putonghua). This policy has been implemented for over 15 years; research shows that the language learning outcomes of school-leavers and university graduates alike leave much to be desired. Employers’ concerns for their (prospective) employees’ linguistic competence, echoed by educationalists and other commentators (including letters to the editor), are periodically heard and amplified in the local media, print and electronic, in Chinese as well as English.

This paper focuses on the nature of the linguistic challenge for Chinese (majority) and South Asian (SA) Hongkongers (minorities) to develop a grade-relevant level of Chinese literacy. Modern Written Chinese (MWC) is largely based on Mandarin (Putonghua), the national language of China. Cantonese, being a ‘dialect’ (albeit the most prestigious in Greater China), is not part of school literacy and, like other Chinese ‘dialects’, is unworthy to be represented in writing (officially banned in China except the two Special Administrative Regions, Hong Kong and Macao). Such a belief is perpetuated through education. In the process of schooling, vernacular forms are systematically purged and Mandarin-based standard forms hammered into children’s minds. What this means for Cantonese-dominant Hongkongers is that a state of diglossia prevails whereby they cannot write the way they speak. In addition, since ancient times Chinese is written with a logographic, non-alphabetic script, making Chinese characters difficult to learn, and easy to forget. There is some indication that, compared with children whose first language follows an alphabetic script (e.g. Korean), Chinese

children take longer time to develop a norm-relevant level of literacy in their national/regional language. Literacy problems in Greater China are getting more acute in the e-era, when Chinese text consumption and production in all kinds of electronic communication are mediated by e-gadgets and facilitated by various inputting methods. All this explains why Cantonese-dominant Hongkongers, regardless of age groups, have to put up with social stigma or even ridicule when their written Chinese performance is assessed or under scrutiny.

If Chinese Hongkongers find literacy development in their ‘native’ language a problem, one can easily imagine the challenge faced by minority SA Hongkongers who do not use Cantonese as a home language and who have no support for learning written Chinese beyond formal instruction. The paper will present empirical evidence showing why and how a lack of a grade-relevant level of Chinese literacy is a major source of social inequality for SA Hongkongers.

Colette Noyau, University Paris-Nanterre: *Learning to read and write in two languages with different writing systems. How to achieve biliteracy for Mauritanian primary school students?*

In this study we seek to understand the serious problems that Mauritanian pupils face when asked to learn to read and write in French after two years of schooling in Arabic (based on materials of our field study in 2008 - see Noyau 2009). French is the second official language of school, and the language in which scientific and technological subjects are to be taught from year 3 (Mathematics) and year 5 (Science) of schooling on — these subjects will be tested in French at the end of primary school. The other subjects are taught and tested in written Arabic — which is not an L1, although the main vehicular in Mauritania, hassaniyya, is a local spoken variety of Arabic.

We will analyse significant classroom moments in Arabic and in French (from our video recordings and observation notes), written productions of pupils in French, and test sheets from the National Primary exam, in order to reconstruct the cognitive paths possibly followed by the young learners in this environment to enter literacy, and to identify the main factors at the origin of their difficulties (see also Noyau & Mansour 2011). Finally, our analyses lead to suggest changes

in teaching practices and in teacher training to improve learning and transfer of learning between the L1 of schooling and the L2 of schooling.

Friederike Lüpke, SOAS, University of London: *The norm as deviation - actual and prescribed literacy and transcription practices in West Africa*

In this talk, I look at occurring vs. imagined literacies in my current research area, the Casamance region of Southern Senegal, but also draw on a wider West African context of (not) writing. I contrast examples of prescribed and exceptionlessly standardised literacies with examples of grass-root writing, both in Latin-based and Arabic-based scripts. The former follow a long tradition of standardising languages and grapheme inventories and orthographies created till today in the tradition of missionary efforts to translate African languages (and often still by missionaries). Recently, this ideology has been taken up by official bodies for the writing of Arabic and has culminated in the attempt to introduce standardised Ajami writing. The latter get by without such norm-creating activities, and, crucially, are much more widely practised than their standardised counterparts. Motivated by my own practice as a descriptive linguist, I finally illustrate how I aim to counteract prescriptive tendencies in transcription (with myself and language consultants as transcribers) in order to be able to gain a fuller picture of variation rather than eliminating it from the outset.

Daniel Bunčić, University of Cologne: *How to spell a birch-bark letter*

A special feature of the society of Novgorod between the mid-11th and the 15th century is that the art of writing was unusually wide-spread among ordinary people and that their favourite writing material was birch bark. More than a thousand birch-bark letters have been unearthed since 1951. At first researchers were appalled by the bad spelling of many of these letters: Their writers often confused the letter *o* with *ɔ*, and *e* with *ɛ*, which are kept strictly apart in documents on parchment. Nowadays there is no doubt that at least in the 13th century this constituted an orthography of its own. However, it is not clear how this norm came about. The explanation given by Zaliznjak (1986, 2002) fails to explain

why this spelling was not used outside Novgorod. Therefore I propose another solution, according to which the special spelling norm of Novgorod birch-bark letters arose as a hypercorrect imitation of Kievan spelling in consequence of a sound change in the 12th century but subsequently established itself as a local orthography in opposition to the ‘tyrannic’ Kievan norm. Its maintenance in the 13th and 14th centuries probably followed similar mechanisms of identity and differentiation (based on a different medium) as the special orthography of certain Russian internet communities nowadays.

Xuan Wang, Maastricht University: *Engaging with normativity and innovativity: (re)writing Chinese in a global era*

The ‘tyranny of writing’ in the Chinese context can be understood in terms of a ‘monoglot standard’ ideology (Silverstein 1996) emerging from the historical development of an *ortho*-graphic system for encoding and disseminating knowledge that transcends diverse forms of speech and oral practices across China and, more recently, from a series of government-led reform and modernization of Chinese writing (based on Northern Mandarin Putonghua) in building a nation-state. Writing in Chinese, therefore, is a highly normative phenomenon that, on the one hand, invokes perpetual group imagination of ‘Chineseness’ as well as hierarchical social distinctions therein, while on the other hand, produces unequal distribution of literacy resources among different sub-groups and dialect speakers of Chinese. Although ‘dialect writing’ in Chinese is problematic both practically and socially, globalization and the changing patterns of communication in China create opportunities for norm breaking and alternative ways of writing. This presentation will explore two such examples: the revitalization of dialect and dialect writing as ethnopoetics in popular culture, and the invention of ‘Martian language’ as a form of technology-driven ‘supervernaculars’ (Blommaert 2011) in everyday communication. These deliberate efforts in *hetero*-graphic writing at grassroots level illustrate the micro-politics of writing and the ongoing renegotiation of norms in writing practices in contemporary China.

Gabriele Budach, University of Saarbrücken: *The social meanings of writing in an urban Inuit community*

The talk explores the role of writing in literacy practices of urban Inuit in Ottawa/Canada. It draws on data from a four year collaborative ethnographic project conducted in partnership with the Ottawa Inuit Children Centre (OICC) – a community institution catering for the educational needs of urban Inuit. Looking at some of the educational activities carried out in this context, the paper aims to understand the significance of communicative mode choice, notably with regards to writing. The paper explores the differentiated social meanings attached to writing in Inuktitut, a term representing a group of indigenous languages for which writing was introduced by white missionaries gradually since the 1700 and for which no standardised written variety exists up to now.

The focus here is on two types of activities which demonstrate contrasting social functions of writing; the first was “Photovoice”, a state funded project involving photographic exploration of the environment, discussion and story writing – the result of which traveled as an exhibition across various locations in white Ottawa neighborhoods. In this context, Inuktitut writing served to “showcase Inuitness” to Western mainstream society, partly through the display of syllabic writing. The second example was an Inuit-designed and Inuit-led activity, called “The Antique Modern Road Show”, which emerged from a working group including Inuit migrant women, literate in English and Inuktitut, from various parts of the Arctic. Centering on talk and the sharing of individual experience, the activity emphasized objects as an essential semiotic resource and as a means to connect people, knowledge and territories. Writing was conspicuously absent from this activity.

Building on this ethnographic evidence, I critically reexamine the premises of structuralist anthropology from a post-structuralist, post-colonial and migration studies perspective. First, as urban Inuit today make distinctive and context-dependent use of the script, opting for or against it in accordance with situationally appropriate worldviews, a perspective which models the transition from pre-literate to literate societies as historically consecutive seems no longer valid. Second, for Inuit practices of writing and their proclaimed social benefits remain intimately tied to the experience of colonialism and its disruptive, culturally destructive effects. Third, the so-called higher techniques of

the intellect, such as abstraction, causality, emotional distance, objectifying historicity, much celebrated by scholars such as Goody, Ong or Havelock seem to have little value for Inuit in our study. The context of migration and local community building seems to require and value instead the personal, the sensual-concrete, the situated and the narrative. These strategies which value material objects rather than the mode of writing are used to connect spatially distant resources in a horizontal fashion, abstaining from any form of unifying, historicizing ideology or attempt to emphasize a hierarchical view of social relations. This approach ultimately resides in an Inuit worldview and the common effort to maintain the connection to “nuna” – the Inuit land which transcends Western notions of time, space, and territoriality – a view that continues to co-exist and thrive alongside Western views of measured time, space and politically defined territory.

Joop van der Horst, Catholic University Leuven: *Rise and fall of a European language culture*

Europe’s standard languages are the product of Renaissance ideologies of language that originated around the 15th and 16th centuries. Renaissance ideologies of language, however, are broader than the idea of a standard, and also affect our ideas regarding for instance translation, language teaching and learning, language change, the relation between written and spoken language, etc. Fundamental in Renaissance language ideology is (1) focus on visible aspects of language (part and parcel of the general Renaissance focus on visible aspects of reality) i.e. on writing, reading, letters, orthography, etc.; and (2) a tendency to split, to divide and to subdivide, resulting in well-defined and clear-cut boundaries. Consequence of the latter is the idea of *language* as a count noun, and of a clear distinction between “good” and “bad” language, i.e. the concept of “faults” in language.

However, Renaissance language culture doesn’t last forever. All aspects of it, including the very idea of standard languages, are now (i.e., the 20th and 21st centuries) in decline and we see the emergence of quite another set of ideologies about language.

The fact that currently throughout Europe standard languages are strongly under pressure is in itself no reason to assume they will disappear. This tide may very well turn again. However, if we take into

account various other aspects of this language culture, it appears that after centuries of flourishing standard languages are currently either fading away, losing their attractiveness, or otherwise meeting growing opposition. This suggests that the current decline of the standard languages is a structural rather than temporary matter. The turning point, I argue, should be situated as early as the period of 1860-1890.

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