

Processes of Standardisation

Standardisation is generally thought of as a process that involves four stages. We need not think of them as being chronological. Indeed, the process of standardisation is an *on-going* one, and a whole range of forces are at work.

Selection

Variability is a fact of life for almost all languages. There are different regional dialects, class dialects, situational varieties. Standardisation represents an attempt to curtail, minimise if not eliminate this high degree of variability. The easiest solution seems to be to pick (although not arbitrarily) one of these varieties to be elevated to the status of the standard.

Acceptance

The 'acceptance' by the community of the norms of the variety selected over those of rival varieties, through the promotion, spread, establishment and enforcement of the norms. This is done through institutions, agencies, authorities such as schools, ministries, the media, cultural establishments, etc. In fact, the standard language comes to be regarded not just as the best form of the language, but as the language itself (*eg* consider the claim that Mandarin *is* Chinese in Singapore). The other varieties are then dialects, which tend implicitly to get stigmatised as lesser forms, associated with the not too highly regarded people, who are seen as less educated, slovenly, uncouth, etc.

Elaboration

For the variety selected to represent the desired norms, it must be able to discharge a whole range of functions that it may be called upon to discharge, including abstract, intellectual functions. Where it lacks resources to do so, these are developed. Thus a standard language is often characterised as possessing 'maximal variation in function, minimal variation in form'

Codification

The norms and rules of grammar, use, etc. Which govern the variety selected have to be formulated, and set down definitively in grammars, dictionaries, spellers, manuals of style, texts, etc.

Haugen (1972) summarised this in the form of a table.

	<i>Form</i>	<i>Function</i>
<i>Society</i>	Selection	Acceptance
<i>Language</i>	Codification	Elaboration

Table 1 (from Haugen 1972: 110)

Haugen, E. (1972), 'Dialect, language, nation', in J. B. Pride and Janet Holmes (eds), *Sociolinguistics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin), pp.97-111. (Originally published in *American Anthropologist* 68 (1966): 922-935.)

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