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"The Ideology of the Standard Language"

Course Title : sociolinguistics

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2024/2025

The ideology of the standard language

Languages like English, French, and Spanish have standard forms that affect how people think about their own language and language in general. People who speak these languages live in cultures where a strong belief in the standard form shapes their attitudes, even if they aren't aware of it. They often think their ideas about language are just common sense.

Standardization is the process of enforcing uniformity in language, aiming for consistent pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary among all speakers. The specific variant chosen doesn't matter for standardization, as long as one is selected. However, the decision is influenced by external social and political factors, which form part of the standard language ideology.

It's not possible for a language to be completely the same everywhere. Written language, like in books, is usually more consistent, but spoken language changes more. To keep a standard form of a language, people need to work on it, and schools help with this. A standard language is helpful, just like using the same units to measure things, because it makes communication easier between people in different places.

A standard language is also needed because it's used in many parts of life, such as school, government, and business. The more a language is used in different situations, the more important it is to

keep it the same. In history, when trade and business started growing, people also began to create standard forms of language. Before that, in the Middle Ages, people spoke in very different ways depending on where they lived.

the advantages and disadvantages of the standard language ideology

Advantages:

- Makes communication easier between people from different regions.
- Brings people together by creating a common language.
- Speaking the standard language can open more career doors.

Disadvantages:

- Other dialects and languages can be seen as less important.
- People who speak non-standard languages may be unfairly judged.
- It can limit creativity by focusing on just one form of the language.

Correctness and authority

One important effect of language standardization is that people start believing in a "correct" or ideal form of language. This belief leads to the idea that it's acceptable to treat people differently, like in hiring, based on whether they use the standard form of language or not. While discrimination based on race, social class, religion, or gender is now seen as unacceptable, it's still okay to discriminate based on language. People often don't realize that language can reflect these other social differences. For example, someone using non-standard language may come from a minority ethnic group or a lower social class, so language discrimination often leads to discrimination against these groups.

The belief in the "correctness" of language plays a big role in maintaining the standard language. This belief is often opposed to what many linguists teach, which is that language belongs to every native speaker and is developed in the mind, making it a personal, cognitive process. In a standard language culture, however, language is seen as belonging to a select group of people who have the authority to set the rules for everyone else. This idea was even expressed by writer Jonathan Swift in 1712, who believed that a group of people should be appointed to "fix" the English language and make it a permanent, uniform structure.

The education system plays an important role in spreading the standard form of a language. People often believe that children go to school to “learn English,” even though, before school, they already know how to speak English and understand its grammar and sounds without being directly taught. In school, children mainly learn how to read and write, and they learn to do so using the standard form of the language. So, people think that school teaches children their native language, but what is really taught is the standard written form, guided by teachers and experts who are seen as having special knowledge. This belief is part of the standard language idea, where people think the formal version with all its rules is the true form of the language.

Prestige

The social value or respect given to a particular language variety or dialect by members of a community. Received Pronunciation (RP) in British English is often seen as having high prestige because it is associated with education, power, and the upper class.

In practice, more than one thing influences which language variety is chosen as the standard. Two important factors are authority and prestige. People often feel that one way of speaking sounds “better” than another, especially if it is used by higher social classes. This shows that social power and respect play a big role. Some groups in society have more authority, and this affects which language forms get accepted. So, social and political factors deeply influence the process.

The opposite of prestige is stigma. When a way of speaking is linked to lower social classes, it is often looked down on by the wider society. These forms are usually not accepted in schools. In fact, some urban dialects are seen as so “wrong” that people even say their speakers don’t know how to speak properly. A school inspector’s comment in 1925 shows how strong the belief in the standard language can be.

However, prestige is not a simple idea. People don’t always agree on which groups or ways of speaking deserve respect. In

fact, the language of the highest social classes often doesn't become the standard. Studies show that elite dialects usually fade away. For example, in Britain, the way the royal family speaks sounds outdated, and younger royals speak more like the middle class. In the U.S., rich people in Boston or New York had no influence on the standard American accent. Instead, the standard form usually comes from people who need to communicate clearly in public jobs, like businesspeople, lawyers, and journalists. Some of them may copy a group they admire, but the standard language isn't just taken from the very rich or aristocrats.

Ligitimacy

When a standard form of a language is created, taught through schools, written in grammar books and dictionaries, and used in many areas of life, it often causes other ways of speaking to be seen as less valuable. The standard form is viewed as the “correct” or “proper” version, while other forms are seen as “incorrect” or even “bad.” People may call these other varieties non-standard or sub-standard. Historians of language helped give the standard form its importance, especially because it's often linked to the pride and history of a country or empire. The language becomes a symbol of national identity.

In the end, every standard language needs to be seen as legitimate and must be supported by rules and authority. There is often a common belief that the language is getting worse over time and that people are not using it properly. Complaints like this help keep the standard language idea strong in people's minds. In cultures where standard language is very important, people believe that if the standard form isn't carefully protected, the language will fall apart. They don't trust everyday speakers to preserve it; they believe it must be watched over by experts or authorities.

References :

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