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## The German neo-standard in a Europa context

### Abstract (Deutsch)

In verschiedenen europäischen Ländern ist in letzter Zeit die Frage diskutiert worden, ob sich zwischen der traditionellen Standardsprache und den regionalen bzw. Substandardvarietäten ein neuer Standard („Neo-Standard“) herausgebildet hat, der sich nicht nur strukturell vom alten unterscheidet, sondern sich auch durch ein anderes Prestige auszeichnet als dieser: er wirkt (im Vergleich) informeller, subjektiver, moderner, kreativer, etc. Im Beitrag werden einige wesentliche Eigenschaften solcher Neo-Standards diskutiert und ihre Entwicklung als Folge der „Demotisierung“ (Mattheier 1997) der Standardsprache beschrieben.

### Abstract (English)

Sociolinguists from various European countries have recently discussed the question of whether a new standard (“neo-standard“) has established itself between the traditional standard variety of language on the one hand, and regional (dialects, regiolects, regional standards) and sub-standard varieties on the other. These new standards differ not only structurally but also in terms of their prestige: they appear to be informal, subjective, modern, creative, etc. while the traditional standards are based on an opposite set of values such as tradition, formality and closeness to the written word. In this contribution I discuss some key properties of these neo-standards and identify them as one of the consequences of the “demotisation” (Mattheier 1997) of the standard variety.

## 1. Introduction

In various European languages, recent decades have seen the establishment of ‘informal’ standards which are distinct from the traditional standards in terms of structure and attitudes: the new standards are considered to be ‘more relaxed’, ‘more personal’, ‘more subjective’, ‘more creative’, ‘more modern’, etc. These new standard varieties are compatible with, and might be seen as one of the symbolic manifestations of Giddens’ (1991) concept of late modernity as an age in which traditional values and authorities are no longer accepted; yet they also reflect other central features of late modernity, including a media culture which creates and disseminates ways of speaking characterised both by supra-regionality (even globalization) and informality. It is possible that the new standards will finally replace the traditional standards, but for the time being, the two standards co-exist. Just like the traditional standard varieties, the neo-standards have an oral and a written variant, but the relationship between the two is fundamentally different.

The Italian sociolinguist Gaetano Berruto has coined the term ‘neo-standards’ for these sociolinguistic developments (first in Berruto 1987). As the neo-standard is not simply the outcome of structural change in the traditional standard, but also affects its status and prestige, we are dealing with what Coupland (2014) has called “socio-linguistic change”.

The old and the new standard share an indifference to regional variation, and they are both based on the idea of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ (as well as ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’) language. In this sense, the “standard ideology” (Kristiansen 1998) remains in place, i.e. the idea that there should be a non-regionalised way of speaking which is accepted by everybody and used nationwide. However, while for the traditional standards maximal distance from the dialects is definitional, what makes the neo-standard a neo-standard is its distance itself from the traditional standard.

The emergence and spread of neo-standards should be seen as independent from the second major sociolinguistic innovation in contemporary European societies, which is the establishment of ethnic speech forms (due to immigration). Various terms have been suggested for the latter innovation, from “multi-ethnolects” to “contemporary urban vernaculars” or “nouveau français”. The neo-standards also need to be distinguished from regionalised forms of the standard language (“regional standards”) with a dialectal substrate, and from historical substandard varieties due to imperfect standard acquisition by the working classes (“français populaire”, “italiano popolare”, etc.).

Neo-standards have been described and discussed particularly for Italy (Cerruti et al.), Denmark (“new Copenhagen standard”; cf. Kristiansen 2001), Belgium (*tussentaal*, cf. Grondelaers/van Hout/Speelman 2011), England (cf. the much disputed *Estuary English*, cf. Altendorf 2003) and Germany (cf. Spiekermann/Auer 2011). Similar trends can doubtless be found elsewhere (cf. the overviews in Kristiansen/Coupland 2011). Admittedly, these developments have not followed the same lines everywhere in Europe. In some countries, institutions such as schools still cling to the traditional, non-variable, codified standard to a much larger extent than in others. The following thoughts are inspired by research on the Italian neo-standard and by the work of Kristiansen and Coupland, mainly on northern Europe, but will include the German perspective as well.

## 2. Neo-standards and the demoticisation of the standard language

Up to the end of the 19th century, and in many regions of Europe well into the 20th century, the spoken language was identical with dialects for the majority of the population; only a small elite mastered and used the national standard variety in speaking. For this elite group, it was a symbol of national belonging and national identity (cf. Milroy/Milroy 1985). The difference between the standard and the vernacular language was obviously less pronounced in the regions where the local

variety had served as a model for the standard (if there was such a region), such as Tuscany in Italy, or the Île-de-France in France, but outside these areas, and therefore for most speakers, the gap between the language of their everyday lives (dialect) and the standard variety (mostly written, only rarely spoken) was huge. It was only during the 20th century that this diglossic situation dissolved and speakers at all levels of society began to have full access to the spoken standard. This was a consequence of better schooling, but also of the evolving mass media, such as radio, cinema and television (cf. Auer 2005). Today, an increasing number of speakers in Europe use the standard on both formal and informal occasions in their everyday lives, and are often not even competent dialect speakers any longer.

Mattheier (1997) introduced the term ‘demoti[c]isation’ to refer to this popularisation of the (spoken) standard variety. The emergence of neo-standards is the most recent, but not the only outcome of this demoticisation.

There are a number of characteristics of neo-standards which distinguish them from traditional standards.

- 1) Their status as a symbol of nationality is at least dubious. This may appear paradoxical, as neo-standards are accessible and used by a much larger part of society than traditional standards. But as European nation building was by and large completed in the mid-20th century, the need for linguistic nationalism decreased. (Exceptions are the new European nation states that came into being after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and separatist movements such as in Catalonia.) Where language as a symbol of the nation does play a role, this symbolic role is fulfilled by the traditional standard, not the neo-standard. Debates in this context about ‘national language cultures’ and ‘national language cultivation’ (*Sprachpflege*) often centre on a critique of those features of the neo-standards that distinguish them from traditional standards.
- 2) Traditional standards are grounded in what Mattheier calls ‘Autoritätsloyalität’ (‘loyalty to authorities’), i.e. the willingness to accept a linguistic norm as prescribed by some (state) institution. Certainly in the 19th and early 20th century they were supported by a canon of literary texts which provided the basis for their nation-building function. The new standards are usage-based. The national literary canon no longer exists (or at least is no longer effectively enforced). The shift from a normative to a usage-based standard should not be equated with destandardisation, though. The neostandards are not substandards; rather, they enjoy a high prestige, which is however defined by a set of attitudinal characteristics distinct from those of the traditional standards.
- 3) Once the demoticised standard ceased to be under the control of the bourgeoisie and its normative institutions, its oral form ceased for the first time in its existence to be influenced by the written form. Rather than the oral form being a secondary (in some cases even a derived) form of the written standard, the new standards have inversed this hierarchy and the written language is now influenced by the spoken language (Mattheier 1997, 8; and section 3 below for examples).

- 4) As Berruto (2017) points out, the model speakers (and writers) of the old and the new standards are quite different; here, the media play an important role. News on national TV is still to a large degree based on scripted speech, linked to the written modality of the traditional standard, although some changes can be observed here as well. Other model speakers of the traditional standard may be still be found in academic discourse, in preaching in church, and in official political speeches (but not, for instance, in politicians' verbal performance in TV interviews or talk shows). But the bulk of mass media speech follows the neo-standard, and many of its model speakers are found there. Hence, the audio-visual mass media, which started out as guardians of the old standard (cf. for Great Britain: Garrett/Selleck/Coupland 2011), have turned into a driving force of the neo-standard through the "vernacularisation" of the language they use (Stuart-Smith 2011).

As far as written language is concerned, academic, bureaucratic and legal documents as well as some national newspapers are still written in the traditional standard, while most written mass media, including most fictional writing, has switched to the new standard.

- 5) As the new standard spread across social classes and situations, it took away usage domains from the dialects. The demoticisation of the oral standard has as its corollary the gradual disappearance of dialects from the sociolinguistic ecology. The stylistic resources formerly provided by a rich repertoire in which various forms of dialectal speech were available in addition to the standard now had to be provided by the standard alone. The new, "multi-functional" standard (Mattheier 1997, 6) needed to be flexible to deal with multiple situations involving different co-participants, topics, speech activities, etc. This adaptability could only be achieved by a considerable increase in internal variability. Neo-standards today function both as a *Sprache der Nähe* ('language of closeness') and a *Sprache der Distanz* ('language of distance') in the sense of Koch/Oesterreicher (1985) for most users.

### 3. Phases of the demoticisation of the standard in Germany

In order to understand the emergence of neo-standards as a result of the social spread of the standard languages in Europe, we need some sociolinguistic history, which will be given here for Germany only.

The demoticisation of the German standard language has had different outcomes in its different phases, and only one of them – the last – resulted in neo-standards. Two previous phases must be seen as transitional. We need to distinguish between:

- a) regional substandards, which came into being when the lower strata of society were confronted with and attempted to learn the standard, but only partly succeeded in doing so;

- b) regional standards, which differ from the (traditional) national standard mostly in terms of phonetics, but also to a lesser degree with regard to lexicon and syntax, and were mostly used by the middle classes; and
- c) neo-standards.

While a) and b) show the underlying influence of dialects, this is typically not the case for c).

Regional substandards as the outcome of the imperfect acquisition of the traditional standard are best represented by *italiano popolare* and by *français populaire*. They are typical of a transition period at the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, particularly in the industrial workforce. Today they are more or less extinct. In Germany, an example is the fossilised learner varieties such as the so-called *Missingsch* (a German substandard spoken in Low-German dialect areas around/in Hamburg by the lower classes in the 19th century) (also cf. Elspaß 2005).

Regional standards are also comparatively old. But in contrast to the regional substandards, they enjoyed (and still enjoy) regional prestige, which goes back to the fact that they originated from the educated classes. The German standard language was first established as a written variety, not based on the spoken dialect of any particular area. Its spoken variant only emerged when the written standard was already firmly established and codified by the end of the 18th century. This spoken variant of the standard usually (i.e. in most regions) mingled standard morphology and phonology (encoded by the orthography) with dialectal phonetics, i.e. it was highly variable in geographical terms. Since only a few people used it on a small number of occasions (in addition to their dialect, or a foreign language such as French), the oral standard could 'afford' to be close to the written language from which it had originated and to which it was still linked in many ways, e.g. through reading texts aloud.<sup>1</sup>

Around 1900, when a unified version of the spoken national standard began to spread, the status and prestige of these regional standards declined, and they either converged with the national standard (resulting in the somewhat attenuated regional standards that are still used today, although less and less frequently; cf. Mihm 2000), or they were destandardised and became substandard varieties.<sup>2</sup>

In these regional standards, the influence of the written standard is as easily detected as the influence of the dialectal substrate. As an example, consider the word-internal orthographic <h>, which serves as a marker of vowel length and/or

<sup>1</sup> Schmidt/Herrgen (2011, 63) call them "oralisation norms" of the written standard, i.e. they do not even concede the status of a variety to these forms of the standard.

<sup>2</sup> Some German regional substandards also seem to have merged with the regional substandards in the sense of (a) (learner varieties), and became associated with the working class, particularly in highly industrialised parts of Germany such as the Berlin area and the Ruhrgebiet. (In all these areas, the original dialects had already disappeared, so that the regional substandards now represent the 'lowest' way of speaking – i.e. the most regional and the most distant from the standard.)

syllable division in German orthography; cf. words such as *sehen* ‘to see’ or *fliehen* ‘to flee’. In the standard pronunciation, it has no segmental correlate, i.e. the second syllable has no onset. But in regional standards such as that of German-speaking Switzerland, the above words are pronounced /se:.hən/ and /fli:.hən/, etc., i.e. /h/ is inserted according to the pattern provided by the written language. This is a clear case of a ‘spelling pronunciation’. A similar example is the schwa-vowel in the participle prefix *ge-* (*ge+sag+t*, *ge+stand+en*, *ge+nomm+en*, ‘said’, ‘stood’, ‘taken’, etc.) and elsewhere, which is represented by <e> in the orthography. In the Upper German dialects (Bavarian and Alemannic), among others, the participle prefix is elided (cf. Bav. *gsagt*, *gstandn*, *gnumma*). Before the demoticisation of standard German set in, the standard pronunciations of these words were only learned in school, together with their written representations. As a consequence, they were pronounced as a full [e], which made them sound as distinct as possible from the dialectal (zero) forms and as close as possible to the pronunciation of the written letter <e> in other positions in the word. These hypercorrect forms then became conventionalised in the regional standards.

Neo-standards, in contrast to regional substandards and regional standards, are clearly not a vehicle for regional identity.<sup>3</sup>

In the neo-standards, the relationship between the written and the spoken standard is reversed, i.e. the written language is influenced by the spoken language. Mostly the influence is syntactic in nature, while the phonological rules of the spoken German neo-standard (some of which will be mentioned below), when transferred to writing, are still considered mistakes. Oral syntax has infiltrated the written neo-standard not only in personal written communication (online posts, e-mails, tweets, texting, etc.), but also in the media. Current journalistic newspaper writing borrows extensively from it. Some examples of this pseudo- (or second order) orality can be observed in the following short extract from a lead commentary published in one of Germany’s national newspapers on the occasion of the pre-negotiation talks for the second coalition between the two German parties SPD and CDU in January 2018.

### Ex. (1)

*Die Steuerpolitik* freilich – **da** setzt sich das alte Kleinklein fort. Und in *der Europa-Politik*: **Da** finden sich schöne Worte, aber keine Kraft und wenig Konkretes. Zwischen dem Brandenburger Tor und dem Eiffelturm liegen etwas mehr als 1000 Straßenkilometer. Aber zwischen den EU-Konzepten des französischen Präsidenten Emmanuel Macron und dem Sondierungspapier der künftigen großen Koalition liegen fünftausend Kilometer.

<sup>3</sup> If the German neo-standard does contain features that appear (or used to appear) to be regional, these features have become ‘de-localised’. Examples include the split pronominal adverbs of the type *Da hab ich nichts von* (formerly Northern German regional standard), instead of the old standard and southern regional standards *davon hab ich nichts* or *da hab ich nichts davon* (lit. ‘thereof I have nothing’ or ‘this is no good to me’). These have spread southwards in Germany and are not perceived as northern German any longer.

*Fiscal policy however – there the old pussyfooting around continues. And in European policy: there we find fine words, but no vigour and hardly anything concrete. Between the Brandenburg Gate and the Eiffel Tower the road is just over 1000 kilometres long. But between the EU concepts of the French President Emmanuel Macron and the pre-negotiation paper of the future Great Coalition the distance is 5000 kilometres.*

Das ist schade. 2019 sind die nächsten Wahlen zum Europäischen Parlament. Spätestens diese Europawahl wird die Antwort geben müssen auf die neuen Nationalismen und Aggressivpopulismen. Antworten findet man nicht viele in diesem Sondierungspapier. Europapolitisch ist es ein Soufflé. Viel Luft, wenig Substanz.

*This is a pity. 2019 sees the next elections for the European Parliament. These European elections will have to find an answer to new nationalisms and aggressive popular movements. Answers of which you don't find many in this pre-negotiation paper. In terms of European policy, it's a soufflé. A lot of air, not much substance.<sup>4</sup>*

The two underlined phrases in the first paragraph (the NP *die Steuerpolitik* 'financial policy' and the PP *in der Europapolitik* 'in European policy') are fronted to a position before the sentence proper ("hanging topics"), and resumed by a text-deictic *da* 'there' in the main clause. The traditional written standard would require syntactic integration and a prepositional phrase in the first example, as local *da* cannot back-refer to a NP, only to a PP: *In der Steuerpolitik freilich setzt sich das alte Kleinklein fort. Und in der Europa-Politik finden sich schöne Worte...* In the second paragraph, the coordinated PP *auf die neuen Nationalismen und Aggressivpopulismen* is removed from the central field (the position between the left and right sentence bracket), where it should be positioned according to traditional written syntax, and instead moved into the post-field, after the verbal cluster (*geben müssen*) – a strategy also well known from spoken German. The object phrase *Antworten* in the following sentence occurs in the front field ('inversion' with the subject) in *Antworten findet man nicht viele*, leaving the quantifier *viele* 'floating' in the middle field (although there is no pragmatic reason for this fronting). Hypotaxis is entirely avoided. For instance, the contrast between the geographical distance between Paris and Berlin and the distance in content between the positions of the French and the future German government would most likely be expressed by a concessive clause in the traditional standard, while the author of this text chooses two main clauses, the second of which is introduced by *aber* ('but').

<sup>4</sup> Süddeutsche Zeitung, lead commentary by H. Prantl, 12-1 18). <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/sondierungen-von-union-und-spd-anders-weiter-1.3823153> (consulted January 12, 2018).



## 4. Structural features of neo-standards and their perception: the prestige of neo-standards

In this section I argue that the linguistic features found in the neo-standard can be linked to one or more of the following components of its prestige: orality, informality, subjectivity/personalisation and modernity. These attitudinal components can be contrasted with corresponding features of the traditional standards that form the basis of the specific prestige of that variety: literality, formality, depersonalisation/objectivity, tradition.

In the following, only a small number of the structural features of neo-standards are discussed (mainly taken from German); the list is of course in no way exhaustive. I suggest that they contribute to current attitudes towards the neo-standards in different ways; i.e. the four aspects of the perception of neo-standards mentioned above are affected to different degrees. A single feature may contribute to more than one of the four dimensions. The following remarks on the relationship between perceptual dimensions and structural features should be seen as hypotheses; they would ideally be tested with a battery of perception experiments based on systematically varied texts showing certain features or groups of features.

### 4.1 Orality

The neo-standard (spoken, partly also written) is perceived as a dominantly oral variety, while the traditional standard is perceived as dominantly written. For instance, the German traditional standard used to be called *Schriftdeutsch* even when it was spoken. The features that are likely to be responsible for this perception often have to do with how information is structured in a way that is typical of spoken language in general. The same features are therefore also found in less prestigious oral varieties, such as substandards or dialects. Among them, topicalisation strategies such as hanging topics, left dislocations, presentational clause constructions, etc. figure prominently. These are largely absent from the traditional standard. Their use makes the neo-standard suited for everyday face-to-face communication and enriches its pragmatic resources.

The following examples are from the French neo-standard. Lambrecht (1986) and subsequent researchers (e.g. Pekarek Doehler/Horlacher/de Stefani 2015) have argued that the basic word order of spoken neo-standard French today is no longer SVO, but characterised by focusing/topicalisation constructions such as the following:

#### Ex. (2):

- a) hanging topics (Lambrecht 1986, 213, 220):

*Jean sa voiture elle est cassée*

Instead of: *La voiture de Jean est cassée*

lit.: Jean, his car, it is broken



*La bière j'aime pas*

Instead of: *J'aime pas la bière*

lit.: *Beer, I don't like*

b) presentational constructions:

*Y avait le guide que nous disait...* (Lambrecht 1986, 246)

Instead of: *Le guide nous disait...*

lit.: *There was this guide who said to us...*

*J'ai mon neveu là qui va... qui s'marie là.* (Lambrecht 1986, 277)

Instead of: *Mon neveu va se marier là.*

lit.: *I've got my nephew there who's going ... who's going to get married there*

c) object-fronting:

*Dix francs vous auriez?*

Instead of: *Vous auriez dix francs?*

lit.: *Ten francs would you have?*

d) left dislocation in combination with clefting:

*la cinq / c'est la seule qu'ils ont écrit* (Gadet 1997, 10)

instead of *ils ont écrit seulement une cinq*

*five it's the only one they wrote*

In the German (spoken) neo-standard, hanging topics and analepses are also possible, but clefting is much less frequent. Here, topic drop is widely used, signalling cohesion with the previous utterance. Topic drop is absent from the traditional standard. Here are some examples:

**Ex. (3):**

a) *Glaub ich nicht.* Instead of: *Das glaub ich nicht.*

lit.: *Think I not.*

lit.: *That think I not. ('I don't think so.')*

b) *Kann schon sein.* Instead of: *Das kann schon sein.*

lit.: *May well be.*

lit.: *This may well be*

c) *Komm schon.* Instead of: *Ich komm schon.*

*Coming.*

*I'm coming.*

## 4.2 Informality

The impression of informality conveyed by (spoken) neo-standards is likely to be based on the frequency of the application of phonological rules of reduction which are considered 'sloppy speech' in the traditional standard. They may be part of a larger group of features that could be subsumed under the heading of 'simplification', which also reaches out into morphology and syntax.

Typical for the German neo-standard are assimilations and deletions as in Ex. (4), or cliticisations as in Ex. (5):

**Ex. (4):**

traditional standard	[ha:bən, ge:bən, ho:lən, za:gən]
neo-standard	[ham, gem, holn, zan] 'to have', 'to give', 'to fetch', 'to say'

**Ex. (5):**

traditional standard	<i>hat es, haben wir, weil sie</i> etc.
neo-standard	<i>hats, hamwa, weilse</i> , etc. 'has it', 'have we', 'as she' etc.

In French, one might mention the omission of the first part of the negation and the development of a postverbal negation marker in this context, i.e. *ne V pas* > *V pas*.

The gradual disappearance of regional forms and the concomitant increase in informal features (i.e. the transition from the regional standard to the neo-standard) has been investigated in detail by Spiekermann (2008; also see Auer/Spiekermann 2011) in the cities of Freiburg, Heidelberg, Karlsruhe, Mannheim, Stuttgart and Tübingen, i.e. for urban standard speech in southwest Germany.<sup>5</sup> In Figure 1, three examples of dialectal substrate features typical of the regional standard are shown, with their development from the 1960s to the 2000s. The frequency of occurrence of all three variables diminished dramatically (by at least 50%) over this period in those areas in which they were a dialectal substrate feature. By contrast, Figure 2 shows three examples of informal lenition/simplification rules in the same data sets, one morphological (loss of the inflectional schwa suffix marking the 1st ps. sg. present tense), and two phonological (*ist* > *is*, *ein* > *n*). In all cases, these features have become more frequent in all locations, sometimes (as in the third example) dramatically.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> He compared a subset (i.e. the standard German part) of the so-called Pfeffer corpus which was recorded in 1961 (cf. Pfeffer/Lohnes 1984) with new data collected in 2001-2003 (interviews with 34 male and female speakers of different age groups). Mannheim, Heidelberg and Karlsruhe are part of the South Franconian dialect zone, while the remaining locations are in the Alemannic dialect zone (Low Alemannic in the case of Freiburg, Swabian in the case of Stuttgart and Tübingen).

<sup>6</sup> In some cases, the values for the first and second were already quite high in the 1960s which is due to the fact that t-deletion in *ist* (or *ischt*) and deletion of the 1st person suffix are also dialectal features.

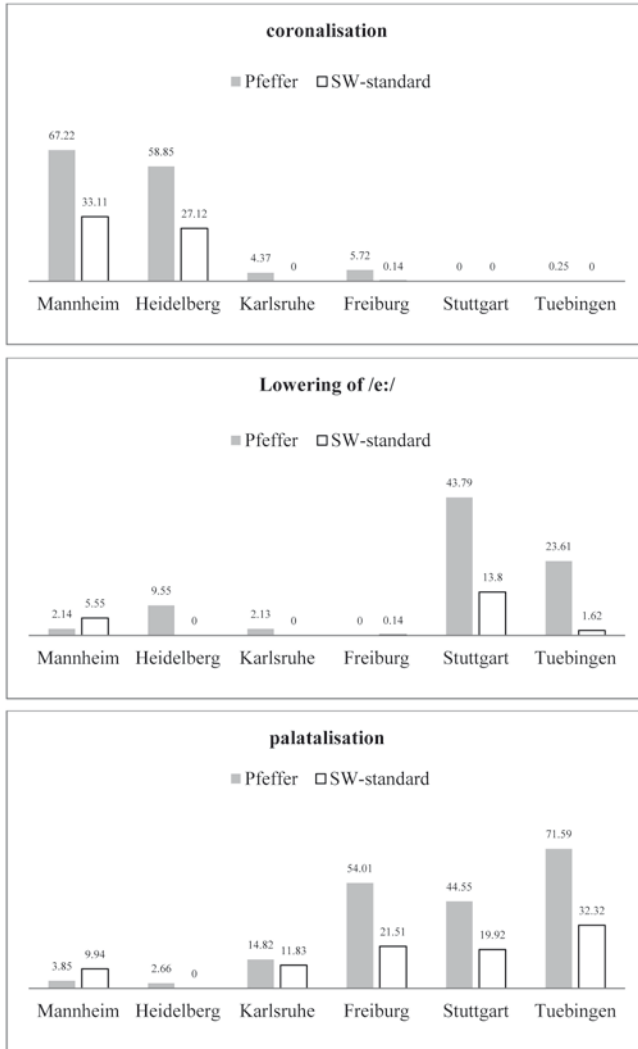


Fig. 1: Three regional phonological variables and their development from the 1960s to the 2000s in standard speakers (interviews) in Baden-Württemberg. Top: Coronalisation of trad.std. [ç] > [ç], [ʃ] in words such as *ich* 'I'. Coronalisation is a (South) Franconian dialect feature. Middle: Lowering of trad.std. [e:] to [ɛ:] in words such as *Lehrer* 'teacher'. This is a Swabian dialect feature. Bottom: Palatalisation of trad.std. pre-consonantal [s] > [ʃ] as in the second person suffix *-st*, e.g. *sieh+st* instead of trad.std. *sieh+st* 'you see'. This is an Alemannic dialect feature. From Auer/Spiekermann (2011).

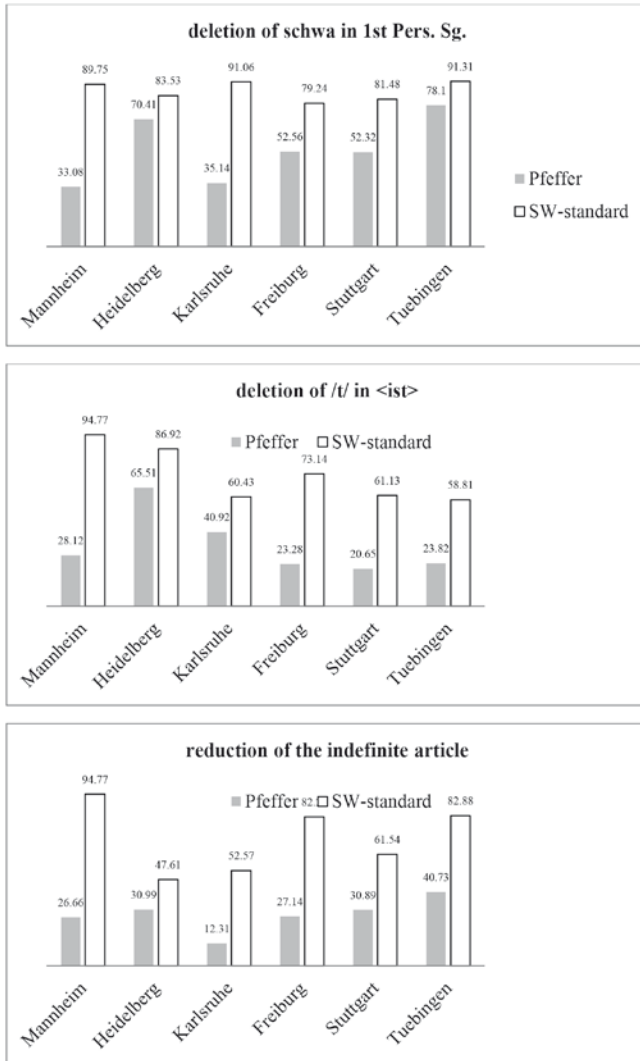


Fig. 2: Three morphological/phonological reductions and their development from the 1960s to the 2000s in standard speakers (interviews) in Baden-Württemberg. Top: loss of the schwa-suffix marking the first person singular in verbs such as *ich mache* 'I make' > *ich mach*. Middle: deletion of final /t/ after /f/ in the 3rd ps. sg. Of the verb *sein* 'to be': *ist* > *is*. Bottom: clitisation of the indefinite article *ein* > *n*. From Auer/Spieckermann (2011).

### 4.3 Subjectivity/personalisation

Among the many features of the neo-standard that contribute to it being perceived as more subjective and personalised (in speaking and increasingly also in writing), the use of what looks like direct speech instead of hypotactic constructions figures prominently. As a consequence, embedded complement clauses are replaced by clauses with main clause syntax:

**Ex. (5):**

- a) *Sie fragt sich natürlich, wird es heute noch zu einer Entscheidung kommen.*  
Of course she asks herself: will there be a decision today.  
instead of trad.std.: *Sie fragt sich natürlich, ob es heute noch zu einer Entscheidung kommen wird.*
- b) *Ich weiß ja, das geht so nicht weiter.*  
I know this cannot go on.  
Instead of trad.std.: *ich weiß ja, dass das so nicht weiter geht.*

Another important neo-standard feature contributing to its personal/subjective character is the use of second- (or even first-) person singular pronouns (and to a lesser degree their polite equivalent, the second person plural pronouns) instead of impersonal constructions, an innovation that has been observed in many European languages (Danish, Dutch, German, Italian, etc.). Cf. the following examples from French:

**Ex. (6):**

- a) *Manger trop vite ça te donne toujours une indigestion.* (Coveney 2003, 167)  
Eating too fast always gives you indigestion.
- b) *Quand on se plaint de tout, il ne vous arrive rien de bon.* (Coveney 2003, 16)  
If you complain about everything, nothing good will happen to you.

In the examples in (6), the new impersonal pronouns *tu/vous* have the additional advantage of closing a gap in the system, as the pronoun *on* does not have an oblique form. In Coveney's data (2003),<sup>7</sup> the percentage of second person pronouns (*tu, vous*) used as impersonals/generics reaches a level of almost 50%, i.e. *on* is only used in half of the instances. This use of second person pronouns is "certainly excluded from formal speech and writing" (Coveney 2003, 167), but is becoming increasingly popular in the neo-standard. (See Auer/Stukenbrock i.pr. for German examples and references on other languages.)

Quasi-quotations instead of syntactic subordination often combine with shifted second person pronouns, producing a kind of internal dialogue which is typical of the neo-standard and which contributes substantially to its subjective character:

<sup>7</sup> The data (interviews with employees in *colonies de vacances*) are from the Picardy.

**Ex. (7)**

*ich hatte damals irgendwie geburtstag oder so, dachte (...) des is jetzt dein geschenk, machste mal; (DOMIAN 26-11-2009)*

*Somehow this was my birthday or something, (I) thought (...) this is now your present, you do it; right?*

Here, the verb *denken* ‘to think’, requiring a complement, is followed by a dependent clause with main clause order (“insubordination”, Evans 2007) in this function. At the same time, the subject of the deliberation (the speaker) refers to himself using the second person pronoun, as in an inner dialogue with himself.

There are many other neo-standard features in (7) such as the topic drop in the second clause starting with *dachte* ‘I thought’ (lacking 1st ps. sg. pronoun *ich*) and again in *machste* (lacking anaphoric pronoun: *das machste mal*), as well as the cliticisation in *machste* < *machst du*. Paraphrasing this utterance in the traditional standard therefore requires major changes: *Ich hatte damals Geburtstag und dachte, dass das mein Geschenk sein würde und dass ich es deshalb machen sollte.*

#### **4.4 Modernity**

The fourth important difference between the traditional and the neo-standard is the latter’s ‘modern’ appeal. This may be due in the first place to lexical features (including word formation). English loans figure prominently here (cf. for a recent overview, Eisenberg 2013). It seems that the role of Latin/Greek in traditional standards, as a source for prestigious loans and word formation patterns, has been replaced by English in neo-standards.

In addition to lexical loans, calques on English also play an important role. They may affect syntax (cf. for instance Fr. *cela ne fait pas sens* or Germ. *das macht keinen Sinn* modelled on English *this doesn’t make sense*; the traditional standard would prescribe *cela n’a aucun sens/das ergibt keinen Sinn*). But arguably, the most important examples can be found in borrowed patterns of word formation, such as confix (prefixoid) formations with *maxi-*, *mega-*, *super-*, etc. The latter are interesting as they show that the relationship between Latin and English word-formation patterns is complex; *maxi-*, *mega-*, *super-* all have Latin/Greek etymologies, but the new word formation patterns that became popular under English influence do not carry this connotation any longer. (Of course, elative prefixoids also can have German words from various word classes as their basis, cf. *hammer-*, *affen-*, *klasse-*, *spitze-* ...)

The same complex interaction is in operation when Latin/Greek-based words are reanalysed and become a resource for new derivations which run counter to their etymology (variously known as clippings, or desegmentation; also cf. Harnisch 2004). In English, these clippings are highly productive (cf. Sippach 2017), cf. *entertainment* > *infotainment*, *spytainment*, *advertainment*, *shoppertainment* ...

(Here, *-tainment* is reanalysed as a morpheme.) In the German neo-standard, this type of word formation does not yet seem to be productive, and the new English words formed in this way still enter the language mostly through direct borrowing (as in *sequel* > *prequel*...). Other neo-standards are much more prone to using this word formation type productively, cf. in the Italian neo-standard *cafeteria* > *snacketeria*, *luncheteria*; *astronauta* > *gastronauta* (from Bombi 2017).

Examples such as *prequel*<sup>8</sup> operate on Latin/Greek-based existing words that are reanalysed and become a resource for new derivations, which pretend to be Latin/Greek-based as well. The point is that these new formations cannot be analysed on the basis of their etymology any longer. There is a Latin source for *pre-*, but none for *-quel*, and *sequel* cannot be decomposed into *se-quel* etymologically, as it derives from Latin *sequi* ‘to follow’ (via middle Latin *sequela*). Hence, knowledge of the prestige languages of the European elites which are associated with the emergence and use of the traditional standards is of no use for understanding the new words via etymological reconstruction.

This shift away from reliance on knowledge of Greek and Latin is of course a consequence of the demoticisation of the standard, resulting in its spread to social classes who lacked 19th century upper middle class language education. Clearly, desegmentation is not the only word formation pattern of this type; there are also older ones. One of them is the shortening of morphologically complex Latin/Greek-based words (retaining their meaning) and the formation of new compounds on the basis of these shortenings. An example going back to the early 20th century is the shortening of Germ. *Automobil* > *Auto*. As the first member of a compound, the meaning of this *Auto* then oscillates between the traditional ‘self’ (*Automat*, *autonom*) and the new ‘car’, as in *Autobus*. A more recent example is the shortening of *homosexuell* to *homo* and the re-use of this shortened word in compounds such as *Homophobie* (which does not mean ‘an aversion to oneself’, as might be reconstructed by a speaker of the traditional standard, but ‘an aversion to homosexuals’), etc. Both shortenings are of course established words in German today. However, shortenings and new compounds which make use of them come into the language all the time. For instance, the compound *archistar* is not (yet) easily comprehensible for Germans; an etymologically informed attempt to understand the word (based on *archi-* in the meaning of ‘head’, ‘principle’) will not lead anywhere. Rather, one has to know that *archi* can be a shortening of *architect*, and that an *archistar* is therefore a famous architect.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> According to Wikipedia, a prequel is “a literary, dramatic, or filmic work whose story precedes that of a previous work, by focusing on events that occur before the original narrative”.

<sup>9</sup> The word is already more established in other languages such as Italian (cf. a newspaper comment in the Italian newspaper *L'espresso* from 2011: [http://espresso.repubblica.it/visioni/cultura/2011/12/12/news/archistar-a-me-non-provateci-1.38342?refresh\\_ce](http://espresso.repubblica.it/visioni/cultura/2011/12/12/news/archistar-a-me-non-provateci-1.38342?refresh_ce)).



## 5. Some conclusions

There are two possible counter-arguments against the idea of a neo-standard distinct in terms of attitudes and structure from (but co-existent with) the traditional standard. One counter-argument is that the neo-standard simply represents the result of language change in the traditional standard. The other counter-argument is that the neo-standard is just the result of the destandardisation of the traditional standard, i.e. some kind of substandard. Both counter-arguments treat the neo-standard as the outcome of change in one and the same variety (the traditional standard), not as a variety of its own; they only differ in their evaluation of this change.

### 5.1 Is the neo-standard the result of language change?

The neo-standards did not exist 100 years ago; they represent an innovation and are therefore the result of change. However, treating them merely as the result of change in the traditional standard underestimates the social implications of this innovation. When linguists talk about language change, they usually refer to structural change in single parameters which are only interdependent to the degree that the language system makes them so. But there is no reason why, for instance, the application of phonological lenition rules and the development of the second person pronoun as an ‘impersonal’ (non-addressee deictic) pronoun should go together from a structural point of view. The idea of a neo-standard, on the contrary, stresses the social embedding of these changes as part of the overarching process of the demoticisation of the standard variety that holds them together. This social embedding implies a wholesale re-organisation of the sociolinguistic repertoires of the speakers, affecting not only the standard (as the variety of prestige) but also the dialects, regional dialects, regional standards, substandards, etc. Most importantly, it includes an attitudinal change in what is considered a prestigious way of speaking: the basis of the neo-standards’ prestige is not the basis of the traditional standard varieties’ prestige. In sum: the neo-standard is not just the result of changes in the traditional standard; rather, it is a new variety.

It follows that the emergence of this new variety as such makes no prediction about the disappearance of the old standard. It may disappear, but need not, depending on whether a niche in the sociolinguistic ecology of a particular society remains for it. Obviously the neo-standards cannot leave the status of the traditional standards unaffected (just as they must also affect the dialects), since their status is defined by its opposition to it in the repertoire. But the relationship is more complex than in traditional models of innovation spread, in which the innovations gradually replace the old forms until only archaic forms remain. It is theoretically possible that the old and the new standards will co-exist for a long time, serving different social needs for distinction (a scenario for which France might be an example).

## **5.2 Is the neo-standard the result of destandardisation?**

The second counterargument sees the neo-standards as destandardised forms of the standard, i.e. a form of decay. The main problem with this counterargument is that the neostandards are not looked upon as substandard by language users, but on the contrary enjoy a high prestige.

Destandardisation can of course mean a variety of things, depending on what is meant by 'standard'. In Auer (2005) a definition of standard is presented which refers to three dimensions. A standard variety is (1) a common language, i.e. it is valid across a territory in which various regional varieties ("dialects") are present as well. (2) It is an H-variety, i.e. one which is taught in school and used for writing and in formal, public situations, and therefore has official prestige. (3) It is at least to some degree codified (which does not necessarily imply the existence of a state-administered codex). These three features can be present to a greater or lesser degree, i.e. 'standardness' (of a spoken variety) is a gradable notion.

In the first sense, a (spoken) variety's status reaches maximum 'standardness' if it is accepted in the largest possible language area (the area in which the regional varieties, for instance dialects, can be perceived as being structurally related to it). This defines the geographical dimension of standardisation. Destandardisation here means that within a language area, certain regions leave the shelter of the established standard variety and establish their own standard instead (or remain without any standard variety, i.e. roofless). With regard to the German language area, the development of German into a polycentric language with different national standard varieties in Austria, Switzerland and Germany (plus perhaps South Tyrol) can be seen as a case of destandardisation in this sense.

Whether the development of German into a polycentric language is in any way related to the emergence of the neo-standards requires an empirical investigation. The crucial question here is whether there is more structural difference between the neo-standards of these three countries than between the traditional standards (as spoken/written today). We have no empirical evidence for this, but it seems that even if the reach of the neo-standard were restricted to the confines of Germany (not including Austria and/or Switzerland) it would still have a sufficiently large geographical reach to be called a standard variety.

In the second sense, a variety's standardness increases with its prestige. This means that speakers of the standard variety are considered to be more intelligent, powerful, authoritative, successful, but also more likeable, more attractive, more trustworthy than speakers of the non-standard varieties (such as the dialects or regional dialects). For example, the standard may gain or lose prestige compared with the dialects. In this sense, Norway and German-speaking Switzerland can be considered examples of destandardisation; in the first case, the traditional standard, close to Danish, has been losing prestige and status in favour of the dialects since the 19th century, while in the second case, the traditional German standard

(or a regional variant of it) has lost prestige in favour of the dialects during the 20th century. The standard mainly has the status of a written variety, while in formal and official situations, dialect can be spoken as well (although this holds for Norway more than Switzerland). The 'Norwegian and Swiss model' (destandardisation) is, however, the exception in Europe. Mostly, the opposite has occurred: only the standard (not regional standards, let alone dialects) is allowed in school and in public. The neo-standards have increased this tendency (since they have taken away usage domains not only from the dialects but also from the regional standards; see the details in section 4.2).

As argued before, the prestige of the traditional standards is based on a different set of attitudes to that of neo-standards. The neostandards stand for modernity, informality, personalisation and innovation, while the traditional standards are associated with the opposite: tradition, formality, depersonalisation, conservatism. Depending on how these features are valued by a society, one or the other set of values can be given priority. It seems obvious that contemporary societies favour the first set of values. In very formal situations, however, the traditional standard may still be required, and can therefore be considered more of an H-variety than the neo-standard. Comparing the traditional and the neo-standard, we may therefore detect a slight destandardisation on that dimension.

In the third sense, a variety's standardness increases to the degree that internal variation is eliminated (this includes but is not restricted to geographical variability), due to a higher acceptance of the linguistic norms. Destandardisation implies increased variability within the standard variety, and less orientation at a codified norm. In this sense, the neostandards are less standard-like than the traditional ones. This needs to be the case, as they couldn't serve their multiple communicative functions otherwise.

In sum, comparing traditional and neo-standards shows evidence for some (minor) destandardisation in the latter when compared to the former. This, however, is still a far cry from calling them substandard varieties. But above all, the neo-standards have not eliminated the traditional standards from the sociolinguistic repertoire; it seems there is still a need for them. Rather than speaking of destandardisation, we should think of a model in which two standards co-exist, serving different functions in society.

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