

**That Ain't Right!: Language Standardization and Prescription**

**in French, Spanish, and English**

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### Abstract:

Language, although often viewed as single and unchanging, is actually in a constant state of competition and change. Language use varies regionally, socially, and contextually, yet there is one variety of the language commonly viewed as “correct.” This paper examines the sociolinguistic processes involved in language standardization: the creation, promotion, and defense of this “standard” form of a language. Using the case studies offered by French, Spanish, and English, it traces language development and change, concentrating on both formal and informal mechanisms of regulation and promotion (societal and economic pressures, language academies, education, etc). A comparison of these three major international languages allows for an examination of the differences and similarities inherent in the language standardization process. It likewise provides the basis for a commentary about the social and political nature of language, its ties to nationalism and culture, and the implications for contemporary global society.

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### 1 Introduction: What is Language?

Language is perhaps the most complex of all human interactions. It is using language that people are able to communicate even the most basic needs and desires, relate to other human beings, and form social networks. As these communications and relationships grow more complex, so too does human production. From politics to science to literature, human existence depends and centers on language.

**Comment [J4]:** This is especially so in the world of learning and knowledge

**Comment [J5]:** Double check this sentence.

As such, language has been the object of extensive study. From the ancient Indians and Greeks to the well-developed and highly diversified field of contemporary linguistics, humans have questioned, studied, and hypothesized about this complex,

unique, chaotic yet orderly system. Some take the philosophical angle, focusing on the origins of language, what it says about the human brain, how it affects thinking. Others have concentrated on the dissection of language, its varied grammars and syntaxes, its phonology, morphology, its vocabulary, spelling, heritage, variation, and change.

This paper will trace this second vein, that of those who study the structure and transformation of this manifestation of human thought. It will reach farther, however, into the political and social implications of language variation and change. Specifically, it will examine the issue of standardization, firstly in its historical context and the effect it has had upon the development of language, and secondly standardization as a manifestation of social and national development.

Modern linguistics is based on Ferdinand de Saussure's idea of the arbitrariness of the sign. That is, a concept (signification) and the expression of it (signal) have no innate link. There is no inherent reason that English speakers should use the word "dog," nor that the French should instead use "chien." The choice of word and sound patterns to express this concept is incidental and arbitrary.<sup>1</sup> Once chosen, this signal is fixed within speech community so that communication may actually take place.<sup>2</sup> The fact that the signification is not intrinsically linked to any particular signal means that there is no rational basis for preferring one signal to another; neither "dog" nor "chien" may be described as a superior way of describing a canine.<sup>3</sup> In the same way, it may be argued that no grammatical system is inherently superior to another; they simply differ.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans., Roy Harris, 16 ed. (Peru, Illinois: Open Court, 2006), 67.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>4</sup>James Milroy and Lesley Milroy, *Authority in Language: Investigating Standard English*, Third ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 10.

It is important to distinguish here between language system and language use. Language system here is the human capacity to produce language, whereas language use (or what de Saussure called “speech”) can be defined as “the combinations through which the speaker uses the code provided by the language in order to express his own thought.”<sup>5</sup>

When non-linguists think about language, they tend to think of it as a set of well-delineated entities: in Spain one speaks Spanish, in France, French, and the political frontier between them is an equally defined linguistic border. This is not in fact the case. Language can instead be described as a sort of continuum<sup>6</sup>, showing variation both regionally and socially. Therefore, a speaker (Speaker A) at any given point in the class structure and geographical area will use a particular variety of the language. The farther removed Speaker B is from Speaker A, the more different his use of language will be. This is particularly true in language families, for instance Romance languages, which continuum spans much of Western Europe.<sup>7</sup> The frontier between, for example, France and Spain delineates the border between *official* languages but in practice an inhabitant of a town on the French side of the border may well be better able to converse with a Spaniard than with his northern countryman.<sup>8</sup>

Just as the idea of languages as distinct entities is contestable, so too is the traditional conception of “dialect” open to questioning. One traditional idea of a “dialect” is a deteriorated form of a language, the way Latin degenerated into regional vernaculars. The problem with this is that traditionally termed “languages” can grow out of dialects

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<sup>5</sup> de Saussure, 14.

<sup>6</sup> Sylvain Auroux, “Instrumentos lingüísticos y políticas lingüísticas: la construcción del francés,” *Revista argentina de historiografía lingüística* 1, no. 2 (2009), <http://www.rahl.com.ar/Revistas/II%20-%202009/auroux-RAHL-%282%292009.pdf>, 4 April 2010, 138.

<sup>7</sup> Ralph Penny, *Variation and Change in Spanish* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

(the way Romance languages grew out of these “dialects” of Latin). Additionally, how does one differentiate a “language” from a “dialect?” One way to do this would be to rely on the concept of mutual intelligibility. Extending this line of reasoning, Spanish and English are generally determined “languages,” and are mutually unintelligible. However, the more closely related the languages, the more this becomes an issue. Take Spanish and Portuguese; speakers of these languages might be able to communicate rudimentary ideas. Think about Spanish and Catalan; speakers might be able to have a conversation. Spanish and Andalusian; speakers probably understand each other most of the time, but not always. Are these all dialects? All languages? <sup>9</sup>

This said, this paper will use the term “language” to refer to the standardized version of a language, and “variety” to refer to all the various realizations of said language systems.

It is useful to highlight at this point that languages, in addition to being highly diverse, also are in a constant state of change. Through dialect contact and migration, different variants come into contact and competition. There subsequently occurs processes of accommodation, as speakers change (if only slightly) their manner of speaking when confronted with a speaker using a different variety, and leveling, as the range of variants is reduced. However, these simplifying processes are countered by emergence of interdialectal variants and reallocation as competing variants cease to be associated with geographical varieties and are instead features of social variation.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 37-54.

## 2 Standardization: Purpose and Processes

### 2.1 Defining “Standard”

As seen above, although the capacity for language is universal, no two people will construct or transmit an idea in exactly the same manner, that is, their *use* of language differs. The number of influences acting upon how each human being uses a single language, putting aside for the moment considerations of the diversity of human languages and constraints their structure may impose on a speaker, are countless. These may include, but are not limited to: region of origin, economic status, level of education, age, gender, etc. Additionally, an individual will adjust his speech, albeit subtly, to fit the situation and person with whom he is conversing, often without even realizing it, a capacity known as communicative competence.<sup>11</sup> It may be said, therefore that each person speaks his own “dialect” or variety of the language.

Considering all this variation, how is it possible to speak of a “standard” language? Firstly, it is important to note that “standard” is not synonymous with “universal” nor “unique.” Even if the world’s languages could be neatly divided from one another and classified into discrete groups, the variation within each language is enough to almost preclude the possibility of finding one manner of speaking common to and utilized by every speaker of that particular language. Rather, a “standard” language is the ideal or “correct” variety of a given language.

The process of “standardization,” linguistic or otherwise, can be defined as “the suppression of optional variability.”<sup>12</sup> That is, proponents of standardization seek to create and promote a language free from variation. This suppression of variability

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<sup>11</sup> Milroy and Milroy, 100.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 6.

operates in direct contrast to many of the processes of variation and change described above, creating a dynamic system of opposition.

A standard language is therefore “a set of abstract norms to which actual usage may conform to a greater or lesser extent.”<sup>13</sup> It is thus that standardization can be defined as an aim, an ideology, rather than an achieved (or achievable) objective. A standard may consequently be defined as a variety of the language which offers no variability and to which usage may or may not correspond; an ideology and a goal, but rarely, if ever, existing in actuality.

It is useful here to mention the differences between written and spoken language. A language “standard” exists almost entirely in the written variety. Whereas the standardization of the written language may be possible to a certain extent, “absolute [standardization] of a spoken language is never achieved.”<sup>14</sup> There have been fewer attempts made both to document and to regulate spoken language. It is for this reason that standardization tends to focus on orthography, syntax, morphology, and even vocabulary, but less on pronunciation.

## **2.2 The Purpose of Standardization**

If the main purpose of language is the transmission of thoughts and ideas from one person to another, the ideal language would perform this function in the most efficient and effective way possible. It is this theory that underlies the idea of a standard language. If language as a system, that is the rules governing its use, were completely uniform, misunderstanding would be rendered impossible as each element could, and would, be used in a particular way entirely understood by the person being spoken to.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Everyone would “use and understand the language in the same way.”<sup>15</sup> In this way, language can be compared to a game of chess, for instance, where everyone must play by the same rules in order to complete a game.<sup>16</sup>

A derivative line of reasoning argues that standardization prevents the disintegration of a language into mutually incomprehensible dialects. The example most often cited here is that of Latin, which, upon the fall of the Roman Empire and the accompanying authority, fell apart into what are now separate Romance languages. There seems to be a common preoccupation with the decline of language, driving the push to create a standard.<sup>17</sup>

As will be discussed below, there are of course many other less formal or function-oriented motives behind language standardization.

### **2.3 Processes of Standardization**

There is a series of steps necessary for a language variety to become a standard. These can be broken down into: selection, codification, elaboration of function, and acceptance,<sup>18</sup> and together trace the process by which a single isolated variety becomes a far-reaching, widely accepted, and highly regulated written language. These four steps do not necessarily happen sequentially, and are for the most part ongoing processes. That is, a standard is in a constant process of codification and acceptance that also contribute to maintenance of the standard.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 22.

### 2.3.1 Selection of a Variant

The first thing to take into consideration when looking at why and how a certain variety is chosen to be the “standard” is perhaps the myth that such a choice is logically driven. That is, there is a common conception that the variety of the language ultimately maintained as the standard is so chosen because it is inherently better: more logical, more efficient, or more successful in its ultimate goal of transmission of ideas. It is thought to be a natural process, a sort of Darwinian natural selection applied to linguistic subjects.<sup>19</sup>

This is evidently not the case. As mentioned above, Saussure questioned the particular attachment of sign to signifier and ultimately decided that the choice of sign to represent a given concept was arbitrary. This allowed him to conclude that no one language was better than another, each simply used a different arbitrary sign. In continuing this line of reasoning it follows that, in the same way, no one variety of a given language is inherently better than another. How, then, is a standard chosen, and for what reason?

There are many contributing factors to the selection of a certain variety as the standard, and because no variety is inherently more qualified than another to be the standard, these decisive factors tend to be social rather than linguistic. The question seems to be not which variety is better, but which is associated with a more prestigious group of speakers. Prestige in this context can be conferred by any number of sources, including political, military, economic, or social power.

These prestigious groups possess the resources and social status necessary for the creation and promotion of a standard and are therefore the wealthiest, most powerful, and

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<sup>19</sup> M. Inoue, "Standardization," in *Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics*, ed. Brown Keith (Oxford: Elsevier, 2006), <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/B7T84-4M3C3K0-2NP/2/d46f0c29c21813ff81e3dee32a7412af>, 24 March 2010, 123.

most educated groups.<sup>20</sup> The written production of these groups is inevitably linked to the prestigious variety spoken by the writer, who was convinced of the eminent superiority of his particular way of speech.<sup>21</sup> It is at this point that codification comes into play. As influential sections of society begin to feel a need for uniformity in, particularly, written language,<sup>22</sup> there is a call for regulation, that is, codification, both to minimize variation<sup>23</sup> and to “arrest and reverse” any perceived decline or deterioration in the language.<sup>24</sup>

### 2.3.2 Codification

This process of codification can be the result of both direct and indirect, official and unofficial, unconscious and conscious actions and decisions. Prescription is inherent in this part of standardization; it is the setting of (arbitrary) rules which will then be held up as the “correct” form. This occurs most rapidly in orthography, followed by morphology and syntax, and most slowly in lexicon, which is almost impossible to standardize completely, due to its open-ended nature.<sup>25</sup>

The earliest forms of codification take place informally, in written works of high prestige. Through the production of literature and efforts of early printers, there evolved a corpus of prestigious language use that could then be imitated by others wanting to write or publish.<sup>26</sup> More formal, or explicit, codification, involves the creation of reference works (dictionaries and grammars) documenting and in many cases prescribing use of the

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<sup>20</sup> Penny, 197.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Train, ““Real Spanish:” Historical Perspectives On The Ideological Construction Of A (Foreign) Language,” *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies* 4, no. 2/3 (2007), <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxyau.wrlc.org/ehost/detail?vid=1&hid=6&sid=283bd1f3-7a69-4299-9abb-d96f02ab5a0a%40sessionmgr10&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWVhc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=ufh&AN=27022859>, 22 February 2010, 217.

<sup>22</sup> Milroy and Milroy, 22.

<sup>23</sup> Penny, 200.

<sup>24</sup> Milroy and Milroy, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Penny, 202.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 201.

language. This often begins with small-scale or private enterprises and expands into larger, more institutionalized efforts.<sup>27</sup>

Within the context of formal codification, one of the better-known and most obvious vehicles is the creation of language “Academies,” that is, organizations with official (governmental) recognition and with the role of regulating the national language. Despite the overwhelming celebrity of the French Académie, there are many more language regulation organisms around the world, both for other Western European languages and such varied languages as Arabic, Persian, Malay, and Urdu.<sup>28</sup> The examples examined further on will be those affecting the case study languages of French, Spanish, and English, but formal entities are by no means uncommon nor unique to European languages. The first of these academies was the Italian Accademia della Crusca, founded in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, whose aim was to encourage study and publication of the language, as well as “maintaining and renewing its ancient lexicographic traditions.”<sup>29</sup> Many of the Western academies were subsequently calqued on this first group of linguistic scholars.<sup>30</sup>

As this long process of codification is shaping the newly selected standard variety, it is simultaneously in competition with other varieties (or perhaps other languages) in its expansion into new domains of usage.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>28</sup> Nigel J. Ross, “Academies and Attitudes,” *English Today* 20, no. 03 (2004), <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?jsessionid=1BA9063D0B4601521F7F24E752482AD5.tomcat1?fromPage=onlin&aid=230465>, 22 February 2010, 23.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 24–5.

<sup>30</sup> Darren Paffey, “Policing the Spanish Language Debate: Verbal Hygiene and the Spanish language Academy (Real Academia Española),” *Language Policy* 6, no. 3/4 (2007), <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxyau.wrlc.org/ehost/detail?vid=1&hid=6&sid=0ef04dec-1d94-4455-94cd-f3a5e8d6905e%40sessionmgr4&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWVhc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=ufh&AN=36176684>, 4 April 2010, 318.

### 2.3.3 Elaboration of Function and Diffusion

As the variety selected to eventually become the standard takes form through codification, it begins to gain recognition as a separate entity. In the case of Romance languages, for example, the simple process of codification increased awareness of the fact that these varieties were in fact not just degenerate forms of Latin, but separate languages in their own right.<sup>31</sup> This acknowledgement through print not only increases popular legitimacy, but also begins the process of elaboration of function. That is, the newly codified variety suddenly has acquired the status necessary to challenge established languages or varieties in new domains. As will be seen below, in the cases of Spanish and French, the language being challenged was Latin<sup>32</sup>, whereas in the case of English, French had been the established language.<sup>33</sup> These new language varieties began their expansion into the new domains of literary, scientific, and even religious works, not only reinforcing their growing prestige, but also gaining a greater audience.<sup>34</sup> Ironically, this spread of the language into entirely new areas produces a contradictory process. As the variety is used to convey ideas it has previously not had to express, it must necessarily undergo change. It must increase vocabulary to communicate new concepts, often resorting to borrowing (a phenomenon that later will be criticized by language purists),<sup>35</sup> or creation of neologisms, and expand lexical and syntactical systems leading to both increased complexity and variation in that there are more combinations possible.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Penny, 203.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Milroy and Milroy, 26.

<sup>34</sup> Penny, 203.

<sup>35</sup> Milroy and Milroy, 35

<sup>36</sup> Penny, 204.

It is at this point that the standard variety, having been selected and codified, is expanded into new usage and societal groups. It follows that the language variety must then become established and accepted in these expanded contexts.

#### **2.3.4 Acceptance**

Language, in addition to its communicative function, has been proven to be a factor in social cohesion.<sup>37</sup> Groups are formed and solidified around commonalities, of which language is often a large part. The core group will tend to use very similar language varieties, and the farther a speaker is from the center of a particular group, the fewer linguistic features he will have in common with them.<sup>38</sup> The language variety particular to a given group is then reinforced<sup>39</sup> within the members of that group, contributing to a common identity and culture.

When any one group establishes itself as the dominant part of society, there is an ensuing cycle of enforcement of this primacy and attempts by the lower classes to move up. One of the strategies the lower classes use to move up in the social hierarchy is the imitation of speech patterns of the elite. Speakers farther and farther from the prestige center of a town or city imitate their neighbors closer in, and so some features of the prestigious variety spread.<sup>40</sup>

Add to this imitative speech the effect of print and discipline-specific language, and the variety has become relatively well-diffused and established. There is another step, however, before a variety can be considered standardized: it must be accepted as the standard. As seen above, language use is inextricably linked to identity, and can be used

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<sup>37</sup> Milroy and Milroy, 93.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>40</sup> Penny, 58.

as a way to both unify groups and differentiate outsiders. Therefore, language, along with other components of identity, can be a powerful tool for political unification. Language as a component of national identity is a relatively recent concept, as is, in fact, the modern conception of a nation, but the identification of language with a political entity is much older. Language names are often political or regional, for example Castilian, which was so named because it was the version of the Romance language continuum spoken in Castile. As these regional or political units group together people who are diverse in many aspects, the variety of language spoken gives them an immediate connection and creates a sense of patriotism. The variety can then be used as a tool for nation-building and even colonial expansion in order to unify disparate elements.<sup>41</sup>

After the variety has been selected, codified, diffused, and accepted, there remains only the maintenance of the newly formed standard, which can occur simultaneously with the above processes and seeks to preserve the established variety in not allowing change or competing variants.

### **2.3.5 Maintenance**

This part of the standardization process is the struggle to maintain a very low rate (as close as possible to zero) of variation in the standard variety. Due to inherent variation and change, however, the only language that can be completely standardized is a dead language.<sup>42</sup> There is therefore, in any modern language, a tension created by sociolinguistic forces pushing on one hand for a standard variety and on the other hand for increased (or maintained) variation. These can include, on the standardization side, social norms and status pressures, as well as written, formal, public, and planned

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>42</sup> Milroy and Milroy, 19.

discourse. The opposing forces would then be community and solidarity pressures reinforcing existing variation in the spoken, informal, and private spheres of language use.<sup>43</sup>

Thus it happens that there still exists considerable variation, even in highly standardized languages, as can be seen below. In the following sections, three case study languages will be examined: French, Spanish, and English; all major international, highly standardized languages. The path each followed to its current state of standardization was unique in its details and severity, due to different historical and social contexts, but similar threads can nonetheless be found in all three languages.

### 3 The Case of French

The first language to be considered as a case study of standardization is French, European in origin and famous for its strict *Académie*. “Perhaps the most highly codified of languages,”<sup>44</sup> French has long been the model for prescription and language standardization.

#### 3.1 Early French

The language today known as “French” originated in the vernacular Latin spoken in the area now known as France, part of the Romance dialect continuum.<sup>45</sup> Following the Roman conquest of Gaul, beginning in the second century, Latin became the language used for high-prestige functions, but oral vernaculars remained in less prestigious

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<sup>43</sup> R. Anthony Lodge, *French, from Dialect to Standard* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), 234.

<sup>44</sup> Shana Poplack and Nathalie Dion, “Prescription vs. Praxis: The Evolution of Future Temporal Reference in French,” *Language* 85, no. 3 (2009) <http://muse.jhu.edu.proxyau.wrlc.org/journals/language/v085/85.3.poplack.html>, 22 February 2010, 558.

<sup>45</sup> Lodge, 29.

contexts.<sup>46</sup> The date usually set as the first awareness of French as a separate language from Latin is 842, the year of the swearing of the “Strasbourg Oaths,”<sup>47</sup> but of course oral vernacular was constantly evolving away from Roman Latin.

After the collapse of the Roman Empire, this Gallo-Romance diverged even more, eventually giving rise to two different (but related) languages by the Middle Ages: the northern *langue d’oïl* and the southern *langue d’oc*.<sup>48</sup> By the tenth century, evidence is that speech varied greatly along regional lines.<sup>49</sup> There was not, however, even by the end of the twelfth century, a single spoken standard. Indeed, it seems that certain regional variations gained in prestige over the twelfth century, centered on regional economic and political areas, such as Toulouse, the Plantagenet courts in the west, and the large northern towns. The Parisian variety, however, gained prominence during the second half of this century, and in this emergence are the roots of contemporary French.<sup>50</sup>

The King’s court had been fixed in Paris beginning in the eleventh century, and gained in power over the succeeding centuries, expanding both its rule and its language. Official writing at this time, however, was in Latin, and it wasn’t until the thirteenth century that French began being used in the Parisian chancellery.<sup>51</sup> It is only at this point, therefore, that we can begin speaking of standardization of the written language.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>51</sup> John H. Fisher, *The Emergence of Standard English* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 71.

### 3.2 The Development of Standard French

As seen above, the language today referred to as “French” grew out of a northern dialect: that of the King’s court in Paris.<sup>52</sup> The current French capital city grew at an incredible rate during the twelfth century, becoming at this time the largest urban community in northern Europe.<sup>53</sup> As the Crown’s power extended through the kingdom beginning in the thirteenth century, so too did the influence of the royal language variety.<sup>54</sup>

The choice of this Parisian dialect and its subsequent codification reflect the highly centralized nature of French society, focused on Paris even now. This prestigious language variety has become, to a higher degree than many other societies, a symbol of national identity.<sup>55</sup> This is a reflection of the monarchy’s struggle for absolute power over the French territory and the need for a single national administration (including language)<sup>56</sup> as the King conquered resistant populations, a situation that of course did not disappear with the monarchy.

#### 3.2.1 Prestige and Informal Standardization

As is the case with many other standard languages, there is the feeling that Parisian French was picked as the standard dialect due to reasons of inherent superiority. It has also been argued that the Ile-de-France region spoke the most neutral variety of the *langue d’oil*, due to its central location. While this second argument may have some merit, the Parisian variety came to be chosen as the standard variety mostly due to the

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<sup>52</sup> Auroux, 138.

<sup>53</sup> Lodge, 103.

<sup>54</sup> Auroux, 140.

<sup>55</sup> Lodge, 6.

<sup>56</sup> Aurélien Sauvageot, *Français d’hier ou français de demain?* (Paris: F. Nathan, 1978), 31.

huge prestige accorded to the Paris region, which was an economically, politically, and socially important city beginning in the twelfth century.<sup>57</sup>

Alongside the expansion of the French kings beginning in the thirteenth century, regional vernacular writing systems began to be diffused alongside Latin in the area of government.<sup>58</sup> In the following centuries French would expand its usage, displacing Latin in a variety of fields. The first of these areas to be affected was the legal and administrative sphere with a variety of edicts: in 1257 St. Louis indicated that official correspondence was to be in French,<sup>59</sup> in 1510 Louis XII called for the vernacular to be the language of the country,<sup>60</sup> and the 1539 ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts established chancery French as the language of law and administration.<sup>61</sup>

Although Latin remained the formal language of the church and university education (thesis redaction, for example) until the twentieth century,<sup>62</sup> French quickly expanded into other fields during the medieval period, including medicine, mathematics, philosophy, and history.<sup>63</sup> Literature in the vernacular also gained significant prestige during this time, particularly during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>64</sup> This elaboration of function into new fields of course necessitated an increase in vocabulary, with both borrowing and neologisms becoming extremely common during this period.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Lodge, 104.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>59</sup> Fisher, 1.

<sup>60</sup> Auroux, 140.

<sup>61</sup> Sauvageot, 29.

<sup>62</sup> Auroux, 140.

<sup>63</sup> Lodge, 128.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 137.

Codification of French was centered on the concerns about “bon usage,” that is, the “correct usage.” This was deemed to be the speech of the élite,<sup>66</sup> and the imitation of this “bon usage” was a large factor in standardizing and codifying usage. This is not to say that this was always a coherent process; the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw significant economic and political competition, and with that came competition of linguistic varieties for the title of “bon usage.”<sup>67</sup> Scholars in the sixteenth century also tried to create spelling systems based on pronunciation, but as these were diverse and also not generally accepted by printers. Therefore, much of the informal codification in French (particularly in spelling) was undertaken by the clerks, civil servants, and lawyers in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and then the printers in the sixteenth.<sup>68</sup> The need for formal codification, however, would become a central preoccupation of the ruling classes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>69</sup>

### 3.2.2 Formal Standardization and the Académie Française

Much of the standardization of modern French is attributed to François de Malherbe and Claude Favre de Vaugelas, who took a negative approach to language codification in that they were clearer about what was *not* “good French” than about features accepted as standard.<sup>70</sup> The former did not elaborate a systematic doctrine, instead redacting a series of comments<sup>71</sup> which would influence later generations of grammarians with their notes on clarity and precision. Vaugelas’ *Remarques* are also a collection of comments based on the idea of “bon usage.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Sauvageot, 32.

<sup>67</sup> Lodge, 169.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>69</sup> Danielle Trudeau, *Les inventeurs du bon usage (1529-1647)* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1992), 10.

<sup>70</sup> Sauvageot, 33.

<sup>71</sup> Trudeau, 142.

<sup>72</sup> Lodge, 174.

Although the most famous, these were just two of a multitude of prescriptive authors during this time. The focus through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was, as in many European languages, the attempt to rationalize vernacular grammar to reflect the prestigious languages of Latin and Greek, as can be seen in the first significant French grammar by J. Dubois, which attempted to trace the Latin logic underlying French grammar.<sup>73</sup> He was by no means the only writer concerned with the purity of the French language, and as this topic was intimately connected with the politics and supremacy of the absolute monarchy, the language was made into an institution to be protected and regulated through Cardinal Richelieu's creation of the Académie Française in 1635.<sup>74</sup>

This regulatory organization rose, like the Italian Accademia della Crusca, out of informal meetings held in Paris in the 1630s,<sup>75</sup> with the goal of “travailler . . . à donner des règles certaines à notre langue et à la rendre pure” (working to provide sound rules to our language and render it pure).<sup>76</sup> This organization has proven itself resilient over the years, despite challenges (for example the attempt in the 1790s to eliminate it), and has over the centuries become the prominent French language authority.<sup>77</sup>

The Académie has concentrated on the production of its dictionary (first published in 1694) and grammatical and rhetorical works on the language.<sup>78</sup> The publication of the official dictionary took more than 40 years and was based on the concept of synonyms developed in the last third of the seventeenth century: that true synonyms do not exist. This concept was extremely useful in elaborating the usage and

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>74</sup> Auroux, 141.

<sup>75</sup> Ross, 24.

<sup>76</sup> Poplack and Dion, 578.

<sup>77</sup> Auroux, 146

<sup>78</sup> Ross, 24.

definition of each individual word and thus significantly improving the clarity of the dictionary.<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, the prestige of the Academy seems to be less based on its publications and more on the standing of its individual members. For example, its *Grammaire*, published in 1932 and was the object of intense criticism, and its dictionary is not the absolute authority that, for example, the Real Academia Española's publication is. Despite the fact that its prescriptions do not have the force of law, the Académie still manages to command respect and has secured a formidable reputation as the guardian of the French language.<sup>80</sup>

The process of formal codification continued unabated through the eighteenth century and beyond, focusing on prestigious classical authors for examples of correct usage.<sup>81</sup> The production of grammars in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries gained great importance as in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the French standard continued to be diffused and accepted in corners of the country previously resistant to standard language use.<sup>82</sup>

### 3.3 French Today

French today is, like Spanish and English, a global language, and the native language of diverse peoples from Paris to Switzerland to Canada to sub-Saharan Africa. For centuries, the standard has been the Parisian dialect, competing perhaps with other languages (indigenous languages, *langue d'oc*, etc) but by and large maintaining its supremacy. In recent years, however, this hegemony of the central standard has been

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<sup>79</sup> Auroux, 143.

<sup>80</sup> Lodge, 161.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

increasingly challenged.<sup>83</sup> The phenomenon now in progress is the rise of competing standards, particularly *québécois*, to reflect this gradual increase of autonomy (political, cultural, and therefore linguistic) of francophone countries.<sup>84</sup>

There still exists, naturally, cases of variation in French, both linked to and independent from regional varieties. One example of this can be seen in the usage of the future tenses; French speakers have the choice to use the simple future, the near future constructed with *aller* or the present in a future context to denote an event that has not yet happened (*I will eat*, for example, can be rendered *je mangerai*, *je vais manger*, or *je mange*).<sup>85</sup> Although many grammarians over the centuries have attempted to assign each of these variants a specific function and context, they have been largely unsuccessful and current usage shows them to be variants in competition. This is especially true as grammarians seem to have been unable to reach consensus on a differentiated role for each variant.<sup>86</sup> Other examples in variation include vocabulary differences and a phenomenon similar to the one occurring currently in Spanish as to how to deal with feminine forms of traditionally masculine words (*auteur*, *chef*, etc.).<sup>87</sup>

All this variation exists despite the strict maintenance and prescriptivism still endorsed by the Académie, which still sees itself, as it did in its inception in 1635, as the guarantor of purity in the French language.<sup>88</sup> Despite an increasing tendency to lean toward description rather than prescription,<sup>89</sup> it has in recent years focused especially on the regulation of terminology, in which endeavor it has been joined by a host of other

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<sup>83</sup> Bernhard Pöll, *Le français, langue pluricentrique? : études sur la variation diatopique d'une langue standard* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 2005), 16.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>85</sup> Poplack and Dion, 558.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 564.

<sup>87</sup> Pöll, 281.

<sup>88</sup> Ross, 24.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 26.

organizations.<sup>90</sup> This standardization of terminology has also been attempted with the collaboration of other francophone populations, notably that of Québec.<sup>91</sup> Much of the focus of vocabulary regulation in French has been aimed toward the protection of the language against English and the words that are being adopted as English linguistic dominance increases. This campaign against English has taken a couple of forms, both present in the 1994 *loi de Toubon*. Firstly, the law encouraged and regulated the use of French in signs, official documents, public services, and the media. Secondly, it set up a committee for the creation of neologisms, so that new concepts without a specific word in French, therefore attempting to block the adoption of English terms.<sup>92</sup> How successful this will be is yet to be seen, but the fact is that other varieties are gaining in prestige and regulatory organisms will soon have to find a way to integrate this into the standard Parisian French.

#### **4 The Case of Spanish**

Spanish shows many similarities with French, as is to be expected from a similarly Latin-derived European language. However, due to differences in political and social development, the creation of a Spanish language standard was accomplished with slightly different means and attitudes.

##### **4.1 Early Spanish**

Spanish, like French, forms part of the Romance language continuum.<sup>93</sup> The language commonly known today as “Spanish” is actually “Castilian” (and is known as

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<sup>90</sup> Pöll, 257.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>92</sup> Ross, 24.

<sup>93</sup> Penny, 2.

such in many places throughout the world), with origins in the prestigious speech of Burgos, later moved to Toledo and then codified as the standard of Castile and later the entire nation.<sup>94</sup>

The history of the Spanish language is a history of migration and political conquest, of dialects in constant contact, and as a result of this constant dialectal mixing, there occurred significant leveling and simplification.<sup>95</sup> In the ninth century can be seen the beginnings of this dialect mixing following the initial Castilian reconquest of central Spain. As military and political power moved south, so too did settlers, each bringing his own distinct speech variety. This continued in the eleventh century as the Castilians moved still farther south into New Castile and Toledo, and would continue through all stages of the Reconquest, even after the initial selection and codification of a Castilian standard language in the thirteenth century.<sup>96</sup>

Early (pre-standard) Spanish was therefore evidently characterized by much more variation than the standard Spanish in use today. Variation was present in all aspects of the language, from pronunciation of sibilants, /h/, /b/ and /β/ to the use of perfect auxiliaries and formation of the preterite.<sup>97</sup> Much of this variation was resolved by these leveling processes resulting from migration, but other variants would have to wait for a formal standardization process to be eliminated.

#### **4.2 The Development of Standard Spanish**

As seen above, many of the features of modern standard Spanish have their origins in the speech of eleventh-century Burgos. As there was no spelling system at the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 42-52.

time,<sup>98</sup> this variety was not codified into the standard, but its influence is still clear. The success of Burgos features is partially attributable to military successes and dialect contact, and partly a result of the cultural and political prestige of the city. This prestige encouraged imitation and the spread of the Burgos variety.<sup>99</sup>

The recapture of Toledo in 1085, and its subsequent elevation to capital of Castile, attracted a significant number of migrants from Burgos. These migrants, who used speech varieties developed in Burgos, often attained social and political power, lending prestige to their speech variety. This ensured the preeminence of the Burgos features over Toledan varieties or those of other immigrants.<sup>100</sup>

#### **4.2.1 Prestige and Informal Standardization**

This gains importance in light of the fact that it was ultimately the Toledan variety which was selected as the base for standard Castilian.<sup>101</sup> The city was both home to the Castilian Church and Court and the site of scientific and literary works, facts which conferred upon the city religious, political, and cultural prestige.<sup>102</sup>

New systems for writing Romance languages were imported from France and applied to Spanish varieties between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, and it was the speech of educated Toledans that was most often represented in new literature.<sup>103</sup> This new literature was published through both private and government-sponsored projects.

Early printers had a significant, if informal, influence on the codification of the Spanish language. Through extensive revision before publication, texts were changed to

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Miranda Stewart, *The Spanish Language Today* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 16.

<sup>102</sup> Penny, 198.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

reflect the usage of the political elite, effectively reducing variation.<sup>104</sup> The major influence often cited in terms of eliminating variation and promoting standard use of the language, however, is the corpus of works sponsored by King Alfonso X (1252-84). These scientific, legal, and literary works were presented as a model for other writers and, as the King's project, carried immense prestige. In addition, the variety was established as the standard for governmental and official documents throughout the kingdom, diffusing this particular variety and supporting its use in new and prestigious contexts.<sup>105</sup>

The elaboration of function taking place under King Alfonso X was only possible because speakers were beginning to be aware of their language as separate from Latin, a process dating to the eleventh century, when scribes began transcribing vernacular pronunciations.<sup>106</sup> Spanish could then challenge Latin for usage in first narrative poetry, then scientific and literary contexts,<sup>107</sup> and even religion with the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century translations of the Bible. Inherent in this expansion was the development of more complex syntactical and lexical resources, as well as the elaboration of vocabulary by both borrowing and derivation.<sup>108</sup>

By the end of Alfonso X's reign, language variation, at least in writing, had been considerably reduced, to the point that the writer's regional origins are masked.<sup>109</sup> The "Golden Age" of Spanish literature also did much to reduce variation and promote the

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>105</sup> Stewart, 16-17.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>107</sup> Penny, 203.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 201.

standard through diffusion of the variety in a prestigious setting.<sup>110</sup> Formal codification of the standard, however, would have to wait until the late 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>111</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Formal Standardization and the Real Academia Española

The first instances of explicit codification took place through small-scale lexicographical enterprises, and the first grammar of a modern language was Antonio de Nebrija's *Gramática de la lengua castellana* in 1492.<sup>112</sup> This can be seen as a response to the idea that Spanish had up to that point "run wild" and needed a political and cultural rejuvenation.<sup>113</sup> Nebrija echoed Juan de Valdés in his classification of the type of language codified in his grammar: "I write as I speak,"<sup>114</sup> basing language not on classical ideals (for instance Latin grammar and etymology), but on the reality of the upper class speech variety. It is also interesting to note that this new push for codification and documentation of the language coincided with the expansion of the Spanish empire. Nebrija's grammar would prove a useful tool in assimilating conquered peoples into the empire by teaching them a standardized form of the language.<sup>115</sup>

A crucial moment in the standardization of Spanish took place in 1713 with the establishment of the Real Academia Española (RAE), with the following goal: "*fijar las voces y vocablos de la lengua castellana en su mayor propiedad, elegancia y pureza* ('to set the words and terms of the Castilian language in utmost congruity, elegance and purity')."<sup>116</sup> As can be seen in this and in the organization's motto: "*limpia, fija, y da*

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<sup>110</sup> Paffey, 317.

<sup>111</sup> Penny, 200.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>113</sup> Train, 218.

<sup>114</sup> Penny, 201.

<sup>115</sup> Train, 219.

<sup>116</sup> Ross, 25.

*esplendor*” (‘to clean, fix, and give splendor’ [to the language]),<sup>117</sup> the organization was, from the very beginning, a conservative organization dedicated to preserving the existing Spanish language.

Beginning in the 15<sup>th</sup> century there is evidence of precursor groups to the RAE: groups of upper class humanists throughout the Spanish kingdoms were meeting to discuss language. These small academies took their inspiration from the even more common groups in Italy, and the establishment of a formal language academy also occurred after the creation of similar organizations in Italy and then in France.<sup>118</sup>

The RAE was officially created in 1713, but had to await royal approval from Felipe V, and the founding documents of the Academia were not published until 1715.<sup>119</sup> The founding members were all aristocrats or cultured members of the clergy, a composition which would change slightly to reflect the evolution of Spanish society. The link to the Spanish Crown, while still maintained, has relaxed over the centuries. Today’s members are for the most part academics, preserving the traditional intellectual atmosphere of the Academia.<sup>120</sup>

The Academia has devoted itself to publications documenting and prescribing language use. These publications, supplemented by private works as well, include *Ortographía* (1741), *Gramática* (1771),<sup>121</sup> and the famous *Diccionario de la lengua castellana* (published in six volumes between 1726 and 1739).<sup>122</sup> These volumes have been updated consistently in the centuries after the first editions, so that by this point

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<sup>117</sup> Penny, 202.

<sup>118</sup> Alonso Zamora Vicente, *Historia de la Real Academia Española* (Madrid: Espasa, 1999), 13.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>121</sup> Penny, 202.

<sup>122</sup> Zamora Vicente, 369.

spelling is highly uniform and morphology and syntax vary only slightly. Vocabulary is the most resistant to standardization, despite significant efforts.<sup>123</sup>

The Real Academia has, in the years since its creation, established itself as the foremost language authority. Despite suffering through the tumultuous events of the nation's history, from the Napoleonic invasion which scattered the members,<sup>124</sup> to the Franco dictatorship and the reorganization of all national institutions,<sup>125</sup> the Academia has continued its work of maintaining standard Spanish.

The Academia's influence has also widened to include other Spanish-speaking countries. Spanish was not declared the official language of the colonies until 1770, as previously the aim had been evangelization and political control.<sup>126</sup> However, upon independence, the ruling elites were Spanish-speaking and the new constitutions legitimized Spanish as the official language.<sup>127</sup> The first member from Latin America (Andrés Bello) was added to the RAE in 1851,<sup>128</sup> and in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> Academies were founded in various Latin American countries.<sup>129</sup> These academies banded together in 1961 to create the *Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española*, promoting a more comprehensive and inclusive language policy.<sup>130</sup>

#### 4.3 Spanish Today

Spanish is currently spoken by hundreds of millions of people and is the official language of 21 countries.<sup>131</sup> In this context, it is not surprising that considerable variation

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<sup>123</sup> Penny, 202.

<sup>124</sup> Zamora Vicente, 451.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 463.

<sup>126</sup> Pöhl, 66.

<sup>127</sup> Penny, 206.

<sup>128</sup> Zamora Vicente, 345.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 349-50.

<sup>130</sup> Stewart, 17.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 3.

still exists. Change has increased both in magnitude and speed, with 30,000 terms added annually in science and technology alone.<sup>132</sup> Given these multiple influences, the RAE has changed tack and, while still remaining a fairly conservative influence, changed its aim in the most recent revision (1993) of the *Estatutos*. The newly articulated purpose of the RAE (and panhispanic collaborators) is the preservation of the unity of the Spanish language as a whole, fighting the perceived threat of fragmentation.<sup>133</sup>

This has led to the inclusion in the *Diccionario* of regional vocabulary and also to the creation of a *Diccionario panhispánico de dudas* which sets out to describe the multiple uses of the Spanish language.<sup>134</sup> In this way and also in its attitude regarding English the RAE differs from the French Academy. The Academia does not seem to view English as a threat in the same way its French counterpart does, and there has not been legislation paralleling the *loi Toubon*.<sup>135</sup>

Despite increasing acceptance of regionalisms, Spanish varieties continue to be the most prestigious.<sup>136</sup> However, certain other varieties, viewed as non-standard when compared to the Spanish usage, have gained national and/or regional prestige. Perhaps the best example of this type of prestigious non-standard is the use of the *voseo* in Argentine Spanish, a feature typical of prestigious Buenos Aires speech.<sup>137</sup> Other features with widespread variation include *leísmo* and *loísmo*, *yeísmo*, and *seseo*.<sup>138</sup> While these occur mostly at the level of spoken language, which is less standardized, they indicate the rise of competing standards. Another interesting instance of change and variation, even in

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>133</sup> Paffey, 321.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 326.

<sup>135</sup> Ross, 25.

<sup>136</sup> Pöll, 79.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>138</sup> Stewart, 106, 48, and 49.

the standard language, can be seen in the attempt to reduce inherent sexism in the language by the creation of a female version of a male term (e.g. *presidenta*).<sup>139</sup>

It is worth addressing the fact that there are emerging different written standards in different contexts, as well. Administrative Spanish will differ from the Spanish used in the print media, and which has published its own style guides codifying usage.<sup>140</sup> Despite centuries of effort at standardization, the Spanish language still shows considerable variation and even competing standards.

## 5 The Case of English

English, while still a European language, has less in common with its continental counterparts. Its path to standardization was affected less by formal governmental policy and more by private enterprises, a fact that has not, however, impeded the creation of a standard. The fact that English was for centuries a low-prestige language subordinate to French and this lack of official organizations has colored both the development and current status of the language.

### 5.1 Early English

In the tenth and eleventh centuries, prior to the Norman invasion of England, the language of the land was West Saxon, a standard imposed by King Alfred's secretariat.<sup>141</sup> After the Norman conquest of 1066 until the fifteenth century, however, the national language of England was actually French, due to the fact that it was the native language of all those in authority.<sup>142</sup> Of course, much of the official correspondence and

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>141</sup> Fisher, 37.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 16.

documentation in both English and French territories took place in Latin, which was still the language of prestige.<sup>143</sup>

Norman control of England lasted from 1066 until 1217, but despite increasing cultural and political independence in the fourteenth century, French influence was particularly powerful during this time.<sup>144</sup> Although Latin remained the language of learning until even the seventeenth century, and French remained the officially recognized and required language, it is clear that by the fourteenth century most daily activity took place in English.<sup>145</sup>

This English, however, was not the standard version of West Saxon common under King Alfred, but instead a myriad of dialects; since the invasion each region had spoken its own variety without any sort of centralizing or standardizing influence. A new standard would emerge in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,<sup>146</sup> but the status of English during this time was a “long and gradual struggle to acquire greater respectability” vis-à-vis French and Latin.<sup>147</sup>

## **5.2 The Development of Standard English**

The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in England saw a rise in the use of English in all contexts. In 1362 English was made the official language of lawcourts through the Statute of Pleading,<sup>148</sup> and more and more literature was published in English beginning in the latter half of the fourteenth century.<sup>149</sup> As English successfully challenged French

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>145</sup> Milroy and Milroy, 26.

<sup>146</sup> Tony Crowley, *Standard English and the Politics of Language* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 100.

<sup>147</sup> Milroy and Milroy, 26.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Fisher, 19.

and Latin for primacy in England, there began to be seen the necessity of a more standardized and unified form of the language.

Standard English today arose from a variety spoken in the Southeast-Midlands area of Britain, a region, like Burgos and Toledo in Spain, which enjoyed cultural and economic prestige. Had the North of England been more economically or politically powerful, the English spoken today would be very different,<sup>150</sup> but beginning in the thirteenth century the Midland dialect gradually gained in importance, to the point of dominance in the fourteenth century. In addition to the prestige attributed to the area, the Midland dialect was also perceived to be an intermediate dialect appropriate for use as the literary standard.<sup>151</sup>

### **5.2.1 Prestige and Informal Standardization**

This choice of variety is often attributed to William Caxton, a fifteenth-century printer, who looked to solve the problem of variability in written language.<sup>152</sup> Others point to Henry V and his English Chancery as the source of this elimination of variability in writing.<sup>153</sup> The truth is that these forces worked in tandem to develop a standard form of English in literary as well as administrative and legal contexts.

Caxton returned to England in 1476 and established his printing press in Westminster, the site of government operations. In the latter half of the fifteenth century printing presses (including Caxton's) and education began taking over the role of diffusing a written standard. However, in the years prior to this, from 1420 to 1460,

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<sup>150</sup> Milroy and Milroy, 27.

<sup>151</sup> Crowley, 101.

<sup>152</sup> Milroy and Milroy, 27.

<sup>153</sup> Fisher, 2

English was beginning to be used in government, business, and also in the private sphere.<sup>154</sup>

This was most likely a deliberate decision by Henry IV and Henry V as a method of strengthening the English kings' control.<sup>155</sup> In 1362 clerks admitted that parliament was addressed in English. Between the second half of the fourteenth century use of English in court and administrative settings gradually increased until 1450, when it was the rule.<sup>156</sup>

One of the other major works involved in setting an informal standard of the English language was the King James translation of the Scriptures. This work continued to be held up as the literary standard through the eighteenth century.<sup>157</sup> This can be interpreted as an example of the elaboration of function and increasing prestige of the standard language; as English became established in a religious context, both the language in general and the particular variety used in the publication gained in influence.

Finally, in the nineteenth century there began to be an increased sense of national unity as a result of foreign wars, a nationalism that manifested itself in defense of a national language.<sup>158</sup> This can be seen in the new objection to foreign borrowing of vocabulary; despite the fact that much of the vocabulary of English was not native, in the nineteenth century there begins to be a sense of the integrality of the language and a resistance to the addition of "artificial" elements.<sup>159</sup> There was also a push for education, and more particularly English language education.<sup>160</sup> This would serve to further promote

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 45-6.

<sup>157</sup> Crowley, 94.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>159</sup> Milroy and Milroy, 37.

<sup>160</sup> Crowley, 83.

the standard form of the language codified informally through use in literature and official documents as well as formally through the publication of grammars, dictionaries, and style guides.

### **5.2.2 Formal Standardization and the Lack of Governmental Institutions**

Unlike the two European languages seen above and countless others throughout the world, the English language does not have a prescriptivist language academy. There is, however, the English Academy of South Africa, founded in 1961, with the goal of “promoting the effective use of English as a dynamic language in Southern Africa.”<sup>161</sup> This Academy, however, was formed long after most of the processes of standardization, and especially codification, had already taken place. Therefore, the history of the standardization of the English language is less tied to a single governmentally sponsored organization, as was the case in France, and more the work of private enterprise and what Milroy calls the “complaint tradition.”<sup>162</sup>

The fact that no language academy currently exists does not mean that no attempts were made to create one. In fact, there were several efforts made, both in Britain and in the United States, to create an official organization to monitor and standardize the language. There were in Britain many informal gatherings of the type common in the rest of Europe and which eventually resulted in official Academies (as in the case of France and Spain). In 1664, a short-lived committee “for improving the English language” was even created.<sup>163</sup> Later calls for purification were made by Jonathan Swift, Lord Chesterfield,<sup>164</sup> and Daniel Defoe. Swift even had political backing, but political events

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<sup>161</sup> Ross, 26.

<sup>162</sup> Milroy and Milroy, 24.

<sup>163</sup> Ross, 25-6.

<sup>164</sup> Crowley, 93.

caused his push for an Academy to come to nothing. The proposals for a formal organization were equally unsuccessful in the U.S., where there were proposals for an “American Society of Language” from 1774 on and a bill for a national academy was even presented to Congress in 1806.<sup>165</sup> This and similar proposals found a distinct lack of support and so never took hold.<sup>166</sup>

These unsuccessful attempts at academies led to the work of formal codification being undertaken by unofficial organizations. This included philological societies in both Britain and the United States.<sup>167</sup> The former set up the Unregistered Words Committee in 1857, an organization that would eventually give rise to the Oxford English Dictionary as a project aimed at unifying the language.<sup>168</sup> Other, earlier projects include Dr. Johnson’s *Dictionary* (1747) and eighteenth century grammar,<sup>169</sup> and Robert Lowth’s 1762 grammar.<sup>170</sup> In addition, Noah Webster composed his famous dictionary changing the spelling system as well as several textbooks as a politically motivated project aimed at increasing the differences between British and American English.<sup>171</sup> To this day, private projects, including these dictionaries as well as language journals, carry out many of the functions attributed to language academies in other countries.<sup>172</sup>

### 5.3 English Today

In Anglophone cultures the focus has been less on linguistic purity and more, recently, on the connection of language to cultural and national identity. This is especially evident in the United States, where a segment of the population which feels

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<sup>165</sup> Ross, 26.

<sup>166</sup> Milroy and Milroy, 158.

<sup>167</sup> Ross, 26.

<sup>168</sup> Crowley, 109.

<sup>169</sup> Fisher, 148.

<sup>170</sup> Pöll, 106.

<sup>171</sup> Milroy and Milroy, 158.

<sup>172</sup> Ross, 26.

threatened by the influx of immigrants has worked to create an English-only movement. The proposed goal of this movement is to make English the official legal language of the United States.<sup>173</sup> Resistance to this movement appears to be based in the historic American attitude toward language: prior to the nineteenth century bilingualism and multiculturalism were the American norm, and there is still a residue of this melting-pot consciousness.<sup>174</sup>

In Britain, ideas about standard language are still closely tied to class and mobility, whereas in the United States language prestige is related more to race.<sup>175</sup> The example most often cited is that of Ebonics, or African American Vernacular English. This speech variety is an excellent example of linguistic prestige being arbitrarily designated according to social, political, or economic prestige, as well as the fact that strong social networks contribute to the maintenance of non-standard varieties.<sup>176</sup>

English, like any other modern language, continues to show considerable variation, as the briefest comparison of American, English, and Australian language use will confirm. This is of course more salient when pronunciation is considered, since a standard language is generally considered to be the written form. In terms of a spoken standard, however, the British and American standards would of course be different, with Received Pronunciation often chosen as the former and what is known as “Network American” as the latter.<sup>177</sup> This connects with the differing ideologies toward “prestigious” language use in that Received Pronunciation is clearly marked for class, native to little more than three percent of the population, whereas the American

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<sup>173</sup> Fisher, 2.

<sup>174</sup> Milroy and Milroy, 157.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>176</sup> Inoue, 122.

<sup>177</sup> Milroy and Milroy, 150.

equivalent is often referred to as “accentless”—a leveled speech variety showing no regional distinctions.<sup>178</sup>

It is also interesting to consider the status of post-colonial English language use. Of course language use is highly varied and often on a divergent course, but this is often tied to national identity. The South African Academy, for instance, is concerned with maintaining the South African usage and function of English.<sup>179</sup> In Singapore, too, language use distinctly reflects the fact that the speaker is Singaporean rather than English, for example with the use of “use to” where standard English would dictate “used to.”<sup>180</sup> In spite of the fact that English speakers, especially when studying variation in other languages, tend to think of their own language as less varied in terms of usage, English actually still shows a great deal of variation in usage.

## 6 Conclusions

The drive for and development of a language standard is inherent and in no way an anomaly. In fact, many non-western countries such as Japan and Thailand saw language standardization as a sign of progress and instituted it in their own countries during the great push for development.<sup>181</sup> The Japanese and Thai saw the great potential implicit in the use of a single language across the entire nation, just as the Europeans had in their nation-building processes centuries earlier.

As seen above, the greater the degree of standardization, the greater the opportunity for communication across a large range of space and social hierarchy.

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>179</sup> Ross, 26.

<sup>180</sup> Milroy and Milroy, 89.

<sup>181</sup> Inoue, 123.

**Comment [J6]:** Remember that ‘however, paradoxically, we should not ignore the fact that for speakers of low-prestige varieties, the establishment of a standard may imply an increase in the range of variation available...’ (Penny: 194)

Although the standard language may only be the native variety of a small percentage of the population, the fact that other populations acquire and are able to use it allows for increased cooperation and commerce of both goods and ideas.

This increased communication is advantageous in all areas: from political governance to literature to science to education, a standard language ensures that ideas are actually transmitted with maximum efficiency. Reduced miscommunication and increased efficiency are certainly important motivations in the search for standardization and especially codification. This was indeed the case in the case study languages: much of the impulse for codification arose in all three languages with the advent of printing and wider readership. The Reformation necessitated a Bible accessible to the masses (and therefore written in the vernacular rather than Latin) and scientific and literary production was booming in all three countries in the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries. It is therefore no surprise that we see pushes by printers such as William Caxton or educated citizens such as Malherbe or Vaugelas for a standardized written language to be used in publishing.

Although this is a perfectly legitimate explanation for the move toward codification, it certainly is not the entire reason. Much of the standardization process is also tightly linked with politics and nation-building. Consider the other benefits of increased communication: increased political control and ease of governance. As in the literary and scientific domains, government administration efficiency greatly increases if, firstly, it is all conducted in a single language, and, secondly, if that language is the native language of those doing the governing (the prestigious variety of the vernacular language). This can be seen, for example, in the decision of the English Chancellery to

conduct business in English rather than French, or the French or Spanish ordinances to move away from Latin.

Secondly, having a single language of administration and governance can be used to promote national unity. As central governments expand their control over both more territory and more population, cohesiveness becomes an issue. As seen above, this sense of national identity can be promoted via the creation or imposition of a common language, bringing together peoples with various backgrounds to be part of one nation. Imposition of a language standard thus parallels the imposition of political or economic authority, the way language prestige is tied to prestige in other areas. This can be seen the most clearly in the French example, where the French kings' expansion in the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, and the subsequent strengthening of the centralized republic, gradually led to the reduction or elimination of regional languages. It is also present in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when the idea of a "nation" was becoming increasingly important.

This was the case in extranational expansion as well. Standardization allows the language to be more easily taught to non-native speakers, streamlining assimilation into the nation or empire.<sup>182</sup> The classic example for this is the Spanish colonization of Latin America in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when Spanish became the language of administration of the empire

It is no coincidence, therefore that the language standardization process tends to parallel historical events. The initial selection of variants occurs as one group begins to acquire prestige and influences nearby areas. This can be seen in the rise of Toledo as the Spanish capital, or Paris as the French one: economic and political clout led to increased

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<sup>182</sup> Train, 219.

influence and centralization. It also coincides with an increasing sense of national belonging: as the French, Spanish, and English elite gained in power and legitimacy, there began also to be an awareness of the native languages as separate from the former prestigious language (Latin or French), and as worthy of standardization in its own right. Further attempts at codification, particularly of the formal variety, including creation of Academies, occurred concurrently with perceived threats to the nation or national identity: the Hundred Years' War, Latin American independence movements, the fight to conquer the French south, even the American struggle for independence.

It can therefore be said that language standardization is often largely politically linked, and in the same vein, is a socially motivated process in that it is mostly completed by the elite. As seen above, social networks act as a reinforcement mechanism for language varieties, standard or non-standard. The elite seek to not only to consolidate the language within their own group for the purpose of communication of knowledge and effective governance, but also to distinguish themselves from less prestigious groups<sup>183</sup> and other nations.

Standardization efforts in French, Spanish, and English have been largely successful in terms of written language, especially in morphology and syntax. However, both the way the process developed in each language and its current state of affairs is unique to each language. French, for example, developed as a very centralized nation based in Paris, expanding gradually outwards in the face of strong resistance. French is still a very centralized state and its language policy continues to reflect this fact. In its reluctance to accept other varieties as parts of standard French, in the Académie's resistance to English terminology, and in the reigning belief of the purity and superiority

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<sup>183</sup> Lodge, 159.

of the French language standard, the French linguistic attitude is perhaps the most conservative.

Spanish is slightly less conservative, in that it has had to deal with the expansion of the Spanish language to all of Latin America. Spanish evolved alongside other regional languages, including Catalan and Basque, and still coexists with several within the Spanish territory. Therefore, although Spanish language policy has also been conservative, and change has been slow to come, it is slightly more open than French. The goal, rather than linguistic purity, is now linguistic unity—in the face of other languages, the language authorities want to keep the Spanish speakers together.

English is a slightly different tale: for centuries the linguistic underdog facing the prestigious French, it spent centuries fighting for legitimacy. The English language is therefore more connected to national identity and the assertion of sovereignty than necessarily linguistic and cultural prestige. This accounts for the lack of formal institutions charged with safeguarding language purity and instead the existence of movements seeking to tie the English language to the American political entity.

Despite these differences in political and linguistic development, these European languages underwent similar processes of standardization, to the point that now there exists a commonly accepted “correct” form, in the written language, at least. Of course, in some ways, further efforts at standardization are useless. Spoken language is almost impossible to standardize, and innovation and change in a modern, living language is inevitable. The only way to stifle human creativity in terms of language is if the language itself is no longer used: standardization is only ever complete in a dead language, but attempts at standardization will be forever present.

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