Wendy Ayres-Bennett/John Bellamy/Andreas Krogull/
Nicola McLelland/Jiaye Wu/Hui Zhao

Standard languages, norms and variation: New perspectives within a multilingual research project

1. Introduction: the MEITS research programme

Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies (MEITS: www.meits.org) is a major interdisciplinary research programme, funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council, under its Open World Research Initiative, which seeks to reinvigorate learning, teaching and research in Modern Languages in the UK. This project, of which Wendy Ayres-Bennett is Principal Investigator, started on 1 July 2016 and will run for 4 years. Its overall aim is to demonstrate the value of languages, both to individuals and to society, and the importance of speaking more than one language – or of being multilingual. This comes at a crucial time for the UK, when language learning in our schools is at an 18-year low,[1] and when university departments in Modern Languages are closing or being severely reduced in capacity.[2] For speakers of English, the instrumental arguments for language learning carry less weight than elsewhere in Europe, and we are therefore looking for new reasons for learning languages, including consideration of questions of health and well-being; conflict resolution and peace-building; identity, diversity and social cohesion.

Such a complex and challenging issue necessarily requires an interdisciplinary approach, bringing in expertise from different centres, as well as over 30 non-Higher Education (HE) partners. Led by the University of Cambridge, we are a team of around 35, with researchers from the Universities of Edinburgh, Nottingham, and Queen's University, Belfast, including 14 postdocs and 6 PhD students. We also have international partners at the Universities of Bergen, Girona, Peking, and the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Our non-HE partners range from large national bodies such as Age UK or the British Chambers of Commerce through to grassroots organizations such as the Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum or

1 For a summary of the position, see the results of the BBC survey published in February 2019 (https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-47334374).

2 For details of the decline in students taking languages at University, see the British Academy's 2018 report, *The Landscape for Humanities and Social Sciences in Higher Education* (p. 5) (https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/news/diversity-subjects-essential-national-prosperity-post-brexit-warns-british-academy).

the East Belfast Mission. The project is engaging with our partners throughout the research programme, from working with them to help us shape our research questions or to find subjects for our research, to using their networks to facilitate the dissemination of our findings.

In seeking to show the importance of languages to key issues of our time and to demonstrate that language learning is not only possible but also beneficial, whatever your age or background, the central aims of MEITS are to:

– Create new knowledge about the opportunities and challenges of multilingualism for individuals, communities and nations,
– Change attitudes towards multilingualism in the general public and amongst key stakeholders and policymakers,
– Develop new interdisciplinary research paradigms and methodologies,
– Re-energize Modern Languages by demonstrating how an innovative interdisciplinary project can integrate language-led research with literary-cultural studies and thereby address key issues of our times.

The MEITS research project is innovative in a number of respects. First, the interdisciplinarity is underpinned by disciplines rarely brought together in a single integrated programme: literary and cultural studies, the history of ideas, sociolinguistics, education, applied linguistics, and cognitive science. At each of our project meetings, methodological and definitional issues are discussed, including reviewing basic key terms such as ‘multilingualism’, ‘native speaker’, ‘proficiency’, and ‘identity’. This interdisiplinarity has allowed us to explore the interplay of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, and to develop innovative approaches, such as integrating the type of focus groups usually associated with sociolinguistics into our work on the cognitive advantages of learning a language. A second innovative aspect is the breadth in the range of languages being researched, based on a desire to take a holistic approach to the languages of the UK, so that language learning is situated within the broader context of the UK’s multilingualism. We are thus considering:

– Languages traditionally taught in UK schools and universities such as French, German and Spanish as well as Mandarin, which is growing in importance,
– The indigenous languages of the UK (Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Welsh, etc.),
– The numerous community or heritage languages (Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, Polish, etc.).

Whilst, then, British people typically think of themselves as poor at learning languages and, as speakers of a global language, do not necessarily appreciate the need to do so, the UK is nevertheless richly multilingual because of it many indigenous and community languages; indeed, around one in five primary school pupils has a first language other than English. Whilst the project’s focus is on the promotion of languages in the UK, we have consistently introduced comparative studies from elsewhere in Europe and beyond, in order to strengthen and add depth to our arguments.

The project thus comprises six interlocking research strands, of which Strand 2 (S2) is key to this chapter's focus, and which will be described in more detail in section 2 below.

S1. Arts of identity: literature, cinema, culture and citizenship in a globalizing Europe (with a particular focus on Catalan and Ukrainian)
S2. Standard languages, norms and variation: comparative perspectives in multilingual contexts
S3. Sociolinguistic perspectives on multilingualism: identity, diversity and social cohesion (with a particular focus on Ireland and France)
S4. The influence of multilingual identity on foreign language learning
S5. Language learning across the lifespan: the role of age, language-specific factors and learning experience on language acquisition
S6. Multilingualism and cognition: implications for motivation, health and well-being

It is crucial not only to understand the factors affecting language learning (S5), but also to shape learners with multilingual identities (S4), who conceive language learning as a lifelong process (S4, S6). We aim to open up Modern Languages to diverse groups, including autistic children and third-age learners (S6). The study of multilingualism demonstrates how research in Modern Languages heightens insight into such major contemporary issues as: the value of pluralism and diversity in the face of cultural imperialism and linguistic hegemony (S1, S2); social cohesion at the local, regional, national and international level (S1, S3); conflict resolution and the advancement of democracy (S1, S3). These and other questions are sharpened through the study of minoritized and/or non-standard languages (S1-S3).

2. New perspectives on standard languages

Strand 2 is led by Nicola McLelland and also includes Wendy Ayres-Bennett, three postdoctoral researchers (John Bellamy, Andreas Krogull, Hui (Annette) Zhao) and a PhD student (Jiaye (Jenny) Wu). The strand also has a number of important strand-specific non-HE partners, including EFNIL.

How does a strand on linguistic standardization fit into a project on multilingualism and the promotion of languages in the UK? A standard language is closely tied to individual and group identities, can enhance social cohesion and democratic citizenship, and is a vehicle for cultural expression. According to established wisdom, standard languages, codified in reference works, tend towards minimal variation of form and maximal variation of function (Milroy/Milroy 1999, 22).

Mastery of the standard typically confers social capital, whilst changes to 'good usage' may be strongly contested. Research to date has tended to focus on standard languages in notionally monolingual nations, notably in Europe.[3]

In our project we are exploring how multilingualism has shaped and challenged standard languages, past and present, in speech and writing, old and new media. On the basis of historical and synchronic analyses, we seek to draw comparisons between languages at different stages of standardization/de-standardization, in varied political and cultural contexts. We are examining the cultural status of standard languages of different kinds: national and transnational (e.g. France/Francophonie), pluricentric (e.g. German), and languages vying with other languages/varieties on cultural, political and ideological grounds (e.g. Ukrainian, Irish, Mandarin).

Our aim, therefore, is to create expertise in the comparative analysis of (de)standardization in multilingual contexts and so build research capacity in comparative historical and contemporary sociolinguistics. In integrating work on European and non-European languages, including minoritized languages, we are exploring the extent to which traditional models and methodologies need to be refined or reworked. We ask:

- What is a standard language, especially in multilingual contexts? What historical, cultural, literary and social factors determine how standard languages are understood by different constituencies, e.g. educators, learners, policy-makers, professional and lay language users? How can standard languages serve as a symbol of, or vehicle for, the expression of cultural, political or ideological identities in multilingual societies?
- How important are standard languages to minoritized languages? How can a standard help or hinder the promotion of such languages, especially where speakers are overwhelmingly multilingual (e.g. Punjabi, Irish)? How far does the imposition of standard languages create cohesion or threaten diversity?
- What role do standard languages and non-standard varieties play in language education?

Our approach combines humanities methodologies (historiography, the history of ideas, close textual readings) with sociolinguistic and historical sociolinguistic methods (qualitative and quantitative). Sources include interviews, surveys, policy documents, lay linguistic publications, grammars and language advice manuals. The core team is focussing on European and Chinese contexts; conferences and workshops have allowed us to broaden our scope and to generate comparisons with other parts of Asia and Europe.

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[3] See, however, Tieken-Boon van Ostade/Percy (eds.) (2017) or Lane/Costa/De Korne (eds.) (2018).

The conferences organized to date[4] have explored, for instance, the long history of multilingualism in the UK, and the difficulty of applying models elaborated for European national languages to different contexts. A workshop on notions of language standards in multilingual contexts, held in Nottingham in July 2017, demonstrated the reality that most individual standard languages – and the standard language ideologies, policies and practices that support them – are located in plurilingual societies, and are experienced and negotiated by many multilingual individuals. The case studies presented, which included studies of England, Ireland, Italy, Switzerland, Sweden, and Ukraine, dealt with standard language ideals and realities in contexts of both indigenous and migration-induced multilingualism. They examined how and why individuals and institutions, in their attitudes, practices and policies, may apply ideologies differentially to different languages, with different outcomes, as well as ways in which standard language ideologies are in tension with other ideologies, such as ideologies of flexible bilingualism and/or translanguaging. A selection of papers are forthcoming as a special issue of the *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*.

A conference at the University of Nottingham's Ningbo campus in December 2017 had as its goal the aim of testing the applicability of notions of standard and variation – chiefly developed by western linguists for European language contexts – in the very different social and political historical contexts of Asia, with case studies drawn from, for example, Japan, Thailand, and India, as well as China, including studies of its minority languages. Another conference in Cambridge in April 2018 further opened up the field to consider global perspectives on standardization. This allowed contributors to one of the major outputs from the project, a Handbook on linguistic standardization, to be published by Cambridge University Press, to explore areas of similarity and difference in different linguistic and cultural contexts. Importantly, the Handbook will address theoretical and methodological issues as well as extending the study of standardization to new contexts and case studies.

In the next section we will outline some of the original research we are conducting, but we will start by highlighting two aspects of our current work. First, in our consideration of standard and non-standard language, language norms and language variation in multilingual contexts, we are looking at both standardization 'from above' (such as the work of policymakers and regulatory bodies) and 'from

[4] "The Emergence of Standard English in Multilingual Britain", organized by Laura Wright, University of Cambridge April 2017; "European experiences of 'good' language, 'bad' language", organized by Nicola McLelland, University of Nottingham, July 2017; "Language Standardization and Linguistic Variation in Asia from Sociolinguistic Perspectives", organized by Nicola McLelland and Hui (Annette) Zhao, University of Nottingham at Ningbo, December 2017; "Global approaches to multilingualism and standardization", April 2018, organized by Wendy Ayres-Bennett and John Bellamy, University of Cambridge. All of these will result in publications.

below', including the role of ordinary language users and language societies. We are also focussing on the means by which this work is achieved, including looking at learning materials, metalinguistic texts, etc. Second, alongside the 'pure' research, we are looking at the implications of standard languages and norms in different policy domains. Most obviously, perhaps, this concerns the education sector. This includes looking at the role of teachers, textbooks, curricula and assessment in the dissemination of norms, and identifying the needs of, and the challenges for, teachers and learners in highly multilingual and multicultural contexts. Another area where the strand is seeking to inform policy is in the intersection between language, identity and social cohesion. This is being achieved through researching places and contexts where language issues are politically sensitive, such as Catalonia, China and Luxembourg. The intention is that improved understanding of the spectrum of views on local, regional and national varieties will lead to improved input into key policy decisions. The strand's final conference, "Language rules? Languages, standards, multilingualism, and linguistic inequality", held in Nottingham in April 2019, brought together researchers and stakeholders, including members of EFNIL, to address some of these practical and policy issues.

3. Broadening perspectives on standardization

In this section, we present some of the case studies being explored by the team and consider how they open up new perspectives on linguistic standardization.

3.1 Luxembourg – John Bellamy

Luxembourg, as an officially trilingual nation, affords a particularly interesting case study for the exploration of standardization. This is because, although official policy promotes Luxembourgish as the 'national language' and the 'language of integration', there is widespread uncertainty about writing Luxembourgish according to a standardized orthography. Indeed, previous research has shown that there is little knowledge amongst the general public about the availability of dictionaries and other metalinguistic resources for Luxembourgish, despite their existence for many years (see Bellamy forthcoming).

John Bellamy therefore conducted research in Luxembourg in Spring 2018, interviewing a range of stakeholders and language authorities, including policymakers, about their knowledge of, and views on, Luxembourg language policy, with a particular focus on the standardization of orthography. Since norms are disseminated by both state institutions and private/commercial organizations, key actors from both types of bodies were consulted. Amongst the former, representatives from the Conseil permanent de la langue luxembourgeoise (CPLL), Lëtzebuerger Online Dictionnaire (LOD), and the Institut National des Langues (INL) were interviewed; amongst the latter, a senior journalist of the popular *rtl.lu* news website, the creator of the widespread *Spellchecker.lu app*, and a publisher also took part in the study.

The results of this fieldwork will be published elsewhere (Bellamy in preparation), but we will mention some of the key findings here which have been analysed within the context of the broader language policy-practice interface. The process of norm transmission, diffusion and implementation (via, for example, teachers, the media and publishers) has a considerable impact on the general acceptance, perception and adoption of those linguistic norms and standards by speakers of Luxembourgish. Although a state body might take it upon itself to develop an official set of standards, the reception of the new language norms depends considerably on an intermediary level to disseminate them effectively and the importance of this stage in the process should not be underestimated. The private and commercial channels of norm transmission, such as widely read online news portals and downloadable apps in practice often have greater success in reaching a wider audience than state efforts, such as the *Schreiwen.lu* campaign.

Cross-communication is also a key factor in the successful distribution of language norms, and this can be hindered in cases where organizations do not always work together (for example, the state and private sectors, leading potentially to inconsistency regarding which rule is the 'correct' one), as well as by the lack of an effective feedback loop for state institutions to evaluate public awareness of official policies and decisions on language. The Luxembourg government passed laws in 1975 and 1999 establishing an official spelling system, but people interviewed by Bellamy doubted whether many Luxembourgers in fact knew about these official rules. A similar finding emerged in a previous study in Luxembourg (Bellamy/Horner 2018), where hardly any of the participants referred to the above regulations and also expressed uncertainty about 'properly' writing Luxembourgish, the 'national language'.

Regarding the latter point, it emerges that private (*Spellchecker.lu* app) and commercial (*rtl.lu* news website) resources are also more widely known and used than official resources (*www.lod.lu* Luxembourg Online Dictionary). The popular *rtl.lu* website is one of the main resources for reading contemporary written Luxembourgish. However, the journalists work under strict time constraints and cannot always ensure every word they publish is 'correct' according to the official orthography. Similarly, in the publishing sector, commercial interests and concerns over readership size can take precedence over decisions whether to publish works in Luxembourgish. Books in Luxembourgish are confined to a smaller book market and geographical area. In any case, Luxembourgers are more used to reading in other languages, such as French, German or English.

Various recommendations have arisen from the study which could inform future decisions on language policy. One suggestion is the promotion of dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders in different sectors, especially between private-public bodies and education-media-publishing sectors. Rather than pursuing common goals independently and duplicating work, this would encourage combining efforts to adopt a more complementary, mutually beneficial and effective approach. This is in turn would support long-term planning rather than short-term goals and serve to reduce potential confusion over which authority is the 'correct' one. Another recommendation is to place more importance on methods to spread awareness about official language norms and at the same time to implement efficient monitoring of their reception amongst the public. On a related note, efforts to increase engagement of speakers and members of the public in the process is also recommended in order to mitigate widespread feelings of being excluded from key decision-making about language norms at the national level. This final action would already be a step towards increasing awareness of the existing language standards, materials and on-going language debates.

3.2 Borderlands – Andreas Krogull

Andreas Krogull's research on historical multilingualism and language contact in the Dutch-German borderlands is an important contribution to the study of standard languages, norms and variation, as it challenges the monolingual bias in language historiography (cf. Braunmüller/Ferraresi (eds.) 2003; Hüning et al. (eds.) 2012; Rutten et al. 2017; Pahta et al. (eds.) 2018). Traditionally, the histories of most European languages, such as German, Dutch and French, have been portrayed as broadly linear developments towards a uniform standard language, as codified in orthographies, grammars and dictionaries. In this one-sided account of language history, falsely creating the impression of monolingualism as the default situation, numerous aspects of language diversity, including internal and external multilingualism, have consequently been rendered invisible (cf. Langer/Havinga 2015).

Andreas Krogull focuses on borderlands, which have constituted a widely neglected area in European language history, especially since the era of nation-building and its 'one language – one nation' ideology, emerging in the eighteenth century. Against the ideological background of clearly segregated spaces, both politically and linguistically, the very nature of border settings increases the unwanted 'risk' of different languages (and their users) coming into contact and potentially mixing with each other, particularly on contrast-poor language borders.

By investigating the specific case of the Dutch-German borderlands in the long nineteenth century from a historical-sociolinguistic perspective, this project is showing that multilingual practices and language contact phenomena can still be traced in archival sources from the period, despite the growing dominance of national territories and their respective standard languages. While previous studies on the Dutch-German border have described the evolution of these standard varieties, usually based on printed and formal texts, and their influence on the West Germanic dialect continuum (e.g. Niebaum 1990; Kremer 1996), Andreas Krogull's approach to language history 'from below' shifts the focus to individual language users and their handwritten texts (cf. Elspaß et al. (eds.) 2007; van der Wal/Rutten (eds.) 2013). These sources were relatively close to the everyday lives of 'common' people and give evidence of hidden linguistic practices *beyond* standard languages and monolingualism.

In early 2019, Andreas Krogull collected data in various archives in the northern and north-eastern provinces of the Netherlands (Groningen, Drenthe, Overijssel, Friesland), unearthing letters, diaries and recipe books which reflect multilingualism and language contact in the borderlands. One intriguing example comes from a preserved collection of letters written by (Low) German seasonal labourers (haymakers and grass-mowers) to their Dutch employer. These sources have primarily been examined by social historians (Lucassen 1987), yet they also allow us to get a (socio-)linguistic glimpse into the large-scale phenomenon of labour migration from northwest Germany to the Netherlands, which lasted well into the nineteenth century. The remarkably 'mixed' language in these letters can hardly be assigned to any specific linguistic category (in terms of 'Dutch', 'High German' or 'Low German'), but rather indicates that labour migrants had multilingual repertoires at their disposal and actually applied them for communicative purposes across national and (standard) language borders.

Another set of authentic sources was collected from family archives in the Dutch border provinces, where intermarriages and thus families with both Dutch and German roots were not at all uncommon, irrespective of political borders. Zooming in on documents from the private sphere, Andreas Krogull illustrates how this largely overlooked type of cross-border contact is reflected linguistically. His preliminary results suggest that multilingualism and language contact near and/or across the Dutch-German border existed in many forms and shades, ranging from the neatly separated use of different standard(-like) languages, to instances of code-switching and interference, and even mixtures of languages and varieties. Therefore, the heterogeneity of this sociolinguistic situation signals that the alleged monolingualism of post-1800 European nation-states must not be taken for granted, but needs to be critically revisited by taking into account the variable and potentially multilingual resources of individual language users.

3.3 Teaching and learning Mandarin Chinese as an L2 to Mongolian learners in China since 1900 – Jiaye (Jenny) Wu

Jiaye Wu's work is important in expanding the geographical range of work on standardization and its relevance to language learning contexts. She is researching the little-known history of the teaching and learning of Mandarin Chinese as a second language (L2) to Mongolian learners within China since 1900. For minority language speakers in China, learning the national language is part of being bi-/

multilingual, but the history of such bilingualism has tended to be erased by the ideological prominence of Mandarin as the national language of China. Focusing on the case of the history of learning the national language among Mongolians in China can highlight the benefits and challenges of multilingualism in Chinese society, caught in the tension between the aim of unifying and modernizing the country, and maintaining the cultural and language rights of ethnic minorities.

Jiaye Wu's work focuses primarily on the analysis of textbooks from the period 1900 to 2000, but she is also drawing on policy documents, statements of pedagogical theory, interviews and classroom observations in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, to illuminate present-day attitudes and practices. She is concerned with both the kinds of linguistic knowledge being taught and the pedagogical methods employed (e.g. changing presentation of correct pronunciation). At the linguistic level, for example, Jiaye's study of the history of describing pronunciation norms of Chinese using the Mongolian script provides a fascinating foil to studies of the history of describing that same pronunciation to western learners of Chinese, and offers an important source for notions of the prevailing norms (and variation) to be taught to L2-learners within China. More generally, it is clear that the oral communicative function of Mandarin outweighs its literary functions in deciding what standard should be presented to a mass public in the twentieth century. Until the early twentieth century, the "standard Mandarin pronunciation" can be regarded as a literary reading pronunciation, heavily influenced by traditional rhyme dictionaries where characters are grouped according to the degrees of similarity between their rhymes. One main purpose of these dictionaries was to serve as reference works for poetic composition. The phonological information supplied in rhyme dictionaries dictated an ecumenical standard (a term borrowed from Weng 2018), encompassing phonetic variants from a number of representative Mandarin dialects. Since the 1930s, standard Mandarin pronunciation has been specified through a series of linguistic standardization efforts, with the Beijing Mandarin pronunciation codified as the standard, and phonetic symbols being developed to present the pronunciation of graphic characters of Chinese. Another key observation is that the standard language ideology of Mandarin strengthens over time, along with an ideology of separate bilingualism (Creese et al. 2011) in language teaching and learning. Mongolian transliterations and translations in textbooks for learning Mandarin decrease dramatically, with the aim of encouraging maximum direct, monolingual exposure to Mandarin.

In her thematic analysis, Jiaye studies the changing representation and discursive construction of Chinese national and Mongolian ethnic identities in textbooks, shining a light on the changing ideologies about the relationship between the Chinese state and its ethnic minority populations through a period of huge political and social change in China. The country was transformed in the course of the twentieth century from a feudal empire into a modern nation, with the collapse of the Qing dynasty and the establishment of Republic of China in 1912, a turbulent period of Civil War, and developments since the People's Republic of China was established in 1949. In both the pre-1949 and post-1949 periods, textbooks are vehicles for propaganda to inculcate in the learners the values and beliefs that serve the interests of the nationalist party and, later, the communist party, such as veneration of party leaders. Typically, the textbook contents present unequal power relationships between Mongolian and the dominant Han people, but in different ways in different eras. In the period before 1949, Mongolian forbears are portrayed as being defeated by the Han, to highlight the Han's glorious history in the discourse of Han nationalism. After 1949, by contrast, the peoples are represented as 'brothers and sisters in a big family', yet even here Mongolians are seen as requiring the help of the Han on their path to modernization.

In sum, Jiaye Wu's work examines how multilingualism is dealt with in China. On the one hand, the teaching and learning of Mandarin Chinese as a second language for Mongolian learners encourages interethnic communication and promotes social cohesion, standardizing Mandarin pronunciation and promulgating a shared Chinese national identity. At the same time, those goals of bi-/multilingualism and cohesion may also be hindered by the hardening boundary between Mandarin and Mongolian and by Han chauvinism in the presentation of Chinese national and ethnic identities in Mandarin learning textbooks.

The study thus addresses important questions about the impact of language policies on social cohesion and ethnic minorities' language and cultural rights in multilingual China. This is complex territory – it is worth noting that during fieldwork in Mongolia, British expectations about ethical conduct of research at times clashed with local anxieties about expressing opinions openly on culturally and politically sensitive topics.

3.4 Multilingualism and language variation in Ningbo and Shanghai – Hui (Annette) Zhao

Hui Zhao's project is important in investigating both the standard variety in China and varieties and variation around the standard (regional dialects, regional accents of the standard variety, and English). She is asking:

- What are the effects of globalization and multilingualism on the standard language in a recently reformed economy and society?
- How are languages and varieties used and perceived in China, specifically in Ningbo and Shanghai?
- How do young Chinese adults negotiate their linguistic and socio-political identity in an increasingly multilingual society with a rigid standard language ideology?

The project adopts a mixed method approach, including collecting speech and perception data from native speakers to help discover and understand language standards and variation in China. The results of a pilot study conducted on social media about language attitudes in Ningbo and Shanghai provide interesting insights into perceptions of the standard/non-standard in China. It was striking that regional varieties of the standard (known as Putonghua, literally translated as 'common speech') in Ningbo and Shanghai are considered non-standard on social media, and that they are also viewed as feminine/effeminate and representative of popular linguistic and cultural stereotypes of different cities. For instance, the variety spoken in Ningbo is considered harsh-sounding, unfashionable, etc., whilst that of Shanghai is deemed soft-sounding, fake, stingy, etc. Moreover, dialect preservation in Shanghai received more attention on social media than in Ningbo (the latter admittedly has a smaller number of speakers).

The fieldwork for the main project was conducted from late 2018 to early 2019 in Ningbo and Shanghai. Over 60 Chinese university students (44 from Ningbo and 22 from Shanghai) were interviewed on their language backgrounds, language use, and language attitudes towards different language varieties in their daily life (Putonghua, local varieties of Putonghua, local dialects, and English). All participants are speakers of Putonghua and at least one regional dialect (Ningbonese and Shanghainese respectively) who have learned English through formal education; their use of and attitudes towards standard and regional varieties can be viewed as representative of young adults in China. Preliminary results from the interviews indicate that different varieties are used differently across different contexts: the standard language is preferred in most settings, apart from intimate family ones where the local dialect is often used. Interestingly, for many Ningbonese, Putonghua is replacing the Ningbonese dialect in family settings too; the same pattern is reported in Shanghai, though to a lesser degree. Moreover, locals with 'non-standard' accents in Putonghua do not necessarily prefer a more standard/region-neutral accent, which is possibly due to their orientation towards the local culture and identity. Finally, English (and a high level of proficiency in English) is strongly preferred over an above-average proficiency in the local variety or the standard language.

To investigate the speakers' perception and potentially correlate that to their overt attitudes shown in the interviews, a perceptual experiment is also included in the project. The experiment, which asks speakers of Ningbo and Shanghai dialects to judge locally accented Putonghua on personal attributes (e.g. 'does this person sound nice/educated?'), will reveal how they subconsciously evaluate speakers of different varieties. The design of the experiment also allows us to tease apart meanings associated with different linguistic features: will speakers respond more negatively towards more stigmatized features (stereotypically local) or will they respond to all local features equally (either positive or negatively)?

4. Concluding remarks

There are considerable advantages – as well as difficulties – in working as part of such a large interdisciplinary project. Through our conferences, workshops and own original research, we have been able to open up discussion of standardization to new languages, areas and contexts. Moreover, whilst the majority of work on standardization is taking place in Strand 2 of the project, the scale and scope of the MEITS programme allows interesting cross-fertilization of ideas across strands. For example, as part of her work for Strand 3 on 'new speakers' of Breton and questions of identity, PhD student, Merryn Davies-Deacon, is exploring the relationship between the use of standard/non-standard lexemes and new speaker status, drawing on a corpus of Breton taken from media sources as well as interviews with speakers and policymakers. This illustrates one of the points that has emerged from our research already: the fact that language standardization is no longer – if it ever was – just the concern of ideally competent "native speakers". The role of new speakers is just one dimension of the need to take a wider view of actors relevant to creating, disseminating and maintaining both linguistic norms themselves and the metalinguistic ideologies that go along with standardization.

As part of our legacy, therefore, we seek to create new knowledge about standardization and contribute to theoretical and methodological debates. However, in view of the challenge-led nature of our research, we are also acutely aware of the broader practical and policy dimensions to our work. This is particularly evident in the educational sphere, where any research conducted into language teaching has to consider the extent to which notions of 'correctness' (and what tolerances of what kinds of non-standard variation) are to be employed in the classroom, and in which classrooms for which kinds of learners (first language, heritage learners, new speakers), and therefore, crucially, also, in which kinds of language testing. Having EFNIL as a partner – which brings together institutions from all the EU member states whose role includes monitoring the official language or languages of their country, advising on language use, or developing language policy – is invaluable in helping us 'translate' our research into policy and practice, not least because of the absence of a language academy or other language policy body in the UK.[5] There remain many lessons to be learnt not only from history, but also from comparing language policy across Europe and beyond.

[5] It is significant that the UK's representatives in EFNIL are the British Council (the UK's international organization for cultural relations and educational opportunities) and the Oxford English Dictionary.

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