

Rethinking Standard Languages: On the Dynamics of Informal Standardization and Regionalization

1. Bringing informal standardization to the forefront

The term ‘standardization’ typically refers to the endeavor of codifying linguistic norms and establishing a prescriptive set of rules, usually encompassing a dictionary, grammar and orthography that define what is considered the ‘best language’ (in the Anglo-Saxon tradition) or *le bon usage* (in the Romance tradition). As a result, a standard language can be perceived as something quite tangible, often manifesting in the form of multi-volume dictionaries, orthography treatises, and grammar books. However, this perspective on standardization focuses only on the (presumed) endpoint of a much broader narrative—a story that often begins much earlier and may not conclude with codification (no ‘happy ending’, one might say). Whereas codified standard languages, defined by prescriptive norms, are frequently regarded as artificial, they are typically not created *ex nihilo*. Instead, they are the outcome of choices reflecting the linguistic preferences of a particular social elite. In this sense, formal standardization nearly always follows the emergence of usage norms, accompanied by an increasingly conscious understanding of which variants belong to, or should be excluded from, the community’s concept of the ‘best language’.

As indicated in the title of this thematic focus, “Informal standardization and the regionalization of language norms”, the articles compiled here, along with this introduction, aim to highlight a recent trend in linguistic standardology: the study of informal standardization processes, or, in other words, the emergence of usage norms. While informal standardization processes can be examined in historical contexts—illuminating the variant selection that preceded the codification of today’s languages—this issue specifically focuses on the informal standardization processes by which new standard languages (or ‘neo-standard languages’) emerge alongside already codified standard languages in contemporary language cultures. The studies presented in this issue cover developments in French, Portuguese and Spanish as well as German, examining the diverse linguistic practices that contribute to the emergence of oral standard languages. They also explore the coexistence and frequent competition between these oral standard languages and codified written standard languages, along with the representations,

attitudes, and linguistic insecurities that arise among speakers as a result. Furthermore, the articles study the fact that, in many—if not most—cases, informal standardization involves both a vernacularization and a regionalization of linguistic standards. This process leads to the re-evaluation of diaphasically or diatopically marked variants—that is, endogenous variants in pluricentric scenarios—previously considered (or even stigmatized) as sub-standard, now being recognized as standard forms.

In the following, we will first outline the specific vocabulary, both old and new, used to describe the increasingly complex reality of formal and especially informal standardization (section 2). We will then contextualize these processes in historical terms (section 3). Finally, section 4 will provide an overview of the contributions to this thematic focus.

2. How to describe an ever more complex reality of linguistic standardness

The most important distinction to be made in the field of standardization contrasts informal standardization with formal standardization, as first delineated by Stewart (1968 [1962]: 534). Whereas informal standardization refers to the ‘natural’ evolution of linguistic standards, i.e. to the observable regularizations within language usage that lead to the emergence of variants considered exemplary by speakers, the explicit setting of standards that may follow it is known as formal standardization or codification, as it is more commonly referred to (cf. Lebsanft / Tacke 2020: 14; Ayres-Bennett 2021: 33; Amorós / Monteagudo 2024: 79). As I have discussed in Tacke (2024), informal and formal standardization typically maintain a dialectical relationship, meaning informal processes usually precede formal ones, which then interact with and often compete against new emerging informal standards. Importantly, informal standardization typically involves a bottom-up process, while formal standardization usually depends on the top-down practices of institutional actors (cf. Elspaß 2021). Traditionally, research on standard languages has predominantly focused on formal standardization, such as the emergence, maintenance, and modernization of, for example, Romance standard languages (cf. Rutten / Vosters eds. 2020 as well as Lebsanft / Tacke eds. 2020). Yet, researchers such as Amorós / Monteagudo (2024: 79) emphasize the importance of adopting a bottom-up perspective on informal standardization—an approach that is vital not only for describing the emergence of standard languages in the early modern period within historical sociolinguistics but also to adequately capture the dynamics of standard language usage in contemporary speech communities.

Einar Haugen's model of standardization remains arguably the most influential framework for describing standardization processes across various sociolinguistic scenarios.¹ Primarily, it addresses the road to the 'first' formal standardization of a language in terms of codification. Without going into much detail, his phased model includes: 1) Selection—determining which variety or varieties to codify, 2) Codification, 3) Implementation—primarily through education, and 4) Elaboration²—the ongoing process of functional expansion of the codified standard language to meet the evolving communicative needs of the speech community. Already prior to Haugen, in the first theoretical contributions to the modeling of standardization processes, which were paramount in making standardization and linguistic normativity the subject of linguistic research, there were considerations regarding the functional adaptability of standard languages to the (changing) communicative needs they are supposed to serve. In this sense, the linguists of the Prague School noted, following Jespersen (1925), that standard languages must exhibit 'stability' but also 'elasticity' to remain useful under changing conditions (Mathesius 1932 or 1976: 89).³ Haugen's 'elaboration' captures this idea, providing a systematic place for it in his model.

Despite critiques,⁴ Haugen's model remains highly effective for discussing the emergence and further elaboration of codified standard languages. However, in scenarios where new standard languages emerge within communities already possessing a codified and established standard language—typical of the Late Modern period—the model reaches its limits. In response to this shift, a conceptual framework has been developed to effectively address these new scenarios, encompassing various configurations and possibilities that reflect changes in standard languages, a reorientation toward oral standard languages, and the coexistence with, as well as the potential decline in prestige of, older codified standard languages. The terms 'destandardization', 'demotization', and 'restandardization' are undoubtedly among the most

¹ Haugen first introduced his model in 1966 (Haugen 1966a), but modified it later that same year (Haugen 1966b) and again in the 1980s (Haugen 1983), providing more detailed explanations (Haugen 1987). For its genesis, modifications, and reception, see Lebsanft / Tacke (2020, 16-22), Ayres-Bennett (2020 and 2021: 30-35, 51-55), Monteaugudo (2024: 8-13), and Elspaß et al. (in print).

² Haugen explicitly borrowed the term 'elaboration' from Kloss's concept of *Sprachausbau* '(language) elaboration' (Haugen 1983: 273; cf. Kloss 1952: 15-37).

³ For the concept of elastic stability, see most recently Daneš (2006: 2453-2455). For an overview of the norm theory of the Prague School, refer to Albrecht (2020). Garvin's works (among others, 1964 [1955], 1959) have significantly contributed to its reception in English and Romance language linguistics (cf. also Ayres-Bennett 2021: 30-31).

⁴ Critiquing Haugen's model, Ayres-Bennett (2021: 54) recently highlighted several aspects that require more precise definition within the elaboration phase. These include: (a) the nature of the elaboration, specifically whether it involves "elaboration of function (i.e. the language moving into new domains of usage) or elaboration of forms (through the creation of new words, borrowings, etc.)"; (b) the actors involved in this expansion; and (c) the objectives and outcomes, whether it concerns modernization or perhaps "purification", and whether the scope is limited to "written, high-register usage" or accepts variation as part of standard language.

significant concepts used to capture the ongoing changes in standard language on both sides of the Atlantic and therefore merit brief discussion:

The establishment of this terminology has been significantly influenced by Mattheier (1997) and the contributors to the volume *Standardisierung und Destandardisierung europäischer Nationalsprachen* (Mattheier / Radtke (eds.) 1997), which brought increased attention to ongoing ‘dissolution phenomena of linguistic standards’ (“Auflösungserscheinungen des sprachlichen Standards”, Radtke 1997: VII) in European speech communities, as well as the emergence of ‘new’ standard languages.⁵ Noteworthy contributions in this vein include those found in *Standard Languages and Language Standards in a Changing Europe* (Kristiansen / Coupland (eds.) 2011), *On the Development of a New Standard Norm in Italian* (Cerruti / Crocco / Marzo (eds.) 2017), and the recently published *Cambridge Handbook of Language Standardization* (Ayres-Bennett / Bellamy (eds.) 2021). Over the past 25 years, it has become clear that distinguishing these terms sharply from one another remains challenging. However, there is consensus regarding the empirical evidence: in all the linguistic communities examined, tendencies toward a reconfiguration of ‘linguistic standardness’ can be observed. This reconfiguration results from what is known as ‘demotization’. Demotization refers to the process by which codified standard languages, historically acquired and used primarily by a social elite, become generalized across society (*demos* ‘people’), particularly through education and mass media. In this process, these languages undergo changes as their broader acquisition opens them up to variation. Demotization is consistently recognized as a phenomenon of Late Modernity (cf. section 3) and leads to the emergence of oral standard languages that are based on, though not identical to, codified written standard languages.

Typically resulting from demotization, the concept ‘restandardization’ denotes another important shift in linguistic standardness. However, its usage has been somewhat imprecise and, at times, contentious. Most researchers use the term to describe processes where a new standard variety emerges.⁶ As traditional, school-taught standards lose prominence in actual

⁵ The term ‘demotization’ was coined by Mattheier himself (1997: 7), while he adopted the term ‘destandardization’ from Daneš (1982 [1968]). However, it appears that the term ‘destandardization’ had also been independently used by Joseph (1987: 174; cf. Lebsanft / Tacke 2020: 21–22). The term ‘restandardization’, on the other hand, was first introduced by Ferguson (1968 [1962]: 31).

⁶ Sometimes it is also used to refer to changes *within* an established standard language, as Auer / Spiekermann (2011: 165; following Mattheier 1997), explain: “Like most cases of language change, it [= restandardization] may imply variation, but this variation is temporary and transitional. Even though changes in the standard variety may promote former non-standard features to the level of accepted standard features, [...] restandardisation is not destandardisation. It is simply language change, even though proponents of the older standard tend to evaluate it as a debasement of the old standard (and therefore negatively).”

language use, speakers increasingly align with a more flexible, informally standardized ‘neo-standard language’. Kristiansen summarizes this for standard languages typically functioning as roof languages (Ger. *Dachsprachen*) within a state, i.e. in so-called ‘within-border’ scenarios. According to him (Kristiansen 2021: 679), the term should be used for radical changes within language communities,

where changes are not conceived of as a development of the existing standard, but as the addition of a new standard, intended to coexist with the old one, in the interests of particular social groups or social functions.

This somewhat narrow definition ties the notion to the emergence of informal standard languages to the intentions and interests of “particular social groups” or “social functions”. However, as we will see, a broader application of the term is not limited in this way and encompasses all kinds of emerging neo-standard languages. Berruto (2017: 37), for instance, notes that the formation of regional standards, incorporating features once considered substandard, should also be considered as cases of restandardization. In such cases, restandardization leads to scenarios, dubbed ‘double-standard situations’, where two (or even more) standard languages come to coexist within one society.

While much of the research on standardization focuses on European national languages, typically within a single country—Kristiansen’s ‘within borders’ scenarios—, the concept of restandardization has (despite some criticism) also increasingly been applied to ‘across borders’ situations.⁷ In pluricentric languages, the traditional school-taught standard may diverge significantly from local usage outside the ‘motherland’. In such cases where the codified standard is considered ‘exonormative’, demotization may strengthen national and regional variants, leading to the development of new national standard varieties, which Stewart (1968 [1962]: 534) terms “endonormative”.⁸ Bell (2011), citing the example of “Ebonics” (African American Vernacular English) as a medium of instruction in the U.S., uses the term restandardization “as the redirection of the standard towards another target. [...] The notion of ‘standard’ is retained but its content is reconfigured so that it differs from the hitherto accepted standard”. What he calls the “de-europeanisation” of New Zealand English, where the former

⁷ Kristiansen (2021: 668) states: “it may be useful to distinguish between two types of situation—*across borders* and *within borders*—depending on whether we are dealing with changes in the norm–variation relationship as an element of endeavours to build new nation-states or with changes in this relationship within an existing nation-state.”

⁸ Following Schneider’s (2003: 233) model, one could also speak of an “endonormative stabilization” resulting from “nativization”.

“eurocentric standard [is] replaced by another”, in this case local standard, is another example for a restandardization process. Similarly, recent discussions have addressed the reconfiguration of standard languages in American Spanish, where the European standard is rarely used as a reference (though it still retains prestige) (e.g., Amorós-Negre 2014, 2020; Greußlich / Lebsanft 2020).

The emergence of double-standard situations through restandardization raises questions about the status of the ‘old’ codified (written) standard language, often still taught in schools but increasingly limited to written communication. Joseph (1987: 173-174) anticipates this in the epilogue of his influential book on the life cycle of standard languages, where he discusses the concept of ‘classicality’:

Classicality represents a valuation of form over function: it is the only way of maintaining a language intact in the face of ongoing change. The language thus ‘embalmed’ only appears to be intact, however, for while its surface forms are retained, its essence—its life, to use the nineteenth-century model—is lost. But a language which ends the standardization cycle with the title Classical has attained the ultimate level of prestige, and chances are good that individual features of the language will survive in living tongues.

While Joseph primarily refers to languages like Latin, Ancient Greek, and Hebrew (which was later revived), this issue has recently been reconsidered regarding the status of literary Italian as opposed to *italiano neo-standard*. Although the ‘old’ standard is being supplanted in use, it retains its prestige, as demonstrated in Cerruti / Crocco / Marzo (eds. 2017). Accordingly, Schiffman (1998: 363, cited in Kristiansen 2021) states that “restandardization will never totally replace the older standard language; the older norm will simply be elevated to a ‘classical’ status that it will continue to inhabit” (cf. the application of ‘classicality’ to Romance standard languages in Tacke 2024).

In contrast to ‘demotization’ and ‘restandardization’, the term ‘destandardization’ is contentious, both in definition and application. It concerns not only standard varieties but also their societal acceptance and the ideological stance towards them. Recent discussions tie destandardization to the validity of the belief in the necessity of standard language, as Ayres-Bennett (2021: 49) explains:

Destandardization: a possible development whereby the established standard language loses its position as the one and only ‘best language’. Democratization can lead to ‘value levelling’ that will secure access to public space for a wider range of speech varieties – this would be equal to a radical weakening and eventual abandonment of the ‘standard ideology’ itself.

In light of the fact that until the present day only one such scenario has been identified (Norwegian⁹), this concept seems more theoretical than practical. In fact, in most cases—and certainly in all cases discussed in this special issue—, linguistic standardness has undergone or is undergoing a significant shift in many speech communities, i.e. “the idea of what this ‘best language’ is, or sounds like, changes”, but, importantly, “the belief that there is, or should be, a ‘best language’ is not abandoned” (Ayres-Bennett 2021: 49), meaning the standard language ideology as such prevails.

In sum, demotization—the societal generalization of standard languages beyond linguistic practices of elites—has reshaped all (European) standard languages in the Late Modern era. In its wake, new waves of restandardization have unfolded, from which oral standard languages, or ‘neo-standard languages’, have begun to emerge. In contrast, destandardization, which may arise from this process, remains a rarer phenomenon, as the belief that “there is only one correct way of speaking” (Swann *et al.* 2004: 296) persists in most societies. However, as Elspaß and Pöll (in this issue) summarize, “recent developments have led to a softening of the strict concept of ‘the standard’—viewed from a normative perspective – or—seen from a more neutral point of view—to a redefinition of the concept of ‘the standard’, which also implies a certain expansion of what can be regarded as standard language”.

3. How we got here and where informal standardization is going

As we previously noted (section 2), informal and formal standardization are dialectically related. Examining the development of European standard languages over the past 150 years reveals not just significant changes but a paradigm shift. I will outline this shift, focusing on Romance standard languages, which can be broadly divided into three overlapping phases.

The first phase, beginning in the Early Modern period, consisted in formal standardization processes, codification endeavors, leading to prescriptive language norms based on the literary languages of the so-called ‘golden ages’.¹⁰ These norms were codified in dictionaries,

⁹ Kristiansen (2021: 673) highlights that, in the Scandinavian context, only Norwegian shows a clear loss of the standard language ideology (SLI). It is worth quoting his summary here: “In brief, the Norwegian language society offers a clear case of destandardization – not in the sense of weakening of an established and fairly homogeneous standard (which never existed, either for writing or speech), but in the sense that a previously existing and commonly shared belief in (the need for) such a standard has vanished. SLI’s position has weakened quite dramatically.”

¹⁰ A prime example of an early discourse on the selection of specific variants and the establishment of norms is Vaugelas’ *Remarques sur la langue françoise* from 1647 (Vaugelas 2009 [1647]). For more on this, see Ayres-Bennett (1987, 2002) and more recently Fesenmeier (2020: 95-98).

grammars, and orthographies, establishing diatopically neutral standard languages, limited both in diastratic and diaphasic terms. This codification emphasized formal, written language, stigmatizing lower registers and everyday spoken usage as less correct or even incorrect. In this context, the codification of European standard languages has traditionally involved not only the selection of exemplary forms but also the elimination of expressions deemed less formal (cf. Lebsanft / Tacke 2020).¹¹ This explains why standard language and conceptually ‘written’ language are largely considered synonymous in modern understanding (see Koch / Oesterreicher 2011, 18-19).¹²

The second phase, starting in the 20th century, marks a paradigm shift as these traditional, literature-based standards were disseminated across society through education, leading to their widespread use beyond the elite. This demotization also saw the extension of standard language usage into oral communication and a significant decline in the dominance of written norms due to the rise of audiovisual media and digital communication (cf. Tacke 2015; Greußlich 2022). This gradual erosion of the literary languages’ status as linguistic models and the shift from written to oral as well as from conceptually written to new forms of hybrid communication is characteristic of Late Modernity (cf. Amorós / Monteagudo 2024: 81-82). Ayres-Bennett / Bellamy (2021: 14-15) note in this regard:

The written form is generally considered fundamental for a standard language, as it is typically the most safeguarded, revered and preserved aspect of the standard. However, there have been significant changes to the nature, practice and domains of writing with the development of technology, especially in the era of Late Modernity. The growing presence and influence of digital communication has ushered in sweeping changes to writing and its spheres of usage. Traditional conceptualizations which characterize writing as predominantly formal, public-facing and distant (both spatially and temporally; [...]) are being challenged by the written practices emerging in channels of communication such as emails, social media and text messaging.

Finally, the third phase marks a shift towards ‘neo-standard languages’. In a gradual process encompassing what we have termed ‘restandardization’, the codified literary languages are losing their status as linguistic models, with spoken standard language increasingly

¹¹ Standardization can, of course, also encompass ‘lower’ registers: “Whilst standard languages are often associated with usage in formal contexts, a standard language can comprise various registers, with different levels of formality being associated, for instance, with lexical differences” (Ayres-Bennett / Bellamy 2021: 6).

¹² For the primacy of written language in the process of standardization, see Aurox (1992: 28-29) and Milroy (2001: 531); see also Ayres-Bennett / Bellamy (2021: 4-6).

diverging from these codified forms. This ‘loosening’ or growing ‘distance’ from formal written communication is most evident in the widespread integration of so-called substandard variants, which were previously stigmatized as diatopically marked or as lower in diastratic and diaphasic terms.¹³

In pluricentric scenarios, this has resulted in a certain loss of prestige—or at least a loss as the de facto role as a normative reference—of the traditional codified standard languages. In language cultures such as Québec French, Spanish in North, Central and South America and Portuguese in Brazil, informal standardization has led to the emergence of new, national or regional varieties of the standard—a process sometimes referred to as ‘restandardization’ or, like in this special issue, as regionalization.¹⁴ Even outside of pluricentric scenarios (e.g., in Italian), the expansion of standard language use into spoken language, more informal contexts, and the incorporation of features from regional variants previously considered substandard have given rise to the notion of ‘new standard’ or ‘neo-standard languages’. These new, functionally diverse yet less codified standards are known by various names, such as *italiano neo-standard* (cf. Berruto (2012 [1987])) or *català light* (as opposed to a ‘heavy’ written norm; cf. Tacke 2017). These new standards reflect a shift away from the traditional focus on formal language and writing, instead emphasizing functionality and situational appropriateness, moving beyond the classical dichotomy of ‘correct’ vs. ‘incorrect’.

4. The contributions to this special issue

The articles in this special issue contribute to shed light on the most recent developments in the domain of informal standardization. They cover a wide range of scenarios within four different (standard) language cultures: European French, Spanish (both in Europe and the Americas, in three very different scenarios), Portuguese (in Europe, Brazil, Mozambique and Angola), and German (in Germany and neighboring countries).

In his contribution “Que estandardização para o português: pluricêntrica ou panlusófono?” Augusto Soares da Silva examines the complexities of Portuguese as a pluricentric language, exploring both formal and informal paths to standardization across the European and Brazilian standard varieties, as well as the emerging norms in Mozambique and

¹³ For the concept of substandard, see, among others, Albrecht (1986, 1990), Mattheier (1990), and Berruto (2000; 2017: 32).

¹⁴ The movement toward regional varieties within standard languages, especially in pluricentric contexts, is frequently described as a democratization of linguistic norms (cf., e.g., Amorós / Monteagudo 2024: 77 and Soares da Silva [in this issue]).

Angola. Through a socio-cognitive lens, he underscores the critical role of informal influences in shaping norms, particularly highlighting Brazilian media, which fosters a unique endonormative standard in Brazilian Portuguese. He also emphasizes how Mozambican and Angolan Portuguese, through nativization and contact with Bantu languages, develop distinct grammatical and lexical features. Soares da Silva not only describes the current dynamics of standardization but also advocates for a forward-looking approach. He advocates for a fully pluricentric standardization that respects regional linguistic identities while encouraging formal standardization efforts aimed at fostering a shared, pan-Lusophone norm to support Portuguese's internationalization.

Soares da Silva frequently references Spanish as a model for understanding pluricentric and pan-Hispanic standardization, offering insights that resonate with similar challenges in Portuguese. Following his contribution, the next three articles delve into Spanish as a pluricentric language across various regions, each exploring unique instances of informal standardization and regionalization within Spanish-speaking contexts.

Cristina Peña Rueda's article, titled "Desorientación normativa y variación gramatical en el español de Canarias. Rasgos gramaticales de estatus indefinido", examines the 'double standard' scenario of Canarian Spanish, where an emerging regional standard competes with the dominant Peninsular standard, which coexists as a reference in everyday life and is dominant in national broadcasting. Her study presents a case of 'second-level pluricentricity' (or 'internal pluricentricity'; cf. Muhr 2016), where informal standardization leads to the emergence of regional centers within a nation-state, all under the broader umbrella of a national standard variety. Against the backdrop of a significant lack of empirical studies on regional variants, Peña Rueda's analysis of specific morphosyntactic variables and speakers' attitudes toward these variants compellingly illustrates that the coexistence of different language standards not only complicates our academic understanding of linguistic standardness but also creates 'linguistic insecurity' for speakers and communities as they navigate competing norms in search of orientation.

María López García's contribution, "Apuntes sobre el estándar del Río de la Plata", shifts to a case of "first-level pluricentricity"—the emergence of the Spanish spoken in the Río de la Plata region, particularly Buenos Aires, as a standard variety with significant influence at the national level and beyond. Her analysis of Rioplatense Spanish provides valuable insights into how this national standard variety functions as a standard, as well as how it competes with other conceptions of the 'best language' arising from 'exocentric' standardization efforts in Europe and other parts of Latin America (e.g., in the dubbing industry). López García's nuanced

analysis of normative attitudes highlights a tension in speakers' perspectives: they embrace this regional standard in daily interactions but may show ambivalence toward its presence in media, such as dubbing in audiovisual entertainment.

Miguel Ángel Quesada Pacheco's article "Mittelamerikanisches Spanisch in den Fernsehnachrichten. Auf der Suche nach einem regionalen Standard?", addresses informal standardization within Central America mass media. Through an empirical study of televised news broadcasts across six countries, Quesada Pacheco investigates whether a distinct Central American regional standard is emerging in news media or if presenters are aligning with broader pan-American varieties like those from Mexico or Colombia. His empirical findings suggest that while Central American Spanish in news broadcasts generally aligns with the broader patterns of 'neutral' American Spanish, it does not fully conform to any established Hispanic standard. This ongoing process of forming a regional standard reflects a broader trend in which regional variations actively shape and diversify standard languages. As Central American Spanish news broadcasts develop their own norms, they add a new layer to the complex landscape of standardization, illustrating how local adaptations drive the emergence of linguistic standards across the Hispanic world.

Taken together, these articles make a valuable addition to the expanding research field of *comparative standardology*¹⁵, providing fresh insights and enriching our understanding of language standardization across diverse contexts. This comparative lens is further exemplified by Stephan Elspaß and Bernhard Pöll's contribution titled "Between Formal and Informal Standards: 'Double Standards' in French, German, and (Brazilian) Portuguese Compared", which concludes this special issue. Building on the theoretical concepts discussed in section 2, the authors present the findings of a comparative study examining various standard language constellations in European French, German, and Brazilian Portuguese. Their research focuses on 'double standard' scenarios, where different concepts of standard language coexist or compete, underscoring the divergence between traditional codified written standards and newly emerging oral standards. A key aspect of these developments is the phenomenon of demotization – the spread of the codified standard language beyond the social elites. The

¹⁵ The concept of 'comparative standardology' was first introduced by Joseph (1987: 13). See also Muljačić (1993), Pöll (2021), and Lebsanft / Tacke (eds. 2020), particularly their comparative analysis of Romance standard languages (Lebsanft / Tacke 2020: 27-47). Further important contributions include the handbook edited by Ayres-Bennett / Bellamy (eds. 2021), the special issue of *Languages* titled "Variation and Change in Language Norms" (Amorós-Negre / Costa-Carreras (eds.) 2022), and, more recently, Monteagudo (ed. 2024). The article by Elspaß and Pöll in this issue, along with an upcoming volume edited by Elspaß et al. (eds.), also contributes to the ongoing research in this area, offering further insights and references to additional studies.

authors note that, despite these changes, there is no evidence of destandardization processes in any of these language contexts. This indicates that both in Europe and in postcolonial settings, the belief in the necessity of a ‘best language’ remains strong, even as the focus of this ‘best language’ increasingly shifts toward new spoken standard varieties. While the term ‘restandardization’ (cf. section 2) could be used to describe this shift, the authors prefer to frame it within the broader concept of demotization.

The articles in this special issue offer a nuanced exploration of the ongoing processes of language standardization, restandardization, and the emergence of new linguistic norms across diverse linguistic contexts. They delve into the complex interplay between formal and informal standards, regional variations, and the broader sociolinguistic landscape, revealing both shared patterns and unique developments. We hope this collection encourages further research, sparking continued interest in the shifting landscapes of language norms and the rich diversity within global standardization practices.

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