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# Minority language standardisation and the role of users

**Pia Lane**

**Abstract**   Developing a standard for a minority language is not a neutral process; this has consequences for the status of the language and how the language users relate to the new standard. A potential inherent problem with standardisation is whether the language users themselves will accept and identify with the standard. When standardising minority languages one risks establishing a standard that the users do not identify with, and thus, standardisation which was supposed to empower minority language speakers may create a new form of stigma for those who feel that they cannot live up to the new codified standard (Lane 2011). In order to investigate the role of users in minority language standardisation processes this article analyses language standardisation as a form of technology and draws on theories from Science and Technology Studies (STS), focussing on actors who resist or even reject (aspects of) standardisation. STS has investigated standardisation of technologies (Bowker and Star 2000) and the reflexive relationship between standards and users (Oudshoorn and Pinch 2003). Insights from these investigations are applied to the case of standardisation of Kven, a minority language spoken in Northern Norway, with a particular emphasis on how users of the standard are inscribed and configured (Woolgar 1991), the exclusionary effects of standards (Star 1991; Gal 2006; Lane 2011) and the positions of non-users (Wyatt 2003).

**Keywords**   Minority language standardisation · Technology · Users · Critical turn · Agency

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## Introduction

Developing a standard for a minority language is not a neutral process; this has consequences for the status of the language and how the language users relate to the new standard. A potential inherent problem with standardisation is whether the language users themselves will accept and identify with the standard chosen. When standardising minority languages one risks establishing a standard that the users do not identify with, and thus, standardisation which was supposed to empower minority language speakers may create a new form of stigma for those who feel that they cannot live up to the new codified standard (Gal 2006; Lane 2011).

An analysis of social practices show how language users embrace, accept and contest language standardisation to varying degrees and for a wide range of reasons (Lane 2011). The aim of this article is to employ the theoretical and analytical concepts of users and non-users to investigate minority language standardisation, showing how these concepts may shed new light on the processes of minority language standardisation. Analyses of those who for various reasons oppose, reject, are reluctant to standardisation or even get excluded from the standardisation processes, can bring new perspectives to the field of Language Policy and Planning (LPP) and also guide policy makers and actors involved in standardisation processes.

This is a theoretically driven article, though founded in the author's practical experience with developing a written standard for a minority language and observing how the intended users relate to the standardisation process and the planned standard. As a member of the Kven Language Council from 2007 to 2010, I was part of the group outlining the principles for the standardisation of Kven, a minority language spoken in Northern Norway. During this process, I became aware of how differently various users position themselves in relation to the standardisation process. This spectrum of reactions encompasses users who embrace the proposed standard, users who are hesitant and even some who, for a wide range of reasons, oppose the standardisation of their language. This experience led me to realise the importance of an analytical framework that includes and addresses the role of users and non-users. With this aim in mind I analyse language standardisation as a form of technology, using theories from Social Studies of Science and Technology (STS), in particular approaches that address the mutually reflexive relationship between standards and users. STS has dealt with different aspects of the standardisation of technologies (Latour and Woolgar 1986; Star 1991), and STS theories provide insights which sheds light on how and why social actors may resist or even reject standardisation processes.

In spite of language standardisation being one of the core fields of LPP and the immense efforts put into language documentation and standardisation LPP has been concerned primarily with issues on the macro level and the interplay between standardisation and language policy. In order to analyse this intricate interplay, I wish to shift the focus from macro-level processes to users, or social actors. Language standards are always designed with implicit or explicit users in mind, and therefore the relationship between the user and the standard is of utmost importance.

In this article I provide a brief overview of LPP, highlighting how the field has been influenced by the critical turn in Social Sciences and Humanities. I then

introduce the concepts of technology and user from STS, apply and discuss the role of users in the standardisation of the Kven language, drawing on my practical experience with the standardisation of Kven, fieldwork and debates and contributions in various types of media. Finally, I highlight the dual face of minority language standardisation, underlining that while standardisation may serve to strengthen and empower, it can also cause groups or individuals to become excluded or alienated from arenas where they previously felt at home.

## Language standardisation and literacy

Languages have been technologised for a long time (Auroux 1994); the inception dates back to the first time a human being made a material representation of an abstract idea or an object. Based on this, sophisticated writing systems were developed; though employing different types of scripts and systems of representations, they all provide humans with a tool for materialising thought, ideas and language, enabling communication across time and space (Ong 1982).

In our modern world written language and standards are taken for granted, to the extent that we often forget that standards are the results of complex and interwoven social, political and historical processes. The advent of the printing press, and later the typewriter, standardised text production, and the written text came to be, at least implicitly, understood as language per se (Lane 2012). In Europe, these processes went hand in hand with the emergence of the European nation states. For European nations such as Germany and Norway for instance, nation was defined in terms of ethnicity, and language was constructed as the outward sign of ethnicity (cf. Cabanel 1997); thus, language became the defining criterion of the nation. Wright (2004:42) points out how promotion of language standards was part of the development of nation states, highlighting some of its roles. A standardised national language is useful for several reasons: it facilitates communication and the economic and political running of a nation state, the schools provide education in and through the standardised national language in order to produce skilled labourers for the nation's work force, and a common standardised language is seen to provide social cohesion. Thus, a standard language becomes both a symbolic object, a social norm and a political tool, as it can be seen as a sign of a common nation and be utilised to construct a nation, and therefore also to discursively construct boundaries between nations (Irvine and Gal 1995). Parallel to, and also preceding these political processes, linguists and missionaries were documenting languages by producing grammars and dictionaries, an endeavour which still persists. Hence, language standardisation has a socio-political and a practical-linguistic dimension.

## Research on language standardisation: from taxonomies to critical approaches

Language standardisation constitutes a core field of LPP, a discipline which initially developed as a part of sociolinguistics and language-in-society studies and emerged as a field of study in the 1960s (Kaplan et al. 2000). Wright (2004) outlines how

LPP after WWII, moved from being primarily an integral part of nation building to a subject of academic enquiry, during the period of decolonisation in particular. The structuralist era after WWII laid the foundations of what was to characterise LPP until the critical turn in the social sciences and humanities in the 1970s. Language was seen as a static and delimited entity, an object which could be captured, codified and thus standardised. The overarching term in this period was Language Planning, with the core pillars *corpus planning* and *status planning*, pertaining to linguistic aspects and the use and status of language, respectively (Kloss 1967; Haugen 1972[1]). In this period issues such as language standardisation, graphisation and modernisation were of main concern for most scholars (Ricento 2000). The critical turn within Social Sciences and Humanities also affected LPP. As key concepts of linguistics such as mother tongue, speech community, native speaker, linguistic competence and even the term language itself were questioned, researchers took on a critical approach to LPP, pointing out that linguists had taken part in constructing standardised languages and thus both forming and maintaining the notion of a standard language. Further, there was an acknowledgement that core sociolinguistic concepts (such as language, speech community, competence) were complex. This insight lead to the recognition that descriptive taxonomies were not sufficient; hence the field took on a critical approach both to the actions involved in and underlying LPP and to the analysis of these actions. This period also saw an urge to develop new theoretical approaches and brought about reflections and analysis not only of the implementations of LPP but also implications of the *research* carried out by problematising the notion of research as a neutral endeavour, a process spurred by the increasing focus on multilingualism (Wright 2004), postmodern theories (Ricento 2000), criticism of the Eurocentric worldview (Kaplan et al. 2000), and the various overt and covert systems of power involved in LPP and how these are used as a tool in the battle of belonging, citizenship, exclusion, hegemony and power (Shohamy 2006).

The structuralist view of language underlying language planning and standardisation was questioned by post-modern theorists who primarily saw language as socially constituted and acquired: they argued that the Eurocentric notion of language as a homogenous limited unit is a constructed object, and not suited to a multilingual post-colonialist world (Wright 2004). This is particularly prominent for the ecological approach to language planning, which shifts focus from standardisation to diversity and prioritises community engagement rather than language management by specialists (Mühlhäusler 2000). Language ecology is not without controversy (Pennycook 2004), but its focus on language planning as inherently socially situated "calls upon researchers to see relationships among speakers, their languages, and the social contexts in which LPP and language use are situated" (Hult 2010:9).

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[1] The coinage of the term 'Language Planning' frequently is attributed to Haugen, but he mentions that Weinreich used the term Language Planning as a title for a seminar in 1959 (Haugen 1972:209).

Since language planning moved from mainly a concern with systematic, coherent and comprehensive taxonomies to including socio-politically grounded analyses, the overarching term came to be Language Policy and Planning. The hands-on practical tasks of language standardisation situates it within corpus planning, but standardisation frequently is done in order to strengthen the status of a minority language, and once a standard is established and taken into use, it affects the social world of its users.

The term language standardisation has many nuances, and this article addresses processes related to the development of written standards. Each stage of language standardisation involves selection, codification and abstraction, as "strictly speaking, however, language standardization does not tolerate variability" (Milroy and Milroy (1999:19), but see Kristiansen and Coupland (2011) for a discussion on standards and variation). Therefore, language standardisation may also be analysed as actions performed by individuals, organisations and official authorities in a given socio-political context. Thus, language standardisation, like language planning, may take place on many different levels and both formally through policy making, development of dictionaries, text books, teaching materials, mass media; and informally, though language socialisation and practices. The focus of this article is on how users relate to the more formal aspects of standardisation. However, there is interplay between formal and informal aspects of language policy; social actors are influenced by language policies, which in turn are shaped and challenged by social actors.

## Language policy and planning today: the critical turn within social sciences and humanities

Research on LPP today is characterised by the following traits: a concern with diversity and globalisation processes, seeing language as constructed and socially constituted, and a greater focus on the interplay between macro- and micro-processes. The constructivist turn brought about a profound change, both in the view of language as an object of study and language as a source of data. In the 1960s and 70s, sociolinguistics turned to spoken language as a social object, and new recording technologies made it possible to analyse audio recordings of spoken language as well as transcripts of these recordings. In combination with these new technological means, focus shifted to seeing language as shaped by societal, cultural and interactional factors (Lane 2012). A wide range of linguists began analysing more than language in the traditional sense, encompassing variation and hybridity and thus addressing what Duranti and Goodwin (1992) called the mutually reflexive relationship between talk and context, as they see language as both shaping and being shaped by context. These intellectual developments from the 1970s and onwards challenged the notion of language as an autonomous entity, and fuelled by technological advances both in text production and as tools for data analysis, language came to be seen as a part of a larger social system. As an object of study, language was resituated in a social and cultural context. Within LPP the focus has been extended to issues of power and identity and discussions of whether

standardisation transfers nation-state ideologies to minority languages (Kaplan and Baldauf 1997; Gal 2006) as well as questions of authority and authenticity in language planning processes (Eira and Stebbins 2008).

Most importantly for this article, the critical turn coincided with and was spurred by technological advances. The advent of high-quality and affordable recording equipment and searchable corpora lead to large amounts of data which in turn drew research focus to variation and language as a contextualised phenomenon, a development which also affected language standardisation. Lexical forms and grammatical patterns were no longer solely elicited based on set questionnaires, but to a far larger extent sought in transcriptions of natural occurring speech. This makes it less feasible to abstract away from variation, which in turn poses challenges for standardisation. Standardisation implies prioritising some forms and structures ahead of others, and thus linguists working in this field are faced with the dilemma of what forms and structures to include, on what basis, and how to codify these. Our choices will influence whether the standard gets accepted by those it is designed for.

Hence, this article is an attempt to answer the call put forward by Ricento (2000) when he underscores that the role of individuals and their agency is one of the unanswered questions within LPP research. Sociolinguistics has always been concerned with the relationship and interplay between macro- and micro-level processes, and Ricento points out that for LPP there is a need for approaches which integrate macro- and micro-level investigations. This is a challenge for LPP because the field has been characterised by a focus on the analysis of large-scale policies and processes, though recently there have been more investigations of language policy in more informal settings (Blommaert et al. 2009; Hult 2010). However, there is still an urgent need for research that does precisely what Ricento calls for: investigate the role of individuals and their agency. One of the aims of this article is to address this gap by looking at how users articulate their positions and actions with respect to standardisation.

## The role of the user: from *language and technology* to *language as technology*

Language planning and standardisation is a complex and often contradictory process, see Lane (2011) and Eira and Stebbins (2008) for discussions. Though there is general agreement that the socio-political context of LPP is essential and that language planning from below is important, there is an urgent need for more sophisticated analysis of how social actors position themselves as users, and sometimes non-users, of language standards.

Seeing written language as technology, though not common within sociolinguistics, is not a new concept; this has been analysed within literacy studies and anthropology (Goody and Watt 1963; Ong 1982; Goody 2000). This article focusses on written language as a form of technology, and thereby contributes a new

theoretical approach by analysing standardisation from the theoretical viewpoint of STS with a particular emphasis on how technology and standardisation inscribe and configure users. In this context I see technology as any form of cultural tools human beings produce and use, and in line with Scollon and Scollon (2004) I see such tools as material, semiotic or both.

Within Social Sciences and Humanities, at least two different approaches to the study of language and technology can be identified. The one dominating within sociolinguistic research is the study of the relationship between language and technology and how technologies affect language use. Sociolinguistics, though not emphasising written language as technology, does analyse the impact of technologies on language use (see Jewitt (2008) for an analysis of technology and literacy). The advent of the printing press and typewriter standardised text production, and the written text came to be, at least implicitly, understood as language per se. Technologies always entail some degree of standardisation, involving codification, abstraction and changing the conditions and scope for human agency. These technological developments, intertwined with the notion of language as a monomodal abstract entity, underpinned linguistic research to a large degree until the 1970s. The paradigm shift described above was facilitated by technological developments for data gathering and analysis. These processes have been furthered by recent technological developments as the production of all forms of written, spoken and visual texts has become more complex through the use of different modes, all types of texts are more widely disseminated due to technological means, and we have developed more sophisticated tools and theories for data analysis. This I would describe as the study of *language and technology* (for analyses, see for instance Kieffer et al. 1998; Scollon and Scollon 2004; Jewitt 2008; Lane 2012).

The other aspect, which is at the core of this article, is to see language standardisation as technology, thus, a shift from analysing *language and technology* to analysing *written language as technology*. Seeing written language as technology brings the role of users and the relationship between users and standards to the fore; a relationship which will be the focus of the remainder of this article.

## Technology and the user

STS is a large and diverse field, and one of its key questions has been the roles of and the interplay between actors, agency and technology. Within this framework there is a longstanding discussion on whether or to what extent agency can be attributed to nonhumans, or in other words: can technology be an agent? Approaches range from seeing agency as situated with the actor or user to ascribing agency also to nonhumans or technology. The latter approach is known as Actor-Network Theory and is associated with researchers such as Latour (2005), who postulates that certain types of objects can be agents, as he ascribes agency to those humans and nonhumans who make transformation and change come about.

Technology studies were also affected by the critical turn of the social sciences and humanities; instead of seeing user and technology as two separate objects of research, they came to be seen as co-constructed; hence, users became an integral part of technology studies (Oudshoorn and Pinch 2003). In the 1980s, Pinch and Bijker introduced the social construction of technology (SCOT) approach, pointed out that scientific knowledge is socially constituted. Technological artefacts were seen as culturally constructed and interpreted; consequently, there is flexibility not only in the way users interpret such products, but also in the design of products. Research within this field used to be concerned with the success rate of technological products (Pinch and Bijker 1986), but focus has shifted to the interplay between the user and technologies (Oudshoorn and Pinch 2003). The 'turn to the user' within STS can be traced back to Cowan's research on user-technology relations when she brought the feminist studies into STS (Oudshoorn and Pinch 2003). Cowan suggested that the *user* and not technological objects or technologies should be the starting point for the analysis. Consequently, one of the central issues of concern for STS is the *agency* of the user. Users are seen as social actors who shape technology and also are shaped by technology, in other words: users and technology are in a mutually reflexive relationship (cf. Duranti and Goodwin's (1992) analysis of language and context).

SCOT introduces the concept of *non-users*, a category which is particularly important to the study of minority language standardisation because standardisation often is a contested process and users may resist standardisation itself and/or object to choice of forms to be included in the standard (Spolsky 2004; Lane 2011). Hence, the category *users* include both those who accept a standards and *non-users*, those who for various reasons resist or reject a standard.

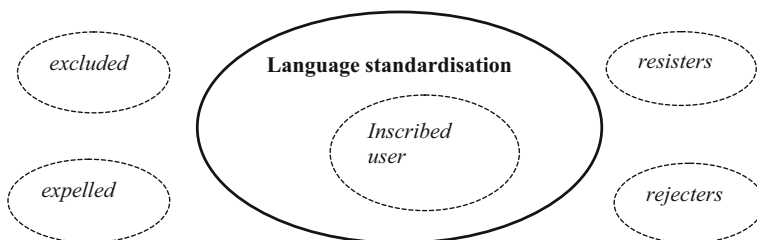The various types of non-users are presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** Language standardisation and users

These categories will be addressed in more detail, but as a preliminary explanation one may say that *Rejecters* do not want a standard, *Resisters* may ask if there is any point in standardising, reject some aspects of standardisation but accept other, or wait and see what happens before deciding how to act. *Excluded* are social actors who lack the resources to use the standard, whereas *Expelled* are those whose opinions get bypassed or ignored.

Though the various types of non-users could are depicted as relatively discrete categories in Figure 1, it is important to keep in mind that social actors may take different positions and roles depending on the situation, and thus, the same individual might be associated with different types of non-users, and even shift between positions of user and non-user. Thus, the concepts of *users* and *non-users* are to be understood as bipolar, but rather be seen primarily as analytical categories used to address contradictory aspects of relation to minority language standardisation.

## Key categories: configured user, intended user and non-user

A standard is always created with a user in mind, though actors are aware of this to varying degrees. When standardising a minority language, one risks establishing a standard that the language users themselves experience that they cannot meet, and potentially, they are faced with a double stigma (Lane 2011): The speakers feel that their language falls short when measured against the official national language, and that it also fails in terms of meeting the standardised version of the minority language. Standardisation, which was supposed to be emancipatory and empower minority language speakers, may create a new form of stigma for those who feel that they cannot live up to the codified standard, described by Gal (2006:170–171) in the following manner:

> the speech of minority speakers whose linguistic forms are not included in the new minority standard comes to seem inadequate, and perhaps even inauthentic, from the perspective of that new standard. Thus, by the nature of the standardisation process, every creation of a standard orientation also creates stigmatised forms – supposed 'nonlanguages' – among the very speakers whose linguistic practices standardisation was supposed to valorise.

The standardised minority language might not be accepted by the minority language users themselves, resulting in a situation where the standard might not be regarded as authentic (Gal 2006; Romaine 2007; Lane 2011). In minority language contexts, the standard may be perceived as the target variety of those who learn the language through education or passive bilinguals who start using the minority language; hence, the varieties spoken by such new speakers may come to be seen as less authentic by traditional speakers and sometimes even by the new speakers themselves (O'Rourke and Pujolar 2013).

As in other forms of technology, users are inscribed and configured through the process of language standardisation. The decision to include, and thereby exclude, some grammatical forms is not a purely linguistically based choice. Standards are established with a purpose, because there is something social actors involved in the standardisation process wish the standard to do or symbolise, or they may wish that

users will appropriate the standard as a mediational means which will enable them to act. Those standardising minority languages usually have an intended user, or intended users, in mind, but they are not always aware that they configure the user through their choices. This implicit role of users often is not included when language standardisation is analysed. As outlined above, a great deal of concern is given to the socio-political context and also to the identities of the minority language speakers; however, when the user perspective is included, there is a tendency to focus primarily on the intended user. Seeing language standardisation as technology opens our eyes to how users are inscribed and configured through the standardisation process, and in turn how users relate to standardisation processes and/or the material result of these processes, such as dictionaries, grammars, text books etc. Thus, as pointed out by the SCOT approach: technologies are only successful when they are deemed to work, that is accepted and appropriated by users.

## The standardisation of Kven: users and non-users

The various reactions to the standardisation of Kven, a Finnic minority language spoken in Northern Norway, provide an illustrative example of these processes. In 2005, Kven was recognised as a language in its own right and not just a dialect of Finnish, and the official process of the standardisation of Kven started in 2007; the process is outlined later in this section.

The Kven is a Finnic-speaking minority in the two northernmost counties of Norway. The area has been multilingual for centuries, and people have made seasonal travels between the inland and the coast for fishing, trading etc. Particularly during the 18th and 19th centuries, migrants from Finnish-speaking areas in what today are the northern parts of Sweden and Finland settled along the coasts of Northern Norway; many of them settled before the current national frontiers were drawn (Sundelin 1998). This group of people and their descendants are called Kven, though some Kven perceive this a stigmatised term and refer to their languages as 'our Finnish', 'old Finnish' or link the language to a place by using the name of a village, such as 'Bugøynes Finnish'. There has also been immigration from Finland, particularly during the 1970s when Finns moved to the area to work in the fishing industry.

The Kven, like many other minorities in the northern circumpolar region, went through a period of substantial linguistic oppression during the national romantic era of the 19th century. The Kven were not allowed to use their language at school, and sometimes children were punished if they used their mother tongue. Parents were encouraged to speak Norwegian to their children, and the teachers would visit parents and advise that they did not speak Kven to their children. Until 1959 the use of Kven and Sámi in the schools was forbidden, and until 1964 one had to speak Norwegian to buy land in the Northern area. Churches were built in traditional Norwegian style, and boarding schools where the use of Kven and Sámi was strictly forbidden were built in the core Kven and Sámi areas (Lane 2010; Pietikäinen et al. 2010). The consequences of this oppression was a devaluation of Kven culture and language, and many Kven speakers have expressed that they did not wish to place

the same burden on their children as the one they had to carry, and therefore they chose to speak Norwegian only to their children (Lane 2010).

Norway's ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 1998 led to the recognition of Kven as a language in 2005, and the Norwegian Government allocated some funds for the standardisation of Kven (Lane 2011). In 2007, the process of developing a written standard for Kven started, and the mandate of the Kven language planning body was to outline the principles for the standardisation of Kven. The Kven language planning body comprised of two sections: the Kven Language Council, consisting of linguists, and the Kven Language Board with members representing various user groups (education, media, and religious organisations). The Language Council's task was to make recommendations based on linguistic descriptions of Kven and dialect samples and prepare documents and suggestions for the Language Board who in turn made the decision.

The council's recommendation was to establish a standard that could be recognised by different groups of users: those who speak Kven and would like to learn to read and write their language and new speakers—those who acquire the minority language outside the home through formal instruction, but also those who have grown up as passive bilinguals; that is they understand Kven but do not speak the language. Further, the council recommended that the standard should be a compromise variety based on Eastern and Western Kven dialects, close to Meänkieli, a Finnic minority language spoken in Northern Sweden, and not artificially removed from standard Finnish. Meänkieli and Kven are similar both in terms of grammar and vocabulary, and many Kven speakers express that spoken Meänkieli is very easy to understand (In general, they do not have access to literature in Meänkieli, so their perceptions are based on oral comprehension). Because there is more written material in Meänkieli and the number of speakers of Meänkieli is considerably higher than for Kven, the Language Council saw it as advantageous that the Kven standard is close to Meänkieli.

The Kven Language Board supported the recommendations of the Language Council; hence, the decision was that the standardisation should proceed based on these recommendations and the preliminary outline of Kven grammar drawn up by the Kven Language Council during the period 2007–2010. The Kven Language Council also suggested that one could have alternative versions of the standard, based on geographical variation, but the Language Board expressed a concern that the number of speakers may be too low to implement a polynomic standard.

Though Norway is a relatively young nation state, there is still a long history of language standardisation, both before and after Norway became an independent nation in 1905. Norwegian has two written standards—Bokmål and Nynorsk (Vikør 2007) and has been described as particularly tolerant of variation (Trudgill 2002). Røyneland (2009) points out that there is a positive attitude towards dialects and also a large degree of variation within the Norwegian written standards. Though the amount of variation within each of the written standards has not been constant, there has always been variation (Vikør 2007; Røyneland 2013). In the light of this, it is not surprising the Kven Language Council and Language Board were in agreement on a standard encompassing variation and including forms from a wide range of Kven dialects, and in a brief written by the director of the Kven Language Council,

the parallel to the variation in Bokmål and Nynorsk is explicitly mentioned (Andreassen 2009). However, the amount of variation was debated at the meetings of the Kven Language Council. A large degree of variation was seen as essential if those who speak or understand Kven were to identify with and accept the standard, whereas a standard with less variation might be easier to master for new speakers who would learn Kven through education.

The standardisation of Kven is not an undisputed process, and there is a wide range of opinions articulated in various types of local media. Some do not approve of using Kven as a term for their language but favour standardisation, others maintain that it would be better to write standard Finnish, some express concern that elements from their dialect might not be incorporated in the standard, and a number of Kven welcome both the standardisation process and the term used for the language. Those who criticise the standardisation process frequently state that the Kven involved in this process are removed from the grassroots and carry out planning without enough knowledge of what happens on the grassroots level (Lane 2011). Similar processes are found with regards to other European Regional or Minority Languages (ERMLs), underscoring the importance of further investigation into the role of users. A wide range of social actors are involved in these processes for various reasons and with different and sometimes contradictory motivations. Though not ignoring the socio-political context, the aim and contribution of this article is to focus on the users and actors in these processes.

## Data

In the following I will present a preliminary analysis of data to shed light on how different groups of users position themselves. Only illustrative examples are presented here, but I base my analysis on participation in the Kven Language Council (2007–2010), field trips during the period 1996–2014, data gathered for the Ruija corpus, a speech corpus from Kven and Finnish-speaking areas in Northern Norway[2] and debates in newspapers and social media. For the latter category I only quote comments that are available to the general public, such as comments on newspaper articles and letters to the editor. The data are used to illustrate various categories of users, though with particular emphasis on non-users, as these are social actors who often are ignored or overlooked in analyses of standardisation processes.

## Users and non-users in standardisation processes

In discourses on language revitalisation, the development of a written norm, and hence standardisation, often is seen as one of the key factors of success, though this has been discussed recently, notably by Duchêne and Heller (2007) who problematise the notions of language endangerment and revitalisation. Even though in some contexts actors involved in standardisation processes also question the role

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[2] http://www.hf.uio.no/iln/english/about/organization/text-laboratory/projects/ruija/ruija.html.

of standardisation, standardisation is still seen as a key component in language revitalisation and as a tool for the minority language to conquer arenas of modern life. In the light of critical approaches to language standardisation, such as Gal (2006), Duchêne and Heller (2007), and Lane (2011), I wish to shift the focus from macro-level policies to users, and in particular to users who do not accept standardisation processes unconditionally, arguing that both users and non-users should be seen as important social actors precisely for this reason.

The following comment in the newspaper Sagat in 2008 and on an online blog, a board member of Kveeninuoret-Kvensk ungdomsnettverk (Kven youth network) is an example of a user who sees the standardisation of Kven as a positive development. The headline *Åpent brev fra en kvensk ungdom* 'Open letter form a Kven youth' highlights the author's position as a young person wishing to maintain the Kven language, which he describes as *et gammelt kulturspråk* – 'an old culture language'. He also takes a positive stance on the efforts made to try to prevent the loss of Kven, underscoring that he sees language as an important marker of the culture of a people. Hence, in his opinion, language and culture are linked.

> *I skrivende stund er tiltak igangsatt for å berge stumpene etter et gammelt kulturspråk, som er truet med å forsvinne fullstendig for våre etterkommere. Kvensk språkstudie i regi av Universitetet i Tromsø har stor tilsøkning, og interessen er stor. Ingen kultur kan rammes hardere enn at deres eget språk forsvinner, og heldigvis er arbeidet nå kommet i gang for å snu dette. Språk og historie er de viktigste kjennemerkene for et folks kultur.*
> At the time of writing, measures to save the remains of an old cultural language facing the threat of being lost forever for our descendants have been taken. Kven language studies at the University of Tromsø are in great demand and there is a lot of interest. No culture is harder hit than when its own language disappears, and fortunately the efforts to turn this around now have started. Language and history are the most important markers for the culture of a people.

The connection between language and culture which was at the core of the conception of the nation state now rematerialises in a different context when the minority language is seen as intrinsically linked to the culture of the minority group.

In order to teach Kven at the University of Tromsø, a preliminary standard was developed. The lecturer at the university started from a few literary texts, most of them produced by authors from the same village and also took dialectal variation in various Kven dialects into account. There was a wide range of reactions to this, and many, like the writer whom I quote above, explicitly stated that that they saw a link between the culture and the language and underlined the role of standardisation and teaching in safeguarding the minority language: *heldigvis er arbeidet nå kommet i gang for å snu dette* 'fortunately the efforts to reverse this now have started'.

The project leader of the Kven Cultural Project in Nordreisa in Troms County expressed in an interview in the newspaper Sagat in 2008 that she saw the standardisation of Kven as important and essential:

*Vi har også behov for at flere arbeider med utvikling av det kvænske
skriftspråket, samt nye termer på ulike fagområder.*
There is also a need for more [people] to work to develop Kven written
language, and new terms in different academic fields.

These two contributions are typical examples of users who welcome and embrace
a written standard, because this is seen as means for new speakers to acquire or
reclaim the minority language, an expression of identity, a means for conquering
new domains etc. These attitudes can be seen as examples of revitalisation
discourses problematised by Duchêne and Heller (2007), though it is important to
underline that the proponents of language standardisation, particularly those in the
field, are aware of the potentially problematic aspects of such discourses.

Some users view the standardisation of the minority language positively, but fear
that their dialect will not be sufficiently included in the standard. This issue was
brought up repeatedly during the meetings of the Kven Language Council. The
course in Kven at the University of Tromsø drew on three novels published by an
author from Pyssyjoki/Børselv in the Western part of the Kven speaking areas, and
many Kven speakers in the Eastern dialect areas positive to the standardisation of
Kven worried that their dialects would not be sufficiently reflected in the standard.

The Language Council outlined principles for standardisation that took regional
variation into account, giving preference to grammatical forms which occur in
several Kven dialects. The descriptive grammar which is to be the basis of the
written standard will be completed in 2014. In the process following the publication
of the grammar, it remains to be seen whether the standard will be polynomic, a
compromise variety or primarily based on the dialect spoken in the Pyssyjoki/
Børselv village.

In this context, listening to the voices of those who are sceptical of standardisation
or even reject standardisation outright brings an enlightening perspective to the
academic analysis of minority language standardisation. This is precisely where
STS offers research on LPP a useful analytical tool. Woolgar (1991:59) explains
how users get inscribed in technologies and standards: the design and production of
a new entity amounts to a process of configuring its user, where 'configuring'
includes defining the identity of putative users, and setting constraints upon their
likely future actions. Drawing on Woolgar, one may see users as inscribed in
standards though the choices made by those involved in the design and production
of standards and that these choices both set constraints on likely future actions of the
users and opens up scope for future actions.

## The importance of non-users

The idea of configuring the user might also shed light on the role of minority language
speakers who reject, contest or do not care about standardisation at all. The term
offered by STS for these cases is 'non-users'. Wyatt et al. (2002) identify four types of
non-users: *resisters*, *rejecters*, *excluded* and *expelled*. When applying this to minority
language standardisation, one can suggest that some users resist the standard because

they do not see any point in writing or perhaps even maintaining the minority language. Another factor could be that most of the ERMLs have a 'mother language' in a neighbouring country, and some might prefer the standard of the 'mother language'. Others are excluded because they for various reasons do not have the resources necessary to use the standard; they might not be fully literate in the national language and thus do not manage to decode the standard. Finally, the last group are those who are expelled, not from the use of the standard, but their opinions might be overheard or bypassed. In revitalisation processes, disputes and controversies about authenticity and authority are common (Costa and Gasquet-Cyrus 2013), and those who get marginalised might not be inscribed in the standard, which in practice means that their linguistic repertoire might be granted less importance. Wyatt underscores the importance of incorporating non-users in our research because this includes (potentially) less powerful actors in the analysis, pointing out that it is essential to "take non-users and former users seriously as relevant social groups, as actors who might influence and shape the world" (2003:78).

In many minority language contexts various types of media (newspapers, radio, blogs, online fora etc.) are arenas where non-users may express their opinions of and attitudes to standardisation. This is particularly the case for the Nordic countries, where both national and local newspapers have regular columns and debate sections dedicated to topical affairs. Hence, a wide range of people contribute, not only representatives of minority organisations, journalists and politicians, but also ordinary citizens (Lane 2009; Røyneland 2013).

Some who reject a Kven standard do so because they see no need for the standardisation of Kven, reckoning that there is no need for Kven at all. This group seems to be rather small as tourism, contact and trade with Finland have increased since the 1970s, and there is now a need for people who master Kven or Finnish. These linguistic varieties are mutually intelligible, though there are morphological and syntactic differences, and more importantly for comprehension also large differences in vocabulary between Kven and Standard Finnish. Kven has retained old borrowings from Swedish and borrowed lexical items from Norwegian, whereas during the standardisation process in Finland during the 19th century, Swedish borrowings were removed from Finnish and new words were coined. Finns generally do not have difficulties understanding Kven because they have acquired at least passive competence in Swedish through the educational system; however, in general, the Kven find in harder to understand Finnish, particularly formal and written Finnish. Because of this relatively large degree of mutual comprehension, many Kven reject a Kven standard and maintain that they see no need for Kven to be written and would rather write standard Finnish, as articulated (in Norwegian) by a woman from a village where Kven still is used:

> *det det e melkeku til staten (.) rett og slett (.) lage ett eget språk (.) det er slett ikke det (.) det er en dialekt (.) av finsk*
> this is exploitation of the State (.) really (.) create a new language (.) really, this isn't [a language] (.) it's a dialect of Finnish

She uses the term *melkeku*, which literally means dairy cow. In Norwegian, this is an expression used to denote that someone exploits a source of funding, and she

finds that the creation of a Kven standard is a waste of money because Kven in her opinion is a dialect of Finnish. Interestingly, though rejecting a Kven standard outright, in the same interview this woman underlines the important differences between the Finnish spoken in her village and Finnish in Finland, referring to the variety of her village as 'our Finnish' and 'old Finnish' and providing several examples of how the two varieties differ and underlining that 'our Finnish' should not be seen as inferior to standard Finnish.

When the Kven migrated during the 18th and 19th century, many of them were literate and had Bibles and hymnals in Finnish. After World War II most of the Kven material culture, including written material, was lost because the German army burned almost all buildings in the Northern areas when they retreated during the autumn of 1944. Today most Kven are not familiar with written Standard Finnish, nor written Kven as Kven still is in the process of being standardised. A written text can be seen as a material outcome of a standardisation process, and therefore I was interested in exploring how Kven speakers would relate to reading texts in Kven. 18 Kven speakers were filmed when reading Kven for the first time. Many expressed that they find reading Finnish challenging, such as Anna when she was asked if she can read Finnish:

> *en mie ossa oikea suomiakha lukkia* (.) *juuri se missä on lyhheitä sanoja*
> I can't read proper Finnish (.) only if there are very short words

Anna says that she can read only short words in 'proper' Finnish, and after having read two short texts in Kven she stated with a smile that this one could learn to read:

> *sitähän kyllä oppi tuo lukehmaan ko* [laughter]
> this one could learn to read like [laughter]

Another interesting aspect here is how Anna positions herself as a 'learner' when she says *this one could learn to read* – followed by *ko* (translated as *like*). In this context *ko* implies that an action can be performed quickly, so Anna not only says one could learn to read the language – this is also portrayed as a skill she could acquire fast. In the conversation following the reading session Anna says that she does not want a Kven language but she would still like her own language be written so that she can read texts in this language. When asked if she would like the Finnish of her village to be written, Anna answers:

Anna   olis↓ (.) ei kvääniä (.) < shakes her head > (.) en mie tykkä
       kvääniä < laughs > se on ankara (.) ankara kieli se kvääni (.) se on niiko
       katkastus poiki se suomi
       *yes it would* (.) *not Kven* < shakes her head > (.) *I don't like*
       *Kven* < laughs > *it is a difficult* (.) *difficult language this Kven* (.) *it is like*
       *broken Finnish*
Int    onko sinusta hyä että Pykeän suome tulle että se olisi tekstiä mitä sie saattasi
       luk[kea xxx]
       *in your opinion is it good that from Pykeä Finnish comes- that there would*
       *be texts that you could* r[ead xxx]

Anna   [niih] < nodding > mhm se olisi mukava < smiles > joo .h se olisi mukava
oppia omma omma kieli mitä sie ittet puhhut < looks at text on
table > mull on viakkea puhua oikea (.) mie en ossa lukkea oike suoma
< nodding > *mhm it would be fun* < smiles > *yes*. h *it would be fun to learn
your own own language that you yourself speak* < looks at text on table >
*for me it's difficult I can't read proper Finnish*

Here Anna repeats that she does not speak 'proper Finnish', an attitude which is
quite common amongst Kven speakers who measure 'their Finnish' up against the
Finnish spoken by Finnish tourists and Finns who immigrated to Kven speaking
areas during the 1970s.

These examples show that even though Anna rejects standardisation of Kven *ei
kvääniä (.) en mie tykkä kvääniä*—*not Kven (.) I don't like Kven*, she still says that
she would like the variety spoken in her village to be written. Anna might be seen as
a resister because she explicitly says that she would like her language to be written,
but does not want the language to be called Kven. She positions herself as a non-
user by rejecting the name of the standard, but simultaneously as a user by
embracing the idea of writing and reading her language,

This ambivalent attitude to the standardisation of Kven characterises many of
those who initially reject a Kven standard; even though they do not see a need for a
written version of Kven, they still maintain that 'their Finnish' is not the same as the
Finnish of Finland. Many also express a strong emotional attachment to their
language (Lane 2010) and would like it to continue being used. Even though some
language users do not explicitly state that they would like Kven to be standardised
or maintaining that the written standard should be Finnish, they still articulate that to
them, 'their Finnish' is not the same entity as standard Finnish.

Thus, the categories of users are not clear-cut: some non-users might not reject
standardisation outright, but rather resist standardisation to lesser or greater degree
and question why their minority language should be standardised, but they still see
their language as different from Finnish. As people encounter written Kven in the
Kven newspaper, transcripts of stories and in online forums many express that they
experience a feeling of recognition and belonging. Thus, they see the value of
writing Kven, though they might not want a formal written standard. Resisters might
also be sceptical if they find the standard too different from their dialect, or more
precisely, if what they see as key phonological or morphological features of their
dialect are not sufficiently incorporated in the standard.

Another important group of non-users are those who are excluded because they
lack the resources to use the standard. This is the case for some of older Kven
speakers who got their education in Norwegian, a language they did not know when
they started school. This was aggravated by World War II as schools where
occupied by the German army and burned at the end of the war. Many Kven
therefore only got a couple of years of education in a language they did not know,
and hence, some are only partially literate. Other factors that potentially might
exclude older users are lack of computer skills and access to the internet, as texts in
Kven often are published online.

The final category of non-users is the *expelled*, or those who get bypassed or ignored. In processes of minority language standardisation and revitalisation there are always social actors whose voices are ignored. This might happen because their opinions are seen as too extreme or confrontational, and therefore they get bypassed. All these categories and types of voices are usually present in (re)vitalisation processes, and therefore, also non-users should be taken into account when we analyse minority language standardisation.

## Conclusion

Standards potentially define, enable, constrain, emancipate and also exclude users; therefore, the exclusionary effects of standards are particularly significant for the study of standardisation of minority languages, as standards have the potential to emancipate, but also alienate users. Applying the notions of *users* and *non-users* provides a contribution to the study of language standardisation, particularly as this approach also allows us to address the role of non-users or social actors whose voices might not be heard. In turn, this sheds light on the role of power in standardisation processes as some users contribute to standardisation processes whereas others are bypassed, chose to not engage or reject standardisation processes. Finally, having the resources to use a standard may also give actors power, whereas others may experience that a standard may restrain their agency and their scope for action.

Standardisation of minority languages is a complex and contradictory process with conflicting agendas and goals. Therefore, minority language standardisation has more than one side to it; while standardisation may serve to strengthen and empower, it can also cause groups or individuals to become excluded or alienated from arenas where they previously felt at home. Standardisation cannot be seen as an unproblematic process, that merely renders visible what was previously invisible, or powerful those who were once powerless. The standardisation process in tandem with status planning, actually transforms a minority language into a different kind of phenomenon, and this transformation, although in many respects beneficial to its users, reconfigures relations of dependence and independence. Many of the mechanisms that can be observed when a new language is being standardised are in fact also at work in the hegemonic official languages. This means that minority language standardisation can be seen as a prism for investigating how language standardisation works in general, far beyond the field of "minority politics".

## Transcription key

(.)    Pause
[]     Overlap
xxx    Unintelligible speech
.h     In-breath
↓      Falling intonation

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