

History of European Standard Languages

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If “a language is a dialect with an army and a navy,” then among the many dialects that make up a language, the standard variety has the largest military. This course is all about the phenomenon of “standard languages.” The standard variety is primarily written with the goal of providing linguistic uniformity in the face of social diversity. Standard languages are often thought of as prestigious, “most beautiful,” and may serve as a symbol of national identity while also being the official language of a country. We will analyze and discuss the “birth” and development of language standards, the development of individual standard languages, and we will see emerging historical–theoretical patterns. Some standards were initiated by kings, others—by intellectuals of peasant origin. Of over 50 present standard languages in Europe a number will be investigated, compared, and classified: English, Russian, German, Greek, Yiddish, Italian, French, Spanish, Lithuanian, Polish, Ukrainian, Norwegian, Croatian, Serbian, Luxembourgish, Albanian, Estonian, etc.