

Language consciousness and deliberate changes

Camiel Hamans (*European Parliament Brussels/Strasbourg*)

In his portrait of Mikołaj Rudnicki (1881-1978) and his linguistic works Jerzy Bańczerowski (2001) stresses the importance of the notion of language consciousness for Rudnicki especially when it comes to language change. In Rudnicki's own words:

“For every language change has its ultimate source in the consciousness of individual language subjects, in the consciousness of particular co-linguators. Actually, this by no means denies that in the final resort, the body sanctioning all language change is the whole community of co-linguating members, but this community is made possible, and is conditioned by, the existence of particular co-linguators. It is clear, after all, that if there were none of these, it would be necessary to part with the whole language community.” (Bańczerowski 2001:247)

Although it is not immediately clear what Rudnicki meant by consciousness – in Polish he uses the term *pamięć* ‘memory’, which suggests an interpretation more or less similar to competence – it might be useful to compare his idea of language change to that of a few non-Polish scholars who worked in more or less the same period. Especially the distinction which Rudnicki makes between *individual* and *social* language consciousness might be interesting.

In this paper Rudnicki's ideas will be compared or better contrasted to that of the Dutch school of pre-Second World War philologists-linguists discussing the process of diphthongization of [i:] and [y:], from earlier [u:]. These scholars criticized the theory of Kloeke (1927), quoted in extenso by Bloomfield in his *Language* (1933), which claimed a process of expansion, a kind of early ‘lexical diffusion’, to be responsible for the results of the diphthongization.

Among others W.Gs Hellinga (1938) tried to prove the diphthongization not only to be an autochthonous process but the final result of the whole process to be highly influenced by deliberate innovations of teachers and early grammarians as well. It is not without reason his dissertation is called ‘The construction of the Dutch received pronunciation’.

These deliberate innovations only became a change when they were socially accepted, so in Rudnicki's terms became part of the social language consciousness.

In a recent article Pieter van Reenen (2005) discussed Kloeke's theory again. He found that in Holland [y:] first changed into [y.j] and then back into [y:] again. This paradox can be solved, according to Van Reenen by assuming that around 1600 ‘Hollanders’, the inhabitants of the province Holland in the western part of the Netherlands, obtained a new linguistic self-esteem.

This of course must have been a conscious social process.

Bibliography

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