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## Language and National Stereotypes

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The text analyses the quite common practice of judging the quality of prestigious and non-prestigious languages and dialects. Historical examples from English, Norwegian and Swedish are discussed, to show how this type of opinion tends to highlight certain traditional stereotypes. The linguistic features quoted in these judgments are often descriptions of human traits.

1. On the quality of language. «As the language, so is the nation» says the distinguished Danish linguist and English scholar, Otto Jespersen (1958<sup>2</sup>:16), writing in 1938. He is only a relatively late follower of a long established notion.<sup>1</sup> A similar belief was expressed by the Norwegian poet Henrik Wergeland in 1835, at a time when it was the current, romantic, view: “Landets Character præger sig i Folkets, dettes i Sproget<sup>2</sup>” (quoted in Skard, 1980:26). These beliefs manifest themselves in a variety of stereotypes. The following, rather idiosyncratic, choice of examples is intended as an illustration.

As David Crystal has maintained (2006) the language of science is not always dry and matter of fact, but full of metaphors, vivid images and emotions. If this is so in science, then it is no wonder that a less than scientific discourse will abound in such expressions. When the subject of study or discussion is language, such images often soar high. What is said about languages and dialects, most frequently turns out to be descriptions and judgments of a very general nature, which are not easy to interpret. One might argue that they are not used by serious scholars, but at least one example will show that even scholars are not immune

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<sup>1</sup> It goes back to the 18th c and Herder's romantic ideas.

<sup>2</sup> “The character of the country is marked in its people's, and their in the language.”





to emotional judgements. Bjørnson, being a poet, does not surprise us when he says (Almenningen, 1981: 69) «Jeg bruger intet Grammatik-norsk, jeg bruger Bryst-norsk»<sup>3</sup>, some of Jespersen's views are not far from this statement.

One point that is described or judged are language qualities, and they mostly reflect positive or negative attitudes of the speaker/writer towards one or more languages or dialects. Some, however, do refer to certain observable linguistic features, such as sounds or words, others to style, and only very few refer to grammar. But no matter whether the description refers to observable features or not, it is biased. Needless to say, the bias is towards one's own idiom and against another or other idioms, though there are some exceptions, as we shall see.

Popular views, such as that Hungarian or Swedish, probably also Croatian, are ugly and French or Italian beautiful, are not uncommon, but not necessarily shared by everyone. As said above, such judgements are usually passed on the sound of a language or dialect, particularly if those whose auditory impressions are expressed have little or no knowledge of the language in question. The perception can even be quite correct and in accord with the findings of physics and medicine, which inform us that some sounds are more pleasing to the ear than others. Most such judgments however, do not take the well being of the listener into consideration, but rather cultural stereotypes, or personal experiences and preferences. These judgments, if they say anything relatively reasonable about a language or dialect, are concerned more with its aesthetic than with its functional merits.

Other «measurable» judgments can refer to the vocabulary, whose size indicates what a range of concepts it is able to cover. But even here, languages tend to be judged by the standards of the „critic“, who does not consider that many of the words in his/her language are perhaps superfluous or less expressive than in another. Conversely, of course, „other“ languages can seem to contain strange words whose usefulness appear marginal. Generally speaking, word-formational means or the use of metaphors, which can either make up for the lack of a word or even surpass it in communicative value, are not normally considered by linguistically less informed critics. As purists in many cultures have shown, the emotional preference for certain words is more important than their usefulness. The origin of the word is more important than the function it has or can gain in the language.

When it comes to judging the aptness of grammatical structure, how is it to be decided what is desirable? The assumption that simple morphology is somehow better, because it is easy to learn (see Jespersen further on) are true from the foreign learner's point of view, whereas native speakers are able to acquire even the most intricate rules, and poets can make use of any kind of linguistic resource. As language historians know, it is not just the simplicity of structure that has brought about a development towards analyticity in a number of languages. Even if morphology or syntax are «simple», complex semantic or intonational patterns

<sup>3</sup> «I don't use grammatical Norwegian, I use breast (i.e. heart) Norwegian».



may be lurking round the corner to compensate for a possible loss of information. In fact, there are still many complex language types that have weathered many linguistic and social developments and influences.

Typically then, the first language, the «mother tongue», is praised in the most general terms as *hochlöblich*<sup>4</sup> (about German, Johann Rist 1647. cited in Eggers 1992: 242), *härlig*<sup>5</sup> (about Swedish, von Dalin 1732 – 1734 see Bergmann, 1970: 142), *admirable* (Charles Mackey about English: 1867: 399, see Bailey, 1996:161), *herlig* (Henrik Wergeland about Norwegian, quoted in Skard, 1980: 17), to name only a few. If it is ever found fault with, then it is because other languages have «deformed», «defiled» of «mishandled» it.

2. On the sound of language. Examples from medieval and later texts show that these ideas have been around for a long time. One such instance is to be found in John of Trevisa's 14th century translation of Ranulph Higden's *Polychronicon* (Sisam, 1955: 148), in which we can read that in many parts of England the language is *apeyred*<sup>6</sup> because the population mixed with the Danes and Normans, and now use *strange wlaffyng, chyteryng, harryng, and garryng grisbityng*. These words are obviously sound imitative, and even without an attempt at translation, we can perceive the grating, unpleasant sounds. These dialects are therefore inferior to the English spoken in the south, more precisely around London.

Similarly Hugo von Trimberg, at about the same time (cca 1300, Eggers 1992: 33), describing German dialects finds that

*Swâbe ir wörter spaltent,  
die Franken ein teil si valtent,  
die Beier si zerzerrent,  
die Dürinc si ûf sprerrent,  
die Sahsen si bezücent,  
die Rînliute si verdrückent,  
die Wetereiber si würgent,  
die Mîsener si vol schürgent,  
Egerlant si swenkent,  
Oesterrîche si schrenkent,  
Stîrlant si baz lenkent,  
Kernde ein teil si senkent.*

If we try to interpret only one or two of these lines we could say that the Swabians «split» their words, the Bavarians «tear» them «to pieces», the

<sup>4</sup> “highly laudable”

<sup>5</sup> “wonderful”

<sup>6</sup> “impaired, damaged”



Thuringians «open them», the Carinthians «partly lower» them etc. And whatever that might mean, it appears to refer to pronunciation.

What one can judge if one does not understand a dialect or a language, is its sound. Today sound is measurable in terms of volume, pitch etc.. The combination of certain of these qualities can have a beneficial or harmful influence on the human ear, or can be perceived as pleasing or repulsive. Most descriptions from our examples, however, are quite abstract and do not consider such effects.

To continue chronologically, Richard Carew (in Beal 2004 from Görlach, 1991:244: 24-25) writes in 1595<sup>7</sup>

«I com nowe to the last and sweetest point of the sweetnes of our tongue, which shall appeare the more plainelye, yf ... wee match it with our neighbours. The Italyan is pleasante but without synewes, as to styлле fleeting water, the French delicate, but ouer nice as a woman scarce daring to open her lipps for feare of marring her countenance, the Spanish maiesticall, but fullsome, runninge to much on the .O. and terrible like the deuill in a playe, the Dutch manlike, but withall very harshe, as one ready at euery worde to picke a quarrell»

Statements to the effect that French sounds as if a woman spoke without opening her lips, or that Spanish has too many «o» sounds, that Dutch is harsh, obviously point to the perception of the sound or pronunciation of these languages. On the other hand words like *sweete*, *pleasante*, *delicate*, *maiesticall* etc. as well as *fullsome* and *terrible* are difficult to interpret in a concrete way. The only word, in fact, which recurs as a description of what languages sound like, is the metaphor *harsh*, i.e. *strident*, *unpleasant*. On the epithet, *manlike* a little later.

In Sweden, almost two and a half centuries later, Olof von Dalin, in the first Swedish weekly «Then Swänska Argus», which he published between 1732 and 1734, in a text (quoted in Bergmann, 1995<sup>5</sup>:142-143) reminiscent of Carew's, writes about the Swedish language comparing it, like Carew did for English, with some other, often neighbouring languages:

”Språket är i sig sielf intet hårt som Tyskan, intet hopplåckat som Engelskan, intet upblåst som Spanskan, intet wekligt som Italienskan, intet obändigt som Pålskan, intet wildt som Ryskan, intet bråkande som Danskan...”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *The Excellency (sic!) of the English Tongue*, 24-25

<sup>8</sup> “The language in itself is not hard like German, not locked up like English, not blown up like Spanish, not weak like Italian, not unruly like Polish, not wild like Russian, not noisy like Danish...”





Details are, of course, different but there are two things of special interest. One is the choice of languages, which reflects the geographical position and the history of relationships between the «neighbours». The other is that Carew notices also the positive qualities of his languages, while von Dalin has only disapproving words for those in his list. Neither is accidental or due to a purely personal attitude.

Carew had to justify somehow the many borrowings in English, which is seen further in his text, where English as it were “improved” on these other languages (Carew, *ibid.*):

» Now we in borrowing from them geue the strenght of Consonantes to the Italyan, the fulle sounde of wordes to the French, and ye mollifieinge of more vowells to the Dutch, and soe (like bees) gather the honye of their good properties and leaue the dreggs to themselues».

It sounds rather curious that English should have had «stronger» consonants than Italian, «fuller» sounds of words than French, or «more» vowels than Dutch. Has he counted them? English has thus collected what was good in these languages and left them «the dregs». These ideas are blatantly subjective, or rather influenced by stereotypes created in particular historical and cultural circumstances.

Von Dalin’s problem with foreign words is not as crass as Carew’s, so he can easily crave that more is written in

“wårt oförfälskade Språk”<sup>9</sup> (Bergmann, *ibid.*), which is “...lent och likwäl Starkt, Rent och likwäl Rikt, Enfaldigt och likwäl Högt, Tappert och likwäl Läckert. Det är beqwämt och liufligt til skaldekonst och obunden Skrifart, til Sång och Tahl, Til Historier och Romaner, til alwarsamt och lustigt, til Kyrkor och Skådo-Spel, til Predikningar och Argus”<sup>10</sup>.

So in his opinion nothing more is needed but to take care of and develop the language that is the Swedes’ own, which has all the best qualities, obviously stylistic and lexical, when it is not adulterated by foreign words and styles, which we shall discuss below.

To come back to the impression of sound, in particular the frequent mention of *harshness*. We can smile condescendingly at the medieval misconceptions of Higden and Trimberg, or even the enlightened mistakes of Carew and von Dalin,

<sup>9</sup> “our unadulterated language”

<sup>10</sup> “soft and yet strong, clean and yet rich, simple and yet elevated, brave and yet tasteful. It is comfortable and wonderful for poetry and free writing, for songs and speeches, for tales and novels, for the serious and the funny, for churches and plays, for sermons and Argus”.





but much more recently, language authorities like Noah Webster, or even linguists of international standing like Otto Jespersen, harboured similar feelings.

Thus Webster in 1789 (Baron, 1982: 62) thinks that the «soft» sounding Romance languages contrast with «the more harsh and guttural pronunciation of the northern inhabitants of Europe». So here we gather that *guttural* i.e. velar consonants are felt to be harsh. What emotional associations the word *harsh* carries, depends on the attitude of the one who uses it. Jespersen (1958: 2) for example, says that there is one expression that continually comes to his mind whenever he thinks of the English language and compares it with others: „it seems to me positively and expressly masculine, it is the language of a grown-up man and has very little childish or feminine about it.“ In the English sound system thus..... „You have none of those indistinct or half-slurred consonants that abound in Danish, for instance (such as those in *hade, hage, livlig*) where you hardly know whether it is a consonant or a vowel-glide that meets the ear.“ It compares even more favourably with Hawaiian, with its many vowel sounds, which may sound „pleasantly and be full of music and harmony but the total impression is childlike and effeminate. You do not expect much vigour or energy in a people speaking such a language; it seems adapted only to inhabitants of sunny regions where the soil requires scarcely any labour on the part of man“ etc. Probably due to a not quite so favourable climate Jespersen says that „in a lesser degree we find the same phonetic structure in such languages as Italian and Spanish; but how different are our Northern tongues,“ whose phonetic systems seem to bear the stamp of “a hard struggle against nature and against fellow-creatures.”

Jespersen notices the pleasing sound of languages with many vowels, but nevertheless thinks of them in negative terms as childlike and effeminate. It did not occur to him, however, that alongside the «Northern tongues» Italian and Spanish also have distinct consonants, and that the English /θ, ð, w/ are similar to the above mentioned Danish consonants. This is the 19th century romanticist idea that nature and the people as well as their language are closely connected. Jespersen's view about Danish seem to be shared by two Wergelands, where Nicolai calls Norwegian «vort skjønne og kraftfulde Nationalsprog<sup>11</sup>» (cited in Skard, 1980: 11) which could not be reduced by Danish. The poet Henrik Wergeland (Almenningen et. al. 1990:56) too, says that Norwegian is hard, full of ore and of a pleasant sound, because of all the mountains where it is formed. Danish, on the other hand, is round and weak like the Danish nature. (Almenningen *ibid.*).

But among other Norwegian cultural figures we meet intricate Dano-Norwegian linguistic loyalties. For example Peter Andreas Munch (cited in Torp, Dahl and Lundebj, 1993: 91), another of the Norwegian language reformers of the same period, says about Danish, which he defends as the public language of Norway, the following: “Vi burde ... glede oss over å ha beholdt et så velklingende språk som dansk<sup>12</sup>...” And Henrik Wergeland (*ibid.*) rails against

<sup>11</sup> “our beautiful and strong national language”

<sup>12</sup> “We should be glad that we have retained such a well-sounding language as Danish”

the “danomanene” like Munch, who liken the Norwegian used by the common people (or as Munch would say “den laveste pøbel”<sup>13</sup>) to “bukkebrek” and “Fenrishyl”.<sup>14</sup>

The strongly negative views expressed by animal sounds, can be added to the earlier mentioned words imitative of other (unpleasant) natural sounds like grating. They are somewhat different from sound qualities such as *weak* versus *strong*, *wild* versus *lovely*, *sweet* and particularly *virile* versus *effeminate*. Carew, who thinks that Dutch is *manlike* but sounds as if the speakers quarrelled, shows that these epithets are clearly descriptive of the human character and behaviour. Language is man.

3. On the virtues of brevity. As to style, von Dalin has a very concrete requirement, and that is to ban

”de ängslige och löjliga långa meningar, som borttaga hela sidor, blad och Ark”<sup>15</sup> (Bergmann, 1970:142) from public texts. He goes on to urge his countrymen to use “korta titlar, och korta meningar”<sup>16</sup> as well as clear concepts and not force the language against its “oskyldiga lynne med oäkta ord til wämieliga wridningar.”<sup>17</sup>

Short sentences and other expressions have been extolled much later by another Scandinavian voice, that of Otto Jespersen (1958:10). It was not Danish that he praised for its *business-like shortness*, but English.

«If briefness, conciseness and terseness are characteristic of the style of men, while women as a rule are not such economizers of speech, English is more masculine than most languages.»

He says *economizers of speech*, and gives a sociolinguistic statement, which has been a shibboleth of western culture for many centuries, though sociolinguistic research has shown that men can be as longwinded as women. Jespersen, of course, actually refers to language and style not speech. As far as length of sentence is concerned, it is true that the English written style, as every translator will know, requires short «and clear» sentences. The same is true of the Scandinavian languages. From von Dalin’s times on, efforts were made, which eventually successfully extricated Swedish from a Latinate style and structure, that took root through the long usage of this language in law, administration and education. What von Dalin recommended was in Jespersen’s time already

<sup>13</sup> “the lowest rabble”

<sup>14</sup> “baying of the buck”, “howling of the mythical wolf Fenrir”

<sup>15</sup> “the frightful and ridiculous long sentences that take up whole sides, leaves, and sheets”

<sup>16</sup> “short titles and short sentences”

<sup>17</sup> “innocent nature with false words to disgusting convolutions.”



preferable in public writing in Swedish as in Danish. In recent history style has again been threatened through the translation of EU documents. According to Hagemann (1993:33ff) the written style of the documents follows a French model, which

«væsentligt afviger fra et nordisk, dels at indeholde en lang præambel (inledning) som begrundelse for reglerne, dels ved at binde oversætteren til oversættelse punktum for punktum i stedet fra ud av en samlet overordnet struktur, bl.a. fordi henvisninger til andre steder i loven i fransk tradition er til «punktum» og ikke som vi bruger til § og stk. .... vore oversættere i EF (har) klar ordre om at oversætte som tæt på forlægget som overhodet muligt.»<sup>18</sup>

and thus brings the old *kancellisproget* back from its grave.<sup>19</sup>

The virtues of linguistic brevity Jespersen also finds in proverbs (1958:6), e.g. «First come first served» is much more *vigorous* than the French «premier venu, premier moulu», the German «wer zuerst kommt, mahlt zuerst» and especially the Danish «den der kommer først til mølle, får først malet». But one can think of a very short proverb even in Latin, whose convoluted style and structures have plagued officialese in many languages, and that is for example *sapienti sat*. And though we might say that the German and Danish versions of the earlier quoted proverb are somewhat lengthy for this type of discourse, I find it rather difficult to see what gives more vigour to the English saying than to the French.

To come back to the epithets *masculine* and *virile*, which Jespersen showers on English. He finds them at every linguistic level, from the sound system to syntax and style, but curiously enough, does not notice these features in the Nordic languages.

4. On virility in language. It is interesting to see what else Jespersen considers to be virile in English, without mentioning Danish or any other of the Scandinavian languages. Continuing on linguistic brevity he says (1938: 5)

-... In grammar it has got rid of a great many superfluities found in earlier English as well as in most cognate languages, reducing endings, etc., to the shortest form possible and often doing away with endings altogether. Where

<sup>18</sup> "is fundamentally different from a Nordic (model), partly because it has a long preamble (introduction) as a justification of the regulations, partly in that it binds the translator to translate point by point instead of from a combined main structure, partly because references to other places in the law in French tradition are to a "point" and not as we do to a § or to subsection..... our translators in the EU have clear orders to translate as close to the original as possible."

<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, the French saw their language as a "logical " or "lucid language" (see Lodge, 1998)







German has, for instance, *alle diejenigen wilden Tiere, die dort leben*, so that the plural idea is expressed in each word separately... English has *all the wild animals that live there*, where *all*, the article, the adjective, and the relative pronoun are alike incapable of receiving any mark of the plural number; the sense is expressed with the greatest clearness imaginable, and all the unstressed endings *-e* and *-en*, which make most German sentences so drawling, are avoided.»

The lack of endings and easy usage has been pointed out in Norwegian by the poet Arne Garborg (quoted in Skard, 1979:30), who says that the Norwegian *landsmålet*, that is to say the rural form, is not an old-fashioned language «tungt, stint, hardt, med store Former og Skrell og dundring».<sup>20</sup> On the contrary «Det er moderne, i somme ting til og med mer modern enn dansken, med få endelser, lett i Svingen og dette er ikke noen mangel, men en fordel.»<sup>21</sup> He notices that modernity means fewer inflections, an interesting idea, which normally does not agree with the efforts of those whose aim is to restore the «original» and «true», that is, conservative language. But with these many endings, the language tends to be «heavy» and «hard».

5. On the beauty of words. Words, besides spelling, have always been a prime concern of language reformers, and a permanent worry of purists. On the one hand, it is the foreign words that have to be “cleansed” and the “true” words of the mother tongue valued and developed, even if to some they may seem unfit for an educated norm and writing.

English, as we have already seen (Carew, above) can least afford purism because of the early injection of Romance words it received before any standardization set in. Charles Mackey (1867:399, cited in Bailey, 1996:161) puts it amusingly when he says:

«The English-speaking people of the nineteenth century, whether they live at home in the British Isles, emigrate to America, Australia, New Zealand, or the Cape, or are the descendants of Englishmen, Scotchmen, and Irishmen who have emigrated a hundred years ago, are continually making additions to their admirable mother tongue. The English Language is endowed with a higher vitality than any other now spoken on the globe, and begs, borrows, steals, and assimilates words wherever it can find them without any other rule of accretion than that the new word shall either express a new idea or render an old one more tersely and completely than before.»

<sup>20</sup> “heavy, stiff, hard, with great forms and shrill and thundering”

<sup>21</sup> “It is modern, in some ways even more modern than Danish, with few endings, easy to manage and that is no drawback, but an asset.”



Henrik Wergeland (*Om Norsk Sprogreformation, 1835*, cited in Torp et al. 1993:129) on the other hand, supports Norwegian words, against Danish ones. These are words used by the common people, in rural areas, which are scorned by those loyal to Danish. They "erklærer at ord som *kamp* (kampestein), *skolt*, *skulp* og *skrasl* bare er kjent i et og annet bygdelag, enda de er kjent over det meste av landet – eller at *grop* ikke skulle være norsk fordi det også finnes i svensk!"<sup>22</sup> Apart from foreign words, dialectal words are not deemed acceptable in urban usage. So he continues to say that "danomanene" forbid the usage of the "lydmalende, uttrykksfulle, allmennorske ord som *smyge*, *sige*, *skvete* og *kulp* fordi de helst forekommer hos de lavere klasser og ikke blant de bedrestilte"<sup>23</sup> He concludes, in an insightful sociolinguistic manner, that there is a *linguistic aristocracy* and that there are *linguistic aristocrats*. Von Dalin (Bergmann, 1970:142) suggest that if „wi utrensade de onödiga fremmande Ord, som et tokugt prunkande först inplantat“, that is, if Swedish was «cleansed» of the unnecessary foreign words, that were introduced like a crazy ornament, „så skulle vårt liufwa Foster-måhl få sin tilbörliga wördnad“, Swedish would again acquire the worth that belongs to it. Munch (Torp et al., 1993: 64) was of the opposite opinion, as far as Norwegian was concerned, and thought that words in an Old Norse folk costume (*bunad*) made a *plumpt* and *platt*<sup>24</sup> impression on *the more educated classes*. For Wergeland, on the contrary, true and original Norwegian words were short, expressive, of «good ore», picturesque, and often indispensable (Skard, 1980:25).

6. Language against language. There are several moments of particular interest. First of all the linguistic loyalties which are to one's mother tongue, but also loyalties to a «higher» language, be it a prestigious dialect or language, usually used by urban and/or educated speakers, e.g. Danish in Norway, or English as seen by Jespersen. Other dialects or languages are «ugly» and if they influence, or are mixed with the "ideal" idiom, they *deface* the characteristic traits of the mother tongue or dialect, and *mar and stunt its kindly growth* (Richard Grant White, 1872: 22d cited in Bailey, 1996: 141-2). Munch (Torp et al., 1993:91) calls language reformers who use popular Norwegian words *språkfordervere*.<sup>25</sup> But English, unlike Norwegian or other lesser used languages, has to pay for its spread around the globe. In the words of Oliver Wolcott (pp 7-8; quoted in Baron, 1982:109) „Nothing now tends to destroy its purity, symmetry and elegance, so much, as its rapid extension,“ that is to say usage by many foreigners. Conversely, in the view of

<sup>22</sup> "explain that words like *kamp* (kampestein), *skolt*, *skulp*, and *skrasl* are known only in a few villages, but they are nevertheless known in most of the country – or *grop* is not Norwegian because it is also found in Swedish."

<sup>23</sup> "colourful and expressive, general Norwegian words like *smyge*, *sige*, *skvete* and *kulp*, because they are mostly used by the lower classes and not by those in better social positions"

<sup>24</sup> "clumsy" and "flat"

<sup>25</sup> "language defilers"



many contemporary language politicians, it is English that today destroys other languages, e.g. the concern about *domäntap* which refers to the use of English terminology, or at worst English, in various fields such as science, technology, popular culture etc. (e.g. Kristoffersen, 2005).

There are two types of language criticism. One is if the critic is a speaker of a «strong» language, i.e. belongs to a powerful nation, he can be at ease with his criticism of other languages, even be generous, allowing some good qualities to other languages, as Carew did comparing several of them with English, but still sure of the superiority of „his“ language. Such a critic can, like von Dalin, take a negative attitude to all „other“ languages and praise only his own. Norwegian language developers represent the other type, who struggle for linguistic independence. They usually direct their arrows against the “imperialistic” language or languages, while justifying the forms and usage of their own, in this case Norwegian vernaculars as an adequate basis for a national norm. It was difficult to make a stand against Danish, which not only had a longstanding position as a public language but was also closely related. A dominant language can be resisted only if the vernacular is placed higher in whatever terms. Symbolic and emotional factors play a major role.

It is not surprising that most reasoning is very general and that if it does refer to something concrete in language, it is “sound” and “words”. More knowledge and sophistication is needed to detect the desirable and undesirable stylistic or grammatical features. In our examples only Jespersen argued about the qualities of English on all linguistic levels.

Apart from the sound imitative descriptions in which «gutturals» are considered «harsh», the northern tongues, which have them are also *hard/hårt* or using other metaphors, *strong/kraftfuld*, *weak/weklig* etc. What is most striking is that qualities which are manifestly those of human beings, are ascribed to languages: *manly*, *virile*, *tapper*, *heldenhaft*, *fromm*, *overdelicate*, *oskyldig* etc. The cognitivists' suggestion that language reflects our perception of the world around us does not appear in the evaluations examined in this paper. They imply, rather, that language reflects the character of the people, even of the countryside. In fact, they recreate long ingrained stereotypes that are difficult to support but also to get rid of. What these perceptions of language do show is the attitude of a language community informed by the historical socio-political relationships with other communities of speakers. One might paraphrase Jespersen and say “As the politics, so the language.”

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## JEZIK I NACIONALNI STEREOTIPI

Tekst se bavi vrlo čestom pojavom ocjenjivanja osobina prestižnih i manje prestižnih jezika i dijalekata. Pogledom u takve ocjene sve od srednjeg vijeka pa do dvadesetog stoljeća, a pogotovo u doba jezične standardizacije engleskog, norveškog i švedskog, citati značajnih autora pokazuju neke tradicionalne stereotipe o jezicima, koji su najčešće i stereotipni pogledi na govornike tih jezika. U sve se tri jezikoslovne tradicije govori o jezicima kao slabima ili muževnima, milozvučnima ili grubima i sl. Zapanjuje koliko su se takve ocjene dugo zadržale te da im nisu odolijevali niti moderniji lingvisti poput Otta Jespersena.

*Key words:* language stereotypes, historical view, English Norwegian, Swedish

*Ključne riječi:* jezični stereotipi, povijesni pregled, engleski, norveški, švedski