IDENTITY(IES)
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Planning and Purism: Ideological Forces in Shaping Linguistic Identity

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Abstract: National identity is typically conservative, reflecting a collective understanding and carried by symbols and signs that have had time to take root. Yet, history has shown that groups can follow very different paths to emerging awareness of ethnic, national, or other group identity. Norms articulated from a central authority may reflect values embraced by the group represented, or else may impose a novel or external value system. Hence, top-down normativity can serve to support or change group identity, but it is not necessarily conservative. This paper looks at both innovative and conservative normativity in language planning across two centuries of formation of a conscious Estonian national identity. This time period includes most of the period during which the awareness of Estonian national identity developed. Various

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sub-periods within that time show how political practices with regard to language planning reflect differences in values of the periods in question. Throughout this time period, rhetoric on the part of official language planners as well as ideologues and activists has placed Estonian identity in opposition to external models, typically German or Russian national identity, and in affinity with Finnish models. In a country the size of Estonia, whose population is currently under 1.3 million, and in a context of constant foreign contacts and influences, it is no surprise that national identity is constructed in comparison and contrast to other nations.

**Keywords:** National Identity, Language Planning, Language Reform, Estonia

1. Background: Two centuries of Estonian national identity formation

The generally accepted narrative of the emergence of Estonian national awareness includes the notion of a dark “folktale” past, in which the Estonian people toiled on the land while ruled by various foreign powers (particularly Denmark, Sweden, Germany, and Russia). The centuries preceding the nineteenth are conceived of as a time of serfdom, when Estonian peasants worked the land for foreign landowners. Importantly, during the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth century, when the foreign landowners and political and cultural leaders were German, it was also true that Estonian peasants who gained access to schools and education became Germanised, both linguistically and culturally. Hence, Estonian was a language of the uneducated peasants.