Language prescriptivism : attitudes to usage vs. actual language use in American English

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CHAPTER 5

Metalinguistic commentary in American usage guides

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will present a fine-grained analysis of the metalinguistic commentary on the six linguistic features discussed in Chapter 3 in a collection of American usage guides, as described in Section 4.3. The two main goals of this analysis are (a) the identification of attitudes expressed in American usage guides towards the linguistic features, and (b) the identification of possible changes in those attitudes. As explained in Section 4.3, attitudes to usage in metalinguistic works such as usage guides can be expressed in various ways, which called for an analysis of more than a single indicator of potentially prescriptive attitudes. I will therefore look at three aspects of metalinguistic commentary in American usage guides: the treatment of usage features, the attitudes expressed towards these features, and a number of additional dimensions of usage which are referred to in the treatment of these features.

Three levels of analysis are distinguished: treatment, attitudes to usage, and dimensions of usage. The first level of analysis involves determining the overall treatment of the features in the usage guide entries by classifying each entry into

one of three mutually exclusive categories, ACCEPTABLE, UNACCEPTABLE, and RESTRICTED, as explained in Section 4.3. The results of the analysis of treatment are discussed in Section 5.3. The second level of analysis, attitudes to usage, concerns the identification and classification of explicit expressions of POSITIVE or NEGATIVE attitudes in the treatment of usage features. This analysis is presented in Section 5.4. The third level of analysis, dimensions of usage, identifies the dimensions of usage which usage guide writers refer to in their discussion of the features; the categories analysed at this level are: FREQUENCY, MODE, REGISTER, SPEAKERS, VALUE, and VARIETY. This part of the analysis is covered in Section 5.5. Before I present and discuss the findings of these three levels of analysis, in Section 5.2 I will provide a general description of the entries, focusing specifically on differences in the frequency with which the features are covered in the collection of usage guides consulted. Finally, in Section 5.6 I summarise all types of findings, and discuss their relevance for the first set of research questions formulated at the outset of this thesis. In doing so, I address the importance of these results in the context of previous studies of usage guides, and their importance for the study of actual language use and speakers' attitudes.

5.2 Coverage of the language features in usage guides

In Section 4.3 I explained how I compiled the corpus of entries on which the following analysis is based. The analysis of the corpus revealed a considerable degree of variation in terms of both the length of the entries and the content of their discussion. Entries vary in length from one line to paragraph-length entries, exemplified with the two entries on *ain't* given in (46) and (47) below; in Gilman (1989: 60–64), for instance, the entry on *ain't* is five pages long. This aspect of the entries seems to change over time, with nineteenth-century entries being in general significantly shorter than those from the second half of the twentieth century; this is true for all of the linguistic features analysed.

(46) "That ain't just," should be, That is not just. (Anonymous 1856a: 68)

(47) "Ain't" has a long and vital history as a substitute for "isn't," "aren't," and so on. It was originally formed from a contraction of "am not" and is still commonly used in that sense. Even though it has been universally condemned as the classic "mistake" in English, everyone uses it occasionally as part of a joking phrase or

> to convey a down-to-earth quality. But if you always use it instead of the more "proper" contractions you're sure to be branded as uneducated. (Brians 2003: 6)

With regard to content, a close reading of the entries reveals interesting and important changes over time in the way in which these usage features are discussed, as well as in the kinds of information included in the discussion. It is, for instance, worth noting at this point that there is some variation in exactly what is thought of as problematic when it comes to the various usage problems (an issue already pointed out in Section 2.6). For instance, the term 'double negative' is used to refer both to the double marking of negation in sentences such as *I haven't seen nobody* (i.e. negative concord) and to examples such as *She is not unhappy* (i.e. litotes) (cf. the entry in Brians 2003: 62, which covers both features under the same heading). These constructions are different from a linguistic point of view, and are also problematic in different ways: negative concord is more strongly stigmatised and more salient than litotes. The former structure is considered grammatically incorrect from a prescriptive point of view, on the basis of the argument that two negatives make a positive, while the latter is considered grammatically correct, but stylistically problematic because it is often considered intentionally misleading (cf. Randall 1988: 241–243). Similar distinctions and peculiarities are also found in the treatment of other usage features. In the context of the usage problem *ain't*, various nuances of 'problematicity' can be distinguished: *ain't* is considered less problematic when used with first person pronouns, or in first person question tags, compared to *ain't* in the third person. *Ain't* used in place of *be not* is likewise generally considered less problematic than *ain't* used in place of *have not*. In what follows, I discuss the various patterns of coverage of the features, as well as some observations made on the basis of a close reading of the entries.

5.2.1 *Ain't*

Ain't is discussed in 46 entries, and appears in 41 guides in total in the collection. Figure 5.1 shows the proportion of usage guides which discuss *ain't*, out of the total number of usage guides per decade. As the figure shows, *ain't* is fairly frequently covered in usage guides, especially in those published in the twentieth century, with about half of the usage guides analysed per decade discussing the feature. For the 1990s and the 2000s, fewer than half of the consulted guides discuss *ain't*; this may be an indication either that the form is slowly becoming less problematic or, as I will

argue below, that its use is limited to certain contexts in which *ain't* is accepted and therefore merits little discussion. Even though in the majority of the cases *ain't* is discussed as a variant for present *be not* forms, some variation was observed in this respect. In 16 of the 46 entries, *ain't* is treated as a variant of both present tense *be not* and present tense *have not*. Out of these 16, only four make a clear distinction in acceptance between *ain't* for *be not* and *ain't* for *have not*, explicitly judging the latter to be much less acceptable than the former. For instance, Utter (1916: 29) declares that "there is no defense possible for the vulgar use of *ain't* for *hasn't* and *haven't*".[1] Another topic identifiable in the treatment of *ain't* is the distinction between *ain't* as a substitute for *am not*, especially in questions, as opposed to the use of *ain't* as a variant for other forms of present tense *be not*. Fewer than half of the entries make this distinction, and the consensus is that *ain't* is more acceptable as a contraction for *am not*, that is, when used in the first person singular, than it is for all other present tense forms of *be not*.

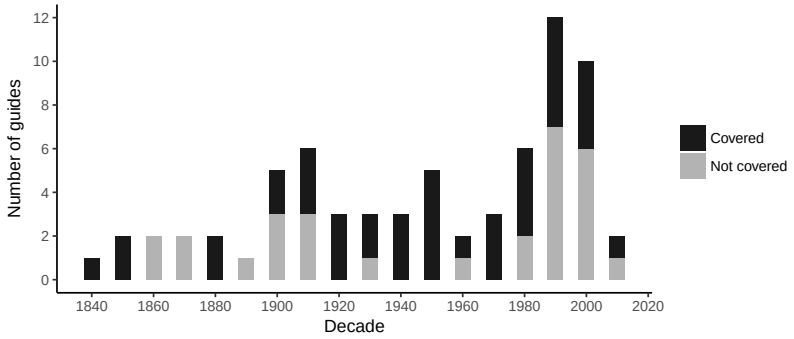

Figure 5.1: Number of usage guides with entries on *ain't* per decade (n, guides = 70; n, *ain't* entries = 41)

Ain't was first commented on in Hurd (1847) and in exactly half of the other usage guides published in the nineteenth century, as shown in Figure 5.1. These comments are, without exception, very short entries, which list *ain't* as an error and give the correct options, such as *am not* / *are not* / *is not*, or *have not* / *has not*, in cases where *ain't* is used in the environment of present tense *have not*. As already mentioned, the

[1] It is important to note that the variant *hain't* is also mentioned in some usage guides in a separate entry – for instance, Hurd (1847: 40), Ayres (1911: 112), Vizetelly (1920: 102), and Wilson (1993: 219). These entries, however, were not taken into account in the present analysis because *hain't* is considered to be a separate feature from *ain't*, and because it is much less frequent, both in usage guide data and in corpus data.

use of *ain't* for *have not* is not discussed to the same extent as the use of *ain't* for *be not*; for instance, the use of *ain't* for *have not* is not mentioned in the usage guides from the nineteenth century. Bechtel (1901) appears to be the first usage guide writer to give a lengthier discussion of *ain't* by referring to its uses as a variant of *be not*, as well as to its etymological predecessor *an't*. He does, however, note that *ain't* is "an inelegant word" and that it would be a "blessing" if the word is no longer used in English (Bechtel 1901: 119–120). Despite the reference to the etymology of *ain't*, Bechtel's treatment of the feature is decidedly prescriptive, as are those found in usage guides published in the twenty years following his publication. In addition to Bechtel, Fernald (1907: 5) and Vizetelly (1920: 8) also describe *ain't* as "inelegant", and fervently proscribe its use. Krapp (1927: 27–28) is the first usage guide writer to note that even though *ain't* is "low colloquial", "many educated people permit themselves the habit, even though they reprehend it as careless". Krapp (1927: 27–28) further notes that "[o]nly the enforcement of a strong academic authority prevents **ain't** from becoming universal colloquial usage".

The situation with the treatment of *ain't* in usage guides changes even more significantly after the 1950s, when we see a slow turn towards accounting for genre influence on the use of *ain't*, a distinction between the use of *ain't* for *be not* and the use of *ain't* for *have not*, as well as a tendency to present attitudes to the feature indirectly by referring to what is generally thought of the use of *ain't* or what authorities on usage say about it. In other words, there is an increase in "reported opinions" as opposed to *ipse dixit* statements (cf. Busse and Schröder 2009: 80). An example can be found in what seems to be the first relatively balanced account, where Evans and Evans (1957: 23) note that "[t]his word may mean *am not*, *is not*, *are not*, *have not* or *has not*" and that "[i]t is not considered standard in any of these cases, with the possible exception of *am not* in a question, that is, *ain't I?*". They also observe that "a few bold spirits insist on using it because the language needs an expression of this sort" (Evans and Evans 1957: 23).

Entries from the later decades of the twentieth century express a more explicit awareness of the proscription against *ain't*, but this is accompanied by a recognition that the word may be legitimately used in deliberately informal usage (de Mello Vianna et al. 1977: 155). Thus, *ain't* is considered acceptable when used intentionally to achieve certain effects, to be jocular, or to index dialectal speech. When its use is shown to be deliberate or specialised, *ain't* is considered part of the speech of educated speakers. An illustrative example of this is found in Wilson (1993: 22), who notes that "[c]onsciously jocular uses are acceptable, but using *ain't*

in circumstances that do not suggest deliberate choice may brand you as a speaker of Vulgar English". More recent usage guides also note that despite the criticism of *ain't*, the word has a "vital history" (Brians 2003: 6) and it is "still going strong" (Pinker 2014: 204). In general, the entries reveal an incremental increase in degree of sophistication in the treatment of this feature, and a movement towards including a more descriptive account of its usage. This is instantiated by references to various degrees of acceptability and contexts of use, as well as to its status as a usage problem, by discussing the popular attitudes to *ain't*.

5.2.2 The discourse particle *like*

The treatment of the discourse particle *like* in usage guides is an important example of how changes in the language, especially those that become socially stigmatised and are characterised by high and increasing levels of metalinguistic awareness among speakers, are treated in usage guides. *Like* is covered in ten entries, found in ten usage guides in my collection. Figure 5.2 shows that the inclusion of *like* in the group of usage problems is fairly new compared to the other five features, as it was only during the 1970s that it started to be discussed in usage guides.

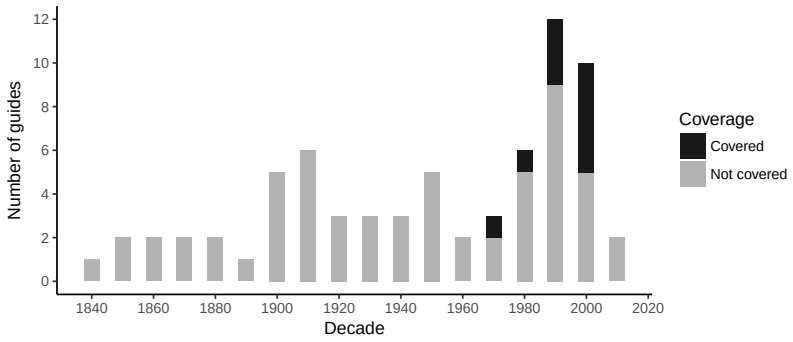

Figure 5.2: Number of usage guides with entries on the discourse particle *like* per decade (n, guides = 70; n, *like* entries = 10)

The first treatment of the discourse particle *like* is found in Shaw (1975: 142), who describes the word as "a filler, a throwaway word used constantly in the speech of many persons, especially young people". Shaw's observation serves as a good illustration of the overall treatment of *like* found in nine other usage guides from the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. Apart from the word "filler", used repeatedly to describe *like*, the word "(bad) habit"

is also used (Brians 2003: 126; Batko 2004: 222), alongside more strongly negative terms, such as "a verbal tic" (Johnson 1991: 361; Garner 1998: 410) or "verbal hiccup" (Brians 2003: 126). *Like* is almost always associated with teenagers or younger speakers. In terms of other groups of people associated with this usage, Brians (2003: 126) observes that the word is "especially associated with hipsters". The use of *like* is mostly associated with uncertainty, poor expression, nervousness, and ignorance.

5.2.3 Non-literal *literally*

Literally is covered in 32 entries in the usage guides consulted. Figure 5.3 shows that *literally* became a usage problem at the beginning of the twentieth century, and has steadily been more frequently covered in usage guides. Commentary on this form first appears in Bierce (1909), which is earlier than the treatment of *literally* found in Strunk (1918), which I initially thought was the earliest mentions of *literally* in an American usage guide (Kostadinova 2015). Apart from Bierce (1909), Strunk (1918), and Krapp (1927), all other entries come from usage guides published in the second half of the twentieth century.

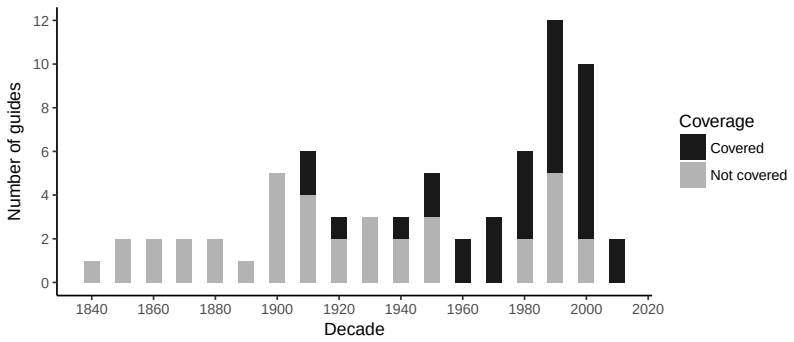

Figure 5.3: Number of usage guides with entries on *literally* per decade (n, guides = 70; n, *literally* entries = 32)

The consensus in the treatment of *literally* is informed by the observed increase in frequency of the intensifying use of the word, which is described as a "misuse" (Johnson 1991: 365) or an "overuse" (Brians 2003: 128). Randall (1988: 2010) sums up the various negative attitudes to *literally* by saying that "such usage may be regarded as loose, superfluous, erroneous, or exasperating". There are two authors whose discussion of *literally* departs from the predominantly negative accounts found in usage guides. The first one is Gilman (1989: 607), who notes that *literally* is "neither

a misuse nor a mistake", but merely a development of a new use of the word. Peters (2004: 326) gives the second more balanced account of *literally*, by pointing out that the word is used much less than is usually assumed, while when it is used it functions grammatically as an intensifier.

5.2.4 Negative concord

Negative concord is covered in 42 of the 70 usage guides consulted. The distribution of the entries across time is given in Figure 5.4. The figure shows that negative concord is consistently covered throughout the period investigated, with roughly half of the usage guides in each decade discussing the feature. Similar to the treatment of *ain't*, all of the nineteenth-century usage guides disapprove of negative concord. These entries tend to be short and concise: the proscription against negative concord is stated simply by using the imperative (e.g. *say x* or *don't say x*), without any arguments or attitudes expressed. Occasionally, the construction is described as "a very common mistake" (Anonymous 1856b: 184) or as "incorrect" (Ballard 1884: 35). Bechtel (1901) presents the first lengthy treatment of negative concord, with eleven subheadings referring to various types of two negatives occurring in the same sentence; he describes negative concord as "inelegant" (1901: 195) and "incorrect" (1901: 196). Similar negative statements are found in usage guides published throughout the twentieth century, and well into the 1990s, as exemplified by Carter and Skates' (1990: 404) pronouncement that "a double negative is redundant and incorrect", and Booher's (1992: 179) remark that there are "no exceptions to this taboo". Similar negative qualifications of negative concord can be found in more recent usage guides as well; an illustrative example is found in Lovinger (2000: 101).

Alongside these negative pronouncements, somewhat less negative discussions of negative concord can also be identified. Hall (1917), for instance, presents the first treatment of negative concord which draws on historical arguments. He notes that negative concord had a prominent place in the history of the language, describing the feature as "out of vogue but not ungrammatical" (Hall 1917: 76–77). He is also the first to qualify the construction as "natural", by noting that "the double negative springs from the desire for emphasis and seems to be natural to human language" (Hall 1917: 77). Hall's pronouncements are thus an important exception compared to other usage guides of the same period. Hall's assessment of the negative concord is reiterated in later usage guides, such as Perrin (1950), Corbin and Perrin (1963), and Ebbitt and Ebbitt (1978). While there are usage guides that describe negative concord in perhaps

less negative terms, use of the construction is consistently advised against. Even those who maintain that it is part of the idiom of English note that it is "widely perceived as a rustic or uneducated form" (Gilman 1989: 365), that it is "inappropriate in spoken and written Standard English" (Wilson 1993: 154), or that it is "socially stigmatized in both American and British English" (Peters 2004: 369). The social stigma against negative concord is a recurrent theme its treatment in usage guides.

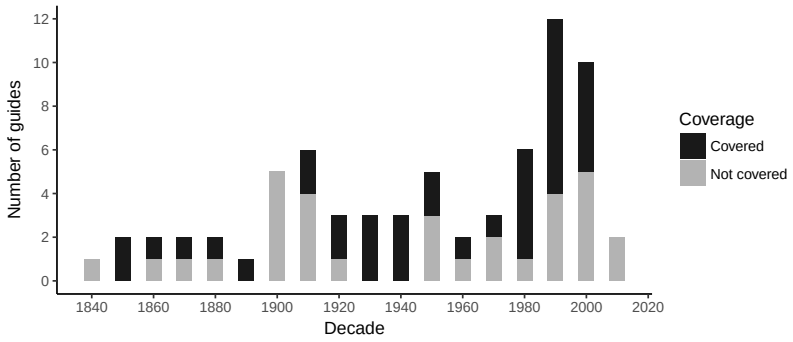

Figure 5.4: Number of usage guides with entries on negative concord per decade (n, guides = 70; n, negative concord entries = 42)

5.2.5 Pronouns in coordinated phrases

The use of subject and object pronouns in coordinated phrases functioning syntactically as subjects or objects is often discussed in usage guides, but there is a marked difference in the extent to which object *I* is covered compared to subject *me*.[2] On the basis of the data analysed, this is undoubtedly influenced by the fact that a particular instance of object *I*, the phrase *between you and I*, is especially salient as a problematic usage feature, and a significant number of the entries identified as entries on object *I* in the usage guides consulted deal explicitly with *between you and I*. With 73 entries on object *I* identified in 47 guides in the collection, this is the most commonly discussed feature among the features included in this study. Figure 5.5

[2] As shown in Table 3.1, object *I*, or *I* for *me*, is covered in 61 of the usage guides included in the HUGE database, while subject *me*, or *me* for *I*, is covered in 49 usage guides. It is important to note that the entries included in the database do not make a distinction between pronoun forms in coordinated phrases and pronoun forms following linking verbs, as in *This is I vs. This is me*. The latter contexts are not taken into account in the present study, so the difference in terms of the number of entries which cover pronoun forms in coordinated phrases functioning as subjects or objects established on the basis of my collection of 70 usage guides is strikingly larger.

shows the number of guides which cover object *I*, out of the total number of guides per decade in the collection. The figure shows that object *I* has been more or less consistently covered in usage guides since the middle of the nineteenth century. In the last two decades of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century, the number of usage guides in my collection which discuss this usage feature is fairly high. This suggests that the usage problem status of object *I* has not changed over time in terms of coverage.

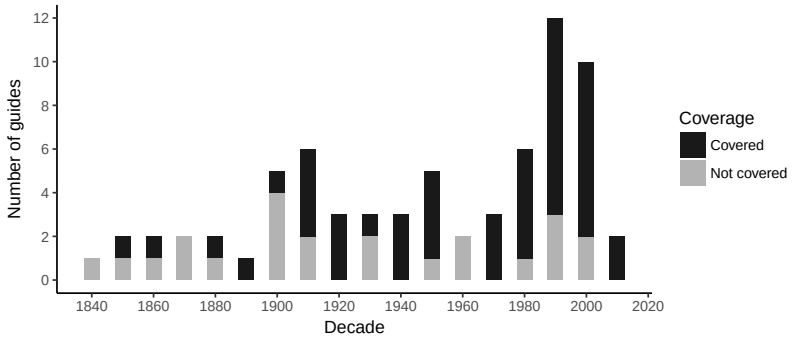

Figure 5.5: Number of usage guides with entries on object *I* per decade (n, guides = 70; n, object *I* entries = 47)

A closer look at the entries, however, reveals that nineteenth-century usage guides are usually both strongly negative in their treatment of object *I*, and very short. While confusion in the use of pronoun case forms tends to be considered ungrammatical and erroneous by the majority of usage guide writers, there are also usage guides in which the nature, or seriousness, of this perceived mistake is questioned. In the spirit of the former view, this variant is described as "as erroneous an expression as any" (Anonymous 1856b: 83), "grossly incorrect" (Utter 1916: 139), a "blunder" (Copperud 1980: 47), and a "gross linguistic [gaffe]" (Garner 1998: 345). Many of the entries also refer to the frequency of occurrence of the object *I* by noting that it is frequently or commonly heard (Perrin 1950: 451; Ebbitt and Ebbitt 1978: 421; Bryson 1984: 27; Pinker 2014: 205). While this variant tends to be associated with carelessness and lack of knowledge of grammar, it is also often observed that educated speakers use the construction; an example is Garner's (1998: 345) observation that "it is perennially surprising how many otherwise educated speakers commit [these gross linguistic gaffes]". An example of the tendency to be more critical of the objections to the use of object *I* is the entry found in Evans and Evans (1957: 60), where it is

noted that even though the expression *between you and I* is not standard, it "has a long and honorable history and has been used by so many great writers that it cannot be classed as a mistaken attempt to speak 'elegant' English". Overall, while the variant is certainly predominantly dismissed as an error, and its usage is advised against, there is an identifiable variation in the treatment, due to considerations of actual language use and language history, as is the case with the entry in Evans and Evans (1957: 60). In fact, a comparison between the oldest entry in the collection, where object *I* is described as a "heinous fault" (Anonymous 1856b: 82), and the latest one, where the author observes that "[w]riters are well advised to avoid *between you and I*, since it makes many readers bristle, but it is not a heinous error" (Pinker 2014: 207), serves to illustrate how the treatment of this variant has changed over time.

Subject *me* is commented on much less than object *I*. As represented in Figure 5.6, subject *me* is only sporadically discussed in usage guides in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth; the number of usage guides which cover the feature is somewhat higher in the 2000s, with about half of the usage guides analysed discussing it. Most of the entries are found in usage guides published around the turn of the twenty-first century. Discussed explicitly in 19 entries across ten usage guides, subject *me* is described as a "gross error" (Bache 1868: 73), a "vulgar error" (Vizetelly 1920: 109), or a "lapse" (Bryson 1984: 77). In less strong qualifications, the feature is described as simply "incorrect" (de Mello Vianna et al. 1977), or an "error" (Beason and Lester 1996). Johnson (1991: 21) and Gilman (1989: 628) point to its occurrence in children's speech. Peters (2004: 341–342) and Pinker (2014: 97) give the most descriptive account of the use of subject *me*; nevertheless, they still advise against its use in formal edited writing.

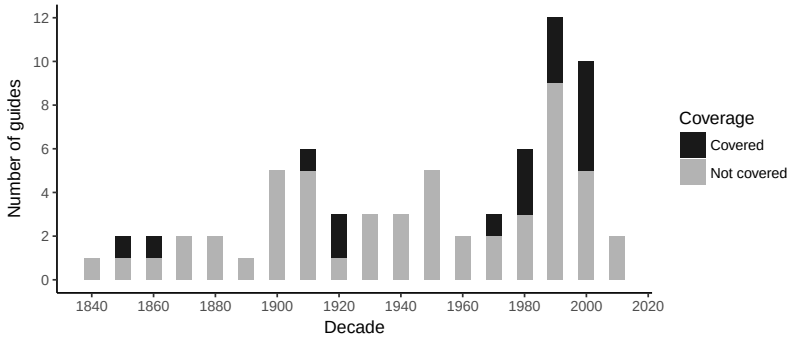

Figure 5.6: Number of usage guides with entries on subject *me* per decade (n, guides = 70; n, subject *me* entries = 10)

5.2.6 The split infinitive

The split infinitive is the second most frequently discussed variant in the collection of usage guides analysed, after object *I*, with 59 entries found in a total of 52 guides in my collection; Figure 5.7 shows the distribution of the entries per decade in the collection of usage guides. The split infinitive is described as early as 1856, and the early treatment of the feature is usually strictly prescriptive. According to the majority of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century authors, the separation of the particle *to* from the verb is not considered a practice of careful writers and speakers, and should be avoided (Anonymous 1856b; Gould 1867; Bache 1868; Ballard 1884; Bechtel 1901; Fitzgerald 1901). In terms of observations about its frequency of use, Ayres (1911) and Bache (1868) note that examples of the split infinitive are commonly attested, and Ayres (1911: 298) is the first author to note that sometimes a split infinitive may be used by someone due to "some special reason for doing so", which is usually related to the need for emphasis or to considerations of clarity of expression. In other words, Ayres is the earliest example in my collection of usage guides of an author making a distinction between acceptable and unacceptable split infinitives. This distinction becomes more common in usage guides in the course of the twentieth century.

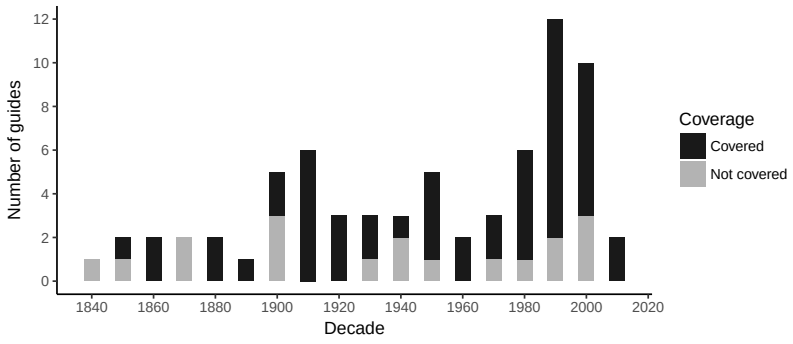

Figure 5.7: Number of usage guides with entries on the split infinitive per decade (n, guides = 70; n, split infinitive entries = 52)

It is also worth noting that the widespread condemnation of the split infinitive and its status as a usage problem is first mentioned by Bierce (1909: 66), who notes that the condemnation was "pretty general", but also fairly recent at the time. In the early twentieth century, Payne (1911: 42) observes that "this much discussed construction seems to be growing in favour, but still it is awkward in most cases of everyday

speech", while Turck Baker (1910: 170) questions the traditional grammarians' censure of the split infinitive by arguing that "there is no reason why [the particle *to*] should not be separate from its verb by the introduction of the adverb, especially when by this position the meaning is more clearly or emphatically expressed". Furthermore, and especially in contrast to the other variants discussed here, split infinitives are more strongly approved of, to the point where the rule against its use is dismissed almost consistently by usage guide writers throughout the twentieth century. For instance, Pinker (2014: 199) calls it a "bogus rule", while Walsh (2004: 64) argues that "more often than not infinitives are better split". The strikingly un-prescriptive treatment of the split infinitive observed here is confirmed in the analyses of treatment and attitudes, to be presented in the next two sections.

5.2.7 Summary

Looking at the results of the distribution of entries in usage guides across decades side by side, and as represented in Figure 5.8, it can be seen that the split infinitive, *ain't*, negative concord, and object *I* are the more frequently treated features, compared to *literally*, subject *me*, and the discourse particle *like*, in terms of both the length of the period in which they are discussed and the number of guides that discuss these features. *Literally* can perhaps be considered to be somewhere in the middle, in that usage guides do not cover *literally* before the beginning of the twentieth century; however, in the second half of the twentieth century, it is covered in the majority of the guides analysed. This attests to its firm place in the usage problem canon today. The split infinitive, *ain't*, negative concord, and object *I* are, in a sense, 'old chestnuts', and consequently, this picture is hardly surprising. What is perhaps more interesting here is the emergence of the coverage of *literally*, which took place around the beginning of the twentieth century, as well as that of the discourse particle *like*, during the 1970s.

The analysis discussed so far in this section reveals two important insights into how features are discussed in usage guides. The first one is that the variation in the treatment of different usage features depends on a number of factors. These factors tend to be associated most significantly with the use of each particular feature, its social connotations, and its place in the history of language advice literature and usage commentary. Negative concord, for instance, is not covered in usage guides as often as *ain't* or the split infinitive, and while some authors do mention the historical development of that feature in English, most of their treatment is focused on the feature's non-standardness. Entries on negative concord rarely refer to its status as

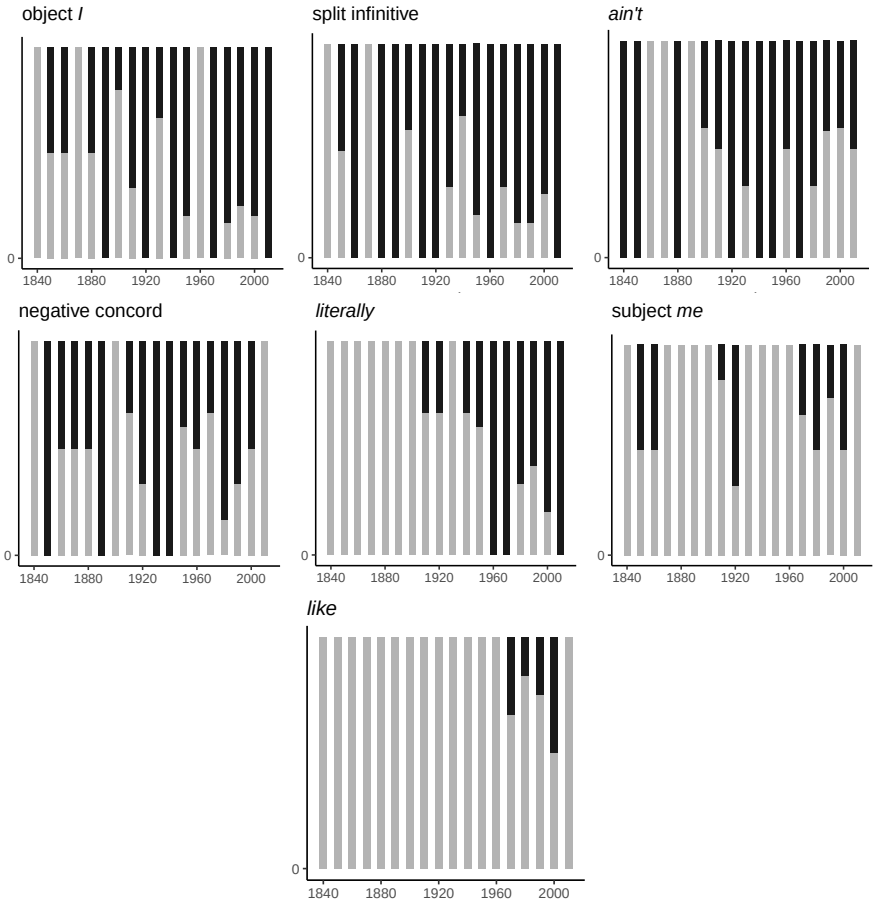

Figure 5.8: Proportions of usage guides with entries on each of the features per decade

a usage problem. This is also the case with more recent usage problems, such as *like* or *literally*. *Ain't* and the split infinitive, on the other hand, are different usage problems, in that the former is considered a non-standard feature, while the latter is considered a stylistic usage problem. Despite this difference, however, the usage problem status of both features is regularly discussed in the entries, resulting in a great deal of prescriptive meta-discourse (cf. Curzan 2014: 48). The second insight is that, despite these differences, we can draw parallels across features in terms of the aspects that are typically discussed in usage guide entries. These aspects include pronouncements on whether the use of a feature is advised or discouraged, whether or not the use of a feature is associated with specific groups of people, whether or not a

feature is a serious grammatical error, and whether or not it is commonly used. These multiple aspects of the discussion of usage features in usage guides are all important in gaining insight into how usage guides treat usage problems, and how this treatment has changed over time. In order to tease out these dimensions, as I mentioned above, I distinguish between treatment, attitudes to usage, and dimensions of usage in the analysis of the entries. Each of these levels of analysis is discussed in the sections that follow.

5.3 Treatment of the language features in usage guides

In the previous section I discussed how the coverage of different features in usage guides varies in degree and across time. Different patterns of coverage can show how usage guides in certain cases continue promote long-established usage problems, such as *ain't*, while in other cases usage guides appear to respond to, or engage with, processes of language variation and change, as in the case of *like*. These patterns, however, tell only one part of the story. In addition to the variation in metalinguistic commentary in terms of the coverage and frequency of discussion of usage features, usage guides vary in how they treat usage features, which is another aspect that is critical to understanding how prescriptive ideas about language features change over time. In order to analyse changes in the treatment, as already explained in Section 4.3, I distinguish three mutually exclusive categories of treatment: whether the usage feature is approved of or accepted (ACCEPTABLE), whether its use is neither explicitly accepted nor explicitly criticised, or accepted only in specific registers of use (RESTRICTED), or whether its use is explicitly dismissed (UNACCEPTABLE). Each entry was classified into one of these three categories (cf. Section 4.3).

The results from the classification are shown in Figure 5.9, which shows the number of each category of entries (ACCEPTABLE, RESTRICTED, or UNACCEPTABLE) out of the total number of entries per feature. This allows for a comparison of the various kinds of treatment, and an analysis of how they differ across language features regardless of the fact that some of them occur in a smaller number of entries than others. As the figure shows, *literally*, negative concord, *like* and subject *me* only have RESTRICTED or UNACCEPTABLE entries, with the latter being proportionally more frequent. This is especially the case with *literally*, *like*, and subject *me*; for negative concord, the proportion is somewhat more even. Entries on *ain't* and object *I* are split between UNACCEPTABLE and RESTRICTED, with a small proportion of entries being

classified as ACCEPTABLE. Object *I* is perhaps treated somewhat less negatively than *ain't*, in that a larger proportion of the entries were classified as RESTRICTED rather than UNACCEPTABLE. Finally, the split infinitive is the feature for which there was a fairly even distribution of entries across the three categories. This shows that the split infinitive was the most positively treated feature, followed by *ain't* and object *I*.

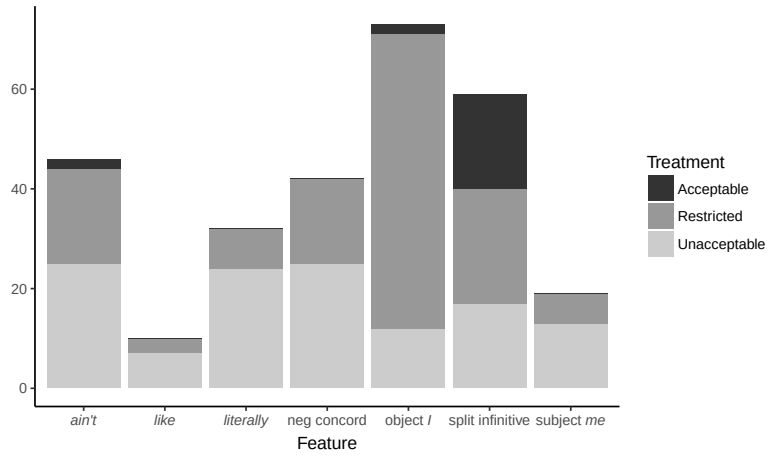

Figure 5.9: Number of entries across treatment categories per feature

While Figure 5.9 shows the general differences in treatment across language features, it does not provide any clues as to possible changes over time. Looking for such patterns across time provides additional evidence of possible changes in precept. In order to identify changing patterns, as well as the statistical significance of these changes, logistic regression modelling was used to investigate how time predicts the likelihood of an entry being a particular category of treatment as opposed to another; this was done using the `mlogit` R package (Croissant 2013), and following the procedures outlined in Levshina (2015: Chapter 12 for binomial regression, and Chapter 13 for multinomial regression). In this kind of modelling, the categories of treatment, i.e. ACCEPTABLE, RESTRICTED, and UNACCEPTABLE, are the three levels of the categorical outcome variable TREATMENT, while YEAR is the predictor variable, which is a continuous variable. Each entry was thus classified as one of the three levels of TREATMENT; the value for YEAR for each entry was the year in which the usage guide was published. Using logistic regression modelling, the likelihood of each of the three categories of treatment is modelled as a function of the year of publication of the usage guide in which the entry was found. This kind

of modelling provides insights into how the probabilities of different categories of treatment have changed over time, and whether this change is significant. I used the multinomial logistic regression technique for the features for which all three categories of TREATMENT were identified, while those features for which only two categories of TREATMENT were present were analysed using binomial logistic regression models. The difference between the two techniques is in the number of levels in the outcome variables. Both the binomial and the multinomial logistic regression techniques allow us to estimate the chances that one of two or three possible outcomes will occur, in this case the three treatment categories, given a specific value of the predictor, in this case the year of publication. In the case of usage features in which only two categories of treatment were identified in the data, the binomial logistic regression model was used for this reason. In what follows, I discuss in detail the results from these tests for each feature in turn.

5.3.1 *Ain't*

Figure 5.10 shows that *ain't* was not found acceptable in usage guides until the twenty-first century. The nineteenth-century usage guides all disapprove of the item, and this situation remains the same in the first half of the twentieth century. The real change happened during the second half of the twentieth century, as evidenced by the number of RESTRICTED entries on *ain't*. Figure 5.10 shows the predicted probabilities for the three categories of treatment, based on the categorisation of the entries described above. After the 1950s, the probability for an entry being UNACCEPTABLE is lower than 50%, while the likelihood that an entry is RESTRICTED increases. Around the turn of the twenty-first century, there is yet another change, with the probability that an entry is ACCEPTABLE increasing, while the probability that an entry is RESTRICTED decreases slightly. The coefficients in a multinomial logistic regression model which compares the odds that an entry is ACCEPTABLE as opposed to UNACCEPTABLE, or the odds that an entry is RESTRICTED as opposed to UNACCEPTABLE, given in Table 5.1, show that the increase in the likelihood that an entry is ACCEPTABLE is not significant, while the increase in the likelihood that an entry is RESTRICTED has increased significantly. In other words, for every year, the odds of an entry on *ain't* being RESTRICTED increase by 1.05. This suggests that while the treatment of *ain't* has indeed changed during the twentieth century, this change does not mean that *ain't* is now considered acceptable; rather, it has become acceptable in restricted contexts, as evidenced by the increased likelihood that an entry

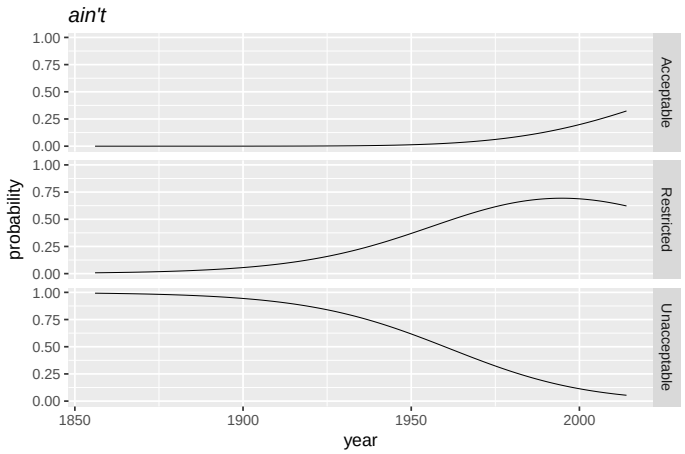

Figure 5.10: Probabilities of the occurrence of categories of entries on *ain't* as predicted by a multinomial logistic regression model

is RESTRICTED in the usage guides analysed.

	b	OR	Std. errors	*t*-value	*p*-value
Acceptable (intercept)	−1532.842	0	1418.500	−1.081	0.2799
Restricted (intercept)	−96.569	1.15e-42	28.890	−3.343	0.0008***
Acceptable:year	0.765	2.150	0.708	1.082	0.2794
Restricted:year	0.049	1.051	0.015	3.343	0.0008***

Table 5.1: Multinomial logistic regression model for the three categories of treatment of entries on *ain't*; reference level is UNACCEPTABLE

5.3.2 The discourse particle *like*

Entries on *like* are split between RESTRICTED and UNACCEPTABLE, with an interesting change happening in the twenty-first century. The entries found in usage guides published in the second half of the twentieth century are not explicitly UNACCEPTABLE, while those in guides published in the first decade of the twenty-first century tend to be more explicitly negative about this feature. Figure 5.11 plots the likelihood of UNACCEPTABLE entries as opposed to RESTRICTED. As was the case with subject *me*, it is impossible to make observations with any certainty on the basis

of these data, because the confidence intervals are too large, as a result of paucity of data. The slight increase in the probability of an entry being UNACCEPTABLE rather than RESTRICTED is not statistically significant. A parallel can thus be drawn between the usage guide treatment of *like* on the one hand, and the increase in negative social evaluation of the item (addressed in more detail in Section 7.3) among native speakers on the other; both of these may be seen as a reaction to the increase in its frequency of use.

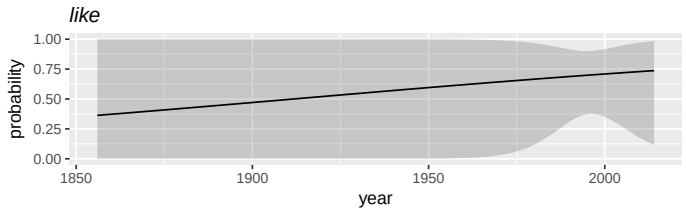

Figure 5.11: Probabilities of the occurrence of categories of entries on the discourse particle *like* as predicted by a binomial logistic regression model; reference level is RESTRICTED, predicted level is UNACCEPTABLE

5.3.3 Non-literal *literally*

Literally starts to be treated as a usage problem in guides at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the majority of the entries are UNACCEPTABLE. Some authors of guides published later in the twentieth, or in the twenty-first century, are vague in their pronouncements, and refrain from expressing an explicit stance towards *literally*, beyond the observation that *literally* is sometimes used as an intensifier. However, these guides are a minority in comparison to those that treat this feature as UNACCEPTABLE. As Figure 5.12 shows, there is a slight decrease in the probability of an entry being UNACCEPTABLE, as opposed to RESTRICTED, in the course of time. This decrease is, however, not statistically significant. This puts *literally* in the same category as *like* and object *I*/subject *me*, as a strongly dispreferred feature.

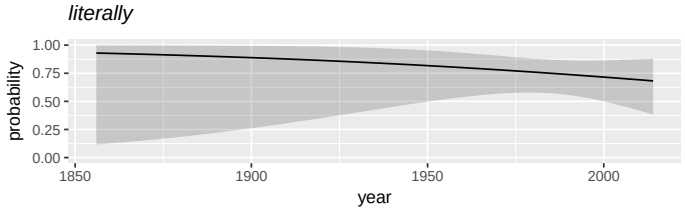

Figure 5.12: Probabilities of the occurrence of categories of entries on the discourse particle *literally* as predicted by a binomial logistic regression model; reference level is RESTRICTED, predicted level is UNACCEPTABLE

5.3.4 Negative concord

Negative concord is considered unacceptable overall, and this is highlighted by the fact that there were no ACCEPTABLE entries. However, the number of RESTRICTED entries, i.e. entries that specify some kind of acceptability in certain contexts or that are vague about the acceptability of the feature, has grew during the second half of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first. This change in the probability for the two categories of treatment identified in the entries in negative concord is shown in Figure 5.13. A binomial logistic regression model of the two categories of entries, *viz.* RESTRICTED and UNACCEPTABLE, which predicts the odds of an entry being UNACCEPTABLE as opposed to RESTRICTED as a function of the year in which it was published, is given in Table 5.2. The model shows that over time the odds of an entry being UNACCEPTABLE decrease ($b = -0.023$); according to the odds ratio, for each one-unit increase in time, i.e. for one year, the odds of an entry being UNACCEPTABLE decrease by 1.023. This change is significant ($p = 0.014$).

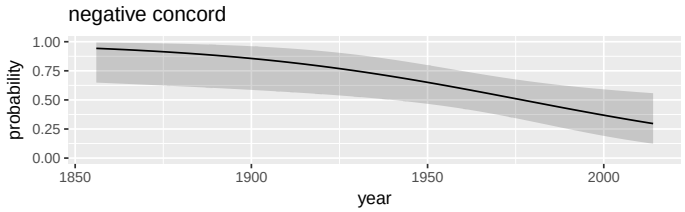

Figure 5.13: Probabilities of the occurrence of categories of entries on negative concord as predicted by a binomial logistic regression model; reference level is RESTRICTED, predicted level is UNACCEPTABLE

	b	OR	Std. errors	*z*-value	*p*-value
Intercept	−45.913		18.70	−2.455	0.014*
year	−0.023	1.023	0.010	0.015	0.014*

Table 5.2: Binomial logistic regression of the two categories of treatment in entries on negative concord; reference level is RESTRICTED, predicted level is UNACCEPTABLE

5.3.5 Pronouns in coordinated phrases

Entries on object *I* are predominantly RESTRICTED, as shown in Figure 5.9 above. The large number of RESTRICTED entries is the result of the acceptance of this feature only in restricted contexts, such as informal, colloquial, or familiar settings, but its use in formal and written contexts is decidedly proscribed. For instance, in discussing the phrase *between you and I*, Pickett et al. (2005: 380) note that, while variation in pronoun case forms has long been characteristic of English usage, the proscription of the use of nominative pronominal forms after prepositions was first put in writing around the middle of the nineteenth century. While guides from that period acknowledge that "the phrase occurs quite often in speech", they also warn the reader that it is "widely regarded as a sign of ignorance", and point out that formal writing requires *between you and me*. Evans and Evans (1957: 60) are the authors whose treatment of object *I* is more positive than the other usage guides analysed, which, as already mentioned in Section 5.2.5, do not consider this feature as a mistake, due to its history of use. Looking at the change in treatment over time, the change in the probability of the three categories of treatment is plotted in Figure 5.14. The figure plots the change in probability in the categories of TREATMENT analysed. In terms of change over time, Figure 5.14 shows that there is a very slight change in the probability of an entry being RESTRICTED, which is about 25% during the second half of the twentieth century. The multinomial logistic regression model reveals that these differences are not significant, suggesting that the treatment of this feature has not changed over time, and has remained RESTRICTED.

The use of *me* in subject position is similarly disapproved of, with 13 out of the 19 entries being analysed as UNACCEPTABLE (Figure 5.9). Since only two categories of treatment were identified, the change over time was modelled using binomial logistic regression, which is shown in Figure 5.15. Since this feature is one of the less frequently discussed, the figure shows that there is little certainty as to which trends

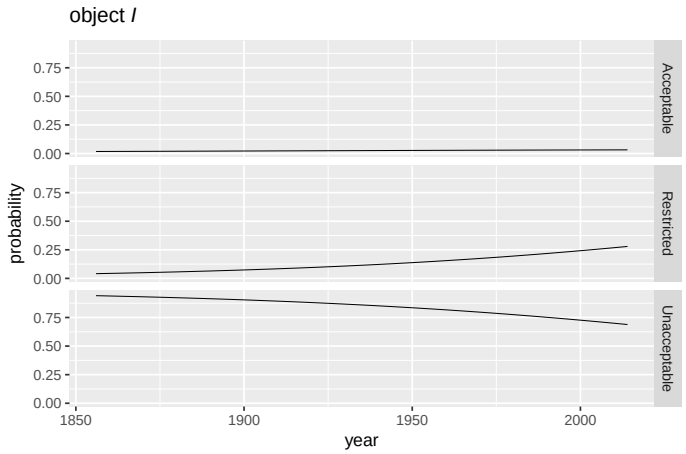

Figure 5.14: Probabilities of the occurrence of categories of entries on object *I* as predicted by a multinomial logistic regression model

can be identified, due to the small number of data points and the large confidence intervals. A trend with smaller confidence intervals can be identified for the latter half of the twentieth century, but not earlier. This change is not statistically significant, which means that on the basis of these results, it is difficult to identify any change in the treatment of subject *me*. Since the results of the model are not significant, I can only conclude that subject *me* is treated as an unacceptable usage feature in usage guides across the twentieth century on the basis of the majority of UNACCEPTABLE entries, as well as the fact that no ACCEPTABLE entries were identified for this feature.

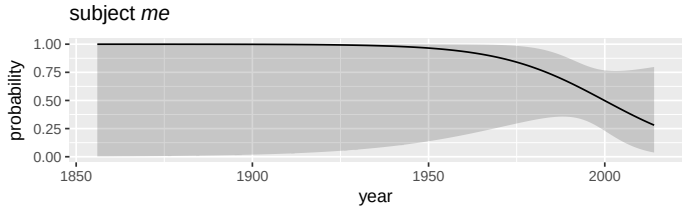

Figure 5.15: Probabilities of the occurrence of categories of entries on subject *me* as predicted by a binomial logistic regression model; reference level is UNACCEPTABLE

5.3.6 The split infinitive

The treatment of the split infinitive provides the most striking exception to the patterns observed for the usage features discussed so far. Figure 5.9 above shows that entries on the split infinitive include the highest proportion of ACCEPTABLE entries compared to the rest of the features analysed, and the lowest proportion of UNACCEPTABLE entries. The change in treatment itself is also significant, statistically and generally speaking. The contrast is quite substantial, with nineteenth-century usage guides decidedly disapproving of the split infinitive, while the treatment of the feature in twenty-first-century usage guides is predominantly ACCEPTABLE. Figure 5.16 and Table 5.3 show the change in the probability of the three categories of treatment.

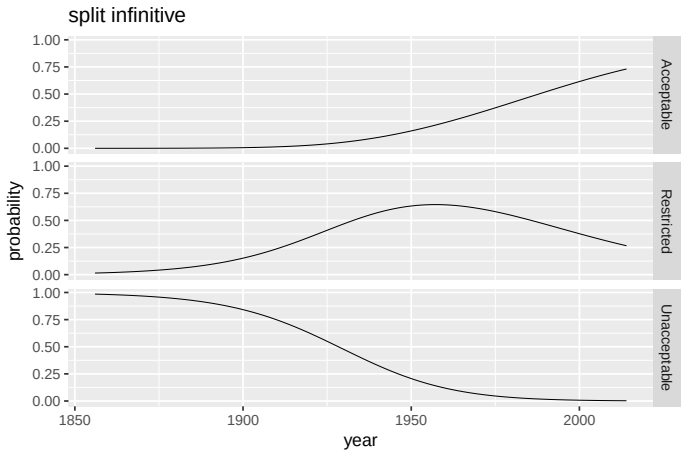

Figure 5.16: Probabilities of the occurrence of categories of entries on the split infinitive as predicted by a multinomial logistic regression model

	b	OR	Std. errors	*t*-value	*p*-value
Acceptable:(intercept)	−183.395	2.25e-80	45.294	−4.049	5.15e-05***
Restricted:(intercept)	−109.667	2.36e-48	32.800	−3.344	0.001***
Acceptable:year	0.094	1.098	0.023	4.055	0.000***
Restricted:year	0.057	1.058	0.017	3.345	0.001***

Table 5.3: Multinomial logistic regression of the three categories of treatment of entries on the split infinitive; reference level is UNACCEPTABLE

5.3.7 Summary

In summary, what these trends in change in the treatment of the various features show is that usage guides vary in their judgements across time and across language features. For some features, usage guides appear quite accepting of changes in the language, while for others the judgements remain conservative over time. In the case of conservative treatment, it is interesting to note that there is rarely universal approval or disapproval of a feature. The variation that exists between the categories UNACCEPTABLE and RESTRICTED may be due to variation within the genre of usage guides. To draw on Algeo's (1991b) typology, which distinguishes between subjective and objective usage guides, subjective usage guides tend towards more strongly expressed negative treatment of a feature, while more objective usage guides fall in the category of RESTRICTED precisely because they refrain from overt negative value judgements. The results observed in the current analysis provide further evidence in support of this typology.

5.4 Expressions of attitudes to usage in usage guides

In this section, I discuss the results of the second level of analysis, i.e. the occurrence of POSITIVE and NEGATIVE attitude expressions in the entries. The number of such expressions is taken as an indication of how usage features are predominantly discussed, but also of how the discussion has changed over time. In addition to the quantitative analysis of the number of occurrences of POSITIVE and NEGATIVE attitudes in the treatment of the various features, I will also discuss other important dimensions of attitudes observed in the data, on the basis of a qualitative analysis. It is important to keep in mind, as I already pointed out in Sections 2.2 and 4.3 above, that these attitudes have to be distinguished from speakers' attitudes.

The frequency of occurrence of attitude expressions differs across the entries, depending on the language feature and the time period with which the entries are associated. These differences serve as further indicators of how the treatment of different features varies across time. Figure 5.17 shows the number of attitudes in total identified for each feature and each entry in the collection of entries analysed. It also shows the number of POSITIVE attitudes compared to that of NEGATIVE attitudes. The subfigures in Figure 5.17 are ordered from the split infinitive, the feature with the highest number of POSITIVE attitude expressions, to subject *me*, a feature for which

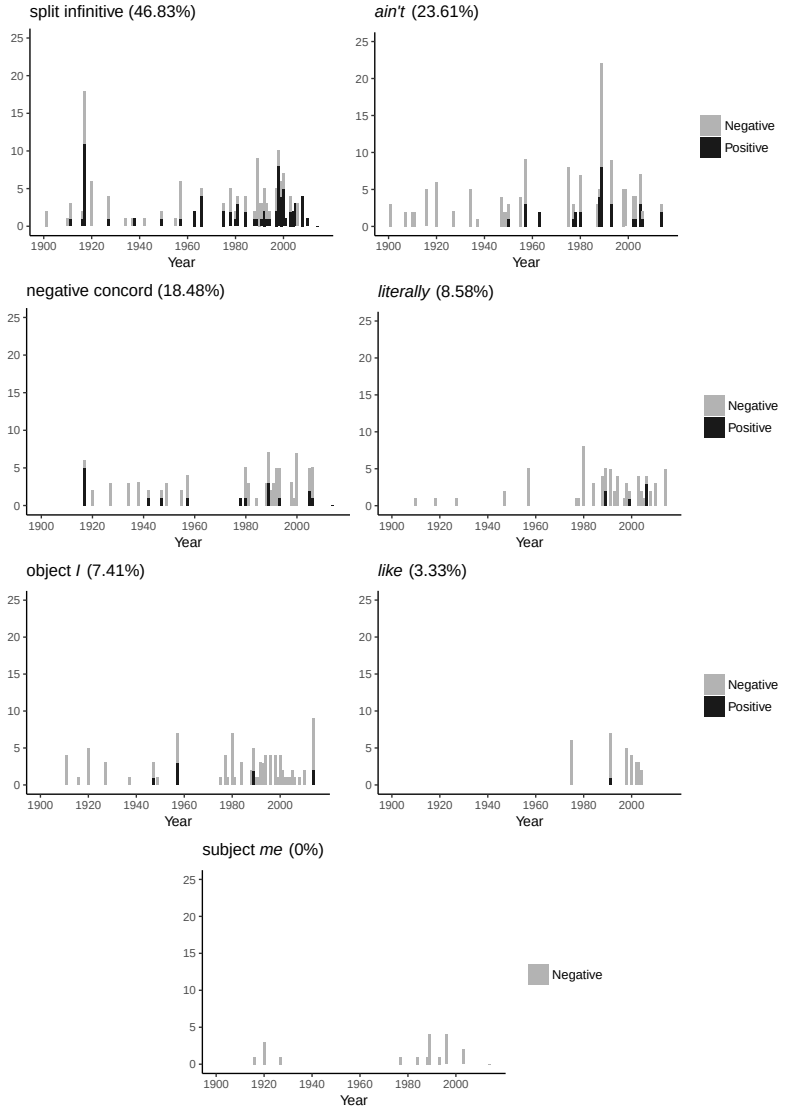

Figure 5.17: Number of POSITIVE and NEGATIVE attitude expressions per feature across time

no POSITIVE attitudes were identified in the sample of entries. The split infinitive can be clearly distinguished from the other features by the number of attitudes expressed explicitly, and, particularly, by the number of POSITIVE attitudes expressed. This pattern is in line with what was observed in the classification of the various types

of treatment according to which the split infinitive is the most accepted feature. There were 84 NEGATIVE attitude expressions, and 74 POSITIVE attitude expressions (46.83%) in the entries on the split infinitive. The attitudes expressed explicitly towards *ain't* were POSITIVE in 23.61% of the cases, i.e. a POSITIVE attitude was expressed 34 times, as opposed to 110 expressions of NEGATIVE attitudes. The treatment of negative concord is also marked by a high number of NEGATIVE attitudes expressed in the entries. There are 75 expressions of NEGATIVE attitudes, as opposed to 17 expressions of POSITIVE attitudes towards this feature, which is 18.48% of the cases. Attitudes to *literally* were POSITIVE in six cases, and NEGATIVE in 64, which translates to 8.58% of POSITIVE attitudes. Attitudes to object *I* are predominantly NEGATIVE, with 100 NEGATIVE attitude expressions as opposed to only eight expressions of POSITIVE attitudes, which is 7.41% of the total number of attitude expressions identified in the entries on object *I*. Attitudes to *like* are also predominantly NEGATIVE, with 29 NEGATIVE expressions and 1 POSITIVE expression, or 3.33%. Finally, all 21 attitudes expressed towards subject *me* were NEGATIVE. Figure 5.17 also shows that, with some exceptions, POSITIVE attitudes are characteristically found in guides published after the 1950s.

These trends provide some indication as to how the attitudes expressed differ across features and change over time, but they do not provide more specific information regarding the kinds of attitudes expressed. As Yáñez-Bouza (2015) has shown, in studies of precept it is important not only to look at general changes, but also to account for more specific types of attitudes expressed. In other words, the ways in which the acceptability of a construction is expressed may differ with respect to linguistic features, usage guides, or time periods. Understanding these nuances provides a more comprehensive understanding of how precept in general, and attitudes in particular, have changed over time. In order to explore this question in more detail, I will now turn to the actual expressions identified in the entries for each feature. I will discuss each feature in the order of proportion of POSITIVE attitudes, starting with the split infinitive. Tables containing all the annotations for expressions of attitudes to each usage feature can be found in Appendix C.

5.4.1 *Ain't*

Similarly to the split infinitive, it is possible to identify a number of recurring themes, or dimensions, in the expressions of POSITIVE or NEGATIVE attitudes towards *ain't* (see Table D.1 in Appendix C). Two of these dimensions can be identified in the

POSITIVE attitudes expressed: references to the naturalness or usefulness of the contraction in the English language, and the appropriateness of *ain't* in signalling casual or colloquial speech. Such observations are found in Corbin and Perrin (1963), Randall (1988), Parrish (2002), and Pinker (2014). The other dimension found in the POSITIVE attitudes to *ain't* refers to its "down-to-earth" quality (Ebbitt and Ebbitt 1978; Brians 2003). An interesting observation about the POSITIVE attitudes towards *ain't* is that the majority appear in usage guides after 1950. This may indicate that a change in treatment has taken place, from a more uniformly negative to a more balanced treatment.

NEGATIVE attitudes are far more common, as shown in Figure 5.17, and there are three themes that can be distinguished here. The first is the perceived grammatical incorrectness of *ain't* (Turck Baker 1910; Vizetelly 1920; Gilman 1989; Mager et al. 1993; Brians 2003). The second theme is the association of *ain't* with "illiterate" speech (Wood and Stratton 1934; Partridge 1947; Witherspoon 1948; Nicholson 1957; Morris and Morris 1975; Copperud 1980; Shaw 1975; Allen 1999; Parrish 2002) or "uneducated" speech (Morris and Morris 1975; Brians 2003). In addition to this social meaning of *ain't*, the feature is also associated with non-standard or dialectal speech. "Vulgar", and related forms, such as "vulgarism", are also often found (Hurd 1847; Ayres 1911; Utter 1916; Vizetelly 1920; Wood and Stratton 1934; Treble and Vallins 1937; Stratton 1949; Perrin 1950; Perrin and Smith 1955; Gilman 1989; Wilson 1993; Pickett et al. 2005). These strongly negative social connotations are most common in the entries on *ain't* as opposed to the other features analysed. The third dimension identified in the attitudes to *ain't* is its status as a usage problem, which suggests its strong presence in prescriptivist discourse. This is exemplified by qualifications such as "bugbear", "condemned", "displeases many people", "frowned upon", and "stigmatised", which reflect what Curzan (2014: 48) calls "prescriptive meta-discourses, or conversations about the prescriptive conversations about language". In other words, what many of these entries contain are not only discussions of the use of *ain't*, but also of the history of the proscription, as well as other sources discussing the feature. Finally, the debate surrounding the status of *ain't* as a word (cf. Curzan 2014) is reflected in the presence of qualifications of *ain't* both as "a word" (Wilson 1993) and as a "nonword" (Garner 1998). This final dimension is interestingly reflected in the study of speakers' attitudes reported in Chapter 7.

5.4.2 The discourse particle *like*

Like is one of the features for which no POSITIVE attitudes were identified in the entries (see Table D.2 in Appendix D). The striking characteristic of the NEGATIVE attitudes to *like*, which sets this usage problem apart from the rest, is the description of *like* not as an error or a mistake, but as a "filler" (Shaw 1975; Garner 1998; Parrish 2002), a "verbal crutch" (Lovinger 2000), "verbal tic" (Johnson 1991; Garner 1998), or "verbal hiccup" (Brians 2003: 126). Furthermore, the use of the discourse particle *like* is seen as a "habit" (Brians 2003; Batko 2004) that "infests every sentence" (Johnson 1991) and needs to be eradicated. The third dimension that is characteristic of the attitudes towards *like* is its strong association with negative personal characteristics such as nervousness (Shaw 1975) or indecisiveness (Johnson 1991). The case of *like*, as already mentioned above, serves as a good illustration of how usage guide authors address recent changes in the language, as well as of the evaluative connotations they use in their treatment of this relatively recent addition to the usage problem canon, such as age and personal characteristics of those who use new forms.

5.4.3 Non-literal *literally*

POSITIVE attitudes to *literally* relate to the variation in its use; such an attitude is expressed through the observation that the intensifier use of *literally* is "neither a misuse nor a mistake" (Gilman 1989: 608) but a development natural to language (see Table D.3 in Appendix D). The only other POSITIVE attitude to *literally*, which was identified in the usage guide entries analysed, comes from Peters (2004: 326), who notes that it "lends impact to quantitative statements" and "invites readers to savour the aptness of the writer's terms of reference". Both Gilman and Peters are descriptive usage guides, and their observations of usage are based on solid empirical evidence. These POSITIVE attitudes cannot therefore be considered to be indicative of a change in attitudes to *literally* in usage guides in general, but merely represent variation within the usage guide genre (cf. Algeo 1991b). The majority of the attitudes to non-literal *literally* are, however, NEGATIVE, and these relate most often to its supposed incorrectness (Strunk 1918; Krapp 1927; Randall 1988; Gilman 1989; Batko 2004), as well as its lack of (logical) meaning (Evans and Evans 1957; Ebbitt and Ebbitt 1978; Johnson 1991; Brians 2003; Pinker 2014). The third dimension discernible in the NEGATIVE attitudes towards *literally* relates to its superfluousness (Copperud 1980; Randall 1988; Johnson 1991; Wilson 1993). Finally, *literally* is seen

as being overused (Sutcliffe 1994; Brians 2003).

5.4.4 Negative concord

POSITIVE attitudes to negative concord are found far less often than NEGATIVE ones (see Table D.4 in Appendix D). The predominant theme which can be identified in these attitude expressions is the naturalness of the feature (Hall 1917) and its place in the English idiom (Ebbitt and Ebbitt 1978). A smaller group of expressions centre on the feature's function in strengthening or emphasising a negative statement. More explicitly, a number of entries explain that the use of negative concord is "not a backsliding from the idiom of more formal English" (Ebbitt and Ebbitt 1978: 483–484), but a "natural" and "normal way of strengthening a negative" (Evans and Evans 1957: 143–144). Speakers are even advised that they do not need to eradicate the feature if it is part of their everyday language use. Negative concord is also seen as emphatic (Hall 1917), as "powerful" (Wilson 1993: 154), and as "an effective construction in writing dialogue or striking a folksy note" (Pickett et al. 2005: 148–149). NEGATIVE attitudes to negative concord are found mostly to refer to the alleged grammatical incorrectness of the feature, and to its inappropriateness of use. The attitude of grammatical incorrectness of negative concord is expressed by labels such as "mistake" (Anonymous 1856b), "error" (Meredith 1872; Stratton 1949; Johnson 1991; Lovinger 2000), and "incorrect" (Ballard 1884; Turck Baker 1910; Carter et al. 1990; Booher 1992; Mager et al. 1993; Pickett et al. 2005). The second dimension identifiable in the NEGATIVE attitudes expressed towards negative concord is the social stigma associated with its use. The feature is seen as "an immediate indication that the speaker's or writer's diction is substandard" (Johnson 1991: 332), while Evans and Evans (1957: 143–144) observe that "no one who values public opinion can afford to" use negative concord.

5.4.5 Pronouns in coordinated phrases

Pronouns in coordinated phrases are also treated in a predominantly negative way, with a very small number of POSITIVE attitudes expressed (see Tables D.5 and D.6 in Appendix D). These POSITIVE expressions are found only for object *I*, while all the attitudes expressed towards subject *me* are NEGATIVE. Object *I* is seen positively as a historically sound construction which is part of spoken English (Evans and Evans 1957; Gilman 1989). NEGATIVE attitudes to object *I* focus almost entirely on its grammatical incorrectness. Classifications of this feature as "incorrect", "wrong", an

"error", a "mistake", or a "fault", are found in the great majority of the entries analysed (Anonymous 1856b; Bache 1868; Ayres 1911; Payne 1911; Vizetelly 1920; Hadida 1927; Treble and Vallins 1937; Stratton 1949; de Mello Vianna et al. 1977; Copperud 1980; Bryson 1984; Randall 1988; Gilman 1989; Carter et al. 1990; Johnson 1991; Booher 1992; Wilson 1993; Sutcliffe 1994; Beason and Lester 1996; Garner 1998; Lovinger 2000; Batko 2004; Clark 2010; Pinker 2014). A small number of entries also refer to the negative social associations of object *I* by labelling it "illiterate" (Nicholson 1957: 55), "half-educated" (Ebbitt and Ebbitt 1978: 421), or as being "regarded as a sign of ignorance" (Pickett et al. 2005: 380). The most common NEGATIVE attitude towards subject *me* is related to its grammatical incorrectness.

5.4.6 The split infinitive

The split infinitive is the feature for which the largest number of POSITIVE attitudes were expressed (see Table D.7 in Appendix D). There are four dimensions observable in these attitudes: grammaticality, stylistic value, social value, and encouragement to use split infinitives. The first dimension can be identified in the recurrent emphasis on the fact that split infinitives are not grammatically incorrect and do not violate grammatical rules. Illustrative cases can be found in Compton (1898: 39–40), who notes that split infinitives are not "not a violation of any rule of grammar"; Gilman (1989: 867–868), who notes that "there is nothing grammatically wrong" with split infinitives; and Allen (1999: 548), who observes that the split infinitive is not "a grammatical blunder". The second dimension refers to the positive stylistic values associated with the use of split infinitives. These kinds of expressions stress that the split infinitive is "natural" (Hall 1917; Nicholson 1957; Bryson 1984; Mager et al. 1993; Walsh 2004), and that it improves the clarity of expression (Hall 1917; Krapp 1927; Ebbitt and Ebbitt 1978; Vermes 1981; Bryson 1984; Lovinger 2000). The third dimension in the POSITIVE attitudes expressed towards the split infinitive relates to the fact that it is not seen as indexical of particular negative social aspects of its users. These include observations that "the use of the split infinitive does not necessarily put us among the illiterates, ignoramuses, and violators of English undefiled" (Hall 1917: 96), or that it is "acceptable" and "perfectly proper" (Garner 1998: 616). Finally, the last characteristic of the POSITIVE attitudes expressed towards the split infinitive relates to calls for using split infinitives freely, which can be found often in the entries. Fogarty (2008: 11), for instance, notes that "it's OK to split infinitives", and advises her readers not to "let anyone tell you that it's forbidden". These attitudes to the split

infinitive show that not only is the feature presented as being acceptable, it is also considered acceptable on multiple levels, both linguistic and social. In other words, split infinitives are accepted in formal speech and writing, especially if they are seen as an emphatic or effective way to express a thought. The stress on the stylistic acceptability of the split infinitive is in line with Curzan's (2014) account of different types of usage problems, or, more specifically with identifying split infinitives as usage features considered problematic on the stylistic level. Since many of the usage guide writers take issue with the prescriptivist discourse prohibiting split infinitives, their attitudes can be seen as reactions to the notion that split infinitives are stylistically unacceptable.

Nevertheless, only about half of the total number of attitudes expressed are POSITIVE; to be precise, 46.83% of the attitude expressions found in entries on the split infinitive are positive (Figure 5.17). The rest of these expressions are NEGATIVE, and in line with what one might expect to find in prescriptive language advice literature. These NEGATIVE attitudes can be seen as directly contradicting the four dimensions of POSITIVE attitudes I mentioned above. For instance, while, according to some authors, split infinitives do not violate a grammatical rule (Compton 1898), others assert that splitting infinitives violates the rule of never inserting an adverb between *to* and the verb (Anonymous 1856b). Grammatically speaking, split infinitives are also seen as mistakes, errors, or faults (Bache 1868; Bechtel 1901; Ayres 1911; Stratton 1949; Follett 1966; Bryson 1984; Allen 1999). In terms of stylistic aspects, NEGATIVE attitudes associated with split infinitives are awkwardness (Payne 1911; Hall 1917; Partridge 1942; Ebbitt and Ebbitt 1978) or clumsiness of expression (Hall 1917; Wilson 1993), as well as sloppiness (Johnson 1991). Split infinitives are associated with ignorance (Johnson 1991) or carelessness (Garner 1998). Finally, on the basis of these NEGATIVE attitudes, in many of the entries readers are advised to avoid using split infinitives.

5.4.7 Summary

In summary, the split infinitive is the most positively treated feature of the six features studied here, followed by *ain't*. The analysis of attitudes across time, however, also shows that POSITIVE attitudes towards the split infinitive are found in the earliest usage guides, which might indicate that the split infinitive was perhaps never a strongly dispreferred feature (cf. Albakry 2007) in comparison to other features. For example, *ain't* is described positively only in usage guides published after 1950. This

indicates that there has been a change in the treatment of *ain't* in the middle of the twentieth century. Such a change is not observed for the other features, the treatment of which remains mainly negative. Furthermore, there is also variation in the indexical nature of the language features. *Ain't* is very strongly associated with negative social characteristics, while object *I* is predominantly seen as an error, and relatively few usage guides mention its association with "illiterate" speech. The other features are all referred to fairly negatively, with very few expressions of POSITIVE attitudes. These NEGATIVE attitudes are expressed with a range of typical prescriptive labels (cf. Sundby et al. 1991; Yáñez-Bouza 2015), the most frequent of which are "illiterate", "inelegant", "uneducated", "ungrammatical", "vulgar", and "vulgarism". This is in turn indicative of the strong prescriptive influence still observable in the genre of usage guides.

Despite the differences in the numbers of POSITIVE and NEGATIVE attitudes expressed towards each of the features analysed, it is noteworthy that the overall number of attitudes in general has increased over time. This is important because it shows that the treatment has changed over time. The entries become incrementally more sophisticated and, especially in the case of so-called shibboleths of usage, such as *ain't* or the split infinitive, there is a pronounced tendency to include both sides of the usage debate in the discussion, resulting in the expression of both POSITIVE and NEGATIVE attitudes towards the feature. In other words, although there is generally a predominance of NEGATIVE attitudes expressed in the entries taken together, the identification of POSITIVE attitudes is important in pointing to two aspects of the way in which these usage features are treated. The first aspect that the presence of POSITIVE attitudes points to is a change in the treatment of some of the features. The second aspect is the variation in treatment observed in the entries, which may suggest a development in the usage guide genre itself.

5.5 Dimensions of usage

Alongside expressions of attitudes to the usage features, the entries also contain various types of references to dimensions of usage; i.e. any aspects of the usage of a particular feature which usage guide authors refer to in their discussion. I distinguish six categories of dimensions of usage: FREQUENCY, MODE, REGISTER, SPEAKERS, VALUE, and VARIETY (see Section 4.3 for explanations and examples of each of these categories). In this chapter I will discuss the dimensions of usage referred to

in the entries for each language feature. The discussion that follows is based on the identification of references to dimensions of usage in the entries for each of the features. The identification of these references was done by annotating each of the entries using 'brat' (see Section 4.3); the complete list of annotations can be found in Appendix D.

	Freq.		Mod.		Reg.		Speak.		Val.		Var.		Total	
	A	E	A	E	A	E	A	E	A	E	A	E	A	E
ain't	37	18	32	15	78	23	43	19	27	1	41	13	258	46
like	6	5	6	4	6	0	12	0	6	6	2	2	38	10
literally	21	16	4	4	4	2	12	9	0	0	1	0	42	32
neg. conc.	24	13	15	11	25	10	40	10	13	10	27	14	144	42
obj. *I*	38	28	17	8	15	8	25	13	11	9	8	7	114	73
subj. *me*	7	7	8	5	6	3	9	5	1	1	4	3	35	19
split inf.	35	14	13	10	19	8	24	11	5	5	5	5	101	59
total	168		95		153		165		63		88		732	281

Table 5.4: References to dimensions of usage (A = number of annotations; E = number of entries in which these annotations were made)

Table 5.4 contains the counts of references to these dimensions of usage for each separate feature. For each feature, the table contains the number of annotations made (the A columns in the table) in the identification of references to each of the six dimensions, FREQUENCY, MODE, REGISTER, SPEAKERS, VALUE, and VARIETY, and the number of entries (the E columns in the table) in which these annotations were made. The counts show that entries on *ain't* have the highest number of references to dimensions of usage, followed by object *I*, negative concord, and the split infinitive. The rest of the features contain smaller numbers of references to dimensions of usage. This is partly, though not entirely, the result of the different number of entries for each feature, as is shown by the total number of entries for each feature. Thus, while *ain't* is not the most frequently treated feature, with 46 entries, it does contain a strikingly high number of references to dimensions of usage, i.e. 258; there are thus on average 5.6 annotations per entry for *ain't* (Table 5.4). A similar mismatch between the number of annotations and the number of entries can be observed in the treatment of the discourse particle *like*, which does not contain the lowest number of references to dimensions of usage, despite being covered in only ten entries. This distribution provides further evidence of the significant variation in treatment across different language features, which parallels the patterns observed in the attitudes expressed, discussed in the previous section. Table 5.4 also shows that the more frequent references to dimensions of usage concern the FREQUENCY of use, categories of SPEAKERS, and REGISTER, followed by the less frequent references to MODE of expression, language VARIETY,

and social VALUE associated with the language feature.

5.5.1 *Ain't*

The entries on *ain't* contain a variety of dimensions of usage; the annotations of the entries are found in Table D.8 in Appendix D. The large number of references itself is an indication of their importance in the treatment of *ain't*, as well as in understanding better how this treatment has changed over time. The judgements on the frequency of *ain't* range from it being described as "common" (Perrin 1950; Gilman 1989; Parrish 2002; Brians 2003) or as "frequently heard" (Bechtel 1901) to being "occasionally" used (Randall 1988; Brians 2003). There is a difference in these observations, depending on the register of use: when authors describe the occurrence of *ain't* as a 'mistake', they also observe that the word is used with high frequency; such a connection is explicitly made in a third of the entries in which *ain't* is evaluated negatively. On the other hand, when they describe the frequency of use of *ain't* in colloquial speech, they describe it as occasional. In terms of register of use, *ain't* is found to be used predominantly in informal and colloquial contexts (Bechtel 1901; Perrin 1950; Corbin and Perrin 1963; Shaw 1975), or in casual speech (Lovinger 2000). In addition, usage guides often refer to a number of more specialised uses of *ain't*, such as its use in proverbs, clichés, or fixed expressions such as *if it ain't broke don't fix it*, or *it ain't over till it's over* (Randall 1988; Pinker 2014), as well as its uses in lyrics (Pickett et al. 2005; Pinker 2014) or in literature as a marker of dialectal or regional speech (Morris and Morris 1975). It is especially with reference to these specialised uses that *ain't* is considered irreplaceable and, hence, acceptable. In terms of MODE, *ain't* is considered to occur predominantly in spoken language, while its use in writing is noted as limited. For *ain't*, 15 of the 46 entries draw on distinctions between speech and writing in its use. Importantly, the use of *ain't* in writing is found to be more acceptable in relation to its more specialised uses described above. In terms of VARIETY, *ain't* is predominantly viewed as non-standard (Corbin and Perrin 1963; Copperud 1980; Gilman 1989), or as regional and dialectal (Shaw 1975; Randall 1988), but it is not related to a particular social or regional group of speakers. When it comes to references to SPEAKERS, it is often noted that *ain't* occurs in the speech of educated or cultivated speakers (Shaw 1975; Lovinger 2000; Peters 2004; Pickett et al. 2005), despite "not conforming to the standard of the language variety of educated speakers and writers" (Randall 1988: 9–10). Finally, the VALUE of using *ain't* is strongly related to the prescriptive pressure against its use, and, thus, using

ain't carries a negative social connotation. The use of *ain't* is found to be acceptable only by speakers whose status as educated is established, while speakers who use *ain't* regularly are seen as uneducated or ignorant (Copperud 1980). In addition, the strong social and educational pressure against *ain't* is seen as the greatest obstacle to using it (Perrin 1950; Corbin and Perrin 1963).

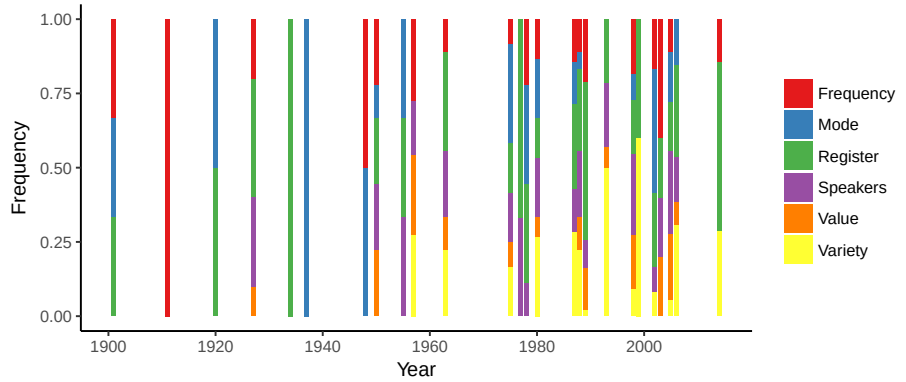

Figure 5.18: Dimensions of usage in the treatment of *ain't* (n = 258)

In addition to the variation in dimensions of usage referred to in the entries on *ain't*, a change can be observed over time in the use and frequency of these references to dimensions of usage. The distribution of the annotations of these references to dimensions of usage identified in the entries on *ain't* is plotted in Figure 5.18. Each column shows the proportion of the six types of dimensions of usage in entries published in that year (usually one or two entries, corresponding to one usage guide published in that year). The vertical axis shows the frequency of the different types of the dimensions of usage as proportions of the total number of references to dimensions of usage, in order to illustrate the changes more clearly. The figure shows that in the second half of the twentieth century, usage guides relied on many of these references to dimensions of usage. On the basis of the figure, it can also be observed that references to VARIETY, indicated in yellow, also started appearing only in the second half of the twentieth century. This suggests that in the course of the twentieth century the treatment of *ain't* became more balanced, more nuanced, and perhaps more descriptively informed.

5.5.2 The discourse particle *like*

Discourse particle *like* has the second highest number of references to usage in its entries, despite the low raw numbers, which is to a large extent a consequence of the relatively small number of entries in total (for the annotations, see Table D.9 in Appendix D). The average frequency of annotations is 3.80 per entry, which puts *like* close to *ain't* and negative concord in this respect. In terms of FREQUENCY, *like* is found to be common, or even "ubiquitous" (Garner 1998), and it is mostly associated with speech, as evidenced from the references to MODE found in four of the ten entries. In terms of REGISTER, it is associated with informal colloquial speech, and the references to SPEAKERS confirm its association with young people or teenagers (Shaw 1975; Johnson 1991; Wilson 1993; Garner 1998; Parrish 2002; Brians 2003; Pickett et al. 2005). According to the two references to VARIETY, *like* is associated with substandard speech and with the variety of English spoken in California (Wilson 1993). Finally, in terms of VALUE, connotations of using *like* are mainly associated with its indexing of young people's speech, which is, as a result, associated with being "faddish" (Lovinger 2000) or as signalling "arrested development" in adults (Garner 1998).

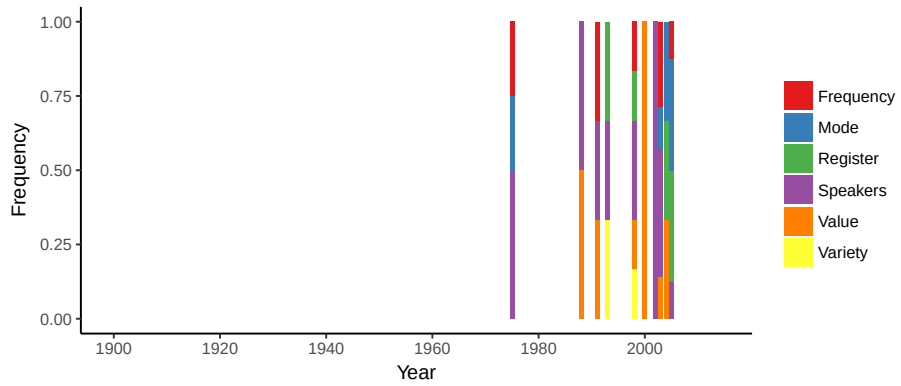

Figure 5.19: Dimensions of usage in the treatment of *like* (n = 38)

5.5.3 Non-literal *literally*

With 1.30 annotations per entry, non-literal *literally* was the feature for which I identified the lowest number of references to dimensions of usage (see Table D.10 in Appendix D). The distribution of these references across time is given in Figure 5.20. The figure shows that the majority of the entries contain a reference to FREQUENCY,

which might be related to the perception of *literally* as an 'overused' word. Entries which state that this feature is often or commonly used are found in many of the usage guides analysed (Strunk 1918; Partridge 1947; Morris and Morris 1975; de Mello Vianna et al. 1977; Bryson 1984; Gilman 1989; Johnson 1991; Sutcliffe 1994; Clark 2010; Pinker 2014), and this perception does not appear to have changed over time. References to MODE are present in four entries only. References to REGISTER and VARIETY are similarly scarce, and no explicit references to VALUE related to the use of *literally* were identified. Groups of SPEAKERS referred to are predominantly writers (Follett 1966; de Mello Vianna et al. 1977; Copperud 1980; Bryson 1984; Sutcliffe 1994; Peters 2004; Clark 2010).

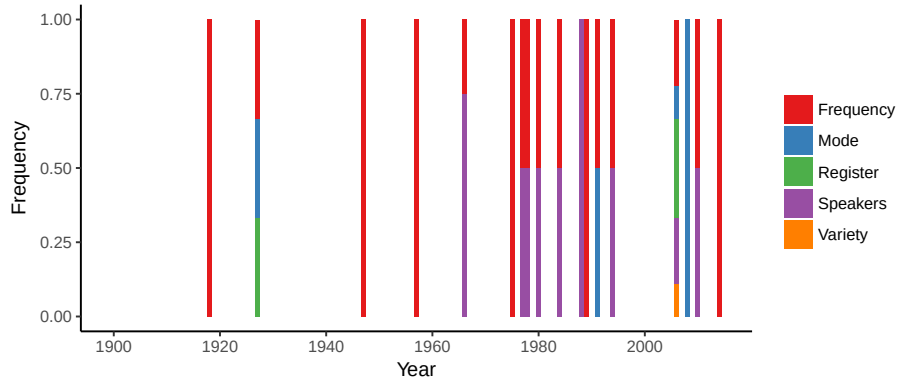

Figure 5.20: Dimensions of usage in the treatment of *literally* (n = 42)

5.5.4 Negative concord

Entries on negative concord contain the third highest number of references to dimensions of usage, with on average of 3.42 annotations per entry (Table 5.4; the complete list of annotations is given in Table D.11 in Appendix D). The distribution of the references to dimensions of usage is shown in Figure 5.21. Here again we can observe a trend similar to the one noted for *ain't* (Figure 5.18). With time, these references become more frequent and more varied. This confirms the trend observed for the treatment of the other usage features. In terms of frequency and use, the consensus seems to be that negative concord is indeed commonly used (Anonymous 1856b; Mathews 1876; Perrin 1950; Ebbitt and Ebbitt 1978; Gilman 1989; Wilson 1993), but that the context of use is non-standard English. Negative concord is found to be uncommon in formal standard English (Perrin 1950; Ebbitt and Ebbitt 1978), or

as used "by educated people" (Corbin and Perrin 1963).

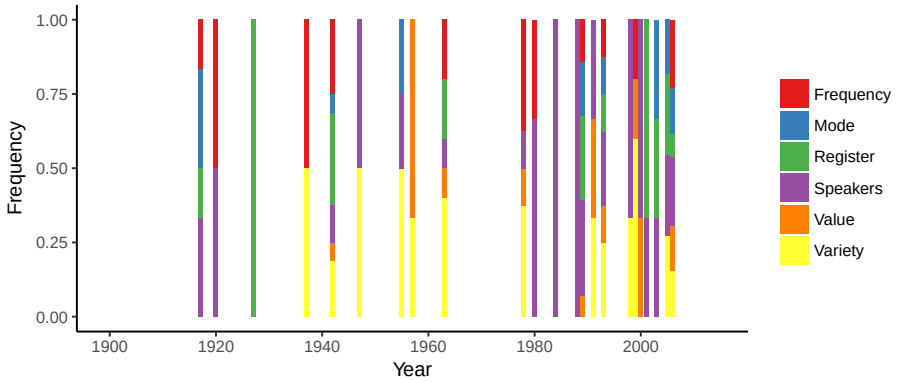

Figure 5.21: Dimensions of usage in the treatment of negative concord (n = 144)

These observations of FREQUENCY also relate to those on MODE and REGISTER. In terms of MODE, in 15 of the 42 entries, a distinction is made between the use of negative concord in speech as opposed to that in writing; this is not a high proportion, but it is nevertheless noteworthy that these kinds of distinctions are present. In terms of REGISTER, negative concord occurs in "conversation" (Krapp 1927; Gilman 1989; Peters 2004) or in jocular (Corbin and Perrin 1963; Wilson 1993) or literary (Gilman 1989) contexts. Groups of SPEAKERS are distinguished primarily on the basis of (a rather vague notion of) level of education, or with reference to language-related professions, such as writers, grammarians, or English teachers. In addition to references to language professionals, the groups most often referred to are the educated (Perrin 1950; Corbin and Perrin 1963), the less educated (Gilman 1989), and the "illiterate" (Vizetelly 1920). References to VARIETY of English in the entries on negative concord are predominantly references to the distinction between standard and non-standard English, which are present in the majority of the entries (Perrin and Smith 1955; Corbin and Perrin 1963; Ebbitt and Ebbitt 1978; Wilson 1993; Garner 1998; Peters 2004; Pickett et al. 2005). Only three entries refer to social varieties of English using terms such as "vulgate English" (Perrin 1950) or "the present idiom of the educated" (Perrin 1950). The types of VALUE referenced in entries on negative concord relate to the negative effects of its use in social situations. Negative concord is seen as not being in "fashion" among educated speakers (Perrin 1950; Corbin and Perrin 1963; Ebbitt and Ebbitt 1978). Furthermore, using negative concord is said to mark a speaker as uneducated (Evans and Evans 1957; Gilman 1989; Johnson 1991;

Wilson 1993; Peters 2004), and its use is consequently not recommended.

5.5.5 Pronouns in coordinated phrases

First person pronouns in coordinated phrases exhibit the same pattern of contrast observed in other levels of analysis, i.e. coverage (cf. Section 5.2.5) and treatment (cf. Section 5.3.5). Object *I* is more often discussed in usage guides, and there are consequently more references to dimensions of usage than for subject *me* (see Tables D.12 and D.13 in Appendix D). Figures 5.22 and 5.23 show the striking difference between the dimensions of usage found in the treatment of the two cases of pronoun use. Pronouncements related to the FREQUENCY of object *I* include observations that the feature is common and frequently used (Anonymous 1856b; Bache 1868; Ballard 1884; Payne 1911; Vizetelly 1920; Treble and Vallins 1937; Perrin 1950; Nicholson 1957; Morris and Morris 1975; de Mello Vianna et al. 1977; Ebbitt and Ebbitt 1978; Copperud 1980; Bryson 1984; Randall 1988; Booher 1992; Sutcliffe 1994; Beason and Lester 1996; Trask 2001; Clark 2010; Pinker 2014). Object *I* is found to be used in speech (Krapp 1927; Randall 1988; Gilman 1989; Wilson 1993; Pickett et al. 2005), and references to the distinction between speech and writing are present in eight of the 73 entries, which indicates that for this feature, the majority of the entries do not draw on this distinction in their treatment of this feature. REGISTER references mostly refer to colloquial use (Krapp 1927; Morris and Morris 1975; Copperud 1980; Gilman 1989), or to formal writing and literature (Ayres 1911; Copperud 1980; Pickett et al. 2005), and serve mainly to point out that object *I* is more characteristic of the former. References to SPEAKERS often mention "educated" speakers (Anonymous 1856b; Johnson 1991; Garner 1998; Brians 2003), as in the case of all other features. There are also recurrent references to language professionals, such as writers, authors, editors, and English teachers (Ayres 1911; Randall 1988; Sutcliffe 1994; Pinker 2014). References to VARIETY are found only in seven out of the 73 entries, and these are references to "dialectal speech" (Krapp 1927), "standard English" (Wilson 1993; Brians 2003), and "educated varieties of English" (Gilman 1989). In terms of VALUE, object *I* is seen as signalling "an attempt at refinement" (de Mello Vianna et al. 1977) or "a form of overrefinement" (Lovinger 2000). It is also "widely regarded as a sign of ignorance" (Pickett et al. 2005), or as a construction that can have negative influence on how its users may be perceived by other speakers (Gilman 1989).

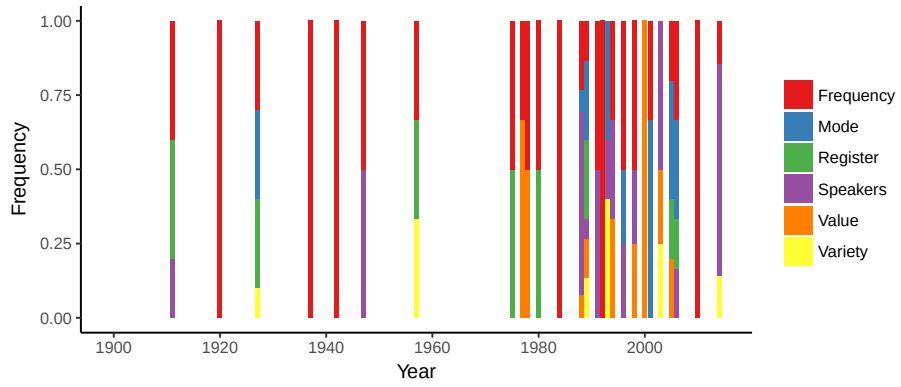

Figure 5.22: Dimensions of usage in the treatment of object *I* (n = 114)

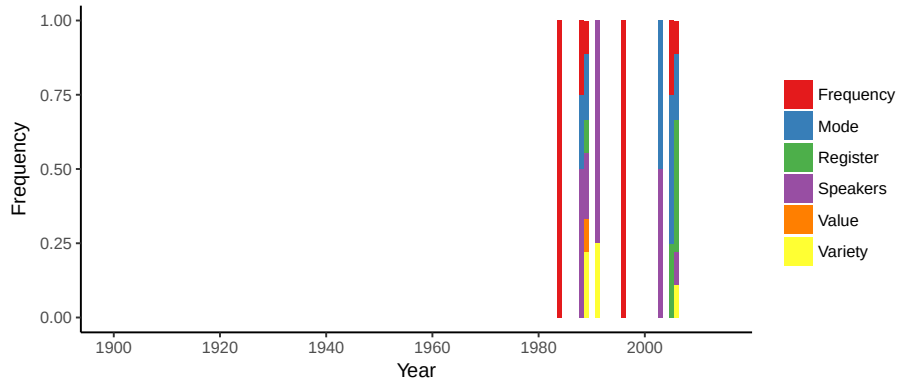

Figure 5.23: Dimensions of usage in the treatment of subject *me* (n = 35)

Compared to object *I*, subject *me* is not seen as "common", but as a feature that occurs "sometimes" (Bache 1868; Randall 1988), or is "quite rare" (Beason and Lester 1996). Distinction in MODE is found in five entries of the 19, all of which observe that this feature is usually associated with speech. References to REGISTER are less frequent, occurring in three entries only. According to these, subject *me* is used "facetiously" (Gilman 1989), or in informal "conversation" (Peters 2004). Groups of SPEAKERS referred to in entries on subject *me* are editors, proofreaders, educated people, and children. References to VARIETY take the form of mentioning what can be described as social varieties of English, such as "less educated English" (Gilman 1989) and "non-mainstream varieties of English" (Gilman 1989). Finally, in one of the entries, subject *me* is "associated with the speech of children" (Gilman 1989), which

can be considered to belong to the category VALUE.

5.5.6 The split infinitive

The split infinitive is somewhat unusual, in that the entries which discuss this feature are the longest, with an average length of 381.58 words per entry (see Table 4.1). However, references to dimensions of usage are not as numerous as those for *ain't*, *like*, or negative concord. I identified 1.71 references to usage on average in the entries on the split infinitive in my analysis. These are plotted across time in Figure 5.24. This figure is somewhat less clear than those for the other features in terms of a trend towards increase and diversification of the references to dimensions of usage over time. While a generalisation can perhaps be made that references become more frequent and more diversified, there are notable exceptions to this observation throughout the period investigated; note, for instance, the last two data points, where only references to FREQUENCY appear. The figure also shows that there are gaps in the occurrence of references to dimensions of usage, most strikingly for the 1940s. One reason for this may be the fact that there is only one entry covering the split infinitive in the usage guides published in that decade in my collection, found in Stratton (1949). An additional examination of this entry revealed that it deals with the intralinguistic constraints on the split infinitive, such as cases in which split infinitives are better than non-split infinitives, but it does not touch upon extralinguistic dimensions of usage.

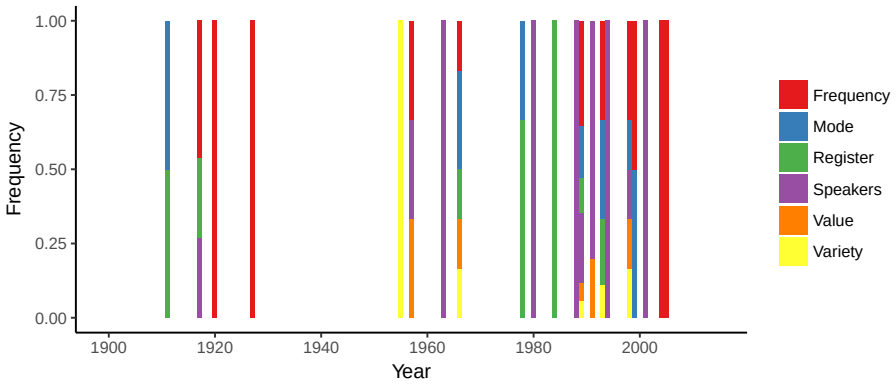

Figure 5.24: Dimensions of usage in the treatment of the split infinitive (n = 101)

Entries on the split infinitive most often contain references to FREQUENCY, followed by references to SPEAKERS. The other categories are less frequently found.

The references to frequency of use of the split infinitive show a lack of consensus. While many of the entries note that the split infinitive is frequently found in all types of registers and contexts, some entries observe that it is nevertheless rare compared to the regular infinitive (Hall 1917; Follett 1966). It should, however, be noted that Hall (1917) is a study of usage based on an empirical analysis of a corpus of literary works. It perhaps comes as no surprise that the observations made by Hall (1917) are contradictory to what is stated in other entries from the same period. Speech *vs.* writing distinctions, i.e. references to MODE, are found in ten of the 59 entries, supporting the idea that usage guides treat features without sufficient regard for differences between speech and writing, or differences between levels of usage. The references to register, which are somewhat more frequently found than references to mode, show that the split infinitive is found not only in colloquial or informal speech, but also in "general English". That this is a stylistic usage feature is also confirmed by the description of this usage problem as "a question of style" (Bryson 1984). Groups of SPEAKERS often referred to are "writers" (Compton 1898; Hall 1917; Corbin and Perrin 1963; Copperud 1980; Johnson 1991; Garner 1998). Varieties of English referred to in entries on the split infinitive are "standard English" (Perrin and Smith 1955; Wilson 1993). Finally, the VALUE associated with splitting infinitives is that it is seen as a "deplorable breach of etiquette" (Nicholson 1957), or as associated with "the speech of the less educated" (Gilman 1989). Interestingly, references to VALUE also refer to the connotations of not splitting infinitives, which is seen as "showing off" (Johnson 1991).

5.6 Conclusion

The first observation to be made on the basis of the results presented in this chapter is that the usage guide treatment of various points of usage is not always characterised by consensus. When it comes to attitudes to usage, the lack of consensus is more striking in the context of the split infinitive, and to some extent *ain't*. Furthermore, the lack of consensus is most notable in the context of references to dimensions of usage. A similar lack of consensus was identified for eighteenth-century English normative grammars by Leonard (1929), and notably also for French normative grammar pronouncements on the future temporal (Poplack and Dion 2009). However, this is only one aspect of the treatment of usage features. For instance, with respect to the frequency of negative concord, we find both observations that its use is frequent,

as well as observations that it is not; such observations are intertwined with references to REGISTER and VARIETY: negative concord is found to be frequent in colloquial, dialectal speech, or non-standard speech, but not in written standard English. In addition, where written standard English is mentioned with reference to negative concord, it is to observe that the feature is not common, but does occur in specific contexts, such as dialogue or fiction. Furthermore, this perspective also provides some evidence against the claim that treatment of usage in usage guides does not take into account aspects of language variation. This analysis suggests that usage guide writers sometimes do take into account aspects of variation in language, even if, in some cases, that variation may be criticised. Even though the number of guides which draw on facts of language variation is still rather small, it is a significant aspect of the usage guide tradition, which merits further investigation.

The second observation is that every usage problem has its own history (cf. Chafe 1984; Tieken-Boon van Ostade and Ebner 2017). There are striking differences in the attitudes expressed towards each feature, which is in line with the hypothesis of Busse and Schröder (2010: 100) that "long-standing cases of disputed usage are treated differently from more recent ones". While both Busse and Schröder (2010) and the present study show that there are indeed such differences, the results of my analyses do not always support their finding that more recent disputed usages are treated more descriptively than older ones, which Busse and Schröder (2010) concluded on the basis of comparing the treatment of *hopefully* with the treatment of *different to / from / than*. In the present study, the picture we see by comparing older and newer usage problems is more complex. A comparison, for instance, of the treatment of the split infinitive with that of *like*, or *literally*, reveals that in both cases more recent usage problems are treated more negatively. A generalisation would thus be difficult to make solely on the basis of the 'age' of the usage problem concerned; additional aspects, such as the extralinguistic associations or personal qualities which it indexes, can play a role in the attitudes to different usage problems expressed in usage guides.

The third observation, related to the previous one, is that prescriptively targeted language features cannot be lumped together in discussions or analyses of prescriptive influence. The most important case here is the split infinitive, as it is usually cited as one of the archetypal usage problems, and is assumed to have been heavily proscribed. As a result, as discussed in Section 2.3, in some discussions of language change prescriptive influence on the use of the split infinitive is readily postulated (cf. Fitzmaurice 2000b; Calle-Martín and Miranda-García 2009; Perales-Escudero 2011), on the basis of the assumption that prescriptive ideology strongly affects

this feature. However, the present analysis of treatment of usage features in usage guides suggests that prescriptive ideology has changed over time, and that the split infinitive is becoming increasingly more accepted. This, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, has important implications for the analysis of prescriptive influence on language variation and change.

The last observation is related to the importance of these results for the study of usage guides in general. The multi-level analysis of treatment conducted here may be reasonably assumed to indicate a change in the genre of usage guides. The increase in RESTRICTED and ACCEPTABLE entries, and the increasing use of positive attitudes, as well as references to dimensions of usage, show that even for strongly stigmatised non-standard features usage guide entries are increasingly likely to offer a more balanced, perhaps descriptively informed, account of those features. This balanced account is crucially characterised by a distinction among various levels of acceptability; the lack of such a distinction in prescriptive accounts of language use is often cited as one way in which those accounts fail to represent or discuss language use more realistically. My analysis thus provides counter-evidence to this observation, and suggests that, taken as a whole, the usage guide genre in American English may be moving, slowly but surely, towards a more balanced account of language use. Additionally, this also provides evidence that there is a clear group of usage guides that offer a more neutral, balanced, or impartial account, which may be related to Algeo's (1991b) typology of usage guides. Furthermore, the results seem to be in line with the findings of the comparative analysis of British, American, and Australian usage guides conducted by Peters and Young (1997: 318), which showed that American usage guides tend to have higher instances of referencing to other sources than British usage guides. Peters and Young (1997: 321) also found that, despite the great variation in types of usage guides in both the American and the British traditions, American usage guides tend to "accept" more than British usage guides. Ultimately, all this taken together could also indicate that in the future, usage guide treatment of language use and contested language features may become ever more influenced by descriptions of language use patterns.