Grassroots prescriptivism

Lukac, M.

GRASSROOTS PRESCRIPTIVISM

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Grassroots Prescriptivism

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For my mother

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Abbreviations

AE06	The American English 2006 Corpus
AHD	*American Heritage Dictionary*
AP	Associated Press
APA	The American Psychological Association
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BE06	The British English 2006 Corpus
BLOB	Before Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus
BNC	British National Corpus
COCA	Corpus of Contemporary American English
COHA	Corpus of Historical American English
CMC	Computer-mediated communication
FLOB	The Freiburg-Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus
GG	*Grammar Girl*
GloWbE	The corpus of Global Web-based English
HUGE	Hyper Usage Guide of English
LE	Letters to the editor
LL	Log likelihood
LLOCE	*Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English*
LOB	Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus
NPOV	Neutral Point of View
NYC	*The New York Times*
MLA	Modern Language Association
NS	Native speaker of English
NNS	Non-native speaker of English
PMW	(Frequency) per million words
POS	Part of speech
MEU	*Modern English Usage*
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary*
ODO	*Oxford Dictionaries Online*
TED	Technology, Entertainment, Design

1

Introduction

1.1 Grammar vigilantes

'For years I've heard rumours that here in Bristol someone has been skulking around the streets late at night correcting poor punctuation on shop fronts and signs. Now I always thought it was just an urban myth, but then I heard from a friend of a friend who said it was true.' This is an introduction to the BBC Radio 4 programme 'The Apostrophiser' (Ledgard, 2017) about a self-proclaimed grammar vigilante who garnered much media attention in 2017 for his mission to purge the streets of Bristol of errant apostrophes (e.g. Kentish, 2017). The so-called Banksy of punctuation (Morris, 2017), however, is hardly a unique case of public linguistic censorship enforced by a layperson. Inspired by the success of Lynne Truss's bestselling prescriptive guide to punctuation, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* (2004), Jeff Deck and Benjamin Herson created the Typo Eradication Advancement League and travelled around the US armed with markers and correction fluid righting the spelling and punctuation errors displayed in public spaces (cf. §3.2; Beal, 2009).

Since the web created a new public platform for both debate and publishing, it is unsurprising that the efforts to clean up and preserve the language have continued unfolding in digital form. Thus, in 2015, a Wikipedia editor, Bryan Henderson, removed 47,000 instances of the expression 'comprised of' from the online encyclopaedia on the account

of its redundancy (Shariatmadari, 2015). Henderson claims that ‘comprised of’ is a conflation of ‘comprised’ and ‘composed of’, and the more appropriate alternative is ‘consist of’. According to the myriad reports on the matter, grammar activism is widespread, and it is not only displayed through the public corrections of disputed items of language use. Attitudes and activities of the self-styled linguistic censors can also be traced through letters to the editors of newspapers that contain criticisms of usage features deemed problematical or nonstandard. Letters containing complaints regarding usage are arguably as old as the letter-to-the-editor genre itself. The dates of publication of such letters correspond to the earliest found in online newspaper databases, such as the *Proquest Historical Newspaper Database,* of which the following—criticising non-standard syntactic constructions found in American English—is an example:

(1) I read with interest an article in your Times of to-day on the phonology and orthography of our language. Will not your correspondent give our young and old men, our children and old women some scathing remarks that shall cause them to eschew ‘I done’, ‘I come to town’, ‘I seen’, ‘I hadn’t ought, had I?’ and a longer list, which I spare you, of syntax so abominable that the young ladies of ‘the family’, strange to say, blush when the ungrammatical member’s mouth is opened. (‘Solecisms of speech’, *New York Times*, 27 August 1876)

Prescriptive practices, as Cameron has already pointed out (1995, p. 2), are fundamental to language use. And, as Burridge puts it, they ‘belong to our tabooing behaviour generally’ and are part of, she claims, a wider ‘human struggle to control unruly nature’ (2010, p. 3). It is these prescriptive comments of ordinary people expressed in letters

to newspapers, radio phone-ins, online discussions, and even on Twitter, that are central to this thesis. Instead of focussing on formal acts of censorship that are carried out institutionally by language planning boards, governmental committees, and agencies, the present thesis sheds light on the attempts of lay people to identify and eradicate perceived linguistic mistakes, which are here dubbed 'grassroots prescriptivism'.

Before going on to describe the contents of my work, I would like to clarify several points and elaborate on the context in which the studies presented in the following chapters were conducted. My views on popular perceptions of language were shaped by investigations into letter-to-the-editor sections of newspapers across the English-speaking world (cf. Chapters 2 and 3); interviews with British journalists who were either in charge of their media institution's stylistic guidelines or were in constant contact with their audience concerning matters relating to language at the time this study was conducted (§2.3); online surveys devised to test the attitudes of the general public on usage (§2.4, §2.5.2, §6.3); and an analysis of online usage discussions found in a grammar blog (Chapter 4) and on Wikipedia (Chapter 5). Public views on language have also been brought into relation with actual usage based on patterns identified in state-of-the-art corpora—such as the Corpus of Contemporary American English (Davies, 2008–) (Chapter 6)—and the prescriptive advice found in both traditional, print usage guides (§5.2, §6.2), and their online equivalents (Chapters 4 and 5).

It is these three perspectives on language use, that of the general public, descriptive linguistics, and prescriptivists, that have been ex-

plored within the research project 'Bridging the Unbridgeable: Linguists, Prescriptivists and the General Public' (2011–2016) led by Professor Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade of which this study is part. In the attempts of bridging gaps among the three communities, I have reached out to the general public by engaging in discussions on the topics relating to prescriptivism, which is something that had rarely been done before this project began. I have also solicited responses from the public to questions pertaining to the acceptability of different usage features. Much of this communication was conducted through blog posts on our website (https://bridgingtheunbridgeable.com/) and articles featured in the *English Today* journal from the first issue of 2014 until the last one published in 2016. Considering the relevance placed on interaction within the course of my investigation, I have chosen to include examples of it in the form of my own *English Today* articles (Appendix A) and blog posts (Appendix B) in this thesis. These pieces exemplify an interactive and crowdsourcing methodological approach in linguistics, widely separated from the pronouncements of what Cameron refers to as 'the finger-wagging tradition' (1995, p. 3), in which speakers are seen as separate from the language they use, and their attitudes and perceptions relating to usage as irrelevant and possibly harmful.

It is worth noting that this study is embedded in a larger research agenda whose remarkable development I have been able to observe since I started conducting my investigation, and which I will here outline only briefly. In 2012, the field saw new editions of two groundbreaking classical works, Milroy and Milroy's *Authority in Language* (4th ed.) and Cameron's *Verbal Hygiene* (revised ed.). New comprehen-

sive accounts of prescriptivism, such as Curzan's *Fixing English* (2014), have appeared in print as well. Moreover, in spite of the recurring pronouncements that 'linguists have [just] not been good about informing the general public about language' (Bauer & Trudgill, 1998, p. xv), a number of linguists have recently been communicating their thoughts on usage and prescriptivism through blogs (*Language Log*, http://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/), TED talks (McWhorter, 2013; Curzan, 2014), podcasts (Slate's *Lexicon Valley*, http://www.slate.com/articles/podcasts/lexicon_valley.html), and even guest appearances on late night television (The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, 2018). Research projects on language standardisation have proliferated, a prime example of which is the Europe-wide network Standard Language Ideology in Contemporary Europe (SLICE). Studies on prescriptivism and its various aspects are continuing to appear in growing numbers in print and they are presented at conferences. (Five conferences on prescriptivism have been organised so far.[1]) Researchers are beginning to answer some of the fundamental questions relating to prescriptivism, the most prominent among which is: What is its effect on language change? (e.g. Auer & González-Díaz, 2005; Poplack & Dion, 2009; Anderwald, 2011; Hinrichs, Szmercsanyi, & Bohmann, 2015).

The five case studies presented here are the result of writing my way into an explanation of grassroots prescriptivism, which comprises yet another factor in this complex field. In doing so, I relied on both the methodology and theoretical insights stemming primarily from socio-

[1] The conferences were organised in Sheffield (2003), Ragusa (2006), Toronto (2009), Leiden (2013), and Park City (2017).

linguistics, more specifically, its strands investigating language attitudes, language change, as well as computer-mediated communication, and corpus linguistics, for the purposes of key word and key semantic analysis, as well as the presentation of frequency-related observations of linguistic variation and change. I will return to these in describing the work's outline at the end of this introduction.

1.2 The end of prescriptivism?

Two contradictory views seem to coexist among linguists pertaining to the current developments and the future of prescriptivism, one of which argues for its apparent demise, and another for linguistic censorship being as vital as ever before. David Crystal, in his chapter 'Into the twenty-first century' in Mugglestone's *The Oxford History of the English Language* (2006, p. 408), advocates the former:

> During the latter part of the twentieth century, a noticeable trend towards a more egalitarian society began to reduce the severity of social-class distinctions, recognise the value of diversity, safeguard the rights of minorities, and revitalise demotic values. The immediate linguistic effect was a move away from the prescriptive ethos of the past 250 years […] and it brought the introduction of new educational paradigms of language study.

Other linguists have also observed the parallelism between the relaxing social norms and those relating to language use and attitudes. In his 1997 chapter 'Parallel Corpora' in *Corpus-Based Studies in English*, Christian Mair offered social explanations for the diachronic frequency changes he observed in the four parallel corpora of the Brown family, Brown (US, 1961), Frown (US, 1992), LOB (GB, 1961), and FLOB (GB, 1991). He used the term 'colloquialisation' (1997, p. 206) in de-

noting a tendency for written norms to become more informal and closer to the spoken language.[2] The term has been taken up many times since then to account for the increase in the use of, to name only a few examples, contractions of negatives (*not* to *n't*) and verb forms (*it's*, *we'll*) (e.g., Leech et al., 2009, p. 240), the growth of the progressive in writing (e.g., Levin, 2013, p. 215), as well as zero-relative clauses, and *get*-passives (e.g., Mair, 2006, p. 189) (cf. Appendix B, 'Out with whom, in with split infinitives'). I also observed linguistic norms seemingly loosening in my effort to keep records of the changing guidelines among informal authorities in the English language over the past five years. As of April 2012, the Associated Press allows for the usage of *hopefully* as a sentence adverbial, and, as of March 2014, the same source accepts *over* to indicate greater numerical value instead of *more than*. *The Washington Post* made headlines across the world in December 2015 when it accepted the usage of the often-disputed singular *they*,[3] as well as the spelling *email*, *website*, *mic*, and *Walmart*, in place of the earlier variants *e-mail*, *Web site*, *mike*, and *Wal-Mart*.

The growing informality of language is not the only indicator of changes, but so are the attitudes towards perceived standards. 'Talking proper'—a phenomenon which Mugglestone traces back to late eighteenth-century London (2007, pp. 279–80)—has been replaced with the notion of 'talking posh'. The superior status of the standard is now challenged as well (Coupland, 2010, pp. 137–38) by the majority of those

[2] Biber and Finegan (1989, p. 515) preceded Mair's observation by a decade in noting that '[t]he development of a popular literacy fostered a shift towards more oral styles'.
[3] Singular *they* was the winner of the American Dialect Society's annual word of the year competition in 2015 (cf. Tieken-Boon van Ostade & Ebner, 2017).

who are not born into it. It has also been suggested, and largely accepted, that we are currently witnessing a kind of norm-levelling, destandardisation, or the democratisation of the standard through which non-standard variants are incorporated and absorbed (Coupland, 2010, p. 145; Coupland & Kristiansen, 2011, pp. 11–35; Armstrong & Mackenzie, 2013, pp. 161–207). In spite, however, of what we may expect at a time when many are arguing against discrimination and for equality of all groups of people, linguistic prejudices are still largely accepted (Burridge, 2010, p. 4). New generations of 'language mavens', 'pedants', and 'wordwatchers' (Millar, 1998, pp. 177–8) seem to be reiterating much of the older pronouncements in support of the standard language ideology. Severin, for instance, has shown in her sociolinguistic study of young Australians' attitudes towards disputed items of usage that, in spite of their greater awareness of the social factors governing usage, prescriptive attitudes and scrutiny remain among this group of speakers (2017, p. 79). A British example of a young person acting as a grassroots prescriptivist is included in the Albert Gifford story in Chapter 2.

The prescriptive backlash is also evident in the rising number and popularity of usage guides across the English-speaking world (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, in progress). These publications have not as a matter of course become more lenient in their approach since appearing as a separate genre in the eighteenth century (Tieken-Boon van Ostade & Ebner, 2017). Recent examples of usage guides that, contrary to linguistic evidence in favour of the features' spread and acceptability, continue to condemn, for instance, the usage of *hopefully* as a sentence ad-

verbial, or spelling *alright* as one instead of two words (*all right*), are Simon Heffer's *Strictly English* (2010), and Caroline Taggart's *Her Ladyship's Guide to the Queen's English* (2010). Bryan Garner is perhaps the best-known American answer to the current legacy of the prescriptive usage guide tradition. In spite of referring to himself as a 'prescriptive descriptivist' (Hingston, 2012) and making use of corpus linguistic tools in the newest edition of *Garner's Modern English Usage* (2016), he continues, in many instances, to make prescriptive *ipse dixit* judgements on language in disseminating usage advice (cf. §5.5.4, §6.1, and §6.5). Finally, this study too would not have been possible without relying on the plethora of language commentary that can be found in all types of media outlets, from newspapers (Chapters 2 and 3), and blog comments (Chapter 4), to discussions on Wikipedia's Talk pages (Chapter 5). As these accounts jointly demonstrate that grassroots prescriptivism, and not only the more institutionalised forms of linguistic censorship, is alive and well in the twenty-first century.

1.3 For how long has the language been in decay?

The short answer to this question is: probably since speakers were aware of any norms being attached to language use. A more detailed answer requires a closer look at the scholarship on the topic of grassroots prescriptivism. The most notable attempt to devise a theoretical account of popular commentary on what is perceived as incorrect usage was made by Milroy and Milroy in the first edition of their book *Authority in Language* (1985). The two authors introduced the concept of the 'complaint tradition' (cf. §5.1) to denote 'the form of complaint

about so-called misuse of language and linguistic decline, [which] has altered little since the eighteenth century' (Milroy & Milroy, 2012, p. vii). In their seven-stage standardisation model, they place the complaint tradition in the final stage of the process of standardisation, i.e. *prescription*, which follows the *selection* of a variety, its *acceptance* by influential social groups, geographical and social *diffusion*, *maintenance*, *elaboration* of function, and *codification* (2012, p. 22). Their model explains well the perpetuating nature of popular linguistic complaints. Although Milroy and Milroy's standardisation model builds on the one introduced by Haugen (1966; 1987), which is arguably the most commonly applied model among linguists, it differs from it in a fundamental way. Whereas Haugen views standardisation as a teleological phenomenon that reaches its final point when the standard variety is fully established, the Milroys see it is a '*process* which—to a greater or lesser degree—is always in progress in those languages that undergo it' (2012, p. 19). Moreover, Haugen's model lacks a prescription stage (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2012), which is relevant for the topic dealt with in this collection.

In describing the complaint tradition, Milroy and Milroy introduced a simple typology and distinguished between the so-called legalistic and moralistic complaints.[4] The authors define legalistic complaints as 'concerned with correctness [and the] "mis-use" of specific parts of phonology, grammar, vocabulary of English' (2012, p. 31). An

[4] A newer, fourfold typology of prescriptivism was introduced by Curzan (2014), although her account focuses rather on institutionalised instead of grassroots prescriptive efforts. In an attempt to disentangle strands of prescriptivism, she distinguishes among *standardizing*, *stylistic*, *restorative*, and *politically responsive* prescriptivism (p. 24).

example of such a complaint from the data collected for my analysis is the following comment from the *New York Times* on the usage of the euphemism *extraordinary rendition*. At the time the letter was written, debates took place in the US regarding the transfer of people from one country another for interrogation under torture, which is what the said euphemism denotes.

(2) How can this country maintain that it is a true democracy and the moral leader of the world yet permit atrocities under its program of **'extraordinary rendition'**? (2 March 2005)

The moralistic complaints, towards which the authors are more sympathetic, 'recommend clarity in writing and attack what appear to be abuses of language that may mislead and confuse the public' (2012, p. 31). They are anticipated in Jonathan Swift's *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue* (1712), and perhaps best exemplified in the still often-cited essay written by George Orwell *Politics and the English Language* (1946). A more recent example comes from the following letter to the *New York Times*, whose author brings to the editor's attention the usage of the term *partner* instead of *spouse* in reference to same-sex married couples:

(3) If Gary Sullivan and Mark Young married in 2005, why do you refer to Mr. Young as Mr. Sullivan's 'partner' rather than his spouse? Using the former term tends to suggest that married same-sex couples are somehow less married than their different-sex counterparts, whom you would never call 'partners'. (4 May 2007)

Prescriptivism is primarily seen as loaded with the baggage of the standard language ideology, which Milroy and Milroy define as 'a pub-

lic *consciousness* of the standard [and a *belief*] that there is a "right" way of using English' (2012, p. 25). What example (3) demonstrates, however, is that prescriptive rhetoric can also be harnessed for politically responsive purposes (cf. Curzan, 2014, p. 24). More recent examples of discussions relating to moralistic complaints see are included in Appendix B in the blog posts entitled 'Censoring the *G-word*' and 'Migrants: the language crisis'.

Previous research on the topic has covered popular linguistic complaints and comments appearing from the eighteenth century onwards. These earliest records of public prescriptive efforts were analysed by Carol Percy, who set up and analysed a database of book reviews in two eighteenth-century periodicals, the *Monthly Review* and the *Critical Review* published at the time (the database itself is still available online, http://projects.chass.utoronto.ca/reviews/) Percy's analysis (2008; 2009) yielded many valuable insights into the period in which language seemingly became an objective index of the quality of the book under review. Through the lens of the current analysis, the book reviewers are considered to be the earliest among the grassroots prescriptivists. They pointed out instances of non-standard usage to the readers, and such usage was interpreted as an index of the author's level of education, social background, and professional competence (Percy, 2010, p. 59). On the market in which high social capital was beginning to be attached to good grammar, reviewers became self-appointed language educators and entertainers of their readers by critically judging contemporary literature. Reviewers appropriated the ideology of standardisation, and by doing so they attempted to ensure their professional

legitimacy through the book review genre, which was just beginning to develop. Percy's is the first historical sociolinguistic overview of complaints in print media. Complaints dating from the twentieth century onwards are taken up elsewhere for analysis.

There are two trajectories of research among the studies that systematically account for linguistic complaints, those that seek to examine linguistic complaints by providing overviews of the problematical usage features and those that do so with the aim of analysing metalinguistic discourses. The studies conducted by Algeo (1985) and Crystal (1997) are examples of the former. Both authors examined public linguistic grievances expressed in the media. Algeo did so by analysing a variety of columns and letters by readers in the US, reporting in most detail on the *Dear Abby* advice column, which, in spite of not specialising in language, included many contributions that touched on usage during the long period of its existence (1956–2009). Algeo concluded that, in spite of a sizeable portion of the reading public being interested in language, it is the topics of lexis rather than grammar that are the subject of popular worry (1985, pp. 57, 63). Homophones (*wreck-less*/*reckless*), variant forms with the same stem (*healthy* /*healthfu*l), and redundant expressions (*most unique*, *personal opinion*) incite much debate. Conversely, grammatical items (sentence-final prepositions, the past tense of *hang* and *sneak*, *it is we*/*it is us*) are rarely discussed according to the author (1985, p. 64)

Crystal introduced a 'Grammatical Top Ten' list into *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of the English Language* (1997, p. 194), which was based on the letters commenting on the most disliked usages from

the listeners of the BBC Radio 4's program *English Now* hosted by the author. He lists the top ten features in the following order: (1) *between you and I*, (2) split infinitives, (3) the placement of *only* next to a word it does not modify as in *I only saw Jane* instead of *I saw only Jane*, (4) the usage of *none* with a plural instead of a singular verb, (5) *differently to*/*than* instead of *differently from*, (6) sentence-final prepositions, (7) *I will*/*you shall*/*he shall* to refer to future time instead of *I shall*/*you will*/*he will*, (8) the usage of sentence-initial *hopefully* in the sense of 'it is to be hoped that', (9) replacing *who* with *whom* as the objective form and (10) double negatives. It is worth mentioning that this list served as one of the starting points in establishing the categories of usage problems in the Hyper Usage Guide of English, or HUGE database developed within 'Bridging the Unbridgeable' project (Straaijer, 2014).[5] The database comprising 77 usage guides, and 123 mostly grammatical usage problems, its purpose, and some examples of the ways in which it can be used by researchers, are described in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this thesis.

Instead of focusing on single usage features as did Algeo and Crystal, González-Díaz (2007) and McManus (2008) examined ideological underpinnings of linguistic purism through a corpus-based analyses of reader letters from databases of *The Times* and *The Guardian*. González-Díaz (2007) compared the findings from contemporary sources—the letters published in the two newspapers in the period between 1995 and 2005—with the descriptions of the eighteenth-century pre-

[5] More information on the construction of the HUGE database is available on the project's blog (https://bridgingtheunbridgeable.com/).

scriptive strands provided by Watts (2000) and Hohenhaus (2002), which are listed in Table 1.1.

What González-Díaz found is quite indicative of the repetitive and perpetuating nature of prescriptivism (cf. §4.4.4). Namely, many of the historical strands mentioned by the two authors have survived until today and the ones that most commonly reappeared in present-day English were the belief in language as a symbol of national identity and the belief in a Golden Age of the English language.

Table 1.1 Mythical strands in in the ideology of prescriptivism according to Watts (2000, p. 41) and Hohenhaus (2002, p. 155)

Watts	Hohenhaus
- language and ethnicity	- the golden age assumption
- language variety	- primacy of written over spoken language
- language superiority	
- language and nationality	- confusion of language and classical logic
- language perfection	
- golden age	- the word is the basic unit
- undesirability of change	- literary language is the highest form of language

Both González-Díaz (2007) and McManus (2008) adopted Halliday's transitivity model in an attempt to discover differences in the ideological stance between the two British quality newspapers, one traditionally conservative and the other liberal and to identify a 'moral panic' in the letters.[6] Whereas they did not find any evidence of a moral

[6] The concept of 'moral panic' is defined as an episode 'where the media and society at large fasten upon a particular problem and generate an alarmist debate around it that in turn leads to action being taken against the perceived problem' (McEnery, 2006, p. 92). Whereas the term received academic treatment already half a century ago by, most notably, McLuhan (1967, p. 89) and Young (1971), in the context of linguistics, the term was appropriated much more recently, by, among others, Cameron (1995, pp. 83–6), McEnery (2006), and Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2013, p. 9).

panic in the analysed data, their studies produced interesting results nevertheless. McManus compared letters published in the 1980s (1985–89), that is in the period of the so-called grammar panic stirred by the national curriculum debate in the UK (Cameron, 1995, pp. 79–116; Milroy & Milroy, 2012, pp. 132–6), with letters published in the 1990s (1995–99). Significant differences were found only in the linguistic levels that the published letters addressed, for which McManus does not offer an explanation. Whereas in the 1980s the main topics of concern were related to lexical items (51%), which corresponds to Algeo's findings mentioned above, the focus in the letters studied by González-Díaz and McManus was on matters of orthography and spelling (63%) in the 1990s. Finally, both studies suggest that the *Times* letters are more alarmist in their tone when compared to those found in *The Guardian*. We can tentatively conclude that the letters published in the more conservative paper of the two are more prescriptive in their tone.

The introduction of the internet saw the rise of the complaint tradition in the new medium as a result. The 'digital' complaint tradition has been explored in several studies all of which explored online complaints within different research endeavours. Skrede Pontes (2007) thus analysed comments on two language-related blogs with the aim of exploring how the complaint tradition as described by Milroy and Milroy (2012) is reflected on blogs as new channels of complaints. In the blogs analysed, she found that people complained more often about written than spoken language and about grammar more than any other component of the language (such as spelling, punctuation, pronunciation, and usage in general).

Chapman (2012) looked at the relationship between politics and prescriptivism in the US by examining the online complaints made concerning the language of politicians. His analysis of web forums and blogs showed that linguistic prescriptivism wins most support from the political left. Chapman was not the first, however, to look at the correlation between political views and prescriptivism, Cameron did so before him in her account of the debate surrounding the national curriculum in the UK (1995, pp. 78–115). Her results run counter to Chapman's, as she found that it was the conservatives, and not the liberals, who were the most strident supporters of prescriptivism. It needs to be acknowledged here, however, that the comparisons between their findings are restricted by the differences between the political systems of the two countries and their different language ideologies (cf. Milroy, 2001; §2.3.1). Linguistic criticism of politicians, Chapman concludes, is premised on an assumed connection between a person's language skills and their ability to govern: people should be governed by the 'educated', the participants of the online discussions conclude, that is, by those able to use an 'educated style'. Usage in these debates may thus be seen as an index of group identity. Problematical features and 'incorrect' usage are, however, often not identified in any linguistic detail by the participants in the online discussions Chapman analysed. The complaints as such can thus be viewed as no more than stereotypes of the politicians' language and of the language of the groups to which they cater.

Finally, Heyd (2014) analysed folk-linguistic photo blogs that record linguistic mistakes and nonstandard practices in public spaces.

The blogs analysed in her study record the usage of emphatic quotation marks (e.g. *New 'management'*, *Fresh brown 'eggs'*) and they are in effect examples of language policing online in the sense that their authors are displaying nonstandard linguistic features and are consequently shaming and stereotyping the speakers who use them, as shown in Figure 1.1. Heyd found that, regardless of the explicit stance expressed by the blog authors in presenting the contents of their blogs, the blogs are all either overtly or covertly prescriptive. In the digital sphere, she goes on to conclude, folk-linguistic photo blogs are prime examples of grassroots prescriptivism.

Figure 1.1 Sample picture from a folk-linguistic photo blog (from Heyd, 2014, p. 491)

Whereas the case studies presented above focus on public prescriptive efforts either predating the internet or in their digital form, one

of the aims of the present work is to introduce a view that offers continuity and contrast between the old and the new media, as the analyses in Chapters 2 and 5 will demonstrate.

Moreover, a socio-linguistic examination of prescriptive efforts from below has so far been limited at best or based on anecdotal evidence. Whereas my findings represent only snapshots of grassroots prescriptivism, they are the result of systematic analyses of the demographic groups of grassroots prescriptivists, and at the very least provide provisional insights as to the backgrounds and motivations of the people engaging in linguistic criticism and correction.

1.4 Thesis outline

This work offers a new perspective on prescriptive efforts from below, which have been of particular importance in the history of the English language, a language that, for better or worse, lacks a single, formal, institutional authority. Although they take historical aspects into account when necessary, the case studies introduced are primarily synchronic and aim to capture the state of twenty-first-century prescriptivism. Methodologically speaking, while the current work can be placed alongside societal treatment studies—the approach within attitude studies in sociolinguistics that looks at content of various sources found ‘out there’ in society (Garrett, 2010, p. 51)—it owes equally to the tradition of corpus-based discourse analysis and tools applied in corpus linguistics and variationist sociolinguistics in general.

Chapter 2 directly connects with the basic sociolinguistic considerations at the core of the present research agenda. It attempts to pro-

vide a provisional overview of the landscape of grassroots prescriptivism and sets the stage for further exploration. A comparative perspective is adopted in exploring grassroots prescriptivism in both traditional and new media. The aim of the chapter is to answer the questions: 'Who are the people engaging in usage discussions?'; 'Which usage features are speakers particularly worried about?'; 'Can we trace any changes regarding the features addressed in the debates?'. In attempting to provide answers to them, I first turn to the analysis of letter to the editors of *The Times* and *The New York Times* published between 2000 and 2010. This rich source of data allows for insights into the identity of the authors, as well as for a comparison on the state of prescriptivism on both sides of the Atlantic. One of the few attempts of comparing the way that the standard language is ideologised in Britain and the United States has been made by Leslie Milroy (2001). My analysis sets out to provide empirically supported insights on the topic. The second part of the chapter explores the results of an online survey that set out to investigate the practices of voicing linguistic complaints in traditional and new media alike (cf. Appendix C). By doing so, a preliminary comparison is drawn between the traditional forms of grassroots prescriptivism, i.e. letters to the editor, and their digital counterparts.

Both Chapters 2 and 3 share their focus on letters to the editor. They differ in that whereas Chapter 2 aims to provide a top-down sociolinguistic overview, Chapter 3 focuses on a staple theme of usage debates in such letters, namely, the misused apostrophe. They complement each other in that together they paint a picture of the overarching

topics and identities of the authors of such letters, and of the discursive strategies they use. In attempting to answer the research question 'What are the characteristics of prescriptive language in letters to the editor?', Chapter 3 employs a corpus-based approach to exploring a collection of letters published across the entire English-speaking world on the topic of the misused apostrophe. The analysis relies on the corpus-based key word and key semantic domain analysis and contrasts the two respective approaches.

The next two chapters comprise yet another topical unit in that they both deal with instances of digital grassroots prescriptivism and bring them into relation with the traditional prescriptive canon as it is represented in the HUGE database. Chapter 4 looks into the comment section of the US-based usage blog *Grammar Girl*. The central research questions in this chapter are: 'How similar is an online usage guide to its traditional counterparts?' and 'What are the characteristics of the comment section of the *Grammar Girl* website?'. The findings show that, in spite of the change in the medium, prescriptive advice has remained much the same in terms of its content. By way of a qualitative analysis, the chapter chronicles the commenter identity constructions as well as the types of comments they post, the support for the arguments they offer, and, finally, their use of humour and anecdotes. Wikipedia's Talk pages comprise the second online platform for grassroots prescriptivism explored in this thesis. Chapter 5 thus sets out to answer the questions: 'How are usage problems discussed on Wikipedia's Talk pages?'; 'How, if at all, is the gap between lay people and experts closed in discussions on the respective platform?'; and 'What are the

differences between the advice formulated through grassroots efforts on Wikipedia and the usage advice disseminated by authors of usage guides included in the HUGE database?'.

Chapter 6 departs from previous chapters, which focus on grassroots prescriptivism proper, in that it explores the gradual, albeit limited, acceptance of a stigmatised usage feature, the controversial adverb *thusly*. Whereas complaints and speaker attitudes are explored, corpus-based analysis of the feature's usage takes centre stage. The question posed in the title, 'What is the difference between *thus* and *thusly*?', is explored through triangulation of research methods. The chapter examines the viewpoint of prescriptivists on the usage of *thusly* (by tracing the word's history in usage guides), the general public (through an attitudes survey), and its actual usage (as it is evidenced in language corpora). The respective methodological triangulation is included to exemplify the approach embedded in the wider agenda of the 'Bridging the Unbridgeable' project, namely, one that takes into consideration the three sides of the debate (linguists, prescriptivists, and the general public) in exploring the prescriptively stigmatised linguistic features. Chapter 7 revisits the key terminology, summarises the main findings of this thesis, reflects on the methodology, and looks towards the future of prescriptivism.

When I started my journey into this topic, the amount of material available seemed overwhelming, which is in itself a testament to the presence and relevance of grassroots prescriptivism. It has become clear quite quickly that the topic is complex enough to engage many researchers and their creativity in a number of ways, with the field only

starting to take a more distinct shape. This work is a summary of the paths I have taken in describing grassroots prescriptivism, and of the arguably early attempts at empirically examining questions that have until recently remained on the fringes of the discipline.

2

Grassroots prescriptivism: An analysis of individual speakers' efforts at maintaining the standard language ideology[1]

2.1 Introduction

People engage in discussions on which linguistic items are 'correct' and 'incorrect', 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' on a daily basis. They do so in private conversations, but also publicly by way of telephone calls to radio stations, letters to newspapers and, since the dawn of the participatory internet, on social media platforms, such as blogs, microblogs (i.e. Twitter), forums and Facebook. Conspicuously, however, in linguists' theoretical models of language standardisation, speakers have traditionally been marginalised as passive followers of the norms established by language authorities. The types of discussions mentioned are viewed as having no impact on actual usage or on what it is that constitutes the standard variety, while standard language norms are, according to such accounts, enforced by language experts, codifiers and 'model speakers [such as journalists and newsreaders] and authors' (Ammon, 2015, p. 65).

Deborah Cameron is among the most prominent figures who challenged this strand of thought more than two decades ago in her influential book *Verbal Hygiene* (a term she uses to refer to prescrip-

[1] Lukač, M. (in press). Grassroots prescriptivism: An analysis of individual speakers' efforts in maintaining the standard language ideology. *English Today*.

tivism). In doing so, she urged professional linguists to reconsider their perception of bottom-up prescriptive practices as 'irrelevant, futile and misguided' ([1995] 2012, p. vii). Linguists have since then continued to argue, from different perspectives, for the need to explore the role of language users in the process of standardisation (Hundt, 2009; Davies and Zigler, 2015, p. 4). My own study—which is part of the research project 'Bridging the Unbridgeable: Linguists, Prescriptivists and the General Public'—is embedded in this proliferating field of research. In my analysis, I explore bottom-up prescriptive efforts of language users from all social backgrounds, which I refer to by the term 'grassroots prescriptivism'. Bottom-up or grassroots prescriptive efforts are here understood as those initiated by lay members of the general public, especially in contrast to top-down prescriptivism that is carried out institutionally. Whereas the most commonly explored prescriptive efforts are those initiated by official language institutions and authorities, grassroots prescriptivists wage their battles in the media by writing letters to newspaper editors, calling radio stations and engaging in online discussions on topics relating to usage. In shedding light on such practices, the analysis of discussions on linguistic features that speakers stigmatise—such as the word *literally* to mean 'figuratively', and constructions such as *between you and I* instead of *between you and me*—proved to be a good starting point. Whereas it is fairly easy to identify where such discussions can be found, narrowing down all that is available to compile a collection suitable for analysis proved to be challenging. Nevertheless, the instances of metalinguistic discussions that I analysed in old and new media together with online surveys in which peo-

ple's practices of engaging in grassroots prescriptivism were investigated allowed me to explore, among other things, the following questions: Who are the people engaging in usage discussions? Which usage features are speakers particularly concerned about? Can we trace any changes regarding the features addressed in the debates? This paper describes the methodology employed in answering these questions and it offers provisional answers to them.

2.2 Who complains about language use?

People complaining about usage, whom I refer to as 'grassroots prescriptive activists', come from all walks of life. While we may expect older people to complain more often about linguistic decline, examples such as those of the 15-year-old prescriptivist Albert Gifford prove such expectations wrong (Gifford, 2014). Gifford obliged Tesco to acknowledge a grammatical mistake in orange juice packaging (*most tastiest* instead of *most tasty*) and received a considerable amount of media coverage as a result. Prescriptive attitudes to language are also often viewed as being intertwined with conservative beliefs and political attitudes (Cameron, [1995] 2012, p. 9). Chapman (2012), however, demonstrates in his analysis of online complaints about the language of politicians in the US that linguistic prescriptivism wins most support from the political left in this country. He suggested that the supporters of the Democratic Party associate stigmatised linguistic features with a lack of education of conservative politicians. A recently published study by Boland and Queen (2016) states that sensitivity to linguistic errors, however, has little to do with traditional sociolinguistic catego-

ries (such as gender, age and level of education), but that it is rather related to personality traits. According to the two authors, less agreeable and more introverted people prove to be more sensitive to grammatical errors, and it may be such people who tend to voice their complaints.

Although Boland and Queen's study is informative as to what kind of people are more inclined to evaluate negatively authors of texts that contain linguistic errors, voicing complaints publicly is nevertheless a different matter altogether from critically evaluating language use in private. Not all people who are sensitive to errors become grassroots prescriptive activists and write letters to newspapers or engage in online discussions on grammar. To explore the social background of this group of people I searched through newspaper databases of *The Times* and *The New York Times* (*NYT*) for readers' letters containing linguistic complaints, which is where metalinguistic discussions are documented in the pre-internet age. Seeing that public discussions on language today are largely led online, I decided to widen the scope of the analysis and, together with Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade, I launched an online survey in 2015 in which respondents were asked about their practices of publicly voicing complaints on usage both offline and online. The findings presented below aim to feed into wider debates about the participation in and the dynamics of grassroots prescriptivism.

2.2.1 Letters to newspaper editors

Both *The Times* and *The NYT* are quality daily newspapers ranking high in national circulation: sixth in the UK (Mayhew, 2018) and second in the US (The Associated Press, 2013), respectively. Quality press, formerly referred to as 'broadsheet press' in the UK, is distinguished by the seriousness of the topics it addresses (including politics, economics and sports), and the higher education of its readers (cf. Bednarek, 2006, p. 13) when compared to popular press. I retrieved letters from both newspapers published during a four-month timespan (March–July) across a period of ten years, between 2000 and 2010.[2] The search led to a collection of one hundred and five letters from *The Times* (comprising 7,769 words) and fifty letters from *The NYT* (5,692 words). Although the two collections are not representative of either the language-related letters published in national newspapers of the two countries or even of the newspapers themselves, they nevertheless offer an insight into topics written in such letters and into the identity of their authors, who are required to sign their letters and who occasionally provide personal information as well. The following passage taken from a reader's letter published in *The Times* illustrates both the typical format and content of such letters:

(1) Sir, Full marks to Sir Jim Rose for at last acknowledging the importance of oral grammar in our education system. More than course work, teachers must be encouraged to correct incorrect grammar in the classroom. Not an easy task but a very necessary

[2] Due to the number of letters published in newspapers it would have been excessively time-consuming to perform a manual search through all of the newspaper issues. Therefore, the respective four-month span was arbitrarily chosen.

> one. While going about this, perhaps they could help to discourage the use of the word *like*, with which most young people tend to preface each phrase. (*The Times*, 28 April 2009)

The author, while referring to a previously published article, focuses on a particular grammatical feature—in this case the use of *like* as a discourse marker—and identifies 'most young people' as language offenders. Complaints like these frequently offer solutions to the perceived declining language standards, and this letter does so by urging teachers to correct their students' grammar.

Before analysing the letters themselves, I conducted interviews with a number of British journalists who engage in dialogue with the general public on matters of linguistic complaints to find out how they perceived grassroots prescriptivists. Oliver Kamm, the author of the language column *The Pedant* published in *The Times*, describes the grassroots prescriptivists as 'generally […] people of an older generation who were taught "rules" at school and have been carrying these with them ever after' (personal communication, 6 May 2015). Stephen Pritchard, who is the readers' editor of *The Observer*, adds that topics addressed in such letters reveal the older age of their writers (personal communication, 11 December 2015). Gender, too, may play a role as to the identity of the people voicing the complaints, claims Ian Jolly, the BBC's chief style editor, who receives a large number of both emails and letters from the audience: 'If there's one thing I'd say they tend to be mostly men' (personal communication, 7 September 2015). If we look at the gender of the authors of the letters that I collected, Jolly's judgment seems to hold true in this context as well. In both newspapers,

males formed an overwhelming majority, with gender bias being lower in *The NYT* (M = 60%, F = 34%) than in *The Times* (M = 83.8%, F = 15.2%).[3] People writing to the newspaper also occasionally identified themselves further by indicating their title or profession (28% of *The NYT* and 18.1% of *The Times* letter writers), as indicated in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1 Authors of the Times and the NYT letters: sociolinguistic data

	Gender				**Language professional**			
The Times	M	F	U*	Total	Yes	No	U*	Total
%	16	88	1	105	13	6	86	105
The NYT	15.2	83.8	0.9	100.0	12.4	5.7	81.9	100.0
%	17	30	3	50	12	2	36	50
Total	34.0	60.0	6.0	100.0	24.0	4.0	72.0	100.0

U* undecided

Whereas professions mentioned included bankers and medical doctors, the majority of those who indicated what they did for a living were language professionals: English teachers, copy editors and professors of sociolinguistics. Although the people who wrote letters to the editor were not only lay members of the general public, but also language professionals (as many as 12.4% in *The Times* and 24.0% in *The NYT*), in their efforts the professionals too were engaging, I argue, in grassroots prescriptivism. They were contributing to public usage discussions instead of acting in their professional capacity. The contents of the letters written by language professionals indicated that in mentioning their skills and competence, the authors were attempting to gain

[3] In all but four letters in my collection where the name was either gender-neutral or only the initials were provided, it proved possible to determine the gender of the author.

distinction, lend credibility to the content of their letters and position themselves as experts in the public discussions on the readers' pages of the newspaper, as did this author of the following letter published in *The NYT*.

(2) **As a teacher of English, a part-time poet and a full-time wordie**, I took genuine delight in Patricia T. O'Conner's review of books about language by Ben Yagoda and David Crystal (1 April 2007)

By revealing their credentials, writers of letters—such as the one in example (2)—appeal to what the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls 'cultural capital' (1986, p. 242), that is, to the knowledge that they have as members of the community of language professionals. It is this type of specific cultural capital that raises their status in usage debates and distinguishes them from lay participants.

This sociolinguistic overview of the letter writers, limited though it is, reveals two points that are relevant for my analysis of grassroots prescriptivism. First, males form a majority among them, which thus confirms the gender bias identified by Ian Jolly already referred to and the findings of earlier scholars who studied the genre (e.g. Wahl-Jorgensen, 2002, p. 184). Second, language professionals seem to dominate the discussions on usage among readers of the newspapers studied. This may be because they are more interested in the topic than lay readers or because their letters are selected more frequently by editors. Media scholars generally agree that letter pages are dominated by authors belonging to social elites: those who are more educated, wealthier and are considered to be authorities on the topic (Hart, 2001; Reader

et al., 2004; Richardson, 2007). As useful a source on grassroots prescriptivism as the letters are, it needs to be noted that they form what are at best 'hazy reflections of the public opinion' (Grey and Brown, 1970, p. 580). The voices of those otherwise belonging to the less influential social groups are, by contrast, not heard in traditional public forums and many of them may not decide to engage in discussions and write letters to begin with. This general observation translates into the more specific context of discussions on usage as well. Finally, I retrieved twice as many letters from the British than the American newspaper. This is a consequence of what I believe is a greater interest in the phenomenon among British readers.[4] In my analysis of letters to the editor published across the English-speaking world (Lukač, 2016), I found that the practice of publishing letters on language use is not limited to a particular country. It is, however, the most popular in Australia and New Zealand,[5] followed by Ireland and the UK, and least established in the US and in Canada.

[4] The difference in the number of published letters to the editor may also be partly explained by the fact that *The NYT* had already dedicated a section to language use in its *On Language* column in the period between 1979 and 2009, which largely coincided with the period covered in my collection. In comparison, *The Times* started featuring its language column *The Pedant* only in 2009.

[5] The high number of letters on usage published in Australia and New Zealand can perhaps be explained by the factor Burridge and Severin (2017) refer to as the 'cultural cringe', which is defined as an internalised linguistic inferiority complex. Antipodean grassroots prescriptivists believe that theirs are stigmatised varieties of English, which exhbitit 'decaying standards'. To protect their varieties from further decline, the writers believe that proper standards need to be fiercely defended (Severin, personal communication, 22 November 2016).

2.2.2 The survey

Although letters to the editor may be among the oldest public media platforms, today they comprise only a fraction of public discussions on language: the liveliest arenas for such discussions can be found online. The survey which Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade and I created in order to find out whether and in what respect the participants of online discussions differ from those writing letters to newspapers was made available through the social media channels of the 'Bridging the Unbridgeable' project between July and September 2015. It was completed by altogether 212 respondents, primarily university-educated (93%) due to the channels through which we distributed it,[6] who included both native (NS) (55.6%) and non-native (NNS) (44.4%) speakers of English. Among the NSs, 55% indicated their variety as British and 25% as American English, while for the NNSs, the most commonly chosen linguistic model was British English (47.4%).

Very few respondents (16 out of the 174 who answered the question) confirmed that they had at some point in the past phoned in on a television or radio programme or written a letter to a newspaper in order to express their opinions on a particular linguistic feature. When compared with participation in online discussions (75/174), the difference is considerable: more people clearly engage in public discussions online than in traditional media, as the summary in Table 2.2 below goes to show. The reason for this is that there are fewer, if any, restrictions for doing so online; unlike newspaper editors, website modera-

[6] Since the responses were not obligatory, the percentages indicated are relative to the number of people who provided an answer to the indicated question.

tors can often be bypassed, since the amount of filtering and selection of potentially undesirable content online varies considerably from website to website. On the whole, publishing has become effortless in the new media, at least for those living on the 'right' side of the digital divide.[7]

Table 2.2 'Have you ever engaged in public discussions about language and grammar?'

Response categories	Frequency	%
No	74	42.5
Yes – online	64	36.8
Yes – other	20	11.5
Yes – in both traditional media and online	11	6.3
Yes – in traditional media	5	2.9
Total	174	100.0

Moreover, the participants in online discussions tend to be younger than the writers of letters to the editor. (Only 3 out of 16 letter writers among the survey respondents were younger than 40.) Speakers aged under 40 are well acquainted with an environment in which opinions are shared publicly online, whereas older participants were used to expressing their views publicly decades ago only through letters and phone-ins. Digital debates are thus not only gaining ground, but those led in traditional media are also losing ground as forums for public discussion.

[7] According to the website Internet World Stats, currently 51.7% of the world population are internet users <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm.> (Accessed 18 September 2017).

Nevertheless, the participation in usage debates is not equal in the seemingly more democratic online platforms. NNSEs were found to be less likely to engage in usage discussions—only 45 per cent of the NNSs who completed the survey had ever taken part in any public discussions on usage in contrast to 68 per cent of NSs—and when they do so, their comments do not centre around usage features in English, but rather on their own native languages. Arguably feeling that they lack the linguistic capital associated with NSs, NNSs feel less confident in commenting on other people's usage in English, and, as a consequence, they form a less powerful group in interactions on usage compared to NSs. This stands in stark contrast with the fact that the number of NNSs of English is far greater than that of NSs. According to Crystal's estimates in *English as a Global Language*, in 2003 (p. 69), NNSs outnumbered NSs by 3 to 1, and in an interview he gave in 2014,[8] he claimed that, with the number of NNSs steadily rising, the ratio has changed to 5 to 1. NNSs nevertheless remain on the periphery of usage debates, as the 2015 survey confirmed. My comments here are provisional, and further research is yet to reveal what roles NNSs play in debates on usage.

[8] The interview is available at <https://teflequityadvocates.com/2014/07/06/interview-with-david-crystal/> (Accessed 18 September 2017).

2.3 Which linguistic features are stigmatised in public discussions on usage?

2.3.1 Comparing The Times *and* The New York Times

Analysing letters to the editor from a US-American and a British newspaper allowed for a comparison between the linguistic complaints in the two countries. Regardless of the variety, among the lay community word choice is the central topic in usage discussions. Not only in newspapers, but also online, we can observe the importance placed on lexical choice in the numerous lists disseminated on social media featuring 'misused' words (e.g. '32 Incorrectly Used Words that Make You Look Bad' and '25 Common Words That You've Got Wrong') (cf. Vriesendorp, 2016). Such lists seemingly outnumber sites providing online advice on grammar, spelling and pronunciation. The specific lexical items that are addressed in the complaints, however, differ between the two countries: corruption by Americanisms permeates the letters in the British broadsheet that warn against '[British English] rapidly disappearing and being replaced with American English, usually for no good reason' (*The Times*, 9 June 2009). For the *Times* readers, the link between lexical choice and nationality thus takes centre stage. They, moreover, seem to advocate a culturally homogenous version of British English purified from outside influences (which they identify as primarily coming from across the Atlantic). On the other hand, political correctness constitutes the central topic in the American newspaper, as example (3) goes to show.

(3) Why do you refer to Mr. Young as Mr. Sullivan's 'partner' rather than his spouse? Using the former term tends to suggest that married same-sex couples are somehow less married than their different-sex counterparts, whom you would never call 'partners'. (*NYT*, 4 May 2007)

Complaints such as this one can be categorised under what Curzan (2014, p. 24) in her taxonomy calls 'politically responsive' prescriptivism, which 'aims to promote inclusive, non-discriminatory, politically correct, and/or politically expedient usage'. In challenging a journalist's lexical choice (*partner* vs. *spouse*), the writer of this letter champions political correctness, a movement that has perhaps had an overall greater linguistic effect in the US than in the UK (Nagle et al., 2000, p. 257; Hughes, 2010, p. 64), which accounts for the relative rarity of the topic in the letters from *The Times*.

The differences between the complaints from the two newspapers are not confined to the realm of lexis. The list of topics addressed per linguistic level, as well as examples of usage features, are included in Tables 2.3 and 2.4 below. British and American letter writers differ in their treatment of accent and other phonological features as well. Striking here is the difference in the frequency with which these topics are addressed. While British writers criticise the BBC presenters for mistakes in their pronunciation and express concerns regarding the high rising intonation in declarative sentences that is popularly called 'upspeak', phonology seems to remain for the most part unaddressed among the American letter writers. Such a difference is in line with Leslie Milroy's claim that standardness is perceived differently in the two varieties: 'popular perceptions involve accent in Britain but not in

the United States, where standardness appears to be essentially the avoidance of particular socially marked grammatical and lexical systems' (Milroy, 2001, p. 58).

Letters addressing nonstandard spelling found in computer-mediated communication (CMC) reveal an overarching moral panic in the period between 2000 and 2010 on both sides of the Atlantic. This is exemplified by this letter whose author adopts a caricatured style of CMC, which is commonly found in letters on the topic:

(4) i am a writing tutor, and i have noticed that a number of hi school students are now writing formal papers in much the same style as they use on the net – in other words, w/plenty of abbreviations, not alot of regard for punctuation, and most of all, virtually no capitalization. it is an uphill battle to get them to understand that essay writing is not the same as email. (NYT, 16 March 2000)

The alarmist tone surrounding CMC expressed here is not unexpected given the newness of the phenomenon at the time. Worries expressed by the writing tutor in (4), however, have been proven unjustified by a number of studies that showed that CMC in fact constitutes a positive factor in literacy (Plester et al., 2009; Wood et al., 2011). In spite of the recurring complaints among members of the public, according to researchers, (young) users of digital technologies are as a rule able to adapt their writing style to different contexts after all.

Whereas lexical choice and spelling conventions comprise the most salient topics of linguistic criticism in the letters analysed, finer points related to deeper syntactic structures of the language generally appear to escape the eyes of the lay observers.

Table 2.3 Complaints per linguistic level in *The Times* letters

Linguistic level	%	Examples of usage features
Lexis	28	Americanisms (*fall/autumn*; *train/railway station*); lexical semantic changes (*unveil*; *deliver*; *couple*); jargon (job titles: *Image Processing Consultant/dark room technician*)
Morphology	16	non-standard forms of second person plurals (*youse*, *yousens*, *y'all*); noun-to-verb derivation (*to be paradise*; *to be verbed*); blending (*unputdownable*)
Orthography	24	spelling reform; punctuation ('death' of the semicolon); CMC (abbreviations, emoticons)
Phonology	13	High Rise Terminal,[9] mispronunciation of foreign words in English; confusion of the BATH/TRAP vowels
Syntax	11	*that*, *which* and *who* in relative clauses; double negatives (*can't get no satisfaction*; *we don't need no education*); subject-verb agreement (*government*; *council is/are*)

Table 2.4 Complaints per linguistic level in *The NYT letters*

Linguistic level	%	Examples of usage features
Lexis	55	inclusive language (*black/coloured/African-American**;** partner/spouse*); jargon (medicine: *brain dead*; business: *vision*; *mission*); political euphemisms (*extraordinary rendition*)
Morphology	6	CMC neologisms (*delinquency + link > delinkquency* 'opting out of Web communication'; *cellphone + celibacy > cellibacy* 'opting out of cellphones')
Orthography	20	CMC (abbreviations); misplaced apostrophes
Phonology	1	native and non-native speaker accent
Syntax	7	split infinitives (*to carefully scrutinize*); dangling modifiers

[9] High Rise Terminal denotes high rising intonation in declarative sentences popularly referred to as 'uptalk'.

When grammar is taken up in the discussions, the features addressed include long-established and widely discussed usage items, such as double negation, the use of subject pronouns instead of objective forms (*I* for *me*), and split infinitives (forms in which a word or a phrase is inserted between the infinitive marker to and the verb form). Letter writers as a rule note few new developments in the grammatical system, if any at all.[10]

2.3.2 The survey

Although the readers' letters and the online survey were analysed separately and were not originally envisaged as comparative studies, several interesting differences emerged as to the usage-related topics that the letter writers and survey respondents identified. Some of the differences can be ascribed to the fact that the respondents reported discussing usage predominantly online, rather than in the old media. For them, orthographical mistakes were the main point of concern and the examples cited were often found in the context of the social media:

(5) Someone had misspelled 'dibs' for 'dips' in a Facebook post. I thought the mistake was a bit silly. (male, NS, aged 25–40)

Written language is foregrounded in the online environment, and consequently, orthography may be the topic of main concern, while grammatical, that is, traditional usage problems are fading into the background (cf. Vriesendorp, 2016).

[10] Mair (2006) makes a similar observation in *Twentieth-Century English*. According to him, anecdotal observations of language change often illustrate 'a minor lexical recategorisation within a stable grammatical system' instead of reflecting 'far-reaching and systematic change in grammatical rules and patterns' (2006, p. 17).

In contrast to the letter writers analysed, the survey respondents, who were arguably younger and many of whom had a background in linguistics, exhibited more tolerant views of language variation and change.

(6) I'm a linguist so I often participate in such discussions, although I almost never come down on the prescriptive side ;-). (female, NS, aged 25–40)

(7) I wasn't complaining; I was defending (being a lexicographer) (female, NS, aged 50–65)

As opposed to the respondents who expressed prescriptive attitudes, those who identified themselves as 'linguists' (as in 6) and 'lexicographers' (in 7) report not being annoyed by usage problems themselves but rather by complaints about usage.

2.4 Conclusion

Whereas usage debates can be found in all types of media and complaints come from people of varying backgrounds, participation in discussions on usage is not egalitarian. In the old media, such as newspapers, access to public forums is limited to privileged members of society, and in the new media, with all its promises of democratic participation, divisions continue to exist between native and non-native speakers, with the latter group being largely absent from the discussions. Descriptivism and tolerant views of language—based on the results of the survey presented—are championed across all age groups. The most significant variable that seems to influence the attitudes of the survey participants towards problematical usage features is an education in

linguistics and an understanding of linguistic variation and change.[11] Topics of usage discussions were found to vary depending on the context in which these discussions are held. They point to cultural differences if we compare the debates held on the letter pages of British and American newspapers, as well as to the nature of the different media. Orthography, the most superficial linguistic level, is currently taking centre stage in the digital environment. The findings of the two studies presented here reveal that the differences and the changes in the on-going usage debates and the topics they address remain indicative of the social environments in which they are embedded and the linguistic ideologies associated with them.

[11] This finding is in line with the discussion in Severin (2017), which explores in detail the relevance of age and education in accounting for linguistic attitudes.

3

Linguistic prescriptivism in letters to the editor[1]

THAT APOSTROPHE
Sir, – Apropos 'That Apostrophe', I have just seen a sign in one of our local shops: 'Open Sunday for Christma's'. (Sign's of the time's?) – Yours, etc., C. HARPUR
(*The Irish Times*, 19 December 1984)

3.1 Introduction

Complaints about English language use have been present in print media from the eighteenth century onwards (Percy, 2009). Language-related letters to the editor are a channel through which writers of these letters promote the standard language by stigmatizing nonstandard varieties. Linguists commenting on linguistic prescriptivism often describe such letters as forums for language pedants, where the often 'poorly informed' (Wardhaugh, 1999, p. 2) 'deplore various solecisms and warn of linguistic decline' (Cameron, [1995] 2012, p. vii). Until the proliferation of online discussions of language use and correctness in the last two decades, letters to the editor have been the best-kept records of the lay community's attitudes on linguistic matters (McManus, 2008, p. 1).

[1] Lukač, M. (2015). Linguistic prescriptivism in letters to the editor. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *37*(3), pp. 1747–1757.

The expression of attitudes towards language correctness has been more thoroughly studied in the context of grammars and dictionaries (Card et al., 1984; Sundby et al., 1991, pp. 38–53); however, hitherto there have been few studies on the expression of language attitudes in letters to the editor. González-Díaz (2007) and McManus (2008), for example, used *The Times* and *The Guardian* archives (1995–2005) to analyse ideological underpinnings of linguistic purism.

The study presented here aims to identify the characteristics of prescriptive language in letters to the editor by applying a bottom-up, corpus-driven approach on a corpus of letters written on the subject of the possessive apostrophe. Letters written on the possessive apostrophe were chosen for this study because the apostrophe has been widely discussed in the print media and the letters dealing with this topic are relatively easy to identify by a key word search.

3.2 The 'misused' possessive apostrophe

A discrepancy seems to exist between the arguably general agreement on the use of apostrophes in grammar books and usage guides (e.g. Burchfield, 2004, p. 466; Swan, 2005, pp. 464–5) and actual usage that often deviates from the prescribed rules (Sklar, 1976, p. 175). Deviation in apostrophe usage is not a new phenomenon. There are reports dating it back to the beginning of the seventeenth century: 'My earliest sighting [of the greengrocer's apostrophe] was in a cargo list (still in a US museum) of a ship arriving in Virginia in the 1620s. It referred, among other things, to 23 female slave's' (*The Guardian*, 4 March 2003).

The history of this punctuation mark has been all but straightforward (cf. Sklar, 1976; Barfoot, 1991; Beal, 2010), which earned the apostrophe the nickname 'the stepchild of English orthography' (Sklar, 1976, p. 175). In her historical account, Sklar (1976, p. 176) reports that the use of the possessive apostrophe was not adopted until the end of the eighteenth century, although the mark had already infiltrated the English language from French in the late sixteenth century (Crystal, 2003b, p. 203). Sklar concludes that, after a period of stability in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, 'the genitive apostrophe is gradually returning to the confusion from which it but recently emerged' (Sklar, 1976, p. 175). Linguists and authors agree that the apostrophe is on its way out (Sklar, 1976, p. 183; Denison, 1998, pp.119–120; Hitchings, 2011). This process, they claim, will hardly raise any ambiguities and misunderstandings (Denison, 1998, p. 120). Prescriptivists tend to disagree claiming that, once abolished, the apostrophe will need to be reinvented (Truss, 2004, p. 67).

A number of language pedants have engaged in elaborate attempts of apostrophe preservation in recent years. John Richards, a former journalist, founded the Apostrophe Protection Society[2] in 2001, whose primary aim is to 'preserve the correct use of this currently much abused punctuation mark in all forms of text written in the English language.' The society's website, along with other platforms such as Apostrophe Abuse[3] and Apostrophe Catastrophes,[4] contains web links and

[2] The Apostrophe Protection Society's website http://www.apostrophe.org.uk.
[3] The Apostrophe Abuse's website http://www.apostropheabuse.com.
[4] Apostrophe Catastrophes http://www.apostrophecatastrophes.com.

visuals illustrating the orthographic pet peeve. One of the best publicised apostrophe preservation attempts was the Great Typo Hunt, a nationwide mission by two young Americans who corrected hundreds of public typos during a three-month road trip and were imprisoned as a consequence (cf. Beal, 2010; Hurdle, 2010).

The possessive apostrophe has in recent years received a considerable amount of attention from prescriptivists, linguists, and the general public. Truss devotes an entire chapter (2004, pp. 35–67) to the apostrophe in her usage guide on punctuation *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*. In her account of twenty-first century prescriptivism, Beal (2010) argues that the greengrocer's apostrophe is the prototype pet peeve of what she calls 'New Prescriptivism' (Beal, 2012). Kress (2000, p. 9) describes the greengrocer's apostrophe as a usage item well recognised by many, the object of mild humour and evaluation. The fact that the possessive apostrophe is so often mentioned in a number of accounts on linguistic prescriptivism reaffirms its position of an 'old chestnut', a recurring linguistic item in debates on language use (Weiner, 1988, p. 175). The recurrence of the topic of the 'mis-used' apostrophes in language-related letters and its prototypical status in the prescriptivist tradition were the main grounds here for narrowing down the data collection to this particular topic.

3.3 Data

This study is based on a corpus made up of 258 letters to the editor collected from newspapers published throughout the English-speaking world between 1983 and 2013. There are 155,906 running words in the

corpus, and the average length of a single letter is 99 words (with standard deviation of 69 words). The letters were collected from the online databases *Factiva* and *Proquest Historical Newspaper Database* from 76 different newspapers published in Great Britain, the US, Canada, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand (for the complete list of newspapers see Appendix D). The files were selected by searching the letters to the editor sections of the databases for the key word *apostrophe*. Only the letters directly addressing language use were included in the corpus.[5]

The aim of the analysis of this corpus is to provide a contribution to identifying the common features of prescriptive language. For the analysis presented in this paper, the corpus was analysed for key words and key semantic domains by using USAS, an automatic semantic tagger (Rayson et al., 2004) integrated in the web-based tool Wmatrix (Rayson, 2009). The number of letters written on the subject of the 'misused' apostrophe has risen considerably in the time period covered by the corpus. This trend can be observed from Figure 3.1, which shows the chronological distribution of the collected LEs.

The illustrated data indicate a rising trend in publications of letters addressing apostrophe usage from 2004 onwards. This year, not incidentally, coincides with the publication of the above-mentioned bestseller *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*.

[5] In some of the older letters, the word *apostrophe* was used with the meaning 'digression in the form of address to someone not present'. It goes without saying that these were excluded from the corpus.

The discrepancies in the number of letters written on the topic over the years are not arbitrary, and for the time period from 2004 to 2013, these numbers are not influenced by the overall number of letters in the two databases.

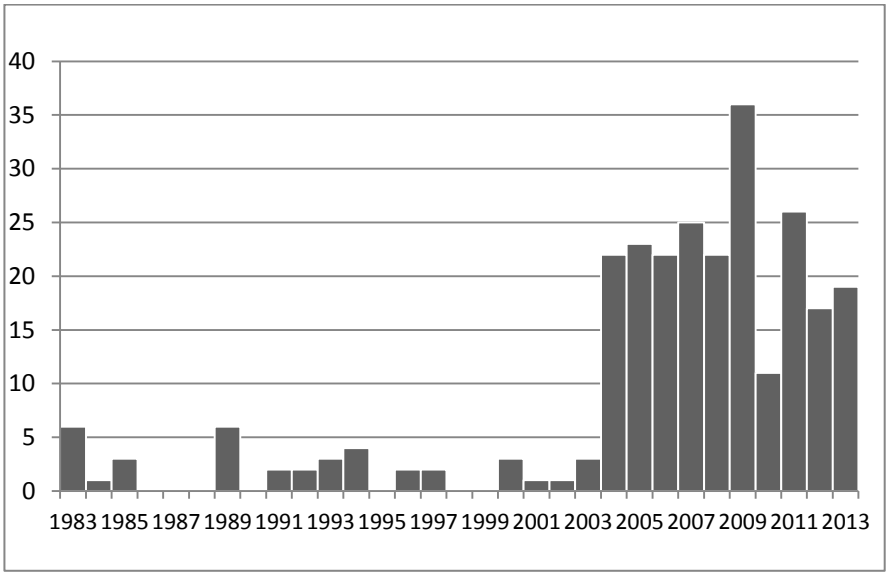


Figure 3.1 Diachronic distribution in the Letters corpus (N=258)

Prior to 2004, there are generally fewer letters to the editor included in both *Factiva* and *Proquest Historical Newspaper Database.* Authors of letters on linguistic usage are often motivated by individual examples of 'bad' grammar which they encounter in various public locations, however, there are also certain broader social events which influence the occasional rise in the number of featured letters. The Birmingham city council decided to remove apostrophes from street and road signs in 2009 (*Birmingham Post*, 2 February 2009; 3 February 2009) and in 2013, the Mid-Devon district council decided to follow suit (*Daily Telegraph*, 18 March 2013; *Times*, 21 March 2013). The bookshop Water-

stones left out the apostrophe from its name in 2012 (*Telegraph*, 14 January 2012; *Daily Telegraph*, 14 January 2012), causing another wave of reactions. Changes in orthography on public signs and in shop names signal a wider social acceptance of apostrophe dropping,[6] causing strong reactions from the letter writers that consequently prompt them to complain publically.

3.4 Semantic analysis

3.4.1 Key words and key semantic domains

The analysis of key words is one of the most commonly applied procedures in corpus linguistics (Baker, 2004, p. 346). Words are identified as key if their frequency is unusually high when compared to a certain norm in the form of a reference corpus (Scott, 1998, p. 62). Key word lists are useful indicators of the 'aboutness' of a text, as they usually reveal the lexical focus or preoccupations of a corpus (Baker, 2010, p. 26). Two criteria need to be fulfilled for a word to be identified as key: the word has to appear in a corpus a certain number of times, and the word's frequency of occurrence in the analysed corpus when compared with a reference corpus should be statistically significant (Scott, 1998, p. 64). The statistical significance in the current study was calculated by applying the log likelihood (LL) test. Words were considered to be key

[6] Waterstones is the latest in the line of British companies to leave out the apostrophe. Barfoot (1991, pp. 129–134) reports on the statements from Barclays Bank, Boots, Harrods, Lloyds Bank, and Selfridges concerning their abandonment of the apostrophe. The grounds provided for abandonment differ, but the companies agree on legal and advertising convenience of the simplified spelling.

at the 0.01% level ($p < 0.0001$; critical value = 15.13) and when they occurred at least five times in the corpus.

The USAS semantic analysis system (Rayson et al., 2004), additionally applied in this study, expands on the keyness method by utilising part-of-speech (POS) and semantic tags. The USAS system enables automatic semantic analysis of text and produces lists of key semantic domains instead of individual words. USAS taxonomy was originally based on the *Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English* (LLOCE). It includes 21 major discourse fields (Table 3.1) and a total of 232 semantic categories (Rayson et al., 2004, p. 3).

Table 3.1 USAS tagset top level domains (from Rayson et al., 2004, p. 3)

A	General & Abstract Terms
B	The Body and the Individual
C	Arts and Crafts
E	Emotional Actions, States and Processes
F	Food & Farming
G	Government & the Public Domain
H	Architecture, Building, Houses & the Home
I	Money and Commerce
K	Entertainment, Sports & Games
L	Life & Living Things
M	Movement, Location, Travel & Transport
N	Numbers & Measurement
O	Substances, Materials, Objects & Equipment
P	Education
Q	Linguistic Actions, States & Processes
S	Social Actions, States & Processes
T	Time
W	The World & Our Environment
X	Psychological Actions, States & Processes
Y	Science and Technology
Z	Names & Grammatical Words

It should be noted that the semantic tags in the 150-thousand-word corpus were not manually corrected. Rayson et al. (2004) report on an

overall 91% precision of the USAS semantic tagger when applied to an evaluation corpus.

There are several advantages to the USAS approach. Whereas key word lists are made up of individual words, the USAS tagger additionally identifies over- and underused multiword expressions. The USAS system includes POS and semantic tagging which makes this system more context-sensitive compared to key word lists. By grouping key words in semantic domains, categories for analysis are reduced and individual low-frequency words that belong to a relevant semantic category are not overlooked by the researcher (Rayson, 2008, p. 526). Finally, collecting words into semantic fields indicates trends in the analysed corpus that are not visible *prima facie* in a key word list (Rayson, 2008, p. 542).

3.4.2 Key word analysis

When compared with a reference corpus, top key words of an analysed corpus are often related to the stylistic features and the topic of the texts that make up a corpus (cf. Scott, 1998). The reference corpus used in the present analysis is the BNC Written Sampler (2005). The BNC Written Sampler is a one-million-word corpus compiled to mirror the composition of the full BNC to the greatest extent possible. In Table 3.2, the first twelve key words in the Letters corpus are listed when compared to the BNC Written Sampler.

The top key words in the Letters corpus in Table 3.2 are predominantly related to grammar and punctuation (*apostrophes*, *apostrophe*,

grammar, *punctuation*, *spelling*, *possessive*, *plural*, and *language*), which is in accordance with the topic discussed in the letters.

Table 3.2 First twelve key words in the Letters corpus

	Key word	Frequency Letters	%Letters	Frequency BNC Written	%BNC Written	LL
1.	*Apostrophes*	85	0.35	0	0.00	633.04
2.	*Apostrophe*	65	0.27	0	0.00	484.09
3.	*Grammar*	56	0.23	4	0.00	387.87
4.	*Punctuation*	55	0.23	3	0.00	386.15
5.	*Sir*	88	0.37	146	0.02	352.65
6.	*Spelling*	47	0.20	2	0.00	333.42
7.	*I*	407	1.70	6904	0.71	226.60
8.	*Possessive*	34	0.14	5	0.00	223.59
9.	*Plural*	32	0.13	3	0.00	217.99
10.	*Language*	53	0.22	94	0.01	207.12
11.	*sign*	46	0.19	59	0.01	201.52
12.	*Letters*	48	0.20	73	0.01	198.51

LL > 15.13 ($p < 0.0001$)

However, the key word *Sir* and the first person pronoun indicate stylistic features. The formula *Dear Sir* or *Sir* (see the example in Introduction) is traditionally used in addressing the editor in the beginning of letters. The first person pronoun is a linguistic cue for a more personalised style of the letters where the addressor is more highly involved (Biber, 1995, p. 59). Previous studies have also shown that one of the primary characteristics of this genre is the overt expression of the authors' personal opinions (Pounds, 2005, p. 69).

Finally, there are key words that appear frequently in the corpus, but are seemingly unrelated to either the topic or to specific stylistic features, such as the word *sign*. Further examination of concordance

lines for the word *sign* reveals that traffic and shop signs are often mentioned in the context of 'misused' apostrophe examples.

(1) It is equally confusing to have an apostrophe where one should not be, as in 'Not suitable for HGV's'. The first time I saw this sign I thought something had been deleted or fallen off, for example 'trailers' or 'heavy wheels' or whatever. Alas, it had not. (*Gloucestershire Echo*, 22 September 2009)

(2) Among all this mind-bending pollution, one example stands out: a large sign on the back of a building that is obviously occupied by a tattooist who is hard at work on all sorts of things except the study of punctuation. The sign reads: 'TATTOO'S' (*The Australian*, 16 February 2010).

3.4.3 Key semantic domains

The same differentiation as for types of key words can be applied in distinguishing among key semantic domains. Semantic domains are primarily identified as key because of their relationship to the discourse topic or because they indicate genre characteristics of letters to the editor. Another category, namely those semantic domains that are not directly related to either topic or genre characteristics, will be examined in more detail. The hypothesis here is that these domains might reveal recurring topics and styles of argumentation in the letters, and subsequently will help identify characteristics of the discourse of linguistic prescriptivism.

The thirty-five semantic domains in Table 3.3 are ordered according to the log likelihood (LL) values they scored when compared to the BNC Written Sampler. The initial semantic domains that were identified as key were grouped into three categories: *Genre and topic*,

Providing factual evidence, and *Prescriptive language*. These categories were introduced following a qualitative, in-depth analysis.

Table 3.3 Key semantic domains in the Letters corpus

	Semantic domain	Frequency Letters	% Letters	Frequency BNC Written	% BNC Written	LL
1.	Language, speech and grammar	721	3.01	1653	0.17	2,535.33
2.	Paper documents and writing	345	1.44	3691	0.38	393.15
3.	Evaluation: Inaccurate	88	0.37	344	0.04	235.45
4.	Education in general	270	1.13	3691	0.38	219.73
5.	Evaluation: Accurate	81	0.34	544	0.06	147.81
6.	Personal names	673	2.81	16,434	1.70	141.31
7.	Using	151	0.63	1,965	0.20	132.38
8.	Greedy	38	0.16	117	0.01	116.07
9.	The Media: Newspapers etc.	84	0.35	828	0.09	105.40
10.	Negative	331	1.38	8,052	0.83	70.47
11.	Unethical	49	0.20	516	0.05	56.92
12.	Pronouns	2,090	8.72	72,023	7.44	49.16
13.	The Media: Books	97	0.40	1741	0.18	48.03
14.	Business: Selling	131	0.55	2,738	0.28	44.86
15.	Vehicles and transport on land	106	0.44	2,171	0.22	38.33
16.	Seen	14	0.06	53	0.01	38.17
17.	Unsuitable	11	0.05	27	0.00	37.51
18.	Knowledgeable	108	0.45	2,302	0.24	35.03
19.	Probability	36	0.15	448	0.05	33.66
20.	Existing	738	3.08	24,177	2.50	29.63
21.	Not understanding	22	0.09	212	0.02	28.32
22.	Unexpected	15	0.06	100	0.01	27.54
23.	Speech acts	323	1.35	9,724	1.00	24.80
24.	Strong obligation or necessity	179	0.75	4,861	0.50	24.22
25.	Avoiding	27	0.11	354	0.04	23.41
26.	Time: Period	279	1.16	8,327	0.86	22.63

27.	Quantities: Little	11	0.05	65	0.01	22.25
28.	Food	117	0.49	2,974	0.31	21.08
29.	Non-existing	6	0.03	14	0.00	20.93
30.	The Media	39	0.16	740	0.08	17.04
31.	Judgement of appearance: Ugly	36	0.15	660	0.07	17.01
32.	Alive	11	0.05	93	0.01	16.25
33.	Sad	47	0.20	979	0.10	16.24
34.	Degree: Non-specific	35	0.15	653	0.07	15.90
35.	Linguistic Actions, States and Processes; Communication	98	0.41	2564	0.26	15.67

LL > 15.13 ($p < 0.0001$)

In the following sections, I will provide a more detailed analysis of the three categories relevant for the analysis presented here, *Genre and Topic* (cf. §3.4.3.1), *Providing factual evidence* (cf. §3.4.3.2), and *Prescriptive Language* (cf. §3.4.3.3), by describing the semantic domains belonging to these three categories and the lexical items within the semantic domains. Several key semantic domains were not included in the present analysis and were categorised under *Other*, these semantic domains are: *Education in general*, *Knowledgeable*, *Probability*, *Existing*, *Not understanding*, *Unexpected*, *Speech acts*, *Avoiding*, *Quantities: little*, *Non-existing*, *Alive*, *Degree: Non-specific*, and *Linguistic Actions, States and Processes*. Several of these uncategorised semantic domains can be attributed to a great number of lexical items in the corpus which are specific for the genres where 'stance' or epistemic or attitudinal comments on propositional information are expressed (*Knowledgeable, Speech Acts, Linguistic Actions, States and Processes*) (cf. Biber, 2004). Others, such as *Education in general* play a relevant multifaceted role in the prescriptivist discourse and were therefore not cate-

gorised in a single domain, but will be analysed elsewhere in more detail and length that is currently beyond the scope of this paper.

2.4.3.1 Genre and topic

The semantic domains *Language, speech and grammar*, *Using*, *Greedy* and *The Media: Books* are identified as key because they contain lexical items directly related to the topic of language use. The lexical items overrepresented in the Letters corpus are related to the discourse of grammar, language use and literacy.

The categorisation in Table 3.4 reveals a type of possible imprecision of the USAS system. Words indicating the grammatical functions *possessive* and *possessiveness* are categorised in the discourse field *Greedy*. The subsequent categorisation that is presented here, however, also enables critical reflection on the automatically attributed categories and creating hyper-categories.

In Table 3.5, the semantic domain of the letter to the editor may be delineated with the six respective categories: *Paper documents and writing*, *Personal names*, *Pronouns*, *The Media: Newspapers*, *The Media* and *Time: Period*. *Paper documents and writing* is a domain consisting of lexical items that reveal references to the newspaper, the letters themselves and the act of writing and editing.

Personal names mostly appear in letter signatures and when the authors refer back to correspondents; however, this semantic domain is of special interest also for the analysis of linguistic prescriptivism. Authors occasionally refer to the names of the individuals who are considered to be authority figures in questions of language use.

Table 3.4 Semantic domains: Topic

Semantic domain	Lexical items
Language speech and grammar	*abbreviation*, *accent*, *adjective*, *ambiguity*, *apostrophe*, *colloquial*, *colloquialisms*, *colons*, *comma*, *English*, *exclamation*, *expression*, *genitive*, *gerund*, *grammar*, *grammatical*, *grammatically*, *homonyms*, *illiterate*, *illiteracy*, *infinitive*, *intonation*, *language*, *linguistic*, *literate*, *misspelling*, *noun*, *paragraph*, *parlance*, *person*, *phonetic*, *phrase*, *plural*, *pragmatic*, *prefix*, *preposition*, *pronounce*, *pronunciation*, *prose*, *punctuate*, *punctuation*, *read*, *rhetorical*, *rhyme*, *semicolon*, *sentence*, *slang*, *spell*, *spelling*, *syllable*, *syntax*, *translator*, *usage*, *verb*, *vernacular*, *vocabulary*, *word*
Using	*use* (v.)
Greedy	*possessive*, *possessiveness*
The Media: Books	*book*, *dictionary*, *writer*, *reader*, *publisher*, *author*, *pedant*, *library*, *manual*, *proof reader*, *literature*, *copy editor*, *grammar book*, etc.

Language professionals mentioned are commonly usage guide authors, such as Lynne Truss, and authors of classical literary works, such as Shakespeare, Dickens, Chaucer, James Joyce, and George Bernard Shaw.

By citing language professionals and literary figures, the authors are referring to linguistic authorities whose usage is exemplary on the one hand and displaying their knowledge of the field on the other. The semantic domain *Pronouns* points to the personalised style of letters to the editor when compared to a balanced written corpus.

References to the print media are also characteristic of the genre. Finally, the letters often mention specific dates (*Time: Period*) when they refer to the previously published letters that also address usage ‘Letters, September 30’, ‘Letters, January 6’, etc. Letters are often not isolated occurrences; correspondence is rather established among their

authors about usage items that on occasion continues to be printed in the respective newspapers over periods of time.

Table 3.5 Semantic domains: Genre

Semantic domain	Lexical items
Paper documents and writing	*letter, page, written, write, print, notice, billboard, hyphen, document, delete, leaflet, list, record, address*, etc.
Personal names	*Brian Alderson, Elizabeth Woodville, David Crystal, Dolores Schuh, Monica Birch, Simon Caplan, Prince George*, etc.
Pronouns	*I, it, its, my, myself, one, our, ourselves, own, something, that, their, themselves, these, this, those, us, we, what, whatever, which, who, whose, your, yours*
The Media: Newspapers	*article, columnist, correspondent, editorial, sub-editors, Gazette, headline, journal, journalism, journalistic, magazine, newsletter, newspaper, front-page, reader, reporter*
The Media	*editor, media, publication, publish, publishing, reviewer, serial, subeditor, title*
Time: Period	*December 2010, Monday, November, September 8, March 5, Jan 25*, etc.

3.4.3.2 Providing factual evidence

Other semantic domains identified as key are *Business: Selling*, *Vehicles and transport on land*, *Seen*, and *Food*. In exemplifying the mistakes in the use of punctuation, the authors consistently refer to these three domains, more specifically, to the misspelled signs in shops, at the grocer's and in traffic.

Claims in the letters are commonly supported by providing factual evidence through examples, figures, facts, and specific occurrences (Pounds, 2005, p. 67). Examples from personal experience are often introduced by the verb *to notice*, as in (3):

(3) In my local market today, I noticed five unnecessary apostrophes. (*The Guardian*, 1 February 1996)

Table 3.6 Semantic domains: Providing factual evidence

Semantic domain	Lexical items
Business: Selling	*ad, advert, advertise, advertisement, advertising, auction, brand, car, centre, consumer, customer, customer services, mall, market, market stalls, market stall holders, marketers, marketing, merchant, realtor, rental, retailer, sale, sell, service, shop, store, supermarket, trade, trader*
Vehicles and transport on land	*approach, road, autobus, avenue, bike, bus, car, car park, cycle, path, cyclist, drive, HGV, lane, motorist, pathway, pedestrian, pram, railway, Rd, road, roadside, road work, sidewalk, station, street, taxi, trailer, vehicle*
Seen	*notice* (v.)
Food	*avocado, banana, bean, beef, breakfast, brunch, butcher, café, cafeteria, carrot, chef, cook, curry, dine, dining, dinner, eat, food, fruit, greengrocer, grocer, grocery, ice-cream, left-over, lunch, marmalade, meal, menu, nutrition, orange, pancake, pea, pear, peel, peppered, pizza, restaurant, sandwich, sausage, spread, store, supper, taco, toast, tomato, veg, vegetable*

The examples of orthographical 'offences' given in the letters are predominantly taken from the mentioned three domains. The additional fourth domain, which is not taken up here for analysis is *Education*. As mentioned in 3.4.3, this particular domain plays a more complex role in the discourse of prescriptivism. Education is seen as the cause of the perceived decline of language standards and also as the criterion that differentiates the letter writers from the 'offenders' of proper language use that make the grammatical mistakes. Traffic signs, signs on market stalls and in shops are the types of publicly available text types where punctuation mistakes are easily observable and targeted by the critics. Example (4) illustrates this:

(4) THE only worse misuse of the apostrophe I've seen, than a recent issue of a major business magazine advertising 'Porsche's' for an

> online used-car website, was a sign in a McDonald's stating, 'EFTPO'S not working' (*The Age*, 30 August 2008)

The most frequent collocate of the words from the semantic domain *Food* after the definite article is *'s*, indicating that, not surprisingly, food items are often used as examples of the greengrocer's apostrophe.

(5) So many people try to make plurals by adding an apostrophe before the *s*, that I think they must be told to do so! Among the worst offenders are greengrocers, hence mangoe's, tomato's and carrot's. (*Hull Daily Mail*, 20 October 2006)

By providing these examples, the authors are placing their letters in the tradition of criticising the uneducated greengrocer who stereotypically makes the mistake of placing the apostrophe in the penultimate position with plural nouns.

3.4.3.3 Prescriptive language

Defining the features of prescriptive language is not a straightforward task. Therefore, all of the initial key semantic domains were analysed in more detail, in order to identify those that can be attributed to the specific features used to express prescriptive attitudes. In the end, nine semantic domains were classified under the category *Prescriptive language* through qualitative analysis of concordance lines that are presented in Table 3.7.

The language of prescriptivism is primarily characterised by explicit evaluations of accuracy. Language use is labelled as *inaccurate* (6), *accurate* (7), or *inappropriate* (8) in comparison with the norm, which is reflected in the number of lexical items from the semantic domains *Evaluation inaccurate*, *Evaluation accurate* and *Unsuitable*.

Authors typically correct the observed mistakes and pedagogically explain the rules of 'proper' usage.

(6) The incorrect overuse of an apostrophe is now a widespread problem in such incorrect plurals as the 1990s, too often written as 'the 1990's' and 'iPod's' instead of iPods. (*The Ottawa Citizen*, 7 February 2009)

(7) I have been a PA for all my working life and have been paid to spell correctly and to use apostrophes correctly so, obviously, I cringe at the blatant misuse of apostrophes in advertisements, notices etc. (*Derby Evening Telegraph*, 13 February 2013)

(8) I deplore inappropriate grammar and the lack of an apostrophe in the correct place. (*Leicester Mercury*, 24 April 2007)

Other types of evaluations indicate additional grounds for stigmatisation of nonstandard usage, such as establishing the association of nonstandard usage with unethical behaviour. The relationship between linguistic profanity and morality has been previously studied (McEnery, 2006).

The authors of the letters in this corpus establish a similar association: the users of the nonstandard constructions seem to exhibit a lack of ethical norms. In these cases, the language 'offenders' are described as sinners (example 9).

(9) Sir, Re your reporter Josh Reich and his story about airport security (Nelson Mail, May 2), with the sentence 'He told The Nelson Mail he was meeting with both council's while in Nelson...' Meeting with both council's what? It seems you need to do a Principal Skinner and order him to line up behind Bart Simpson to write out 100 times 'Apostrophes are not needed for plurals'. But, to be fair, Josh isn't the only sinner. (*The Nelson Mail*, 11 May 2011)

Table 3.7 Semantic domains: Prescriptive language

Semantic domain	Lexical items
Evaluation inaccurate	*boo-boo*, *error*, *gaffe*, *inaccurate*, *incorrect*, *incorrectly*, *misplaced*, *miss* (v.), *mistake*, *typo*, *ungrammatical*, *wrong*
Evaluation accurate	*accuracy*, *accurately*, *correct*, *corrected*, *correctly*, *corrections*, *error*, *free*, *precision*, *properly*, *put it right*, *rectified*, *right*, *spot on*
Negative	*no-ball*, *none*, *not*, *n't*, *nothing*
Unethical	*barbarian*, *corrupt*, *corruption*, *misuse*, *rogue*, *shame*, *shameless*, *sinner*
Unsuitable	*inappropriate*, *irrelevant*, *misplaced*, *unsuitable*, *tangential*
Strong obligation or necessity	*compulsory*, *essential*, *have to*, *impose*, *must*, *necessarily*, *necessary*, *need*, *ought to*, *prerequisite*, *responsibility*, *should*
Judgement of appearance: Ugly	*awful*, *deplorable*, *ghastly*, *horrible*, *mess*, *nasty*, *unpleasantly*, *unsightly*
Sad	*alas*, *bemoan*, *cringe*, *cry*, *depressing*, *despair*, *distress*, *embarrassment*, *grave*, *grievous*, *howling*, *in a state of*, *mourn*, *pity*, *plaintive*, *regret*, *regrettably*, *sad*, *sadly*, *seriously*, *suffer*, *unhappy*, *upset*

Another claim for the unacceptability of deviant usage is made on the basis of the aesthetic criterion (cf. Weiner, 1988, p. 197; Pullum, 2004, p. 7). Thus, language use can be categorised as 'ugly' when it differs from the norm, as in example 10.

(10) Swansea Council seem to want to extend their policy of creating more and more obtrusive and unsightly roadside clutter throughout rural Gower. (*South Wales Evening Post*, 13 September 2006)

The semantic domain *Strong obligation or necessity* is another obvious indicator of the presence of prescriptive attitudes in the Letters corpus. This domain consists mostly of deontic modals (*must, ought to, should*, and the semi-modal *have to*) and verbs and adjectives of obligation. These results coincide with previous research of deontic and epistemic modals as indicators of prescriptive and descriptive language attitudes

respectively in the eighteenth-century grammars (cf. Straaijer, 2009). These lexical items are relevant in prescriptive language when the actual 'incorrect' usage is compared to the 'correct' usage—the authors are urging and requiring a change that would bring actual language use closer to the standard language ideal, more generally, the authors of the letter are taking a position in respective of normative rightness (Pounds, 2005, p. 63) as in (11).

(11) Don't get me started on the use of your when it should be you're. (*Lincolnshire Echo*, 25 September 2009)

The category *Negative* is a more covert indicator of prescriptivism, identified upon analysing the concordance lines. Negations are relatively rare, marked occurrences often indicating something different, unusual, or contrary to the expectations of readers (Jordan, 1998, p. 714). In many of the Letters corpus examples, negations are used in discussing the observed mistakes or in promoting 'correct' usage. They highlight that the discussed nonstandard items are not expected, they are marked and different from the expected norms of standard language.

(12) The possessive is not necessary, and apostrophes could be omitted from all newly named roads and streets; there is no need for St George to own a street. (*The Daily Telegraph*, 18 March 2013)

Finally, prescriptive language is characterised by the frequent expression of the emotional state of sadness (key semantic domain *Sad*). The authors usually express sadness in relation to the perceived declining language standards. They are in states of *depression*, *sadness*, *mourning*, they are *unhappy* and *grieving* the observed 'misuse' of language.

(13) Just because a word ends in ‘s’ doesn’t mean it needs an apostrophe. How about ‘Glady’s Knight and the Pip’s’? Laugh? I could cry. (*Lincolnshire Echo*, 25 September 2009)

Prescriptive language is characterised by lexical items that indicate that the authors are stressing their view of the nonstandard usage as marked: the misused apostrophes are incorrect, contrary to the norm and, therefore, aesthetically unpleasing. The metaphor of sinning is projected on the nonstandard usage and its users. Finally, there is a strong sense of obligation and necessity expressed—a plea to the readers who should act upon the perceived nonstandard ‘deviations’ that are potentially spreading across the communities of speakers.

3.5 Conclusion

The analysis of key words and key semantic domains in a corpus of language-related letters to the editor presented in this paper sets out to contribute to the analysis of prescriptive language in print media. The corpus linguistic tools adopted for this analysis have proved to be useful in identifying general topics, genre characteristics, and features of prescriptive language used in letters to the editor as the genre where complaints about language use are traditionally expressed in the English-speaking world. Future analysis of letters will include letters written on various usage problems and it will address in more detail the topics of education and language authorities (in the forms of individuals, institutions and specialised literature), which play a relevant role in the complaint tradition discourse.

The results of the quantitative semantic analysis reveal that the factual support of their claims in the form of examples from their sur-

roundings plays a major role in the accounts of the authors of the letters. Similar findings have been reported in Pounds (2005) in a contrastive analysis of English and Italian letters to the editor. Pounds (2005, p. 74) concludes that providing factual evidence in support of epistemic claims is very common in this genre. This implies that although the authors are expressing their own opinions, they are attempting to structure their arguments logically and factually in order to support and justify their argumentation and points of view.

The combination of quantitative and in-depth analyses of concordance lines resulted in identifying several semantic domains strongly associated with prescriptive language. These semantic domains indicate specific linguistic features (e.g. the use of deontic modal verbs, lexis of evaluation and obligation, and negation), and also offer insights into prescriptive arguments, which have their origins in the realms of the aesthetic, correct, suitable, and ethical (for similar accounts see Weiner, 1988, pp. 177–180 and Pullum, 2004, pp. 6–7). This analysis points to the relevant issues to be addressed in the joint qualitative and quantitative analysis of an extended corpus: the characteristics of the discourse of prescriptivism, and the types of argumentation used in the criticism of nonstandard linguistic varieties.

4

From usage guides to language blogs[1]

4.1 Introduction

In debating what is perceived to be 'correct' language use and in searching for answers to questions such as 'Is *thusly* a word?' or 'Should I use *affect* or *effect*?', most people prefer to consult online sources. This was a finding of a recent online survey that aimed to explore people's practices of looking up usage advice. Guidelines on what is considered correct usage have traditionally been available in various genres: grammar books, style guides, and usage guides often include explicitly stated prescriptive rules of usage.[2] Even dictionaries and grammars that are not expected to make explicit normative statements but rather to describe the linguistic system may occasion-ally be consulted as reference sources on what constitutes 'correct' usage (Milroy, 1992, pp. 8–9; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 2). Since the advent of the internet, however, many of the genres that traditionally comprised usage advice have adapted their format to the online medium. Publishing houses now offer online dictionaries accompanied by additional interactive resources, including blogs and multimodal resources, one example being the Merriam-Webster *Ask the Editors* videos, which fea-

[1] Lukač, M. (2017). From usage guides to language blogs. In I.Tieken-Boon van Ostade (ed.), *English Usage Guides: History, Advice, Attitudes* (pp. 107–125). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[2] On the distinction between usage guides and style guides, see Straaijer (2017) and Ebner (2016, pp. 310–11).

ture topics on usage as well. Online versions of style guides by publishing and media houses are also, often freely, available, and through an additional subscription, *Oxford Dictionaries Online* offers access to a number of online editions of usage guides including *Garner's Modern American Usage* (3rd ed., 2009) and *Pocket Fowler's Modern English Usage* (Allen [ed.], 2nd ed., 2008).

With technological advancements, the introduction of Web 2.0, and with the rapid growth of user-generated content, we are witnessing the development of many internet genres, among others blogs, micro-blogs (such as Twitter), digital forums and different forms of social media. With public platforms now potentially being available to any user with an internet connection, the online medium has enabled individual authors writing on language use to gather followers and establish themselves as language authorities. One of the online sources created by an individual author that has gained immense popularity is the US-based educational podcast *Grammar Girl's Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing*.[3] The *Grammar Girl* podcast has been down-loaded tens of millions of times: iTunes, for instance, listed it among the twelve 'Best Classic Podcasts' in 2013 (Slashgear, 2013), and its creator, Mignon Fogarty, has published seven books on usage since 2006, when she started publishing the podcasts.

All *Grammar Girl* podcasts are available in blog format as word-for-word transcriptions of the audio segments. Currently, there are over 500 of them, and most of the topics covered are the result of

[3] I am grateful to Mignon Fogarty for enabling me to have access to the *Grammar Girl* comments for the research for this chapter.

crowdsourcing—that is, they were inspired by questions from the audience. In addition, below the blog entries there is a comment section allowing feedback from the audience. This section is also a forum where questions from the audience are elicited, some of which are selected and addressed in subsequent episodes of the *Grammar Girl* podcast. 'I choose my topics,' Mignon Fogarty states, 'based on listener questions and on my own knowledge about what the common questions are that people have about language' (personal communication, 31 January 2016).

This chapter begins by examining the popularity of grammar blogs like *Grammar Girl* in relation to other online sources based on the results of the above-mentioned survey. I will compare the format of an online usage guide, here called a 'usage guide 2.0', with traditional printed usage guides that are part of the Hyper Usage Guide of English or HUGE database (Straaijer, 2014), a collection of British and American usage guides published between 1770 and 2010 (see also Straaijer, 2017). Furthermore, I will present an analysis of the interaction in the comment section of four *Grammar Girl* podcast transcriptions including more than 400 comments from the audience. Comments on a website relating to language use reveal the practices and the dynamics of a metalinguistic discourse that supports or potentially opposes the norms constituting 'correct usage'. In broader terms, such comments facilitate the analysis of public discourses relating to the 'ideology of standardisation' (Milroy and Milroy, [1985] 2012, p. 18). Whereas so far linguists have described the role of prescriptivism in public debates in more detail (Milroy and Milroy, [1985] 2012, pp. 24–46; Pinker, 1994a,

pp. 370–403; Curzan, 2014), in this chapter I will also analyse the role of descriptivism in usage debates. In contrast to the limited media forums available to the general public prior to the birth of Web 2.0, such as letters to the editor (Lukač, 2015), internet users can now engage in online discussions without any restrictions being imposed upon them apart from the online community's norms and guidelines. This analysis sheds light on the ways that the internet and digital technologies have affected the public metalinguistic discourse.

This chapter will therefore show that potential innovations are brought to metalinguistic discussions by the online medium in the form of the growing numbers of descriptive comments originating from the general public, and in that of the dynamics specific to an online community such as language-related 'trolling'—the behaviour in which an individual, a 'troll', is 'being deliberately antagonistic online, usually for amusement's sake' (Hardaker, 2013, p. 58; see also Donath, 1999, pp. 42–7; Hardaker, 2010). There are, however, clear indicators that many of the online discussions among members of the general public, and many of the topics proposed by them that are selected by the author of the *Grammar Girl* website for discussion, simply reflect and continue the 250-year-old tradition of usage advice (cf. Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2010).

4.2 The popularity of grammar blogs

In an online survey conducted between December 2015 and January 2016,[4] respondents were asked to rank the sources that they most frequently used when searching for advice on language use; in all, 189 people responded to the survey. The three categories with which they were presented included printed books (such as grammars, dictionaries, and style or usage guides), online sources (Google search, online dictionaries, internet forums, and language blogs), and automatic grammar checkers (such as Microsoft Word Grammar Checker and grammar apps). The results showed that online sources were rated as most popular by 51 per cent of the respondents, and that the younger the respondents, the more frequently they consulted online sources. Among the youngest group, below the age of 25, online sources were ranked first by 81 per cent of the respondents. In the questions that followed, the respondents were asked to report in more detail on their practices of looking up usage advice online, and to select among five online usage advice genres those that they consulted most often. Grammar blogs constituted the second most popular source of online usage advice in this survey, preceded only by online dictionaries.[5] Those who reported consulting grammar blogs, moreover, were predominantly native speakers who were also language professionals, such as translators, writers, journalists, editors, language teachers, linguists, lexicographers,

[4] The survey, conducted through the web-based survey tool Qualtrics, was published on 21 December 2015 on the 'Bridging the Unbridgeable' project blog.

[5] The percentages of respondents who reported using the five genres of online sources were as follows: online dictionaries, 95.3%; grammar blogs, 47.1%; Wikipedia and Q&A websites, 42.4%; web forums, 40.6%; and language corpora, 27.6%.

and students of languages or linguistics; these informants constituted 70 per cent of the group of grammar blog users.

Another aim of the survey was to examine the perceived reliability of different printed and online sources with respect to the usage advice they provided. Institutional sources, such as those produced by renowned publishing houses like Oxford University Press, were perceived as the most reliable. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) and the *Oxford Dictionaries Online* (*ODO*) were rated highest among the survey respondents. The name 'Oxford Dictionary' seems to remain synonymous with the 'great Dictionary' (Winchester, 2003, p. 2) until today. The list of the sources that were rated on their reliability also included the *Grammar Girl* website. The mean ratings for the ten sources included in the survey on a five-point Likert scale[6] based on their reliability are listed in Table 4.1.

Following the three online dictionaries with the highest reliability ratings, i.e. *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Oxford Dictionaries Online*, and *Merriam-Webster Online*, are two large-scale language corpora consisting of samples of naturally occurring text, the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA). Although linguistic corpora do not offer explicit grammar advice, they are regularly consulted as sources by users in determining common usage.

The three lowest-scoring sources are Wikipedia and the two automatic grammar checkers, a grammar program called Grammarly and the Microsoft Word Grammar Checker. In terms of both the number of

[6] The format of the scale used to measure the respondents' attitudes towards the presented statements was: (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) disagree, and (5) strongly disagree.

respondents who were familiar with the website and the reliability they attributed to it, *Grammar Girl* came just behind Fowler's *Modern English Usage* (*MEU*), arguably the most influential twentieth-century usage guide in Britain (Crystal, 2009, p. vii). Just over half the respondents reported being familiar with both *Grammar Girl* (50.6%) and *MEU* (52.4%); both of the sources were rated moderately positively in terms of their reliability.

Table 4.1 Mean values for the ratings of the sentence '… is a reliable source for grammar advice': strongly agree (1)–strongly disagree (5)

Source	Mean	Standard deviation
Oxford English Dictionary	1.64	.721
Oxford Dictionaries Online	1.64	.778
Merriam-Webster Online	1.84	.803
British National Corpus	2.00	.894
Corpus of Contemporary American English	2.03	.920
Fowler's *Modern English Usage*	2.24	.917
Grammar Girl	2.52	.979
Wikipedia	3.01	.948
Grammarly	3.24	1.132
Microsoft Word Grammar Checker	3.55	1.035

What the results of the online survey suggest is that among online usage sources, which are currently the most popular format for sources on usage, grammar blogs constitute a relevant and popular category. Some of them, such as *Grammar Girl*, are well known, and are consulted and perceived as moderately reliable sources on usage.

4.3 *Grammar Girl* as a usage guide 2.0

In this section the usage guide genre will be compared with the *Grammar Girl* website based on the basis of three characteristics: the purpose with which each is written, their content, and their target audience. The

question that arises is whether websites such as *Grammar Girl* can be viewed as extensions of the usage guide genre in the online medium and, therefore, as constituting a new category of usage guides, which I designate as usage guides 2.0. A usage guide is defined as an 'integrative all-in-one reference work […] that bridges the traditional divide between a grammar and a dictionary' (Busse & Schröder, 2009, p. 72). The beginnings of the genre can be traced back to 1770 and the publication of Robert Baker's *Reflections on the English Language* (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2008a, p. 17), and the purpose of a usage guide is to help users decide between alternatives which from a descriptive point of view both exist in the language but of which one, for some reason or another, is considered less good English than its counterpart (Weiner, 1988, p. 173). The topics and the content covered in usage guides are thus disputed items of usage, also called 'usage problems' (cf. Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2013). Finally, the intended audience of usage guides are 'linguistically insecure' native speakers of English (Weiner, 1988, p. 173; Beal, 2009, p. 42) who were not 'born into' the standard variety. The majority of the usage guide authors were traditionally writers, editors, teachers, and educators (cf. Straaijer, 2014; 2017), while the number of linguists who have authored usage guides is small in comparison: Crystal (1984) and Peters (2004) are among the two more notable exceptions.

The tagline used on the homepage of the *Grammar Girl* website is 'Your friendly guide to the world of grammar, punctuation, usage, and fun developments in the English language'. Whereas the website also includes pieces featuring topics generally related to language, such

as ‘How Do Words Get in the Dictionary?’ and ‘Do the Minions Speak a Real Language?’, most of the topics covered on Grammar Girl address usage problems. According to the Alexa website (a commercial tool developed by Amazon.com which provides web traffic data and analytics),[6] the five most frequently used search terms that send traffic to the *Grammar Girl* website are *complement, further vs farther, affect vs effect, when to use a semicolon,* and *when to use a colon*. This list indicates that most people who visit the website are in search of advice on disputed items of usage. Mignon Fogarty confirms that the idea behind creating the website was to offer clear-cut advice on usage problems. While working as an editor, she informed me, ‘I noticed that my clients were making a lot of simple errors such as using semicolons incorrectly and not knowing the difference between *affect* and *effect*. I created the *Grammar Girl* podcast to cover these simple rules and styles for native English speakers who wanted a quick refresher or simple answer’ (personal communication, 31 January 2016).

To compare the topics and the content covered in *Grammar Girl* and in printed usage guides, I looked for the ten most popular usage problems addressed in the HUGE database and in the *Grammar Girl* podcasts. The popularity of the topics was based on the number of usage guides mentioning a particular usage problem in HUGE, while the number of comments written below the Grammar Girl transcripts on the website was taken as an indicator of a post’s popularity; in taking the latter approach I am basing myself on a study conducted by Mishne and

[6] See http://www.alexa.com.

Glance (2006), which analysed the correlation between the number of comments on blog posts and blog popularity. The *Grammar Girl* comments included in my own analysis covered the period between 6 September 2006 and 29 April 2013, when over 18,000 comments were posted under the transcripts of 461 podcasts on language use. In Table 4.2, I have listed the results of my search for the ten most frequent usage problems in the HUGE database and on the *Grammar Girl* website.

Though the HUGE database covers usage guides published between 1770 and 2010 and the topics of Grammar Girl podcasts were elicited between 2006 and 2013, there is nevertheless a considerable amount of overlap between the two: five out of the ten most popular usage problems are identical between both lists, i.e. *who*/*whom*, *lay*/*lie*, singular *they*, *less*/*fewer*, and *I for me* (*between you and I/between you and me*). While this finding confirms the similarities in the topics covered in traditional guides and in usage guides 2.0, it also shows that the content of usage advice sources seems to vary little over the years. In fact, all the other usage problems listed for the *Grammar Girl* website can be found in traditional usage guides as well.

Specific recurring usage problems constitute an essential part of the prescriptive tradition, and they are commented on even though their current status as 'controversial items of usage' is arguable. Nevertheless, the discussions on these items—which Weiner, a usage guide author himself, calls 'old chestnuts' (1988, p. 175)—are among the key identifying features of the genre (cf. Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2015a, p. 57).

The target audience of the *Grammar Girl* website are native speakers. With a high number of non-native speakers searching for advice on English grammar online, however, foreign language learners constitute a substantial segment of the audience based on the reports of Mignon Fogarty and on the number of comments in which authors identify themselves as non-native speakers, such as: 'My mother tongue is Portuguese, and I study English by myself. So, I love listening to your podcasts', and 'I am a student from Vietnam. I have just accidentally come across your site when searching for a good way of learning grammar.'

Table 4.2 Most frequently discussed usage problems in the HUGE database and in *Grammar Girl* comments (September 2006–April 2013)

HUGE usage problems	No. of usage guides	Grammar Girl usage problems	No. of blog comments
shall/*will*	65	*who*/*whom*	645
different to/*than*/*from*	63	*affect*/*effect*	512
who/*whom*	63	*lay*/*lie*	361
lay/*lie*	63	ending a sentence with a preposition	329
Only	62	active/passive voice	305
split infinitive	62	singular *they*	268
I for *me*	61	*a*/*an*	181
singular *they*	59	*which*/*that*	171
less/*fewer*	58	*less*/*fewer*	170
none in plural context	55	*between you and I*/*between you and me*	166

As in the case of most printed usage guide authors (see Straaijer, 2017), Mignon Fogarty, a former editor, is a language professional but not a linguist. Traditional usage guide authors are often criticised for their subjectivity in the selection of topics and in their judgements on what constitutes correct usage, as well as for their lack of referencing (Algeo, 1991, p. 6; Peters and Young, 1997, p. 317; Peters, 2006, p. 765). As a rule, however, the *Grammar Girl* podcasts do include lists of references for each usage problem discussed (e.g. the *AP Stylebook*, the *Chicago Manual of Style*, *Garner's Modern American Usage*, *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage*, *Etymology Online*, *World Wide Words*, and *Google Ngram*).

The traditional usage guides and the *Grammar Girl* website coincide in their purpose, content, and target audience. Whereas the online medium is new, the *why*, the *what*, and the *who* of usage advice has not greatly fluctuated over the years. On the one hand, the process of topic selection has been influenced by crowdsourcing and interaction with the audience, and the level of referencing both the descriptive linguistic sources and the prescriptive ones has significantly increased. Nevertheless, what can be observed on the other hand is a clear continuation of the usage guide genre in this relatively new online medium. Much of the consistency in both the format and the normative recommendations is influenced by questions from an audience searching for clear-cut guidance on usage, and it is this feature that makes this usage guide 2.0 significantly different from the traditional genre.

4.4 Comments on the *Grammar Girl* website

Comments posted by the *Grammar Girl* audience below the podcast transcripts are revealing in that they identify the characteristics of this particular online discourse community—more specifically, in that they determine who its members and what their goals are. The comments additionally offer an insight into the dynamics of online metalinguistic discourse and into the underlining arguments in debates surrounding correct usage. What I will present here is an analysis of 412 comments published below four posts on the *Grammar Girl* website: 'Like Versus As' (posted on 13 April 2007), 'Units of Measure' (16 August 2007), 'Which Versus That' (30 October 2009), and 'Ending a Sentence with a Preposition' (31 March 2011). The discussions were coded for personal information shared by the commenters in the body of the text,[7] the types of comments posted, and the criteria through which the claims presented in the usage discussions were justified. The analysis is consequently divided into three sections. I will first comment on the relevance of the commenters' identity construction in the *Grammar Girl* discussions; this is followed by an analysis of the comments themselves, based on the type of information that is shared and the commenters' arguments presented in the usage debates. Finally, I will address a topic that emerged as relevant through the qualitative analysis of the data—the role of repetitive narratives in metalinguistic discourses.

[7] In order to preserve the commenters' anonymity, the data including their user names and other personal details were omitted before the analysis.

4.4.1 The commenters' identity construction

The identities of *Grammar Girl* commenters are, as in any online environment, primarily enacted and 'written in text' (Turkle, 1999, p. 643). It is in online interactions that language becomes 'central to creating, performing, and negotiating one's identities' (Vásquez, 2014, p. 68). The analyses of online reviews by Mackiewicz (2010) and Vásquez (2014) have revealed that in attempts to gain credibility, participants in online discussions tend to reveal personal information, such as their experience and expertise (as in examples 1–5 below), while they also offer self-descriptions of character (as in examples 6 and 7). Whereas establishing credibility is one of the relevant aspects of sharing personal information among members of online discourse communities, another is constructing and expressing self-identities online (cf. Page, 2012; Lee, 2014).

Among the 412 posts analysed, only in 54 (13.1%) did the authors explicitly provide self-identifying information. The commenters most commonly provide information on their native language, age, place of origin, and profession. The self-identified non-native speakers generally participate in the discussions by posting questions and encouraging the author to continue providing usage advice. These commenters usually address the author directly and not the other members of the community; in doing so they express positive stance, but in most instances do not contribute any new information to the on-going discussions.

Both age and place of origin serve as experiential, first-hand evidence of the commenter's knowledge of the language-related topic; the example in (1) illustrates this.

(1) As a child of the 60s, I can safely say that ‘where it’s at’ rarely meant ‘where it is.’ More often, it was the equivalent of today’s ‘cool’: ‘Panama Red is where it’s at.’ ‘Demonstrations are where it’s at.’ ‘Afros are where it’s at.’

In engaging in an ongoing discussion on the topic of ‘Ending a Sentence with a Preposition’, the commenter in (1) provides an account based on personal experience in opposing a previous assertion by a commenter who denounced the usage of ‘where it’s at’ as a ‘useless corruption’. According to the commenter, who is evidently personally familiar with the youth slang of the 1960s, ‘where it’s at’ constitutes an idiomatic expression and, in its most common usage, does not indicate location. The largest number of comments (22 out of 54 altogether) in which a person discloses personal information refers to their professions. Commenters mentioning their professions are either identifying themselves as language professionals or are emphasizing their expertise on the topic in question on the basis of their occupational affiliation. These commenters are also the ones who most commonly add new information to the on-going discussions in threads following the podcast transcripts. In the example in (2), a medical writer adds a comment to the discussion under the title ‘Units of Measure’ based on personal experience in encountering irregular usage of units.

(2) I am a medical writer at a European pharmaceutical company, and I must say that you hit on one of my pet peeves with today’s topic. I often see sloppy use of units, even from persons who should know better. I thought I’d chime in on some points that you skipped. […] with the temperature units, it seems to be an open question. The AMA style guide does not leave a space between the quantity and the degree, but other style guides (I believe ACS among them) do.

As an expert on the topic, the commenter takes a more critical stance towards the content of the podcast and adds information that is considered to be missing. Moreover, being a language professional, the commenter refers to external sources—two style guides, one published by the American Medical Association and the other by the American Chemical Society. Many of the self-referential comments that mention the commenters' professions appear in the first sentence of the post, as in examples (3) – (5):

(3) As a freelance writer and editor, I often find myself frustrated by poor sentence structure and superfluous prepositions.

(4) From one technical writer/editor to another, kudos on joining the battle against misuse of the English language.

(5) As a strictly descriptive linguist and ESL teacher, I am often driven crazy by the comments of prescriptivists and grammarians.

Through asserting their qualifications in this way, the commenters lend credibility to the content of their posts by positioning themselves as experts—they are the ones with specialised knowledge in the discourse community. The strategy of initially stating their expertise in the field, prior to explicitly introducing an argument and making a contribution to the discussion, potentially adds to the perceived reliability of the commenter (Mackiewicz, 2010, pp. 17–21). Finally, some of the commenters construct their online identity by explicitly referring to their language attitudes and their status as grammar enthusiasts, as lay persons with an interest in usage-related topics, or, as they designate themselves, as grammar sticklers, as illustrated in (6):

(6) Thank you for finally covering this! I'm known as a bit of a stickler for correct grammar amongst my friends, and some of them delight when they catch me using a preposition at the end of a sentence.

There are instances, like the one in (7), in which the comments posted by the participants who construct their self-identities as grammar sticklers are subject to linguistic criticism from other commenters.

(7) *A.* My mother taught my sister and I the prepositions in a song every day on our way to the babysitter. I was 9 and my sister was 6. To this day, I still know all the prepositions and am a grammar freak. I never use prepositions at the end of a sentence.

B. It seems that the next subject should be the correct use of 'I or me'. Few people use these correctly. There is a comment in this thread in which the author typed 'My mother taught my sister and I the prepositions in a song', when it should have been 'my sister and me'.

By explicitly positioning herself as a 'grammar freak' in the discussion on sentence-final prepositions, A evokes linguistic criticism from B, who points out that A's comment uses *I* in object position in the sentence when it should have been *me*. More extreme examples of negative stance towards this group of commenters can be found in attempts at 'trolling' (cf. §3.1). Grammar is a common object of the criticism of trolls in any form of online discussion (cf. Hardaker, 2013, p. 72). Instead of commenting on the content of the posts, trolls comment on the participants' language use. In a blog dedicated to usage, criticism of the grammar found in both posts and comments is quite common; unsurprisingly, there are several instances of trolling among the comments analysed. The example in (8) is an instance of successful trolling in

which the troll, B, evokes a sincere response from a commenter (A) after correcting A's post for punctuation—more specifically, for the usage of contractions, colons, sentence-initial conjunctions, and missing commas.

(8) *A.* Hey Grammar Girl, I love this podcast. I'm just a lowly student, who is not particularly well versed in grammar rules. But (:) listening to your podcast which, by the way I find to be highly entertaining, has made me want to argue in favour of more grammatically lax writing. […]

B. @A: If you love something, you might try listening to it:
Paragraph I
1. Contraction (I'm)
2. Starting sentence with conjunction (But)
3. Colon in parentheses indicates you are not sure if there should be a colon there; there most definitely should not.
4. 'by the way' not finished with a comma.
[*signature*] SUCCESSFULLY TROLLED BY B […]

A. @B: I apologise if I gave impression of being high-minded or self-righteous. As I mentioned before I am only a high school student and by no means a learned grammarian. […] Perhaps I was too lax with my grammar

Trolling in (8) is successful, as A reacts by apologizing for the seemingly 'high-minded or self-righteous' comments in the preceding post and acknowledges 'incorrect' grammar usage.

In disclosing personal information, the commenters position themselves within the online discourse community by identifying themselves as members of the target audience (learners), claiming competence (experts), expressing their interest in the topic (grammar sticklers), or being antagonistic to other participants in the discussions (trolls). Whereas providing self-identifying information is one of the

primary ways of asserting expertise in online usage debates, commenters support their arguments through a variety of additional discourse strategies. This is a topic that I will discuss in the next section.

4.4.2 Types of comments

Based on the types of information that commenters provide in the written text, all of the comments in my collection were classified into one of the following seven categories: the introduction of new information, questions (usually directed to the author), corrections of information posted either by the author or by other commenters, examples of mistakes, humour, personal comments, and encouragements to the author. Table 4.3 presents this classification according to frequency of the respective types of comments.

As the overview in the table shows, the most common types of comments include new contributions to a topic, which account for a third of all comments in the dataset analysed; the authors concerned thus form a group of genuine contributors to the discussions.

.**Table 4.3** Comment categories in the *Grammar Girl* dataset

Type of comment	%
Introducing new information	33.2
Question	22.1
Correction	13.6
Personal comment	11.4
Encouragement	10.0
Humour	8.3
Examples of mistakes	1.4

These contributors either refer to previous comments in an existing thread or to the original post. Whereas discussions do develop among

the Grammar Girl followers, especially in longer threads, 80 per cent of the comments analysed are directed at the author.

Since the comment sections are also places where topics of future podcasts are solicited, many members of the audience post questions as well, usually asking the author to give a recommendation on correct usage while presenting two alternative constructions as in (9) and (10).

(9) Which is correct?!
The car runs AS it should
or
The car runs LIKE it should

(10) Can you say 'equivalent to' or should it be 'equivalent of'?

Grammar Girl is here addressed in her capacity as a language authority and is asked to provide guidance on 'correct' usage. The commenters in examples (9) and (10) request simple answers and normative guidelines; the *Grammar Girl* podcasts and their respective transcripts cater to such requests and do so by providing explicit answers. What is striking in these two examples is the fact that no linguistic context in which the items are used is provided; the underlying idea here is that there is a single correct linguistic form which should be used independently of the register in which it is occurs.

The category 'corrections' in Table 4.3 refers either to the corrections directed at the content of a particular podcast or to the language used in the podcast itself or in the comments presented by other commenters. These comments potentially include negative face-threatening acts in which either the author's or the commenter's writing is negatively evaluated. In (11), one commenter is addressing a podcast in which

Grammar Girl advocates the use of sentence-final prepositions, which goes against many prescriptive recommendations.

(11) You gave the example that it is okay to say, 'What did you step on?' That is incorrect. The proper way to say that question is, 'On what did you step?'

Examples (9) – (11) present comments from a segment of the audience which expects the *Grammar Girl* website to be their reference source for easy-to-apply prescriptive rules on the 'correct' way of speaking and writing. Therefore, if the guidelines provided in the podcasts fail to coincide with traditional prescriptive recommendations, these readers will disagree with *Grammar Girl*'s advice and offer alternative rules that they acquired either through teaching or from their knowledge of relevant sources.

In making personal comments, the members of the *Grammar Girl* audience express their own experiences relating to usage, or share their views on language without contributing new information to the discussion on particular usage items, as in (12).

(12) I had a non-fiction book published about 10 years ago. One of the most memorable things in that process was working with an assigned editor. Along with other nonsense he told me to never end a sentence with a preposition.

Through describing their past experiences and personal views, and employing self-disclosure, the authors of such comments construct and perform online identities. In comments which make up 10 per cent of the dataset, the audience praise the podcast and encourage its author to 'Keep up the good work'; such comments are not real contributions, and neither the author nor other readers usually respond to them. There

are two types of humorous comments in the dataset; firstly, there are instances in which authors introduce anecdotes that are often retold in the context of usage discussions (cf. §4.4.4) and secondly, as exemplified in (13), commenters target other commenters who express opposing views.

(13) Favorite joke with which to ridicule others, 'What was E.T. short for?' Because he had little short legs. :)

Example (14) is an instance of a further category of comments, 'Examples of mistakes': authors of such comments make contributions to the topic by providing examples from everyday life. In this particular quotation, the author cites a sentence found in a formal text that includes a sentence-final preposition:

(14) I have no patience, however, with textbook authors that fail to follow the rules of formal, academic writing! In my textbook, for example, the author writes, 'Rubrics often differ from one instructor to another, so this example will give you an idea of some of the kinds of elements you might be graded on.'

The authors of such comments relate the contents of the podcasts to their own experiences and observations, and thus commonly designate the addressed usage items as their 'pet peeves'.

Although the comment section is primarily envisaged as a forum for eliciting questions from the audience, my analysis of the comments in my collection shows that the online community does more than that. By providing personal input, commenters contribute new information to the topic, offer alternative points of view, and enact their online identities.

4.4.3 Arguments presented in metalinguistic debates

Whereas the functions of comments posted by the audience in response to podcasts on usage advice were the topic of the previous section, in what follows I will address the content of the comments based on the types of arguments presented by their authors in metalinguistic debates. In commenting on discussions involving issues relating to standard language ideology, linguists have noted that many prescriptive texts resort to extra-linguistic justifications in their argumentation (Pullum, 2004, p. 7; Lukač, 2015, p. 329). The analysis of the descriptive side of metalinguistic debates, however, with some exceptions (Cameron, [1995] 2012, pp. 5–11), has received less commentary from linguists. Whereas prescriptive arguments are more often than not perceived as expressions of the standard language ideology, descriptive arguments, usually originating from the field of linguistics itself, are not commented on but are rather considered to be objective accounts of usage (cf. Pinker, 1994a, pp. 370–72). In examining the content of the comments in the dataset, I first identified those comments whose authors explicitly positioned themselves as descriptivists; this group accounted for 54 comments (20.4% of the dataset). Explicitly prescriptive comments were more numerous, accounting for 227 comments (55.1%); the remaining comments did not belong to either of these groups. All comments were then categorised according to ten types of arguments that are found in support of the criticism or of the preferences expressed regarding usage: prescriptive rules, external authorities, logic, rules of the linguistic system, common usage, teaching, euphony, semantics, sociolinguistic considerations, and language history. The categories identified emerged

from my collection of comments; perhaps unsurprisingly, however, they at least partially coincide with the criteria for usage criticism listed in Allen (1992) (cited in Busse, 2015, p. 77), Pullum (2004, p. 7) and with the list of arguments on which recommendations are based in usage guides introduced in Weiner (1988, pp. 178–80). The frequencies of the arguments, their description, and examples of each category are presented in Table 4.4. The examples were drawn from the collection analysed. Of the ten types of argument identified in the dataset, as many as eight were found among both groups, the one identified as descriptive and the other as prescriptive; however, the frequency of the number of arguments in the different categories differed, as may be seen in Figure 4.1.

Table 4.4 Categories of argument support in metalinguistic debates

Type of argument used (%)	Description	Examples from the GG comments
Prescriptive rules (34.7%)	Rules of correct usage are transmitted through the prescriptive tradition.	If a comma is required, use 'which', if not, then 'that'.
External authorities (11.2%)	Acceptable usage is recommended by linguistic authorities.	The *Chicago Manual of Style* recommendation is not to hyphenate with abbreviated units.
Logic (10.5%)	Rules of language correspond to rules of logic and should not include redundancy, contradictions and illogicality.	'Where are you' instead of 'Where are you at' (…) It seems both shorter and more intelligent. The word 'at' is clearly not needed—*redundant*.
Rules of the linguistic system (10.1%)	The linguistic system defines what constitutes usage norms.	In 'he stood up for the cause,' 'cause' is merely the *direct object of the verb* 'to stand up for' and *not the object of a preposition*. Thus, 'His cause is something to stand up for' is perfectly acceptable English

Common usage (9.1%)	The description of the speakers' linguistic behaviour defines what constitutes acceptable usage.	Do *native English speakers* say 'That's where it is at' or 'That's where it's at'? (…) Not only is 'at' perfectly acceptable here, the *speaker's* intention may actually REQUIRE the 'at'.
Teaching (7.7%)	Rules of correct usage are transmitted through teaching.	*I learned this* 65 years ago when my *Wonderful English teacher* instructed and challenged us with a then common commercial ad for cigarettes. 'Winston tastes good LIKE a cigarette should'.
Euphony (5.4%)	Usage is subject to aesthetic judgements. Correct usage is or sounds more beautiful.	It *sounds terrible* and frankly I think it's embarrassing.
Semantics (4.9%)	Acceptable usage is determined by the correspondence of the linguistic form and meaning.	In some cases 'outside of' could convey a subtly *different meaning* to 'outside'.
Sociolinguistic considerations (3.5%)	Usage identifies speakers as members of particular (marginal) social groups.	'Off of' to my mind identifies the speaker as likely to be an *American*, and possibly *someone that needs a smack on the upside of the head*.
Language history (2.8%)	Usage is acceptable if it has been part of the language over (a considerable period of) time.	I have simply noted that [the use of 'like' as a conjunction] has been around *since the 1600s*.

The descriptive comments were the only ones referring to language history, while they included references to external authorities and common usage more frequently. The prescriptive commenters in my collection were the ones resorting to prescriptive rules, and they more commonly referred to logic, teaching, and euphony in support of their arguments. The two groups did not differ in how frequently they mentioned the rules of the linguistic system, semantics, and sociolinguistic considerations in their comments.

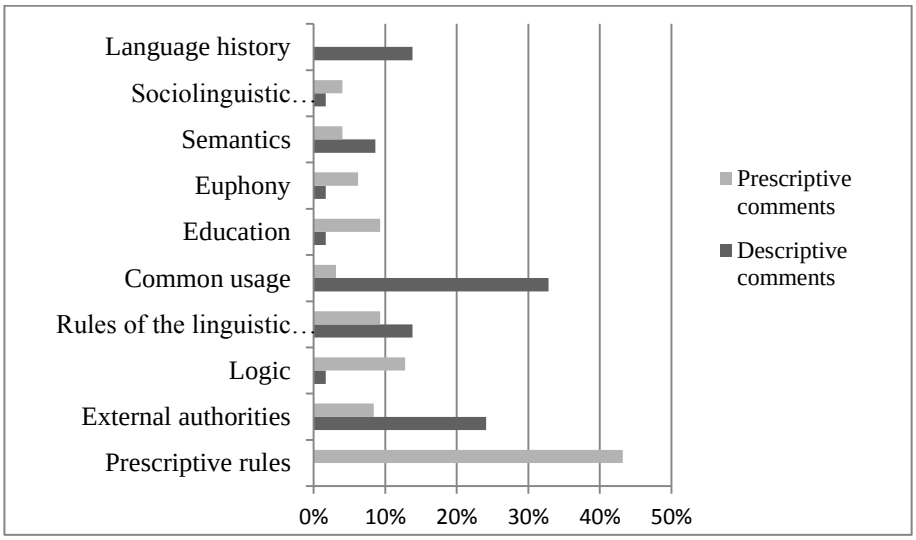


Figure 4.1 Frequency of argument support categories in prescriptive and descriptive comments

The high frequencies of the arguments that appeal to actual usage and to prescriptive rules in the descriptive and prescriptive comments respectively suggest that these types of arguments are key in identifying the elements of descriptive and prescriptive discourses (Figure 4.1). The authors of the descriptive comments additionally refer to language history in demonstrating that the linguistic items that are currently considered problematical in language have, in fact, been in use for a longer period of time. Zimmer (2005) refers to the practice of misinterpreting long-existing usage items as examples of linguistic innovation under the term 'Recency Illusion'. What is perhaps most surprising in my analysis of the categories identified here is the frequency with which linguistic authorities are alluded to in the descriptive comments. Whereas Pullum (2004, p. 7) lists 'Authoritarianism' as one of the principal bases for justifying prescriptive claims, according to my own findings, descrip-

tivists are more likely to cite established linguistic authorities, such as dictionaries and usage advice literature (e.g. *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, *Collins Dictionary* and *The New English Grammar*), as well as reputable authors, grammarians, and lexicographers (Bryan Garner, Paul Brians, Jack Lynch, as well as Samuel Johnson). In appealing to authorities, the prescriptivists in my collection of commenters either cited rules without any references or referred to what they had been taught in school. Defining usage as logical or aesthetically pleasing are considerations pertaining to prescriptivism (see also Weiner, 1988, pp. 178–9; Pullum, 2004, p. 7).

Both groups of commenters referred to linguistic norms in their argumentation, one set of norms stemming from usage and the other from an existing set of prescriptive rules. Linguistic observations were found to take into account diachronic developments, meaning, and common usage, including what may be found in reference sources such as dictionaries. Linguistic comments thus constitute the underlying support for descriptive statements on what constitutes acceptable usage. Prescriptive norms, on the other hand, are based on the existing system of rules that are transmitted primarily through education, and they are related to extra-linguistic concepts that attribute notions of beauty and logic to the linguistic system. The sets of arguments were, however, found not to be restricted to either group of comments, the descriptive commenters resorting to education and logic in their arguments, and the prescriptive commenters supporting the presented normative rules by way of linguistic analysis.

4.4.4 Repetitive narratives and humour in metalinguistic discourses

Another unifying element in the contributors' comments was the repetitive sharing of anecdotal evidence, with the aim of showing that their authors were well informed about the metalinguistic discourse in question. The participants in the metalinguistic debates analysed here, more specifically the recent contributors to the *Grammar Girl* comment threads, rely on their existing knowledge in sharing views on acceptable usage. The content of some contributions, however, is regularly repeated by a considerable number of commenters, even after they had already been shared in the thread. These contributions are accounts of usage-related anecdotes. In discussions on the proscription against sentence-final prepositions, for instance, the name 'Winston Churchill' tends to occur frequently due to the existence of a well-known anecdote relating to the politician allegedly rejecting the rule:

(15) Winston Churchill's famous line was supposed to have been written in the margin of a piece of writing by one of his subordinates who was foolishly attempting to avoid ending sentences with prepositions.

> He wrote: 1. This is the sort of English up with which I will not put. His point was that the sensible way of writing the sentence was: This is the sort of English I will not put up with.

The humorous anecdote is used both for claims in support of the commenters' descriptive position and by those who make prescriptive comments in claiming that the awkwardness of Churchill's construction does not refute the general application of the rule against ending sentences with prepositions. A search through the HUGE database confirms that the story has also been recounted in a number of usage guides

published throughout the twentieth century, including Gowers (1948, p. 48), Crystal (1984, pp. 58–62), Mager and Mager ([1992] 1993, p. 297), Brians (2003, p. 73), Peters (2004, p. 438), Pickett, Kleinedler, & Spitz (2005, p. 372), Sayce (2006, p. 78), and Lamb (2010, pp. 57–58). Although Zimmer (2004), for instance, describes the quote as apocryphal, Churchill never objected to its being attributed to him: he was aware of Gowers noting the witticism in *Plain Words*, in which we find the first mention of it. Churchill must have been well acquainted with the contents of *Plain Words*, since he recommended the book for departmental use in Parliament in 1954.[8] Another such example is the following anecdote from a *Grammar Girl* comment related to the use of *like* as a conjunction in the Winston cigarette ads from the 1950s.

(16) Many people became aware of the two options in 1954, when a famous ad campaign for Winston cigarettes introduced the slogan 'Winston tastes good—like a cigarette should.' The slogan was criticised for its usage by prescriptivists, the 'as' or 'as if' construction being considered more proper.

The accounts of the same anecdote in the HUGE database again confirm its status in the usage-related discourse: it is retold in a number of usage guides from the final quarter of the twentieth century onwards, including Morris and Morris (1975, p. 370), Randall (1988, p. 205), *Webster's Dictionary of English Usage* (Gilman, 1989, p. 600), Mager and Mager ([1992] 1993, p. 216), *The New York Public Library Writ-*

[8] I thank Rebecca Gowers for kindly shedding light on the details of the Churchill anecdote. See also the transcript of the House of Commons debate dating from 16 November 1954 for Churchill's recommendation of *Plain Words* (millbanksystems.com/commons/1954/nov/16/departmental-letters-english).

er's Guide to Style and Usage (Sutcliffe, 1994, p. 11), and O'Conner (1996, p. 103).

Such narratives constitute a part of the metalinguistic discourse. By retelling the anecdotes, authors show that they are acquainted with the prescriptive rules and the narratives associated with them; they cite them as 'punchlines' in the threads, occasionally without providing any context—this is illustrated in a one-sentence comment in (17):

(17) That is the sort of English up with which I shall not put!

The recurring narratives, along with the consistency of the arguments provided and the topics discussed in usage guides, illustrate the repetitive nature of the metalinguistic debates on usage.

4.5 Conclusion

Online sources constitute the most relevant category of usage advice sources today. Although major publishing houses that traditionally provided usage advice literature noticed the potential of making their sources available online, through the introduction of the online medium new linguistic authorities have come to be established. The *Grammar Girl* website is one such authority. Although its format is new, its purpose, content, and target audience do not differ from those of traditional usage guides. Such websites are part of a genre that has merely expanded by being published online and is, therefore, designated as a 'usage guide 2.0'. Websites like *Grammar Girl* enable what was not possible for the authors of traditional usage guides: interaction with and among the audience. Although the comment sections analysed primarily serve to elicit new topics of *Grammar Girl* podcasts, followers use the com-

ment sections to contribute new information and to construct and express their online identities as ‘learners’, ‘experts’, ‘grammar sticklers’, and ‘trolls’. The meta-linguistic debates show two polarised groups of commenters, who resort to either prescriptive or descriptive arguments. The unifying element between these two groups is that they offer arguments traditionally found in discussions on usage, retell familiar anecdotes related to the usage tradition, and preserve and continue online the metalinguistic debates on what is perceived as correct usage.

5

From usage guides to Wikipedia: Re-contextualising the discourse on language use[1]

5.1 Introduction: Expert discourses on language use

The word *usage* in linguistic contexts has two different attitudinal connotations, one neutral and the other more judgemental and negative (Peters, 2006, pp. 759–60; Busse & Schröder, 2009, p. 72). In general terms, *usage* refers to the customary or habitual way of doing something, but in the context of linguistic prescriptivism, *usage* may refer to linguistic practices that are contrasted with what is prescribed, namely the rules of the standard language (Allen, 1992, p. 1071). Such non-standard usage is often labelled 'bad usage' (Allen, 1992, p. 1071), 'bad grammar' or simply 'a mistake' (Bloomfield, 1944, p. 45), and it may be stigmatised in the prescriptive tradition. Linguistics as a discipline primarily aims at describing the rules of use accurately or, in the words of Charles Fries, linguists traditionally hold that 'there can be no *correctness* apart from usage' (as cited in McArthur, 1992, p. 421).

[1] Lukač, M. (2017). From Usage Guides to Wikipedia. Re-contextualising the discourse on language use. In M. Bondi, S. Cacchiani and D. Mazzi (eds.), *Discourse In and Through the Media: Recontextualising and Reconceptualising Expert Discouse* (pp. 315–50). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Quite contrary to these views originating from structural linguistics, the prescriptive tradition introduces evaluative judgements by prescribing certain rules for usage and proscribing others (McArthur, 1992, p. 446). The history of linguistic prescriptivism in the English language goes back to the eighteenth century (Beal, 2009), when the prescriptive rules were established as a by-product of the early grammarians' attempts to codify English grammar (Peters, 2006, p. 761). In this period prescriptive rules such as the rules proscribing against double negation and split infinitives were first introduced. The history of prescriptivism in the English language is recorded and preserved in the tradition of the usage guide genre or the 'para-lexicographic tradition' (Peters & Young, 1997, p. 317), which continues to persist independently in spite of the 'descriptive turn' in lexicography and in the writing of grammar books. The 'descriptive turn' has been greatly influenced by the establishment of linguistics as a discipline and, subsequently, by using naturally occurring data for studying language. The language advice in usage guides is still, however, for the great part the result of the topical selection, acceptability judgements and attitudes of their authors (Algeo, 1991, p. 6; Peters & Young, 1997, p. 317); in other words, usage guides are often subjective and dependent on introspection.

Usage guides, however, are not the only records of the prescriptive tradition. The history of the standard language ideology, the consciousness of the standard and of 'correct' and 'incorrect' language use (Milroy & Milroy, 2002, p. 25) is charted out in the 'complaint tradition' (Milroy & Milroy, 2002, Chapter 2), which consists of public

complaints about the misuse of language and about linguistic decline, which are commonly published in letters-to-the-editor sections of newspapers and, more recently, on weblogs and Internet forums. Usage advice has also found its place in the new media genres, on specialist weblogs, wikis, and in various types of social media (Pinterest boards, Facebook groups, Twitter accounts, etc.) dedicated to usage (Schaffer, 2010).

Although both the usage guide tradition and the complaint tradition serve to maintain the standard language ideology, they traditionally represent different groups of participants in the discussions on linguistic prescriptivism. On the one hand, there are the usage guide authors, the prescriptivists, and on the other the members of the general public, popularly known as language pedants or 'language mavens' (Cameron, 1995, p. vi). Since the introduction of Web 2.0, however, the two groups, the ones engaging in giving usage guide advice and the members of the general public, are no longer clearly separated. In the medium where publishing became accessible to anyone with an Internet connection, many of the members of the general public with an interest in usage got the opportunity to create their own weblogs and contribute to discussions on language use (Schaffer, 2010, pp. 23–4). One such medium where language use is discussed and described is Wikipedia, the online collaborative encyclopaedia community. In the sphere of advice on language use where linguistic authorities traditionally functioned as gatekeepers, Wikipedia currently functions as a platform for translation between the groups that would otherwise not communicate. The status of grammars and usage guides as authorities is thus chal-

lenged and the questions of language use are negotiated on a more equal footing between the language experts and the general public.

In this paper I present an analysis of Wikipedia entries and the secondary Wikipedia Talk pages, which editors use to discuss the respective Wikipedia entries, on usage items such as *ain't*, the split infinitive, preposition stranding, and *who*/*whom*. The reason behind choosing this particular online genre for the analysis of the discussions on and descriptions of language use is the fact that all of the content is created by the members of the general public who negotiate the content of the entries in the secondary Talk pages. On the other hand, the reason for choosing language use as a topic for demonstrating the phenomenon of re-contextualisation of expert discourse is the afore-mentioned established gap between the advice-giving experts and the advice-seeking laypeople.

Although Wikipedia instructs its contributors, 'Wikipedians', to provide informative and descriptive accounts of usage items, the Talk pages demonstrate that many of the contributors express prescriptive attitudes towards usage. I focus here on an analysis of the prescriptive and descriptive arguments of the collaborators creating Wikipedia entries and the guiding principles of Wikipedia that provide the basis for the construction of the entries.

The second point of the analysis focuses on a comparison of the Wikipedia entries on selected usage items with their equivalent entries in usage guides, which are retrieved from the Hyper Usage Guide of English or HUGE database (developed by Robin Straaijer at Leiden University). The HUGE database (Straaijer, 2014) is a growing collec-

tion of usage guides covering the period from 1770 onwards. The database currently includes 77 usage guides and its aim is to combine a history of usage advice into a single library. The HUGE database has been envisioned within a research project at Leiden University Centre for Linguistics called 'Bridging the Unbridgeable: Linguists, Prescriptivists and the General Public'. In doing so, I will address in section 5.5 the differences in the styles of the Wikipedia and usage guide entries, analyse the arguments provided, and the language of prescription and description.

5.2 The usage guide as a genre

The usage guide has been described as 'a neglected genre' (Weiner, 1988, p. 171), although a rising number of studies have been devoted to it since the late 1980s (Busse & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2011). The usage guide genre has been defined as 'an integrative all-in-one reference work written for educated lay people that bridges the traditional divide between a grammar and a dictionary' (Busse & Schröder, 2009, p. 72). Being a usage guide author himself, Weiner (1988, p. 173) defines the goal of usage guides as helping its users decide between alternatives which from a descriptive point both exist in language, but of which for some reason or another one is considered less good English than its alternative.

Usage guides are not intended for the language learner, but rather for the native speaker (Weiner, 1988, p. 173). Among the native speakers, the target readership of such usage guides are in Labovian terms 'the linguistically insecure' (Beal, 2009, p. 42), social climbers,

who are not ‘born into’ using the standard language, and who are ‘shamed by their English’ (Beal, 2009, p. 42). As the author of the arguably most influential usage guide, *Modern English Usage*, Henry Fowler argues in his correspondence with the Oxford University Press:

> In point of fact we have our eyes not on the foreigner, but on the half-educated Englishman of literary proclivities who wants to know Can I say so-&-so?, What does this familiar phrase or word mean?, Is this use English? (...) the kind of Englishman who has idioms floating in his head in a jumbled state, & knows it… (as cited in Burchfield, 1991, p. 96)

Usage guides continue to be extremely popular; a study by Busse and Schröder (2008) showed that the numbers of the usage guide publications are steadily on the rise, presumably along with the rising popularity of other guides, self-help and how-to literature.

Several linguists have provided critical accounts of the usage guide tradition. In his classification of different types of usage guides, Algeo (1991, pp. 6–13) points to the fact that the largest group of usage guides is that consisting of books that largely depend on *ipse dixit* judgements, in other words, guides that largely rely on the personal judgements of their authors (Algeo, 1991, p. 6). Usage guides on the other side of the prescriptivism-descriptivism spectrum are far and few between. An example of a more descriptive usage guide according to Algeo is *Webster’s Dictionary of English Usage*, which he describes as ‘a book [which] does not tell people what they ought to say, but explains the options and the likely consequences of choosing one option over another’ (Algeo, 1991, p. 11). Although there seems to be a chronological shift towards usage advice that is more explanatory and usage-

based, some more recent publications, such as Burchfield (1996) and Garner (1998), still seem to be relying on personal, subjective judgements of their authors (Peters, 2006, p. 765). Although usage guides tend to vary considerably in the choice of their items, they also usually include the traditional shibboleths of usage (Peters, 2006, p. 12) that are also known as 'old chestnuts' (Weiner, 1988, p. 173). It can be argued that normative judgements essentially belong to usage guides. Their readers expect clear, user-friendly guidance, which is usually lacking in the more objective accounts of the more jargon-loaded grammar books and dictionaries (Busse & Schröder, 2009, p. 84).

Despite the fact that usage guides are read for their often clear-cut advice, scholars analysing the tradition of usage guides warn of their lack of lateral referencing (Peters & Young, 1997, p. 318), which serves little use to the contemporary reader who would like to be informed about current usage trends. Those works that do not include the analyses of contemporary usage do little more than replicate conservative attitudes, support 'the paralexicographic tradition' and institutionalise the tradition of 'tertiary responses to language', which are widely accepted regardless of their validity (Bloomfield, 1944, p. 45).

5.3 The history of collaboration in knowledge creation: From the *OED* to Wikis

Collaboration in knowledge creation, as we find it today in Wikipedia, is hardly a novelty: it has been around since biblical times when scribes simultaneously edited, updated, interpreted, and reinterpreted texts as they were transcribing them (McArthur as cited in Stvilia et al., 2008, p.

983). One of the greatest global processes of collaboration and co-creation in the pre-computer age, which is also of special interest for linguistics, is that of the making of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) (Simpson, 2004, pp. 192–196; Stvilia et al., 2008, p. 983; Bhalla, 2011, pp. 8–9).

Besides the practice of contacting specialist consultants, the *OED* has a long history of recruiting volunteer contributors from the members of the public (Simpson, 2004, pp. 193–4).[2] In 1879, the then recently appointed editor of the OED, James Murray, decided to instigate *Appeal to the English-Speaking and English-Reading Public to Read Books and Make Extracts for the Philological Society's New Dictionary* (Mugglestone, 2005, p. 15). This 'crowdsourcing' process contributed significantly to the *OED*, with thousands of contributors and millions of archived physical slips which have been in use until today (see the *OED*'s website). Not unlike Wikipedia, Murray's *Appeal* encouraged democratic collaboration, which allowed everyone to take part: 'This is work in which anyone can join, even the most indolent novel-reader will find it little trouble to put a pencil-mark against any word or phrase that strikes him, and he can afterwards copy out the context at his leisure' (as cited in Mugglestone, 2005, p. 16). In order to manage the work done by the volunteers more efficiently, Murray complemented the initial *Appeal* by a pamphlet including a more targeted approach including 'lists of wants' and 'desiderata' which made the collaborative process more helpful for the editors (*OED*'s website). The collaboration

[2] The history of the *OED* website is documented on the *OED* website http://public.oed.com/the-oed-appeals/history-of-the-appeals/.

of the *OED* with the general public has continued until today in the form of online appeals.[3]

Although quite ground breaking, the collaborative participation on the *OED* did include organisational difficulties: the contributions were occasionally obsolete, incorrect or duplicated, and they required a substantial amount of editing and assessment from the central institution. Such issues today have been largely overcome with the development of collaborative processes that are greatly facilitated by the introduction of online content management technologies such as Wikis (Stvilia et al., 2008, p. 984), through which subsequently thousands of contributors continue creating dictionaries (*Wiktionary*) and online grammars and usage guides (*English Grammar and Usage Wiki*).

5.4 Wikipedia: The online collaborative encyclopaedia community

As of April 2014 Wikipedia is the sixth most visited website in the world.[4] It has become the most widely used tool for knowledge dissemination and the largest collaborative text-editing project in the history of human kind. The multilingual and freely accessible online encyclopaedia is available in 285 languages. Potentially every Internet user can edit documents on Wikipedia. To date it has approximately 31 million articles and 76,000 active contributors. Contributors are considered to be 'active' with a minimum of five contributions per month. There are currently 4,518,174 articles written in English.[5] The greatest contribution of this project is the fact that through it a vast quantity of infor-

[3] See 'OED Appeals' www.oed.com/appeals.
[4] See 'The top 500 sites on the web' www.alexa.com.
[5] See 'Wikipedia: About' (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About).

mation that was previously accessible only through traditional knowledge institutions such as libraries has been greatly popularised and made available to the general public.

Wikipedia is an instantiation of the Wiki software concept, which allows users to collaborate in a web-based manner and to edit a single document. Originally it was developed by Ward Cunningham, who was looking for a tool that would enable better collaboration among developers (Ebersbach et al., 2008, p. 14). Cunningham also introduced 'wiki-philosophy', which is based on the unlimited possibility to create and edit pages, and is referred to as the 'open editing concept' (Fichter, 2005, p. 47). Wiki systems are also document management systems which allow users to trace back every single change that has been made to the document and reverse it. The open editing concept was designed to enable a more democratic access to information systems to users with no advanced technological skills.

Since Wikipedia is constructed collaboratively, it can be regarded as an online community, which is defined as a group of people 'who come together for a particular *purpose*, and who are guided by *policies* (including norms and rules) and supported by *software*' (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005). Bruns (2008) places Wikipedia in the wider context of the social media, which aim at participation by a wider audience, not just by a community of experts. Through client-based editing, the traditional linear knowledge dissemination process from the expert to the lay community has been enriched by the fact that laypeople and experts are now interacting on the same platform in a multilateral way. The representation of knowledge on Wikipedia is constructed in a self-

organised way; nevertheless, Wikipedia is not an egalitarian system (Gutounig, 2015, pp. 149–150). Established hierarchies and powers are, however, not attributed through external status, but through actual contribution to the system. In this way they can be defined as ‘meritocracies’ (Bruns, 2008, p. 25).

The entries and the editing interface are just the most visible side of Wikipedia. To enable the discursive aspect of collaboration, Wikis usually have discussion functions, in the case of Wikipedia, in the form of Talk pages. These pages enable not only collective editing of the entries, but also engaging in a discussion on the topic of the entry. The Talk pages should lead to a usually temporary consensus regarding the entry in question. The basic principles of the open-editing concept combined with the traceability and discussion functions enable the self-organised editing process without central governance among people who are usually not acquainted with each other. Due to these characteristics, Wikipedia seems to establish what is considered in some aspects to be an unprecedented, emergent discourse context (Herring, 2013, p. 14).

5.4.1 Related work

Due to the success of the Wikipedia project, a substantial number of scholarly publications have dealt with the phenomenon in the course of the last decade. Studies have so far focussed on the collaboration and coordination patterns in Wikipedia (Viégas et al., 2004). Researchers have devoted attention to the acts of vandalism on Wikipedia, i.e. edits that were made with bad intentions (Viégas et al., 2007, p. 3; Potthast et

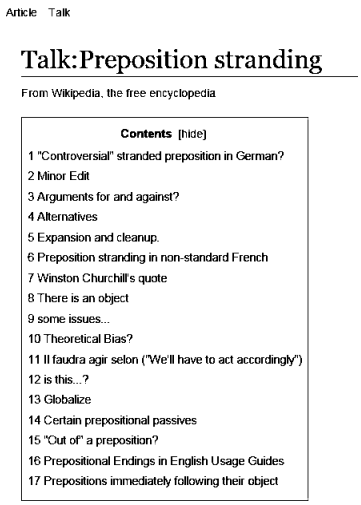
al., 2008), as well as to the quality of Wikipedia entries when compared with traditional encyclopaedias (Giles, 2005). These studies showed that entries in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* and Wikipedia go head to head concerning the number of factual errors or misinterpretation of important concepts.

In linguistics, Emigh and Herring (2005) were among the first to analyse the aspect of text production on Wikipedia. By performing genre analysis on the level of formality and informality of Wikipedia entries, they found that in spite of the collaborative and open-editing approach of Wikipedia, its level of formality can be compared to that of traditional encyclopaedias. Myers (2010) devoted a book to the analysis of the discourse of blogs and Wikis. According to Myers (2010, p. ix), there are two main reasons to analyse Wikipedia linguistically; the first is focussing on new aspects of the language of emerging web genres, and the second is linguists' contribution to a phenomenon that has been dealt with primarily in the field of technology. In his analysis of Wikipedia, Myers primarily focussed on the interaction among 'Wikipedians' on Talk pages.

5.4.2 The structure of Wikipedia entries and Talk pages

The fact that Wikipedia entries hardly differ from the entries in traditional print encyclopaedias can be explained by the phenomenon that, since the beginnings of the project, Wikipedians 'were guided by the rhetorical models of existing encyclopaedias' (Shirky, 2010, p. 116) and that they have 'internalised cultural norms of encyclopaedic style' (Herring, 2013, p. 15). The formality and stylistic homogeneity of en-

tries (Herring, 2013, p. 9) is for a large part the accomplishment of the active rank-and-file Wikipedia users, who continue changing existing text according to the stylistic norms of a traditional encyclopaedia, and who are also referred to as page 'watchers' (Viégas et al., 2004, p. 580). A relevant point of Wikipedia's departure from traditional print encyclopaedias are its secondary Talk pages, which greatly determine knowledge construction processes on Wikipedia, and which are an essential part of defining a collaborative online encyclopaedia. An example of such a Talk page can be found in Figure 5.1.


Article Talk

Talk:Preposition stranding

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Contents [hide]

1 "Controversial" stranded preposition in German?
2 Minor Edit
3 Arguments for and against?
4 Alternatives
5 Expansion and cleanup.
6 Preposition stranding in non-standard French
7 Winston Churchill's quote
8 There is an object
9 some issues...
10 Theoretical Bias?
11 Il faudra agir selon ("We'll have to act accordingly")
12 is this...?
13 Globalize
14 Certain prepositional passives
15 "Out of" a preposition?
16 Prepositional Endings in English Usage Guides
17 Prepositions immediately following their object

Figure 5.1 Talk page on Preposition stranding

Talk pages are devoted to the discussion of issues surrounding the topics on 'real' pages. They provide a different forum from the Wikipedia entries, and they consist of discussions on what information should or should not be included in the main articles (Viégas et al., 2004, p. 576). The Talk pages on Wikipedia contribute to Wikipedia being a successful system. They serve a number of functions in creating and managing

articles, such as strategic planning of edits, enforcement of Wikipedia policies and conducting guidelines (Viégas et al., 2007, p. 1). Talk pages have a central role in keeping up the quality of Wikipedia entries. They are conversation places and as such are governed by different rules from the entries. For example, the entries are not deleted in the Talk pages, and this is often the case with the edited content in the entries, and the participants are encouraged to sign their postings (Viégas et al., 2007, p. 6). There are three main layout and mark-up conventions in Talk pages, (1) signatures, (2) indention and (3) discussion topics (Viégas et al., 2007, pp. 6–7). The convention for the contributors to sign their postings in Talk pages is respected in 67% of the instances (Viégas et al., 2007, p. 7). When the postings are left unsigned, only an IP address appears in the end of the posting. Users usually indent their answers to previous postings in order to visually disambiguate the relationship between the postings. Finally, contributors are instructed to put each new conversation topic at the end of the existing Talk page.

Researchers have found that the genre of Talk pages most resembles informal web discussion boards (Emigh & Herring, 2005, p. 7; Myers, 2010, pp. 154–56), which is in contrast to the formal style of the entries themselves. The linguistic features identified as indicative of the informal, web-chat style are first person pronouns, contractions, emoticons, and informal lexicon (Emigh & Herring, 2005, p. 8) as well as conversational discourse markers, such as discourse particles (*well*, *umm* and *ahem*), nonwords (*ahem*, *uh huh*) and politeness markers (modals, verbs of cognition and perception, and modal adverbs) (Myers, 2010, Chapter 10). Politeness plays a crucial role in Talk pages, as

it softens potential conflicts and contributes to the general feeling of belonging to a Community of Practice (Myers, 2010, pp. 155–56).

Concerning the topics and functions of discussions on Talk pages, Viégas et al. (2007, pp. 7–8) analysed the dimensions along which contributions to Talk pages can be classified. Wikipedians most commonly use Talk pages to request for coordination of the entry edits and they also approach the participants as a community of experts and ask for information. Talk pages occasionally include off-topic remarks, which means that the participants discuss topics loosely related to the entry, or rather report on their own experiences and opinions. Some of the Talk pages provide insights into 'edit wars' between groups of Wikipedians, in which two people or groups of opposing opinions alternate between versions of the page. In some instances of discussions on Talk pages, participants also point to internal resources, namely, other Wikipedia pages (Viégas et al., 2007, pp. 8–9). Ferschke et al. (2012) analysed dialogue acts in Simple English Talk pages, and they found that the most common types of entries on Talk pages are information-providing comments, in which Wikipedians communicate new information, request information or suggest changes. Wikipedians tend to report on their edits in order to justify the changes made to the entries, and almost 40% of turns in Talk pages are article criticisms. It is common to start a discussion or a topic on a Talk page by referring to a particular deficiency in the accompanying article.

Myers (2010, pp. 146–154) found in the analysis of types of argumentation on Wikipedia that the rhetoric of Wikipedians is greatly influenced by the Wikipedia's explicit principles: (1) Neutral Point of

View, (2) No Original Research, (3) Verifiability, (4) Be bold and (5) Civility. Neutral point of view, or NPOV as Wikipedians refer to it in their discussions, implies that editors should try to include a full range of views on a topic in their accounts. No Original Research (NOR) warns editors against publishing new ideas or mentioning facts that cannot be documented instead of referring only to the available sources. Additionally, every statement needs to be verified; in case it is not, editors insert 'Citation needed' tags into the entries. The 'Be bold' principle of Wikipedia urges editors to rather say something roughly accurate than to say nothing at all, and to build up content. Finally, due to the fact that the goal behind each entry is to reach consensus, editors are urged to be polite and cooperative.

5.5 Analysing Wikipedia entries on language use

For this study I selected seven Wikipedia entries on usage items, in alphabetical order: *Ain't, Double negative, Fewer vs. less, Gender neutrality in English, Preposition stranding, The Split infinitive and Whom* (Table 5.1). These entries were selected as they all included accounts of acceptability of usage and were described in the context of the prescriptivism-descriptivism debate.

Most of the included usage items have a longstanding place in the history of the prescriptive tradition. The prescriptive rules regarding the respective usage items could be summed up as following: Do not use *ain't* when you mean *isn't* or *aren't*. Do not use more than one negative particle to negate the same clause. Do not use *less* instead of *fewer* with plural countable nouns. Do not use gender-specific words in non-gender

specific contexts. Do not place a preposition in the end of the sentence, but before the noun phrase it modifies. Do not insert anything between the infinitive *to* marker and the verb-form itself. Use *whom* as the objective form of the interrogative pronoun *who*.

In Table 5.1, I provide data on the selected Wikipedia entries, including their length, number of watchers who are alerted when changes are made to each of the entries, date of page creation, total number of edits, total number of distinct authors, page views, and comparison of the data with average values for Wikipedia entries where these values are available, namely for page length, number of edits and page views. All pages on usage items are considerably more often edited when compared to an average Wikipedia entry (see column Total N of edits), which is on average edited 21.82 times. The usage entries attract more attention, contribution and updates from the editors. The entries on usage items are also considerably longer than an average entry. Although they are heavily edited, not all entries on usage items are viewed more than the average (see column Difference to avg. page views).

Preposition stranding and *Whom* are the least popular among the selected usage entries. The *Split infinitive* and *Ain't* attract by far the most readers. Another sign of popularity are the numbers of editors of a particular entry, which are the highest for *Gender neutrality*, *Double negative* and the *Split infinitive*. In the following sections (5.5.1) and (5.5.2), I give a description of the Wikipedia contributors and I describe the entries on usage items themselves.

5.5.1 The editors

Researchers usually distinguish between two general groups of Wikipedia editors (Bryant et al., 2005), novice and expert users. Novices contribute to topics they are familiar with, identifying omissions and weaknesses, and correcting them. Up to 60% of Wikipedia's registered users never make another edit after their first 24 hours.6 The experts' goals expand as they continue contributing to Wikipedia. Al¬though they continue to improve the quality of the content, they have an additional role in the community, as they become concerned with maintaining the quality of Wikipedia itself. Expert editors use tools such as watchlists and WikiProjects, which allow them to review changes and observe instances of vandalism.

Another relevant distinction between novice and expert users is their sense of community. Whereas for novices Wikipedia seems to be a collection of articles, more experienced contributors view themselves as members of a tribe in which they establish their identity through their contributions (Bryant et al., 2005, p. 7). Novice users usually become experts through observation and direct coaching by the more knowledgeable users (Bryant et al., 2005, p. 8).

In this study I additionally attempted to address the question: 'Who are the contributors to the entries on usage items?', and more specifically, 'Are they *experts* who are dealing with language in their professional contexts?'

Table 5.1 Data on selected Wikipedia entries on usage items*

Title of the article	Page length in bytes	Difference to avg. page	N of page watchers	Date of page creation	Total N of edits	Total N of distinct authors	Page views April 2014	Difference to avg. page views
Average values	2,680	n/a	n/a		21.82		2,095.45	n/a
Ain't	16,040	+498.5%	58	6.9.2010	199	112	18,731	+793.89%
Double negative	25,007	+833.1%	68	9.3.2003	849	513	9,880	+371.5%
Fewer vs. Less	6,774	+152.8%	<30	17.1.2007	120	64	3,710	+77.05%
Gender neutrality	33,962	+1167.24 %	111	24.8.2002	1,331	551	4,025	+92.08%
Preposition	13,486	+403.21%	<30	27.1.2006	165	85	2,033	-3.07%
Split infinitive	49,338	+1741%	118	18.11.2001	1,124	493	18,761	+795.32%
Whom	21,064	+685.97%	33	4.3.2004	400	208	2,095	-0.2%

*The data were retrieved from the information provided for each page (2014, April 20), Wikipedia article traffic statistics (http://stats.grok.se, 2014, May 20) and Wikimedia statistics (http://stats.wikimedia.org/, 2014, May 25).

Due to the fact that at least 30% of the editors remain anonymous (Viégas et al., 2007, p. 7) and many do not provide biographical data on their user websites, it was impossible to present an accountable quantitative overview of the editors' professions or involvement in language-related fields. However, by observing available user websites, it is clear that a number of editors of usage entries work in language-related professions, whereas others include language and grammar among their personal interests. An author who writes under the name of Doric Loon is Professor of Translation. On his user website, he provides information about his interests and about Wikipedia edits which greatly coincide with his real-life research interests. Another frequent contributor on the usage items pages is Daniel Freeman, who in spite of not having a job that would directly qualify him as a language expert describes himself as a user of proper English:

(1) I am no great writer but I know the basics of proper English writing. I even use the word 'whom' correctly! When I worked at the local newspaper they called me the 'comma king' because I was an expert at knowing where commas are required, and where they are optional.

Jerry Friedman is another non-expert, but, again, a contributor who qualifies as a well-informed individual teaching physics and mathematics and providing style advice for Wikipedians on his user website, an example of which is presented in (2).

(2) Have some doubt about 'Note that', 'Interestingly', 'It is important to note that', etc. You can often just leave them out.

Gramorak is a retired language teacher who collects early grammars of English and tries to write a grammar of the English verb. So-

SaysSunny double-majored in Astrophysics and Math, and says she cannot avoid noticing grammar mistakes and typos, which earned her the moniker Renegade Grammarian for contacting webmasters concerning grammar mistakes. Her 'go-to' book on English usage is Fowler's *Modern English Usage*.

Although many contributions remain anonymous, and not enough biographical data on the contributors are available to make general conclusions, it can be observed that authors with more 'real-life' linguistic expertise often contribute more frequently, and assume a more relevant role in coordinating the edits than the anonymous and novice users.

5.5.2 Wikipedia entries on usage items

Busse and Schröder (2006, p. 71) describe usage guides as works in which the description of grammar and lexis are synthesised, contrary to the traditional division of labour between grammar books and dictionaries. Wikipedia entries analysed here do not merely describe lexical items, as does its sister dictionary project *Wiktionary*; however, they are not usage guide entries either. Instead of instructing the readers on language use, Wikipedians are urged to create informative entries.

(3) Wikipedia is not in the business of saying how words, idioms, phrases etc., should be used (but it may be important in the context of an encyclopedia article to discuss how a word is used.[7]

Nevertheless, the secondary Wikipedia pages, i.e. the Talk pages, demonstrate that prescriptive attitudes are present to a great extent among the contributors and attempts are made in the initial stages of

[7] See 'Wikipedia: Wikipedia is not a dictionary' wiki/ Wikipedia:Wikipedia_is_not_a_dictionary.

creating the respective entries to include the correctness labels related to the particular usage items, as is evident in (4).

(4) The article reads like a style manual. The majority of the article is focused on how to use who/m, with little focus on the historical development. Look at that tiny section on its history, it doesn't even tell us what the Old English and Middle English forms were! The tone of the article has a very prescriptivist attitude, reading more like a random book on grammar than an encyclopedic article. This is unacceptable; all linguistic articles on Wikipedia are descriptivist, sensibly so. Cntrational

I agree. That is a risk with articles involving common grammatical foibles and hobbyhorses. See also Apostrophe, which needs to be guarded against amateurism of the less benign sort. So please: do more than your one edit so far, to improve the article. NoeticaTea?[8]

However, although they are often overtly expressed, prescriptive attitudes and negative value judgements of usage items rarely make it into the encyclopaedia itself, due to the interventions of Wikipedia entries such as the one in (4). In order to explore this phenomenon, I will here first use corpus linguistics tools in order to illustrate the differences between Wikipedia entries and usage guide entries (see §5.5.3) and, secondly, illustrate the discourses situated in the prescriptivist-descriptivist discourse on the Talk pages as well as the dynamics that prevent them from becoming embedded in the respective Wikipedia entries (cf. §5.5.4).

[8] See 'Talk: Who (pr onoun)' http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Who_(pronoun).

5.5.3 Corpus-based comparison of Wikipedia entries and usage guides

For this analysis two sub-corpora on seven usage items were created, the first being made up of Wikipedia entries, and the second from the usage guide entries available through the HUGE, in order to explore the potential differences between the two text types. The exact numbers of entries per usage item, and the number of words per each topic and per sub-corpus are available in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Sub-corpora on selected usage items: HUGE and Wikipedia entries

Usage Item	N of entries	N of usage guides containing an entry for the item	Total N of words per usage problem in HUGE (combined all entries)	Total N of words per entry in Wikipedia
Ain't	29	23	8,764	2,057
Double negative	49	40	15,440	3,394
Fewer vs. less	73	58	14,435	919
Gender neutrality	40	34	14,633	3,976
Preposition stranding	51	47	21,212	1,801
Split infinitive	71	59	34,121	6,473
Whom	87	60	38,840	2,850
			Total: 147,445	Total: 21,470

In order of popularity among usage guides, the usage items are listed as follows: *Whom*, *Split infinitive*, *Fewer vs. less*, *Preposition stranding*, *Double negative*, *Gender neutrality* and *Ain't*. If we compare this order to the number of views of the Wikipedia entries in Table 5.1 (*Split infinitive*, *Ain't*, *Double negative*, *Gender neutrality*, *Fewer vs. less*, *Whom* and *Preposition stranding*), we can see that there is a considerable discrepancy between what users seem to find of most interest

and what is mostly written about. For example, the most popular item in usage guides, *Whom*, is very poorly frequented on Wikipedia when compared to the other usage items. These numbers, however, cannot be compared one-to-one, since we need to take the temporal dimension into consideration, because the usage guides in HUGE date back to the late eighteenth century, and the first usage item entry in Wikipedia was created in 2001. The page view statistics on Wikipedia entries are an indicator of how interested people are in certain topics. Thus, they provide a more accurate and data-based account of the actual usage problems people are interested in, in contrast to the usage problems selected by the usage guide authors.

In comparing the two sub-corpora, the entries in HUGE and the Wikipedia entries, I used the web-based Wmatrix tool (Rayson, 2009) for finding key words, and subsequently key semantic domains that would help determine significant differences between the Wikipedia-type entries and those found in usage guides. The Wmatrix tool (Rayson, 2009) enables access not only to the traditional tools of corpus linguistics, such as key words, concordance lines and frequency lists, but also to both automatic part-of-speech and USAS semantic taggers (Rayson et al., 2004). In this analysis I focussed on the results obtained from comparing the key semantic domains via the USAS semantic tagger that enables the researcher to identify relevant semantic categories which are overrepresented in one corpus when compared to another. Since the two sub-corpora were small in size, especially the Wikipedia sub-corpus, instead of focussing on key words, I decided to focus on key semantic domains, which facilitate the recognition of small fre-

quency items as key if they belong to the same domain. In the analysis introduced below, I present the top key categories, which were calculated by using the log likelihood test. The minimum key value of the log likelihood statistical test was set to 15.13, which corresponds to $p < 0.0001$, and the minimum word frequency from each domain was set to five occurrences. The results of the analysis are shown in Tables 5.3 and 5.4. In Table 3, the lexical items overrepresented in the HUGE subcorpus are categorised into four different semantic domains. These domains are based on the USAS tagging system, but I also slightly modified them to better fit the purposes of the analysis.

Table 5.3 Positive semantic domains in HUGE

Positive semantic domains in HUGE	Lexical items
Pronouns	*it, one, we, they, you, what, he, which, our, these, those, your*
Downtoners	
(a) Minimisers	(a) *hardly, scarcely, at least, barely, at all*
(b)Compromisers	(b) *quite, pretty, rather, sufficiently, reasonably*
Evaluation: Inaccurate	*incorrect, wrong, missing, error, mistake, ungrammatical, blunder*
In power	*power, rule, govern, master, hierarchy, insist, order, force, upper-class*

The four semantic domains over-represented in usage guides when compared to Wikipedia are *Pronouns*, *Downtoners*, *Evaluation: Inaccurate*, and *In power*.

The use of pronouns in register variation has been addressed in various corpus-based studies conducted by e.g. Biber (1995, p. 30). First- and second-person pronouns have been repeatedly found to be related to interactiveness, whereas third-person pronouns tend to be

related to the narrative dimension of register variation (Biber 1995, p. 151).

Usage guide authors guide the readers and provide advice. They are more narrative in their style than the factual Wikipedia entries, and they occasionally address the reader directly as in (5).

(5) We do know that it had an earlier spelling an ‘t (or sometimes a ‘n’t), which you can see would not be difficult to derive phonologically from are or am; (Ward, 1989, p. 60)

According to Quirk et al. (1985, p. 452), downtoners are intensifying adjuncts that lower the effect on the force of the modified verbs. The difference between *minimisers* and *compromises* in Table 5.3 is, however, a matter of degree. Minimisers realise a greater degree of intensity and negate the full implication of the predicate. The use of downtoners and other types of hedging devices observed in (6) can be well explained in pragmatic terms.

(6) After reading these we can perhaps conclude that the decisive influence is probably the vague impression beforehand that whom is more likely to be right; but it need hardly be said that slapdash procedure of that kind deserves no mercy when it fails. (Fowler, 1965, p. 707)

The authors are attempting to emphasise an orientation to the reader by using first and second person pronouns and hedging devices through which they attempt to gain the reader’s acceptance of the proposed arguments (cf. Hyland, 1998, pp. xiii–ix).

In a study of prescriptivist language in letters to the editor (§3), it will be demonstrated that the choice of lexis that indicates negative evaluation is typical of prescriptivism. In prescriptivist texts marked,

nonstandard forms are compared to the non-marked standard ones, and labelled *incorrect* as in (7).

(7) A double negative does, however, sometimes survive accidentally and incorrectly in Mod.E., especially in conversation. (Treble and Vallins, 1936, p. 65)

It should be noted though, that unlike in the usage guide *A.B.C. of English Usage* (1936) in (7), newer usage guides do not directly refer to usage as 'incorrect' *per se*. They rather refer to older sources through which such attitudes are secondarily transmitted in the form of citations, as in the following example from Webster's *Dictionary of English Usage*, which cites Fowler on the usage of *ain't*.

(8) By 1926 H. W. Fowler could view first-person use of *ain't* quite differently from other uses: *A(i)n't* is merely colloquial, & as used for *isn't* is an uneducated blunder & serves no useful purpose. (Ward, 1989, p. 60)

Finally, the lexical items from the domain *In power* are statistically overused in comparison again in Wikipedia entries due to the common reference to rules in the language of usage guides. See (9) for an example of this.

(9) The *OED* lists numerous other examples (15-20C.) of the breakdown of formal grammatical rules governing *who* and *whom*. (Fowler, 2000, p. 847)

Table 5.4 demonstrates the domains and their respective lexical items that are over-represented in Wikipedia pages when compared to the usage guide entries. Five different domains are listed, but a number of them can be combined and ascribed to the same phenomenon. Thus, numbers and the much more common references to personal names and

the media provide common evidence of one characteristic to the online encyclopaedia (see above) that is generally largely lacking in usage guides, i.e. referencing. The *Numbers* in the Wikipedia corpus most commonly refer publication dates cited and the *Personal names* are often names of authors. The domain *The Media: Newspapers* consists mostly of words that are parts of titles of journals and other types of publications.

Instead of providing *ipse dixit* judgements, such as the one common in usage guides, Wikipedia authors, guided by the Verifiability principles (see above) are obliged to support their arguments by providing external sources, which do not include only individual linguistic authorities, but also up-to-date linguistic research. External sources in Wikipedia usage item entries include usage guides, grammar books, newspaper and journal articles, encyclopaedias and academic weblogs (such as *Language Log*). Instead of referring to grammatical rules, the Wikipedia entries focus on reporting linguistic descriptions of different types of usage in different varieties of English, and, occasionally, the editors also introduce comparisons with other languages regarding a particular usage item.

For this reason, the semantic fields made up of lexical items from the field of linguistics, *Language, grammar and linguistic processes*, and *Languages and language varieties*, are over-represented when compared to the usage guides.

An example of the types of accounts that rely on the specialised terminology of linguistics can be seen in the excerpt from the entry on the *Double negative* in (10).

(10) A similar development to a circumfix from double negation can be seen in non-Indo-European languages, too: for example, in Maltese, *kiel* 'he ate' is negated as *ma kielx* 'he did not eat', where the verb is preceded by a negative particle *ma-* 'not' and followed by the particle *-x*, which was originally a shortened form of *xejn* 'nothing' - thus, 'he didn't eat nothing'.

Table 5.4 Negative semantic domains in HUGE

Negative semantic domains in HUGE	Lexical items
Numbers (dates and page numbers)	*1925, p. 25, 1998*, etc.
Languages and language varieties	*British, standard English, Cockney, Australian, Aussie, American, Scots, French, German, Greek, Latin*
Personal names	*Eric Partridge, Jonathan Swift, Dickens, George Bernard Shaw, H. W. Fowler, Shakespeare*
The Media: Newspapers	*article, press, magazine, newspaper, correspondent, headline*
Language, grammar and linguistic processes	*utterance, token, grammar, verb, plural, denote, sign, clause, imply, proverbial, speakers, usage, vowel, pronunciation, dialects, language*

To return to Biber's dimensions, which were mentioned briefly in relation to the discussion of Table 5.3, the linguistic items that are characteristic of Wikipedia entries are more representative of informative language than of what we normally find in usage guides. Precise names (*Personal names*) and references (*Numbers*, *The Media: Newspapers*) are given, and the specialised terminology of descriptive linguistics is used, which stands in stark contrast to the rule-oriented, guiding and often prescriptive language of usage guides.

5.5.4 Comparing Wikipedia Talk pages and entries on usage items

As previously mentioned, the reason why Wikipedia entries maintain a high level of quality and objectivity is that general consensus exists

between Wikipedians, which is for the most part obtained by the experts, i.e. senior Wikipedians who have been around for some time. In practical terms, the quality is directly guided through the application of Wikipedia principles. In this section I will show how prescriptivist attitudes have failed to enter the articles on the described usage items due to the application of Wikipedia principles.

As mentioned in the previous section, one of the ways in which the Wikipedia entries on usage which I analysed differ from the usage guide entries is referencing, which is due to Wikipedia's principle of Verifiability. The references and examples of proper usage in the prescriptivist tradition are the renowned literary figures, and the 'one's social and intellectual betters' (Landau, 1979, p. 4). In the HUGE subcorpus analysed here there are many instances which illustrate that the 'intellectual betters' are often taken as exemplary language users, as can be seen in (11).

(11) Than them (=than they) is used by Adelaide Procter; than me, occasionally in Shakespeare, Swift, Prior, Pope, Dr. Johnson, Southey, Thackeray, Bulwer, and Clough; than him in Shakespeare, Johnson, and Kingsley; than her in Boswell and Prior. It has been said in earlier paragraphs that these phrases are found in the King James Bible, Caxton, the Genevan Bible, Goldsmith, Scott, Beddoes. (Hall, 1917, p. 293)

The discussions on Wikipedia Talk pages illustrate that entries without appropriate references are deleted from the entries (12), classical authors are not always seen as appropriate sources for illustrating acceptable usage (13), and even the traditionally reputable sources do not escape the Wikipedia editors' critical scrutiny (14). In (12), the edi-

tor called Drjamesaustin is negotiating his edit with another experienced editor. The discussion is resolved when he admits to an insufficient basis for his addition to the entry, which is based on intuition and interpretation, instead of a reputable source.

(12) That's fine with me. I can cite no references to back up my interpretation—merely my Latin-influenced view of grammar—so will gladly bow to higher authority. Thanks Jerry! Drjamesaustin[9]

Some authors of usage guides uncritically list classical sources to illustrate good usage. In (13), the editor is questioning both the sources, and the appropriateness of comparing the usage in poetry to the everyday usage.

(13) Likewise I don't see that the use in poetry is particularly important. We do need the example from Shakespeare and the one from Burns, but I don't think the Shakespeare one is necessarily 'to good effect'. Anyway, much though I like poetry, I'd say it's outside the mainstream of usage, so it doesn't belong in the lead. JerryFriedman

Finally, even reputable sources such as Garner's *Modern American Usage* (1998) referred to in (14), are critically evaluated and compared with other sources in order to report on insights that are most plausible or most widely accepted by the expert community. In this way, the editors avoid repeating myths that could have been presented and reported on in numerous sources but have nevertheless been disputed, such as in our example, the statement that the eighteenth-century

[9] See 'Talk: Split infinitive' http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Split_infinitive.

grammarian Robert Lowth proscribed against the split infinitive (cf. Tieken, 2010).

(14) The article now says that Lowth did NOT proscribe against the split infinitive. Every reference I have ever seen says that he did, and he is cited in Garner's latest usage manual. Where is the evidence he did NOT create this proscription? Manning

> Manning, if you've want, you can add the cite from Garner to footnote 13 as more evidence that reputable people believe in the myth. JerryFriedman

Another Wikipedia principle that works in favour of the lack of prescriptive argumentation in the articles is the Neutral Point of View (NPOV) principle. In the words of Cameron (1995, p. vi), 'language is, notoriously, something which engenders strong feelings'. The expressions of attitudes towards language, although working against the NPOV principle, resurface in the Talk pages, while off-topic remarks on usage of the for-and-against type are common in Talk pages (15).

(15) Split infinitives are absolutely never acceptable as any grammarian would tell you. The idea that they are acceptable in some contexts or that this is a controversial issue among grammarians is simply a common misconception. For a reliable source, just ask any English Professor or even any K12 English teacher. The Mysterious El Willstro

> You are entitled to your usage. You'll be very lucky indeed if you can find a university teacher of English who agrees with you, but K12 teacher might just be possible. Good luck with that. Doric Loon (...)

> If she'd like to contribute information with reliable published sources to the article, she's welcome to. JerryFriedman

The closed off-topic discussion in (15) entitled ‘Hear me out…’ is an example of an exchange of opinions about the acceptability of a particular usage item. Whereas the user introducing the topic, The Mysterious El Willstro, introduced arguments based on alleged opinions of language professionals, one of the most active editors of the article responds by requesting explicit references in print form, which The Mysterious El Willstro is not able to provide. Finally, after seven exchanges, the administrators closed the topic by citing one of Wikipedia’s guidelines: ‘Wikipedia is not a forum’.

5.6 Conclusion

Discussions on language use have entered the new media since the introduction of Web 2.0, one of them being the online encyclopaedia, Wikipedia. Wikipedia is primarily defined as an online collaborative community that introduced a great shift from a one-way communication pathway between expert and lay communities into a dialogue. In the language sphere, the OED would be an example of a forerunner of such collaboration between the two communities with its history of contributions from the general public.

The traditional sources for the ‘linguistically insecure’ before the online usage advice came into the scene are usage guides. Although very popular among their readership, usage guides have been criticised by linguists for their authors’ prescriptive attitudes and lack of referencing (Peters &Young, 1997, p. 318). In this study I compared the entries on selected usage items on Wikipedia and in the database of usage guides and usage problems developed at Leiden University Centre for

Linguistics, HUGE. The Wikipedia entries on usage items have proved to be on average more visited, heavily edited and they have attracted more collaboration from Wikipedia editors than the average Wikipedia article (see Table 5.1). Some of the editors participating in the writing of the entries on usage items are language experts, and, usually, the more real-life expertise they have in language-related fields, the more editing and coordination they do in the entries on usage items. A corpus-based comparison of usage guide and Wikipedia entries has shown that usage guides tend to use a more narrative and personalised style, which focuses on the rules and the stigmatisation of nonstandard usage. Wikipedia entries, on the other hand, include significantly more references to other sources and lexical items that come from the specialised terminology from linguistics.

The qualitative analysis of the secondary Talk pages has shown that the main reason why Wikipedia entries manage to obtain a level of objectivity and avoid prescriptive accounts, in spite of the many editors' comments which include evaluation and negative attitudes to the nonstandard usage, is the editors' commitment to Wikipedia principles. The principle of Verifiability influences the number of references included in each entry, while the principle of the Neutral Point of View supports descriptive as opposed to the traditionally prescriptive accounts of usage guides.

Wikipedia entries on language use are a product of collaboration of many contributors as opposed to usage guides that are usually works of individual authors. Due to this fact, as well as the guidance of Wikipedia principles, balanced discussions on Talk pages and regular edits,

Wikipedia entries on language use largely reflect critical, up-to-date accounts relying primarily on linguistics as a discipline and actual usage, instead of single authorities and traditional gate keepers. The actual impact of Wikipedia and other forms of social media on usage and their popularity when compared to other sources of advice on usage is yet to be explored. Widening the research scope beyond the discourse on language use, it would be worth analysing different phenomena of expert discourse re-contextualisation on Wikipedia in fields other than linguistics and looking into the effects and potential difficulties accompanying the communication between experts and laypeople facilitated by the web-based collaborative processes.

6

What is the difference between *thus* and *thusly*?[1]

6.1 Introduction

The HUGE (Hyper Usage Guide of English) database compiled at Leiden University as part of the research project 'Bridging the Unbridgeable: Linguists, Prescriptivists and the General Public' by Robin Straaijer (2014)[2] includes 123 usage problems, which are defined as disputed items of usage in British and American English. Among them, the usage of the word *thusly* is one more recently added to the usage guide tradition.[3] Although it is first mentioned only in 1927—that is, relatively late in a database which includes 77 usage guides published between 1770 and 2010—it has since its introduction appeared regularly in the US American publications. *Thusly* has been described by usage guide authors as 'unnecessary […] since *thus* is already an adverb' (Allen [ed.], 1999, p. 573), 'not only a needless variant of *thus* […] but also a nonstandard one' (*The Written Word,* 1977, p. 309) and even as an 'abomination' (Morris & Morris, 1975, p. 599). Its usage continues to

[1] Lukač, M. (in press). What is the difference between *thus* and *thusly*? Paper submitted to *E-rea: Revue électronique d'études sur le monde anglophone*.

[2] The HUGE database was developed in the context of the project 'Bridging the Unbridgeable: Linguists, Prescriptivists and the General Public', directed by Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade and financed by the Netherlands Organisation for Scien-tific Research.

[3] *Usage guides* are authoritative all-in-one reference works comprising advice on correct usage (Busse and Schröder, 2010, p. 87), which address usage problems (cf. Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2013).

be condemned until today, most recently by Bryan Garner, who in the fourth edition of the *Garner's Modern English Usage* (2016) calls *thusly* a 'nonword'.

In the 'Bridging the Unbridgeable' research project we attempted to bridge the gap between prescriptivists, linguists, and the general public by systematically exploring the usage guide tradition, the usage problems that they address, the attitudes of the general public towards these problems and actual usage. Embedded in this research agenda, this paper examines *thusly* as it is perceived through the lens of prescriptivism (§6.2), by the general public (§6.3) and the word's actual usage (§6.4). For that purpose, I will analyse (i) the relationship between the prescriptive rule enforced against the usage of *thusly* in usage guides that are part of the HUGE database, (ii) the attitudes of speakers towards its usage and (iii) the actual usage explored by way of corpus analysis and classified by speakers of English. By comparing sentences including *thus* and *thusly* extracted from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) (Davies, 2008–), I attempt to demonstrate that factors including word meaning, genre and type of verbs modified all help distinguish between different contexts in which *thus* and *thusly* appear and account for systematic variation. This paper aims to show that in spite of the prescriptive rule (which in its most typical form indicates that *thusly* should be replaced by *thus*) *thusly* is a distinct adverb used in specific contexts in standard American English, which is increasingly gaining acceptance, particularly among younger speakers.

6.2 The prescriptivists

Usage guides include a set of core prescriptive rules that have been handed down from the authors of one usage guide to the next, which are referred to as the 'prescriptive canon' (cf. Chapman, 2010, p. 142). The HUGE database provides ample evidence of the repetitive nature of the usage guide tradition. For instance, the distinction between *shall* and *will* is mentioned in 65 usage guides, and the variability in the choice of the preposition in *different to/than/from*, as well as the distinction between *who* and *whom* are taken up in 63 out of the 77 usage guides in the HUGE database. Not only are the topics repeated by the authors, but so are the arguments supporting the prescriptively enforced rules. The reiterated arguments were the focus of the analysis of the entries on *thusly* in 16 usage guides in the HUGE database. As previously reported in Lukač and Tieken-Boon van Ostade (in press), *thusly* is a usage problem embedded in the American prescriptive tradition: 11 out of the 16 respective usage guides are written for an American readership. If we take a look at the frequencies of the word in GloWbE (Davies, 2013), the recently compiled 1.9-billion-word corpus of Global Web-based English, it becomes apparent that *thusly* is most frequently used in American English and perhaps does not appear often enough in other varieties to be picked up by usage guide authors. The origins of the word are, according to several usage guides, associated with nineteenth-century American humourists who coined the word as an example of a humorous hypercorrection and '[an] "ignorant" substitute for *thus*' (Wilson, 1993, p. 437) with the aim of 'imitating the speech of poorly

educated people straining to sound stylish' (Pickett, Kleinedler, & Spitz, 2005, p. 464).

Both the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) and *Merriam-Webster* list 1865 as the year of the first recorded usage of *thusly*.

Table 6.1 Frequency of *thusly* in GloWbe

	US	Canada	GB	Ireland	Australia	NZ
total N	346	78	99	26	43	31
freq. per million	0.89	0.58	0.26	0.26	0.29	0.38

The example sentence from the *OED*, taken from the 1865 December issue of *Harper's Magazine* in (1) and the earliest recorded usage of *thusly* in the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA) (Davies 2010–) from 1967 (2), both illustrate humorous contexts in which the word is used:

(1) It happened, as J. Billings would say, 'thusly'[4]

(2) He concloods thusly: – 'I am forced to ask yoo, ez one enjoyin confidenshel relations with Him who occupies the Presidenshel chair, to hev it given out that I stand in opposition to him.' (COHA:1867:FIC:Swingin round the Cirkle)

Some of the first records of it its usage in the Google Books corpus indicate that *thusly* may have been simultaneously used in non-fiction writing without humorous connotations. Consider the following examples:

(3) '[B]ut not content with carrying his ill-temper towards Scottish Masonry into his Grand Commandery, he lugs it into the recesses of Royal Arch Masonry, in the notice of the District of Columbia by attacking Comp. Rockwell thusly: 'In the correspondence,

[4] Josh Billings is the pen name of the well-known American humorist Henry Wheeler Shaw (1818–85).

> Comp. Rockwell gives his opinion as a "33d," which has about as much to do with the affairs of Royal Arch Masonry as "the man in the moon"'(Google Books:186: Proceedings of the Grand Royal Arch Chapter of the State of Illinois)

(4) An Alabama paper perpetrates thusly—'As out shirt was not brought home in proper season this week, we called on our old washer-woman to learn the cause.' (Google Books:1871:The Latter-day Saints' Millenial Star Vol. 33)

Although *thusly* clearly originates from nineteenth-century American English, it remains uncertain whether it has indeed been coined by humorists as numerous sources report (cf. Pickett, Kleinedler, & Spitz, 2005, p. 464; Butterfield, 2007, p. 157). Considering that several instances of its usage in neutral contexts can be found at the same time when the humorists introduced it to their writing, they could, in fact, have been using the word that they have come across in actual usage. The emergence of *thusly* at the time may be another testament to the general tendency for morphological exceptions to regularise over time (Leiberman et al., 2007).[5]

Perhaps the most constant piece of advice given by usage guide authors (9/16) regarding *thusly* is that it should be replaced by *thus*, as it is '[unnecessary since] thus is already an adverb' (Allen [ed.], 1999, p. 573) and 'merely […] a needless' and '[nonstandard] variant of thus' (*The Written Word*, 1977, p. 309). 'There is no such word in standard English', Trask argues (2001, p. 284), 'write thus, not *thusly.' Suggesting using one linguistic feature in place of another is conventional in usage guide writing. In fact, one of the main purposes of the genre is

[5] I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for suggesting a reference to this article and providing other useful comments and recommendations.

to help the reader decide between two or more alternatives in language (Weiner, 1988, p. 173) such as *less* and *fewer* in referring to countable nouns (*less*/*fewer people*) or between using *further* and *farther* as the comparative of *far*. What is problematical, however, regarding the advice for replacing *thusly* with *thus* (as it is by and large phrased in usage guides) is the lack of accounts on the context in which *thusly* is used. The most notable exceptions here are *Pocket Fowler's* (Allen [ed.], 1999) and *Webster's Dictionary of English Usage* (1989). *Pocket Fowler's* (Allen [ed.], 1999, p. 573), as Lukač and Tieken-Boon van Ostade (in press) report, is the only among 16 usage guides that distinguishes between two different meanings of *thusly*, *thusly*$_1$ 'therefore' (5) and *thusly*$_2$, 'in this way' (6). The example sentences below illustrating the respective meaning distinction were taken from the COCA corpus (Davies, 2008–) (cf. Lukač & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, in press):

(5) I don't want to commit myself to a long-term relationship, and thusly, I don't want to be financially responsible. (COCA:1993: SPOK:Ind_Geraldo)

(6) He describes his daily routine thusly: 'I open my mail and I turn it over to the secretary to answer. I can go into my office now for an hour and that's a day's work.' (COCA:1992:MAG:jet)

The meaning distinction proved to be relevant in measuring the acceptance rate of *thusly* in the survey reported on in §6.3— unsurprisingly perhaps, as *thusly*$_2$ is much more common than *thusly*$_1$ according to the results of the corpus analysis presented in §6.4.

6.3 The general public

6.3.1 The survey

To analyse the attitudes of speakers towards *thusly* and differences, if any, between demographic groups together with Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade I set up a questionnaire using the online survey tool Qualtrics. The survey was made available between July and September 2015. It consisted of three sections: we first tested the acceptability of *thusly* and flat adverbs, that is, unmarked adverbs (*Drive slow* for *Drive slowly*), in standard usage. The results of the analysis of the part of the questionnaire dealing with flat adverbs are reported on elsewhere (Lukač & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, in press). In the second part of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked about their practices of publicly complaining about grammar and usage, for instance on social media or in newspaper letters to the editor. Finally, we posed a series of demographic questions to identify the respondents' gender, age and education, as well as whether they were native speakers of British or American English or another variety (or, alternatively, which language variety formed their preferred linguistic model). The survey was announced in the journal *English Today* (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2015c), it was further distributed through the 'Bridging the Unbridgeable' project's blog, Facebook and Twitter, and notifications about it were sent out through newsletters for graduate linguistics students at the Universities of Leiden, Basel and Freiburg as well as that of the Dutch-based Society for English Native Speaking Editors (SENSE). The survey was completed by altogether 212 respondents. Table 6.2 provides

the socio-demographic information on the survey respondents; as they were not required to provide all answers in order to finish the survey, the total number of responses differs per question.

Table 6.2 The demographics of the participants

Gender	M	F	Unspecified				Total
	59	103	11				173
Age	25 >	25–40	40–50	50–65	65–75	75 <	
	14	61	21	59	11	7	173
Variety (native)	British	American	Other				
	52	24	19				95
Variety (model)	British	American	Other				
	36	22	15				76
Education	Primary	Secondary	University				
	1	10	157				203

As Table 6.2 shows, almost 60 per cent of the informants who answered the question about their gender were women, with the largest number coming into the age groups 25−40 and 50−65. The youngest and oldest categories contain the fewest respondents. Among those who answered the question whether English was their mother tongue, there were slightly more NS (55.6%) than NNSs (44.4%), and nearly 55 per cent of the informants who stated that they were NSs identified their variety as British English and 25 per cent as American English. British English was the most commonly chosen linguistic model among the NNSs. The majority of the informants were well-educated: nearly 80 per cent of them attended university, which was unsurprising, considering the channels through which the survey was distributed.

6.3.2 Acceptability of thusly

In testing the acceptability of *thusly*, we presented the participants with sentences (5) and (6) above and asked them to rate the two items on a six-fold scale. Following the classic study on attitudes towards usage problems conducted by Mittins et al. (1970), we asked the respondents whether they found the sentences to be acceptable in informal speech, formal speech, informal writing and formal writing; to these traditional categories, we also added 'netspeak'—which we described as including 'internet usage or chat language, texting' (cf. Crystal, 2006, p. 402; Hedges, 2011)—and the option 'unacceptable under any circumstances'. The respondents could choose more than one category in their responses. They were, moreover, given the opportunity to comment on their response in a follow-up open question 'If you disapprove of *thusly* as an adverb, why is that?' The results of our analysis for the acceptability of the two items are summarised in Figure 6.1 and 6.2 below.

The results of the analysis show that the majority of our respondents found both *thusly*$_1$ and *thusly*$_2$ unacceptable under any circumstances. The percentage of the unacceptable responses for *thusly*$_2$ (62.3%), however, was significantly lower than that for *thusly*$_1$ (79.6%) (χ^2 [1, N = 497] = 10.261, p = .001). Although the percentages were higher for the acceptability of *thusly*$_2$ across all categories, the difference was significant only for formal contexts: the participants found *thusly*$_2$ to be more acceptable in both formal speech and writing than *thusly*$_1$ (χ^2 [1, N = 497] = 14.900, p = .001).

In 2002, the *American Heritage Dictionary* included *thusly* in their Usage Panel survey, which enabled us to compare our own find-

ings with those from thirteen years earlier. In the respective survey, no distinction was made between the two meanings of the word, and only the acceptability of what we call *thusly*$_2$ was tested. The acceptability of *thusly* was rated by the *AHD* Usage Panel on the following sentence:

(7) His letter to the editor ended thusly [‘as follows’]: ‘It is time to stop fooling ourselves.’

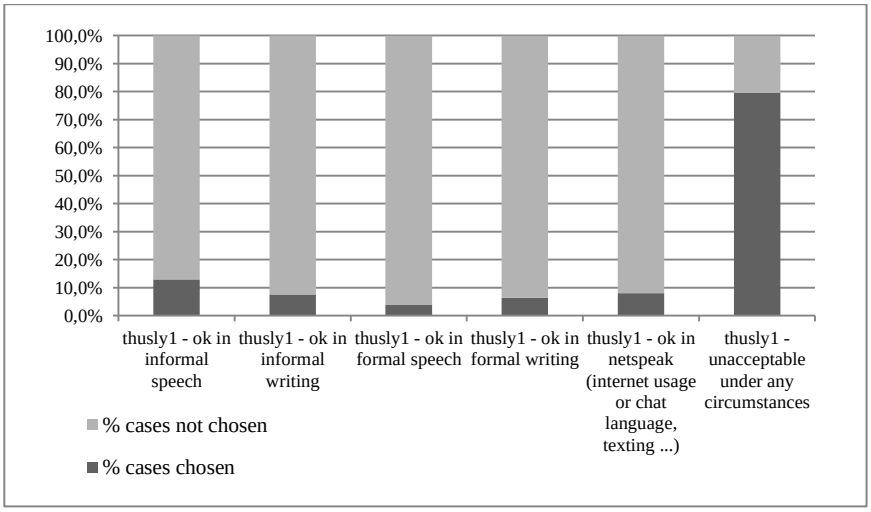


Figure 6.1 Acceptability rating for *I don’t want to commit myself to … and thusly* [‘therefore’], … (*thusly*$_1$) (from Lukač & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, in press)

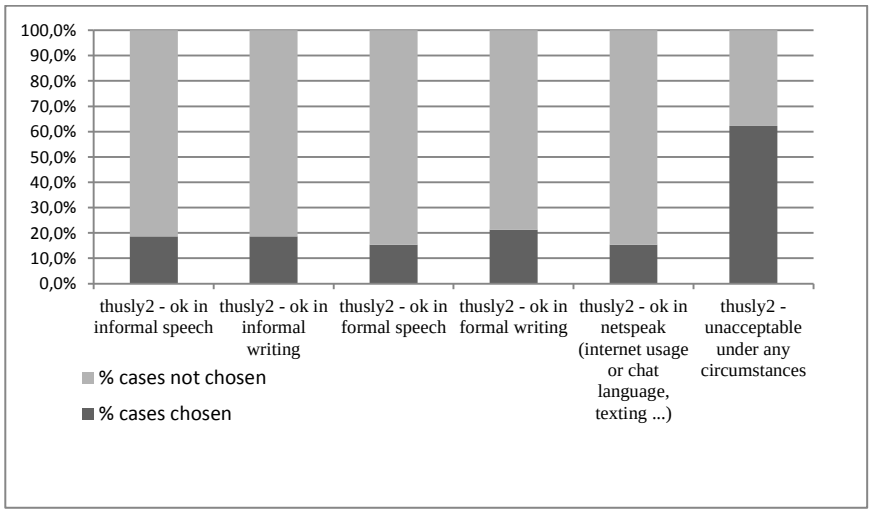


Figure 6.2 Acceptability rating for *He described his daily routine thusly* ['as follows'] (*thusly*$_2$) (from Lukač & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, in press)

At the time, 86 per cent of the *AHD* Usage Panel found the sentence in (7) unacceptable. When we compare these ratings to the ones presented here (unacceptable 62.3%), we can tentatively conclude that the acceptability for *thusly*$_2$ ('as follows') has risen in the meantime. The question we subsequently set out to answer was: How did the demographic groups, if at all, differ in their acceptability judgments?

6.3.3 Differences among demographic groups

Considering that our respondents could choose multiple answers in judging the acceptability of *thusly*$_1$ and *thusly*$_2$, we categorised their responses—which together comprised 23 different categories—into a three-point scale ranging from (1) unacceptable, (2) informal, for those multiple responses in which at least one of the informal contexts or netspeak were chosen or a combination of them, and (3) formal, if the

respondent chose at least one of the formal contexts. To compare the mean ranks across demographic groups we performed a Kruskall-Wallis test the results of which are summarised in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3 Differences in acceptability rankings across demographic groups (Kruskal-Wallis test) (based on Lukač & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, in press)

	Gender	Age	Nativeness	Variety (native)	Variety (model)	Education
Thusly$_1$						
Chi-Square	5.092	7.712	.229	1.913	1.041	.261
Df	2	5	1	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.078	.173	.632	.384	.594	.878
Thusly$_2$						
Chi-Square	.506	18.792	3.777	5.549	.264	1.497
Df	2	5	1	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.776	.003*	.052	.062	.876	.473

NNSs seem to be slightly more accepting of *thusly*$_2$ than native speakers (56% of NNSs' responses were categorised under 'unacceptable', as opposed to 67% of the NSs' responses). British respondents rejected the form more often (77%) than the American respondents (50%), with one reporting: 'I've never heard or seen "thus" used in this way…' (male, 50–65) and another: 'Thusly doesn't exist in my dialect. (Southern British, close to RP.)' (male, 50–65). One male British respondent aged between 50 and 65 acknowledges that the word may have a different status in American and British English: 'I recognise that it is not uncommon and is standard in US usage. It is just not part of my idiolect, and I find it superfluous, as well as comical.' And one female NNS

(aged 40–50) makes the same distinction stating, in fact, that she chooses not to use *thusly* since her model variant is British English.

Although interesting for further exploration, the differences between the respective groups of respondents were found not to be significant in the present study. The only significant difference we found was that among age groups for *thusly*$_2$. The younger the respondents, the less likely they were to opt for the response 'unacceptable'. Whereas less than half (46.6%) of those aged below 40 rated *thusly*$_2$ as unacceptable, almost three quarters of those above 40 (72.2%) did the same. In the initial report of the survey, in the light of this finding, we argued for a potential change in progress, with younger speakers showing a more tolerant attitude towards the formerly stigmatised feature. Furthermore, the US American television sitcom *The Big Bang Theory* may have also contributed to the popularisation of the word among younger speakers. 'I have informed you thusly' (instead of 'I told you so.') is a well-known quote from the series introduced by the character of the theoretical physicist, Dr. Sheldon Cooper (cf. Lukač & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, in press).

The responses to the question 'If you disapprove of *thusly* as an adverb, why is that?' were interesting in their own right, with a number of respondents describing *thusly* as a hypercorrection and an incorrect substitute for *thus*. Others describe it as excessively formal, archaic or belonging to World Englishes. All in all, the comments echo the descriptions found in the usage guides (§6.2), pointing to the fact that our respondents, many of whom are language professionals (translators, editors and linguists), are perhaps also familiar with the prescriptions

against *thusly* found in the usage guides. Few among the respondents argued that they consider *thusly* to be acceptable in an appropriate context. And interestingly, I found a number of opposing statements describing the usage of *thusly* either as extremely formal or informal and jocular, as the following examples illustrate:

(8) It is OK in informal chat among friends when it is used consciously as something of a joke. (male, NS British, over 75)

(9) I hardly ever come by it. It sounds EXCESSIVELY formal. (male, NNS, below 25)

In further exploring the contexts in which *thusly* is used (be it formal or informal) as well as the genres in which it appears, I analysed 112 occurrences of *thusly* in the COCA corpus. Moreover, since most usage guide authors describe *thusly* as a 'needless' variant of *thus* (§2), I additionally decided to explore a random sample of 100 occurrences of *thus* in the COCA corpus and compare them with the *thusly* sentences taking into account the genre in which the two words occur (§6.4.1), the meaning of the word (§6.4.2), and the group of verbs that it modifies (§6.4.3).

6.4 Actual usage

6.4.1 Genre differences in the usage of thus *and* thusly

The *OED* puts *thus* in band 7 out of 8 frequency bands,[4] which 'includes the main semantic words which for the substance of ordinary,

[4] Each non-obsolete word in the *OED* is assigned to a frequency band based on its overall frequency score in present-day English (1970–). Bands run from 8 (very high-frequency words) to 1 (very low-frequency). The scale is logarithmic: words in Band

everyday speech and writing'. *Thusly* belongs to band 4 in the *OED* 'marked by much greater specificity'. This categorisation stands the test of corpus analysis: in the COCA corpus *thusly* occurs with the frequency of 0.21 and *thus* 130.52 per million words. As big as these differences are, the two words seem to follow different trends: the overall usage of *thus* is decreasing, whereas there is evidence for the slight increase in the usage of *thusly* since it first appears in corpora in the 1860s. Consider Figure 6.3 and 6.4 below, both of which are based on the frequencies from the Google Books corpus.

Although the Google Books corpus does not enable a genre-specific search, the data from the COHA corpus, admittedly scarcer, provides additional information on the trends in usage. Despite the fact that *thus* has decreased in usage across all four genres (fiction, non-fiction, magazine and newspapers), in present-day English, it remains the most frequent in non-academic texts (Figure 6.5).

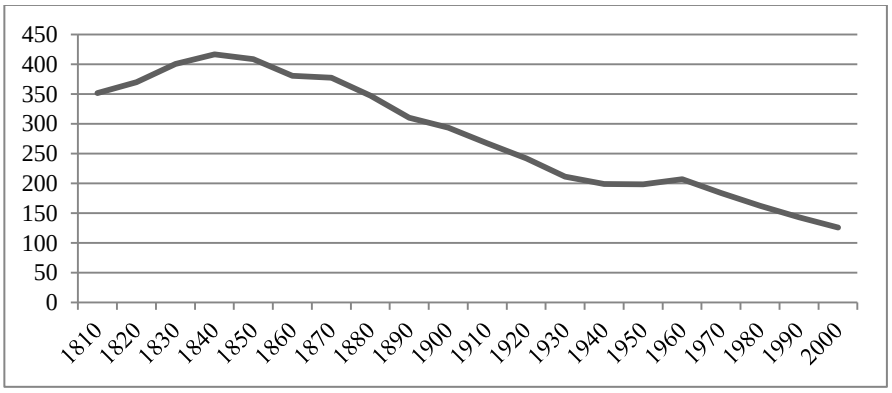


Figure 6.3 Frequency per million words in the usage of *thus* in the Google Books (American) corpus

8 are around ten times more frequent than words in Band 7, which in turn are around ten times more frequent than words in Band 6.

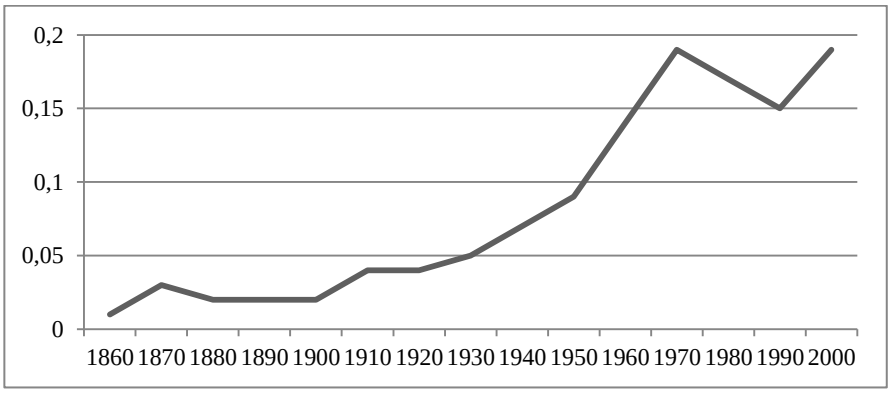


Figure 6.4 Frequency per million words in the usage of *thusly* in the Google Books (American) corpus

Based on the sparse data on *thusly* (47 hits) from the COCA corpus, it seems that the usage of this word is following the opposite trend: whereas it originally appeared only in fictional writing, over time it spread to other genres as well (Figure 6.6).

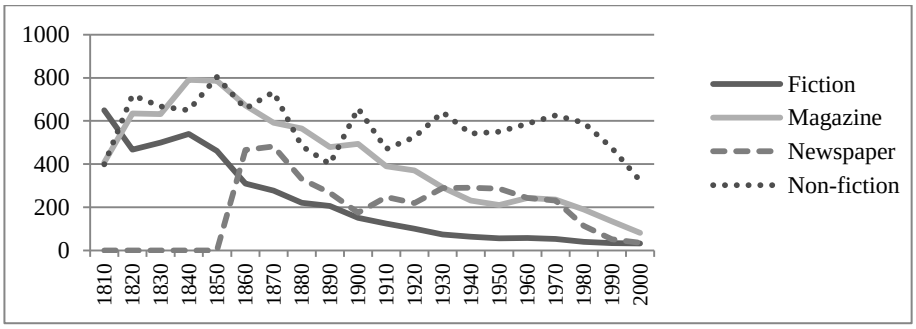


Figure 6.5 Frequency per million words in the usage of *thus* per section of the COHA corpus

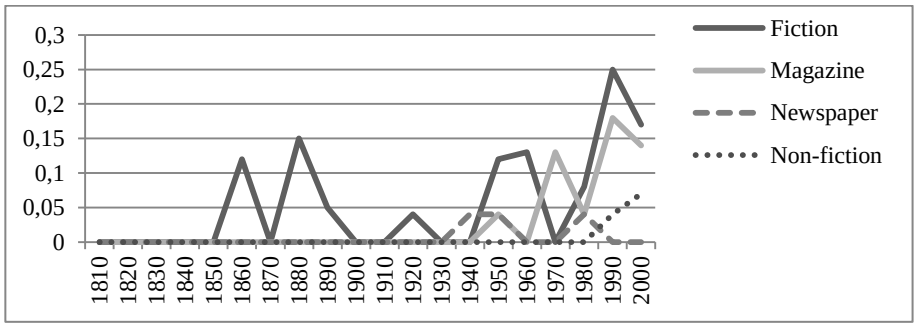


Figure 6.6 Frequency per million words in the usage of *thusly* per section of the COHA corpus

The data from the COCA corpus summarised in Figure 6.7 suggest that the distribution found in the newer parts of the COHA corpus mirrors current usage: whereas *thus* is overwhelmingly used in academic writing (71.25%), *thusly* is more evenly distributed across the five genres included in the corpus. Both words are infrequent in the spoken section of COCA.

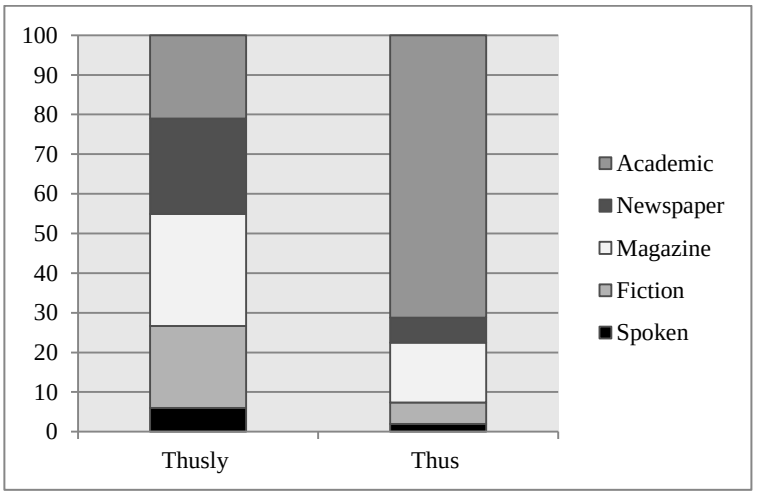


Figure 6.7 Distribution of *thus* and *thusly* per section of the COCA corpus (%)

In order to explore not only the genre differences, but also the contexts in which the two words are used, I extracted their occurrences from COCA, which were the starting point for the analysis in the next sections.

6.4.2 Differences in meaning between **thus** *and* **thusly**

Seeing that the acceptability levels among the survey respondents were significantly higher for *thusly*$_2$ than *thusly*$_1$ (cf. §6.3), I explored the differences in the frequency of the two meanings. The 112 sentences in which *thusly* was used from COCA were classified either under *thusly*$_2$ or *thusly*$_1$ (as in examples 5 and 6) by four different raters, two NSs and two NNSs of English, all of whom are language professionals. The classification resulted in substantial agreement (Fleiss' kappa: κ = 0.8). Out of the 112 sentences as many as 92 were finally classified under *thusly*$_2$,[5] which, based on this sample, indicates that this is the primary way in which *thusly* is used. Considering moreover that *thus* is according to a number of usage guide authors and survey respondents seen as the natural replacement for *thusly*, I additionally looked at the 100 instances of *thus*, which I then classified under *thus*$_1$ ('therefore') or *thus*$_2$ ('in this way'). The exception were four instances of the phrase *thus far* which were categorised under *thus*$_3$ ('until now'). The sentences in (10) – (12) illustrate the threefold categorisation.

(10) Thus, Klebanov and his group were exploiting some special cases of the duality between supergravity and strongly coupled gauge theory. (COCA:1998:ACAD:Physics Today)

[5] Where there was disagreement among the raters, I settled on the interpretation preferred by the majority.

(11) The ISMGF established ties to the International Olympic Committee (IOC), thus expanding the scope of wheelchair sports. (COCA:2004:ACAD:African Arts)

(12) North American botanists marveled at Hubbell's 300 tropical species, but that number pales in comparison to the 800 or so identified thus far in the Malaysian plot. (COCA:1994:MAG: Science News)

A subset of 48 sentences from the random *thus* sample was classified by a NS of American English, resulting in substantial agreement (Cohen's Kappa: $\kappa = 0.78$).[6] *Thus* and *thusly* significantly differ in how frequently they were paraphrased as either 'therefore' or 'in this way' (χ^2 [2, N = 212] = 13.6, p = .001), with *thusly* more commonly paraphrased as 'in this way' (82%) than *thus* (58%). Moreover, in spite of the many comments made both by the survey respondents and usage guide authors that *thusly* is used ironically, by examining further the contexts in which *thusly* is used, I identified only two instances in which the authors used *thusly* in the respective context.

(13) A neat mind did a neat job and a neat job thusly made for a neat mind. He actually used the word when he told them. Thusly. But they like him anyway (COCA:2003:MAG:Boys Life).

(14) He's a downscale Bill Moyers of the Insinkerator, an aproned P.C. guru of Ethnic Self-Esteem... And his message might be summarised (as he says) 'thusly': The Oppressed make better sausages. Give him Latvian dwarfs in funny hats cooking up a

[6] The disagreement in some instances was the result of two possible interpretations of a given clause (*thus*$_1$ categorisation indicates a consequence, and *thus*$_2$ a reason for something), which were occasionally difficult to separate, like in the following sentence 'He played only 100 games in the outfield, *thus* missing more than a third of the season..' After applying this final criterion ('consequence' as opposed to 'reason'), I resolved the disagreements, and the final categorisation is the result of my own interpretation. The above example was finally classified as *thus*$_2$.

> mess of tripe and snails in peanut butter and blueberry sauce. (COCA:1992:MAG:Harpers Magazine)

Occasionally authors do make metalinguistic comments on the usage of *thusly* as in (13) and (14), as well as in the following citation from Jack Lynch's *Lexicographer's Dilemma* (2009), for whom *thusly* is a quintessential example of a linguistic shibboleth: 'People have always depended on shibboleths of various sorts. We all do it unconsciously: when someone speaks with a regional accent, we make certain assumptions about the speaker; and when a writer uses words like *thusly* in an essay, we make other assumptions.' Much more often than not, however, *thusly* is used in neutral contexts. Its status as a shibboleth, as Lynch describes it, is changing, if we take the results of the survey as indicative of general attitudes. The word, which may have its origin in the usage of humourists, is used neutrally today in standard American English.

6.4.3 Verbs modified by **thus** *and* **thusly**

To explore further the different contexts of usage, I semantically categorised all of the verbs modified by *thus* and *thusly* according to the UCREL Semantic Analysis System or USAS (Rayson et al., 2004). The USAS taxonomy, which was originally based on the *Longman Lexicon of Contemporary English* (McArthur, 1981), includes 21 major discourse fields (cf. Table 3.1).

When *thus* and *thusly* were used as conjunctive adverbs as in (15) and (16) below, I left out the semantic verb categorisation.

(15) By then the virus and its associated diseases, as well as a closely related monkey virus, had also been found in Africa. Thus, researchers assumed the virus had come to the Caribbean by way of the slave trade. (COCA:1993:ACAD:Natural History)

(16) Thusly, I will sign off, as always, your friend, confidante, and troubled soul... (COCA:2006:FIC:A tale of two summers)

The overall frequencies of verbs per semantic category are shown in Table 6.5.

The difference between the categories to which the verbs modified by *thus* and *thusly* belonged was significant. Adjusted residuals were calculated for each score in the table to determine which differences were significant at .05 level.

Table 6.5 Number of verbs per semantic category (Fisher's Exact, $p < 0.0001$)

	A	K	M	N	Q	S	T	X	Total
	be	*croon*	*go*	*massify*	*read*	*treat*	*originate*	*identify*	
thus	28	0	2	3	3	8	2	4	50
thusly	19	1	6	0	67	2	2	6	103

As can be seen from Table 6.5, the biggest difference is that in the number of verbs belonging to the category Q: Linguistic Actions, States & Processes. Most of the verbs modified by *thusly* are speech act verbs belonging to this category:

(17) He was quoted in the article thusly: 'I don't even worry about it,' said Gonzalez, who was 71-91 in 2007 and 84-77 last year. (COCA:2009:NEWS:Atlanta Journal Constitution)

(18) [I]ts spokesman officially proclaimed it thusly: 'Minnesota, the state of Walter Mondale, Hubert Humphrey and Kirby Puckett....' (COCA:2003:MAG:Sports Illustrated)

On the other hand, the verbs from the categories A: General & Abstract Terms (19) and S: Social Actions, States & Processes (20) are significantly more frequently modified by *thus*:

(19) In 1984 one of the largest menhaden processors acquired its closest competitor, thus gaining ownership of 7 of the 11 active plants in the Gulf of Mexico. (COCA:1991:ACAD:Marine Fisheries Review)

(20) Many young people grew up with BE and had an opportunity to see successful black professionals in the corporate arena profiled in the magazine, thus providing role models for success. (COCA:1990:MAG:Black Enterprise)

What we can observe here is yet another nuance to the distinction in the usage of the two words. The most striking finding in this part of the analysis is the frequency with which *thusly* occurs with speech act verbs. As the examples in (17) and (18) show, *thusly*, when used with speech act verbs, almost always introduces a quotation, which seems to be its most common function.

Finally, as we can see from data in Table 6.5, *thus* functions as a conjunctive adverb as frequently as it modifies a verb (50/50 occurrences in COCA). *Thusly* is infrequently (10/112) used as a conjunctive adverb: the sentence in (21) is one among the few examples of such usage in the COCA corpus.

(21) Thusly, it is imperative to utilise the best instrument for assessment as well as the best assessment specialist with instrument administration. (COCA:1996:ACAD:Education)

6.5 Conclusion

In the fourth edition of *Garner's Modern English Usage* (2016), *thusly* is classified at Stage 1 on Garner's language-change index. The words belonging to Stage 1 are described as 'innovations' and as 'displacing a traditional usage'. If anything, this paper has shown based on corpus analysis that *thusly* is hardly an innovation, but rather a word that has existed in standard American English for more than 150 years and which has become a distinct adverb that cannot be described merely as an erroneous form of *thus*. Whereas *thus* is predominantly found in academic genres, the usage of *thusly* is less genre-specific. *Thusly* is most commonly paraphrased as 'in this way' and it by and large modifies speech act verbs and introduces quotations. *Thus*, on the other hand, in half of the occurrences analysed in this paper acts as a conjunctive adverb, which is hardly ever the case with *thusly*. Although the word remains low in frequency and is still ranked as unacceptable by the majority of speakers, its rise in frequency and the rising acceptance rates among younger speakers indicate that its usage may spread in the future. Finally, whereas Garner indicates that he uses the Google Ngram Viewer as a basis for his recommendations, this paper shows that the analysis of word frequency is just the first step in accounting for actual usage of a particular linguistic feature. Without exploring the actual context and regularities in a word's usage, corpus-based advice remains incomplete and inaccurate.

7

Conclusion

7.1 Revisiting the concept of grassroots prescriptivism

The present thesis has been one of the first attempts to examine thoroughly the subject of twenty-first century grassroots prescriptivism. The term ‘grassroots prescriptivism’—which was first introduced by Heyd (2014) and whose theoretical predecessor is Milroy and Milroy’s concept of the complaint tradition (2012, pp. 24–46)—was defined in the earlier chapters of this thesis as the attempt of lay people to eradicate the perceived linguistic mistakes by publically voicing their concerns about the standards of correctness. The findings as well as the challenges revealed in the case studies of this thesis indicate the need to revisit the concept of grassroots prescriptivism. (e.g. Androutsopoulos, 2014),

Prescriptivism, regardless of whether it is carried out institutionally or by language users, is inseparable from the notion of the standard language ideology, i.e. the view that the standard variety of language has an inherently higher value than others (cf. Crystal, 2010, p. 2). Although the respective definitions are widely accepted among sociolinguists, they require reassessment at a time when the term ‘standard’—and the concepts related to it—has become elusive. It has been acknowledged that the concept of the ‘standard’ should not be taken for granted, as it is largely a product of perceptual reality and hardly as stable as it is often considered to be (Coupland et al., 2016, pp. 12–13). The findings presented in this thesis also indicate how context-

dependent the notion of the standard is. In spite of the level of standardisation of English, the standard is still perceived differently across varieties and time periods. Today, perhaps more than ever, as a result of the dynamic social processes related primarily to globalisation, the perceived stability and the authority of the standard has become questionable.

Nevertheless, in order to approach the phenomenon of grassroots prescriptivism analytically, the term 'standard' needed to be operationalised in the present context. I have, therefore, set out to explore the discussions on the disputed language features that together make up the 'prescriptive canon' (Vorlat, 1996; Chapman, 2010), i.e. the body of folk-linguistic knowledge comprising rules regarding usage problems (cf. Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2017, p. 7). The general public usually associates notions of grammatical correctness with the respective rules. An analysis of the complaints embedded in the prescriptive canon enabled me to identify those linguistic features that are salient in prescriptive discourses today (e.g. the misused apostrophe, Americanisms, *who/whom*, *affect/effect*). Moreover, the comparisons between the contemporary prescriptive discussions with the entries in the HUGE database (Chapters 4–6) facilitated a preliminary analysis of the relevant diachronic changes. For all its limitations (cf. §7.4), the approach taken in this thesis allows for observing the changing socio-cultural conditions related to prescriptivism. In concrete terms, I was able to ask, among other questions, the following: 'Which features are part of the prescriptive canon and why?'; 'Is the prescriptive canon changing or is it historically stable'; 'Who are the members of the public that share

and perpetuate this body of folk-linguistic knowledge?', and to answer them accordingly.

Despite the fact that this thesis owes much in terms of its theoretical embedding to the account of the complaint tradition provided in Milroy and Milroy (2012, pp. 24–46), it departs from it in one relevant aspect. Whereas the two authors claim that the complaint tradition has changed little since it appeared in the English language (2012, p. vii), this thesis, at least partly, challenges this view. Changes relating to grassroots prescriptivism are part of the larger on-going processes of sociolinguistic changes (e.g. Androutsopoulos, 2014), that is, the changing relationships between language and society. The chapters above have thus demonstrated that such changes are occurring on several levels. The language users' views on linguistic authorities are slowly changing, with new voices finding their way into the language debates. Standards are shifting, and although *prima facie* they seem to be loosening, we are rather witnessing their restructuring. Some prescriptive rules are considered to be obsolete, while others are taking their place. The following sections of this chapter touch upon the possible effects of such changes.

7.2 Bridging the gap

In explaining the differences in the way that linguists and non-linguists perceive language in the context of prescriptivism, scholars have often resorted to the 'rule' analogy. Constitutive or descriptive rules of the linguistic system are described as the rules for the game of chess and the regulatory rules of prescriptive grammar as the rules of etiquette

(Brinton & Brinton, 2010, p. 8). We can follow the former and flout the latter, or as Steven Pinker puts it 'there is no contradiction in saying that a taxi obeys the laws of physics but breaks the laws of Massachusetts' (1994, p. 372). Whereas useful in providing comprehensive definitions of the two terms, analogies such as these, inevitably perhaps, do not disentangle the complex fabric of views on grammar held by the expert and lay community alike. And they, consequently, disregard a number of developments that are currently taking place.

Following the newest edition of *Garner's Modern English Usage*, Mark Lieberman (2016) of *Language Log*—when commenting on Garner's rebranded empirically-based prescriptivism (cf. §1.2)—states that 'it seems that Bryan Garner and Geoff Pullum are now on the same team, at least as viewed from a sufficiently distant perspective'. If anything, this sentence implies that we can no longer talk about parallel discourses and a fundamental misunderstanding in terms. Some prescriptivists are, in providing usage advice, resorting to linguistic tools. Linguists, on the other hand, acknowledge that studying prescriptive rules does matter, not only in the context of their relevance for the history of the standard language and studying speaker attitudes, but also 'in the lived experience of English speakers and writers' (Curzan, 2014, p. 177). And as Cameron (1995, p. 34) vividly describes:

> Consider the text you are reading now. From the moment I began to compose it, it was shaped by all kinds of rules and norms: the rules of standard English grammar and spelling, the norms of appropriate diction and tone, as well as ideas about style that go beyond correctness or appropriateness to a more aesthetic sphere of 'elegance' (e.g. be brief, be specific, avoid jargon and cliché). I cannot claim I always observe all the relevant prescriptions and

> sometimes indeed I deliberately flout them […] But when I make this sort of choice I am aware I may be called to account for it.

Those describing the rules of linguistic systems, Cameron argues in the passage above, are not exempt from applying them, and they do so in order to follow the conventions of particular formal genres.

It has often been acknowledged by linguists (§1.1) that the field is not successful in communicating with the lay community. Self-proclaimed experts seem to be able to convey their messages more clearly, and their audience readily lends its ears to the binary advice that offers clear answers to what is 'right' and 'wrong' in usage. Whereas the Bristol Grammar Vigilante (§1.1) is perhaps more zealous than an average grassroots prescriptivist, his activism is indicative of a sentiment deeply engrained within his speech community. The comments below *The Telegraph*'s online article featuring the story (Yorke, 2017) show that the Vigilante—judging from the following statements of the article's readers—enjoys considerable support: 'Bravo, sir, whoever you are. Our dear Lady English has far too few defenders in this age of "anything goes" grammar and punctuation' and 'You, sir, are my absolute hero. There should definitely be more people like you.'

With all the faith in education reforms to put an end to the prescriptive era (§1.2), the need for prescriptive advice is not weaning, and the discriminatory aspects of language attitudes are far from eradicated (Severin, 2017). Even among those whose education actively attempted to 'educate away' prescriptivism, it is fairly common to hear statements such as these, according to Burridge, who gives an account of the Australian context (2010, pp. 11–12): 'Even though it's not socioling-

uistically correct to say this, but I think American English is "bad" English and we should try and stay away from it as much as possible.' For all that, prescriptivism too, like the standard language, while persevering, possibly indefinitely, is changing in some of its aspects in the twenty-first century.

7.3 Changing prescriptivism

In the Introduction, I noted that prescriptive rules change, and, most commonly, these changes become news once accepted by media style guides. Generally, changes—such as the one described above by John Allen, a former Style and Radio Newsroom Editor of the BBC—are accepted only after being in general use for an extended period of time.

> The tide of change overwhelms people and the people who care (maybe that's not the right word) who would make changes would gradually disappear and suddenly it's perfectly all right to… I mean, we used to have a rule that only *buildings* could be *evacuated*, you couldn't say that *people were evacuated* in the events of a flood or something, of course that was total nonsense, but that's what the BBC style guide said: 'Only buildings could be evacuated.' It would happen so often that *2,000 people had been evacuated because of*… Eventually there was no point in arguing about it or fighting it even if you were prepared to. That's how things change.
>
> (John Allen, personal communication, 2 February 2016)

Even when accepted, changes are not received without resistance. A Twitter-based backlash ensued following the changes that the Associated Press introduced to its guidelines (cf. §1.2). 'Have we ceased to be a society rules by laws and order, AP?' one tweet read. Scott Lilwall cries out (2014). Grassroots prescriptivism seems to be more resistant to change than its institutional counterpart.

Nevertheless, prescriptivism, too, changes and even the most vigilant among its proponents will accept that infinitives can be split: 'Her Ladyship [i.e. the persona adopted by Taggart] believes that clarity and Elegance are far more important than eighteenth-century edicts and that to scrupulously avoid splitting an infinitive and thereby produce a clumsy sentence is to take pedantry too far' (Taggart, 2010, p. 38). Articles regularly appear in newspapers and on websites proclaiming the death of certain prescriptive rules with titles such as '10 grammar rules you can forget: how to stop worrying and write proper' (Marsh, 2013) and '7 bogus grammar "errors" you don't need to worry about' (Yagoda, 2013).

This does not imply, however, that the inventory of the perceived usage problems is shrinking in its scope. In the place of the old chestnuts, new usage problems are introduced (cf. Vriesendorp, 2016). These new usage problems are often associated with the perceived corruption of the language resulting from computer-mediated communication (cf. §2.5.2) and, in terms of linguistic levels, with spelling and punctuation (cf. Chapter 4). Complaints focusing on spelling and punctuation are, according to the authors who commented on them in some detail (cf. Beal, 2010; Heyd, 2014), examples *par excellence* of twenty-first century prescriptivism. Interesting, too, is Beal's argument that once punctuation takes centre stage in usage discussions, we are, in fact, witnessing a rise in literacy. The concept of literacy, Beal explains, has now expanded to include the knowledge of, often minute, rules of punctuation. Such complaints, Beal argues (2010, p. 62), are 'a consequence of universal education', though they are also symptomatic of a division

between the ‘knows’ and the ‘know-nots’ with respect to prescriptive rules.

Another change, chronicled in Chapters 2, 4, and 5, and ensuing from digital online discussions, touches on the nature of participation in what can broadly be referred to as the prescriptive discourse. The introduction of the participatory internet changed the answer to the question: Who participates in usage debates? In spite of optimistic pronouncements in the spirit of web egalitarianism summarised in the title of Clay Shirky’s influential book *Here Comes Everybody* (Shirky, 2010), however, not everyone does take part in debates. The debates on usage, be it in blog comment sections or on Wikipedia Talk pages, are dominated by language professionals, who among themselves form a heterogeneous group, comprising both those who enforce language rules (such as editors and teachers) and descriptivists (linguists and lexicographers). Online platforms on usage are therefore arguably set up as meritocracies, rather than democracies.

Online platforms, moreover, allow for interaction between prescriptivists and their audience, which is something that should have seemingly qualitatively changed the discourse. Yet, the content of websites such as *Grammar Girl* remains comparable to the usage guide genre in its printed form. And much of what we can see among those disseminating advice online can be categorised under what Schaffer (2010) calls ‘Old Whine Online’. We can observe the retelling not only of the same rules, but also of the prescriptive narratives. Prescriptivists, not unlike university lecturers, continue retelling the same humorous anecdotes relating to prescriptive rules (such as sentence-final prepositions,

cf. §4.4.4) for generations. Significant shifts occur only when the rules of the game change. In new online genres that are not the products of single authors but rather of the negotiation of many, prescriptivism is largely ousted in favour of linguistic description. In the case of Wikipedia, this happens under the guidance of community principles, i.e. the principles of Verifiability and of Neutral Point of View.

Striking in the online context is the fact that the largest group of English speakers—that comprising NNSs—remains largely silent in these discussions. More than gender, age, class, or education, it is the sociolinguistic variable of nativeness that correlates with the speakers' willingness to take part in linguistic discussions (cf. §2.4). 'English with an accent' (Lippi-Green, 2012) remains an obstacle and an indicator of the lack of linguistic capital, or at least it is perceived as such by NSs and even NNSs themselves.

Finally, in accounting for the changes in twenty-first-century prescriptivism, a covert yet extremely influential factor needs to be taken into account, namely, automatic grammar checkers, which Curzan refers to as 'the most powerful prescriptive force in the world' (2014, p. 64). Their hidden prescriptivism, which is ingrained in technology, is finding its way into written language use below the threshold of the authors' conscious awareness. Automatic grammar checkers are reiterating many of the rules that are part of the prescriptive canon. The Microsoft Word Grammar Checker frowns upon sentence-final prepositions, the use of *like* as a conjunction, and nonstandard constructions such as *He talk* (Curzan 2014, pp. 79–80). In flagging 'errors', it fails to distinguish between style and grammar, standard and nonstandard va-

rieties. Moreover, it promotes prescriptive rules and spelling preferences of the American English variety, paying little attention to the many other standard varieties of the language. Although, as my analysis has revealed, grammar checkers are still met with scepticism (cf. §4.2), their influence on language use is undeniable. The extent and the nature of this influence, especially in varieties other than British and American English, remain yet to be explored.

7.4 Methodological challenges

The exploration of people's commentary on grammar involves dealing with 'big' and 'messy' data. In an attempt to manage such data and draw connections and conclusions regarding the phenomenon of grassroots prescriptivism, I have reached out for the tools and categories available primarily in corpus linguistics and sociolinguistics. Each of the puzzle pieces that the chapters of this thesis represent are aimed to form a meaningful whole, yet, each of them is distinct due to the complexity of the topic, which was viewed through the prism of different approaches. The methodology employed in Chapters 2–6 is thus revisited individually in this section.

Although snowball sampling proved to be beneficial in collecting survey responses described in Chapter 2, as with other nonprobability sampling techniques, it is not possible to make unbiased estimates or to generalise from a sample collected in this way to the general population. Similarly, as argued above, letters to newspaper editors analysed in Chapters 2 and 3 cannot be viewed as reflections of public opinion (cf. §2.2.1). Although exploring the attitudes of people who already are

interested in language or belong to privileged social groups is compelling in its own right, turning the attention to the population at large in future studies would further add to our understanding of the topic. Chapter 3 investigates one of the most recognisable features of orthographic prescriptivism, the misused apostrophe. Other linguistic features merit similar attention from researchers. Moreover, it would be particularly interesting to determine which new linguistic features are included in the prescriptive canon and why they are singled out at all. Chapters 4 and 5 turn to an exploration of two online platforms, the Grammar Girl blog and Wikipedia. In Chapter 4 (cf. §4.2), I touch on the array of available online sources on grammar advice, the so-called usage guides 2.0. Their number and different formats are steadily growing and they too lend themselves to further analysis. More is to be said about the relationships between people engaging in online discussions on grammar and their motives for participation.

The methodological approach taken in Chapter 6 is subject to limitations similar to those found in any study engaging in a corpus-based analysis of relatively low-frequency linguistic features. Whereas the occurrence of *thusly* in large-scale corpora, such as COCA, is rather limited, as I am writing this, a Google search for the word on the English-language pages yields as many as 2,060,00 results. Although using the web as a corpus may thus be useful, such an approach hinders the process of analysis due to the lack of data structure. New web-based corpora, such as GloWbE (Davies, 2013) and the Intelligent Web-based Corpus (iWeb) (Davies, 2018–), however, may offer potential solutions to such problems.

7.5 Moving forward

In spite of all the fears expressed surrounding the disappearance and decay of standard English, with the number of its defenders on the rise such fears hardly seem to be justified. One thing is certain though: the set of rules of standard English with which grassroots prescriptivists claim to be familiar are constantly changing, and those who complain are usually correct in saying that what they observe in usage is quite different from what they were taught was 'correct' in school. Although this conclusion may seem obvious to a linguist, perhaps less obvious is my observation chronicled throughout the previous chapters that the face of prescriptivism is changing as well.

In studying the language of the usage guide genre (Chapter 5) and its online counterparts (Chapter 4), I was able to get an insight not only into the way their authors communicate with their audience, but also into what they believe are their audience's needs and expectations. Instead of addressing, as Henry Fowler (§5.2) did in 1926, the 'half-educated Englishman', a number of 'new' prescriptivists are aware of the fact that they are addressing a global audience for whom comparable sources are only a click away. As Mignon Fogarty puts it, 'all the traffic data tells me that people learning English are a real audience segment' (personal communication, 31 January 2016). With objectivity becoming an increasingly important factor in the writing of those positioning themselves as experts on usage, prescriptivists are borrowing from linguists and engaging in dialogues.

Today, more than ever before prescriptivists are lending their ears to linguists. This is not to say that the dialogue is always approached in

the same way. After I wrote about the rise of the descriptive backlash against prescriptive rules on the project's blog (cf. Appendix B, 'The descriptive backlash'), one of the blog's followers commented on my usage of *myself* in the subject position in the following sentence fragment: 'In the survey Ingrid Tieken and myself conducted in 2015'. A person signing off as a 'British native speaker and translator' stated that '[*Myself*] as a replacement for "me" or "I", I prescribe that it is still considered incorrect by people who care about grammar rules'. Whereas I explained in my reply that the usage exists in language and that I find it quite amusing to insert it in a rather informal blog post on a topic relating to descriptivists 'fighting back', grassroots prescriptivists did not seem to acknowledge the context and were not willing to extend the discussion beyond what is 'right' and 'wrong'.

As limited as the success of explaining the relevance of context has been (cf. Burridge, 2010; Severin, 2017), attempting to communicate our findings relating to sociolinguistic variation and change remain the main tools employed by linguists in disseminating these findings on usage to the wider community. The attempts at triangulating, that is, analysing prescriptive pronouncements, speaker attitudes, and actual usage, remain most useful for linguists who not only study prescriptivism but also commit themselves to broadening the avenues for both discussion and investigation.

Appendix A

English Today features

Apostrophe('')s, who needs them?[1]

The improper use of the possessive apostrophe has for a long time been a subject of concern among the authors of usage guides in English. Apostrophes do not represent any sounds, and since nouns in the genitive, and plural nominative and accusative nouns with few exceptions sound the same, their spelling distinctions are purely grammatical (Bryant et al., 1997, p. 93). Because the sign exists only in the written language, its usage has been rather unstable ever since it was first introduced to the English language in the sixteenth century to mark dropped letters (Little, 1986, pp. 15−16), and it was not until the eighteenth century when the possessive apostrophe was first introduced (Crystal, 2003, p. 68). The usage guide database HUGE (Hyper Usage Guide of English), which is built by Robin Straaijer as part of the 'Bridging the Unbridgeable' project that Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade wrote about in an earlier issue of *English Today*, proves that apostrophe 'misuse' is the most popular topic in the field of language advice when it comes to punctuation. The apostrophe holds its own among numerous disputed items, such as ending sentences with prepositions, using me for I, who for whom or splitting infinitives. The first historical reference to the apostrophe in the HUGE database appears in *Reflections on Language*

[1] Lukač, M. (2014). Apostrphe('s), who needs them? *English Today*, *30*(3), pp. 3─4.

Use by Robert Baker in 1770 and it continues to be discussed to the present day. The discussion of the mark's 'misuse' has been widely popularised by the publication of Lynne Truss's *Eats, Shoots and Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* in 2003.

The apostrophe keeps stirring emotions both from the proponents of the sign's 'correct' usage and from the opposition who are advocating its abolishment. The debate participants are represented online in groups such as the Apostrophe Protection Society or, on the other side, on a website with the resonating name, Kill the Apostrophe. Last year, the Mid-Devon District Council banned the use of apostrophes from their street signs with the purpose of avoiding confusion. The news spread like wildfire. Similar relevance was attributed a year earlier to Waterstones [sic] decision to drop the apostrophe and adapt to the digital world with a more versatile and practical spelling. Companies such as Waterstones, Barclays Bank, Boots, Harrods, Lloyds Bank and Selfridges are not the only ones who decided to abandon the mark. The apostrophe seems to be generally impractical in the world of new media, especially on Twitter, which limits the users' posts to 140 characters. Recent analysis of the language used on Twitter by Brandwatch analytics (www.brandwatch.com) showed that all of the five most frequent grammatical mistakes are attributed to apostrophe omission, respectively *im*, *wont*, *cant*, *dont* and *id*. At the same time there seems to be a proliferation of complaints about the 'greengrocer's apostrophe' (cf. Beal, 2010), found used in the penultimate position with plural noun forms such as the following:

> Sir, We do not need to fear the extinction of the apostrophe (report, Aug 21). A local college is advertising 'study opportunities including National Diploma's, Degree's and Master's programmes'. (*Times*, 22 August 2006)

Although there never appears to be a shortage of complaints about the apostrophe that reappear in newspapers on slow news days, language professionals seem not to judge such misuses as particularly serious. Garrett and Austin (1993) studied attitudes towards apostrophe mistakes among British and German students of English. The apostrophe-related mistakes never scored higher than a mid-point on a five-point scale ranging from 'unimportant' to 'very serious'. In certain contexts, such as in the case of computer-mediated communication, the stigma against apostrophe omission has been entirely lifted. Nevertheless, the prophets of the apostrophe's death might still have to hold their breath until we can actually observe changes in all registers of the English language. In formal contexts, such as job applications, the apostrophe and other disputed usage items continue to represent cultural shibboleths that distinguish the educated from the uneducated (Bryant et al., 1997, p. 107). In the scope of our research, 'misused' apostrophes provide exactly the kind of arena for public discussions which allows us to investigate the implications of the in- and out-group dichotomy that separates the inner circle of the standard language users from its less proficient users. So what do you think of this disputed usage item? Let us know by leaving a comment at the 'Bridging the Unbridgeable' blog at http://bridging theunbridgeable.com/english-today/.

Grammar Advice in the Age of Web 2.0: Introducing the new (and keeping the old) language authorities[2]

When I launched an online survey last December with the aim of learning about people's practices of looking up usage advice, I anticipated that searching for answers to grammar questions would not differ considerably from what are currently most common practices in searching for any kind of information. The answers are, as a rule, simply looked up online. From a group of 189 respondents, among whom the majority were university-educated language professionals such as linguists, editors, journalists and translators, more than half reported that they preferred consulting online rather than printed sources. The respondents below the age of 25 who reported looking up usage advice in printed books were few and far between (11%). The question that can be consequently raised is what implications this finding has for the future of the printed usage advice literature, which includes usage guides, all-in-one reference books we are researching in the context of the 'Bridging the Unbridgeable' project. What is more, the number of sources that are available on the Internet is growing exponentially, and we need to probe more deeply into the matter to ask which of the available sources are in fact consulted.

Through search engines, the web itself is often consulted on usage questions and is used as a linguistic corpus, a freely available source of hundreds of billions of words of text, many of which are written in English. The numbers of 'hits' produced by searches are then seen by users

[2] Lukač, M. (2016). Grammar Advice in the Age of Web 2.0: Introducing the new (and keeping the old) language authorities. *English Today*, *32*(2), pp. 2–3.

as indicators of general usage preferences. If you are unsure about the plural form attorney generals, you can quickly find out that there are over 3 million instances of attorneys general found online, but very few attorney generals. Search engines are just a point of departure. Further analysis of the popularity of specific websites, however, helps to uncover the identity of linguistic authorities online.

To begin with, what we find online in many ways mirrors the situation in the printed usage advice literature, namely that the prominent publishing houses are still key players on the market. The most popular online usage advice sources are online dictionaries, which are used by 95% of the survey respondents. Albeit many of the popular online dictionaries nowadays are user-generated collaborative dictionaries such as UrbanDictionary.com and Wiktionary.com, in which a handful of dictionary editors is replaced by a large-scale usage panel of lay user-authors (Cotter & Damaso, 2007), the dictionaries that are considered to be the most reliable are those whose names were established well before the internet age, The *Oxford Dictionaries Online* and *MerriamWebster*. Whereas there is no doubt that the reputation of *Oxford Dictionaries Online* owes much to its name and the fact that the 'Oxford Dictionary' remains synonymous for many with the 'great Dictionary' (Winchester, 2003, p. 2), online dictionaries also score highly on their free accessibility, ease of use, and the speed with which they provide answers to usage questions. These three characteristics are surely of considerable importance in the context of new media. Other online sources with offline equivalents are publishing style guides such as the *Chicago Manual of Style*, *APA* and *MLA* style guides, all three of which

provide guidelines for academic writing, and style guides of media houses, including the Guardian and Observer style guide and the *BBC News Styleguide*. The latter category, although intended as in-house manuals that promote the uniformity of journalistic and broadcasting styles, are widely consulted by members of the general public and by a number of outside institutions.

In recent years much has been said about the use of corpora, databases of naturally occurring language, for purposes other than linguistic research. Corpus resources that are representative either of a specific genre or of an entire language variety and that often comprise millions of words, such as the Corpus of Contemporary American English (Davies, 2008-) and the British National Corpus (2007), include what no other language source does, a plethora of 'real world' examples of text. Nevertheless, those using such sources belong to a minority of respondents (28%). In spite of the richness of context and the nuanced insight into usage that language corpora facilitate, they do not cater to what most people expect when searching for advice on usage, namely clear, quick guidance which will enable them to make a choice between alternatives, compare with or compare to, affect or effect, disinterested or uninterested...

Real innovations in the usage advice market occur in two different types of online sources. The first is collaborative platforms, Wikipedia, Q&A websites and forums, where a consensus as to what constitutes acceptable usage is negotiated among individuals. Language professionals, translators and editors report that they regularly consult their peers on questions of usage on specialised online platforms. They turn

to their own professional community for advice, and it is this community that for them holds the highest position of authority. Lay users also engage in discussions on usage, for example in the process of creating Wikipedia entries on problematical features. These entries are under the watchful eye of many author-editors, and as a consequence, include critically processed content of good quality (Lukač, 2017). For all that, Wikipedia is still considered to be a relatively unreliable source. The second innovation is grammar websites created by single authors. Some of the respective online sources are so immensely popular that their authors have become household names. The number of people surveyed who are familiar with the podcast *Grammar Girl's Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing* is comparable to the size of the group which is still familiar with Fowler's *Modern English Usage*.

If anything, the results of the survey have shown that the established names on the usage advice market have found their place also in new media. Even so, the web allows for a dialogue between experts and lay people alike, who are now provided with platforms for potentially negotiating bottom-up what constitutes correct usage. Moreover, the web allows new players to enter the market, create their own audiences, and position themselves as linguistic authorities. If you would like to assist in exploring this topic further and comment on who (if anyone) is a linguistic authority today, visit our website at https://bridging–theunbridgeable.com/english-today/.

Appendix B

Bridging the Unbridgeable blog entries

Jafaican: 'Ali G would understand it perfectly'[3]

In recent years, linguists across Europe have described new language varieties spoken by young people living in multicultural and multilingual communities of large cities. In Germany the variety is referred to as *Kiezdeutsch* ('neighbourhood German'), in Norway as *kebabnorsk* ('kebab Norwegian'), in the Netherlands as *straattaal* ('street language'). Professor Paul Kerswill gave a talk yesterday at Lancaster University on the UK print media representations of the London multiethnolect, Jafaican ('fake Jamaican'). The innovative features of Jafaican include, most prominently, pronunciation, vocabulary and non-standard spelling. A stereotypical utterance thus produced by a speaker of Jafaican would be, 'Raaass man, me gwan me yard see me babymother/babyfather', or in plain English, 'I'm off home to my better half'.

According to Kerswill, there are two sides of the coin when it comes to media reception of Jafaican. The variety is often stigmatised and related to 'bad social practices', such as teenage abortions, stabbings and gun crime. David Starkey (in)famously related Jafaican to the 2011 riots (Pullum, 2011), and, more generally, to the violent, nihilistic gangster youth culture on the rise. Right-wing populists even warn of

[3] Lukač, M. (2013, January 25). Jafaican: 'Ali G would understand it perfectly' [Blog post]. Retrieved from (https://bridgingtheunbridgeable.com/%202013/01/25/2677/).

the ‘dangers’ of Jafaican as a potential replacement of its native British counterpart, Cockney.

More positively, many describe Jafaican as a product of natural language change, and even as cool, contemporary and classless. The London-based magazine, *Time Out*, humorously included Jafaican among the three dialects of London English (next to Estuarine and Mockney). The TripLingo app, a tool for deciphering slang in a number of languages, included Jafaican in the TripLingo (2012 Olympics) UK edition.

Although speakers of Jafaican have little awareness of the impact of their variety and of its exact place among the London speech communities, Jafaican seems to be opening a range of discourses. How do people establish relationships between language and social practices? What is the nature of the ‘backwash effect’ of minority languages on the majority language? And, more generally, what is the future of multicultural language varieties? Kerswill’s research doubtlessly provides plenty food for thought.

Out with whom, in with the split infinitive[4]

One of our blog authors recently tackled the ‘whom issue’ (Maud, 2013), and it made me wonder if this word is really dying out. Our readers will also remember several posts featuring the split infinitive, the pedants’ pet peeve.

[4] Lukač, M. (2013, April 11). Out with *whom*, in with the split infinitive [Blog post]. Retrieved from (https://bridgingtheunbridgeable.com/2013/04/11/out-with-the-whom%20-in-with-the-split-infinitive/).

I have decided to explore the actual usage of *whom* and the *split infinitive* (separated by one adverb only) in British and American English from the first half of the twentieth century onwards. I investigated the changes in British English for the period 1931–2006 (corpora used in the analysis: BLOB-1931, LOB, FLOB, BE06) and in American English for the period 1960s–2006 (corpora used in the analysis: Brown, Frown, AE06).

Here are the results (the data for American English in 1931 are not available):

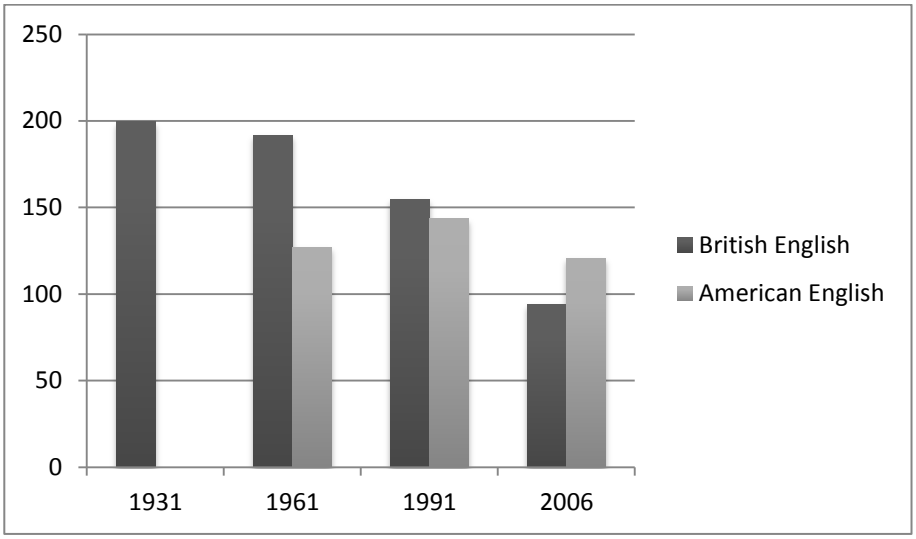


Figure 8.1 The use of *whom* in British and American English (frequency PMW)

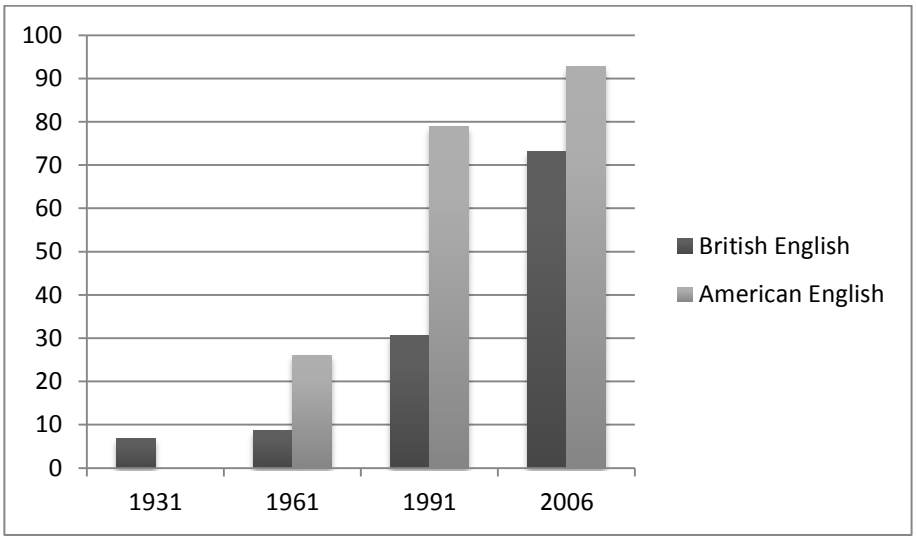


Figure 8.2 The use of the split infinitive in British and American English (frequency PMW)

Whom has indeed been losing popularity in British English since the 1930s, and the decrease in use is getting sharper. Things are not as straightforward in American English, where it seems that *whom* witnessed a revival in the beginning of the 1990s, which was again followed by a decrease in use.

Things are, on the other hand, rather unambiguous when it comes to the split infinitive. This grammatical construction is on the rise. The increase in use was not as dramatic in British English in the period between the 1930s and the 1960s, but it has rocketed since then. A similar trend can be identified in American English: a high increase between the 1960s and the 1990s, with a continuing rising trend. What do you think, which other constructions and/or words are on the rise, and which ones are on their way to extinction?

David Crystal and the history of English spelling, or how the Internet is killing off silent letters[5]

The Hay Festival of Literature and Arts, which is held annually in Wales, was a prolific place this year for discussions about language use. Professor David Crystal gave a wonderfully engaging talk at the event, presenting his latest book *Spell it Out: The Singular Story of English Spelling* (Crystal, 2013).

The *Daily Mail* reported on the event in an article with a catchy title 'Receipt without 'p', rhubarb without the "h": How the Internet is killing off silent letters' (2013). Crystal explains the history of English spelling in his talk, a history of waves of variation and novelty, and of various people who kept 'messing it up'. The French changed the simply spelled Anglo-Saxon word CWEN into QUEEN, the Flemish typesetters are responsible for the 'H' in GHOST, and the educated users of Latin for the 'B' in DEBT (lat. DEBITUM). Crystal goes on to explain how English spelling is continuing to evolve today through the use of the Internet. The silent letters, such as the 'H' in RHUBARB, are disappearing online in a medium that allows for writing and publishing without the filtering, editing process.

David Crystal was not the only one at the Hay festival to tackle the issues of spelling, language and pedantry. Simon Horobin, English professor at the Magdalen College, Oxford, addressed the language pedants in his talk, suggesting that there is nothing sacrilegious about

[5] Lukač, M. (2013, June 3). David Crystal and the history of English spelling, or how the Internet is killing off silent letters [Blog post]. Retrieved from theunbridgeable.com/2013/06/03/david-crystal-and-the-history-of-english-spelling-or-how-the-internet-is-killing-off-silent-letters/.

'thru', 'lite', and even the lack of spelling differences among 'they're', 'their', and 'there', *The Telegraph* reports Wallop, 2013)

What caught my attention were the reactions from the readers, who seem to have less tolerant attitudes towards usage than the linguists. The best rated comments on the David Crystal article all express concern about 'language wreckage' and the lack of education, whereas the results of the poll on the importance of grammar in *The Telegraph* speak for themselves (Does grammar matter? Yes: 3,646 votes or 93.37% and No: 259 votes or 6.63%).

The history of txt spk and Queen Victoria[6]

For years the language of instant messaging or text speak (txt spk) has been targeted in the popular media as hard evidence of the on-going decline in literacy. In 2003, *The Daily Telegraph* published an article about a 13-year-old girl who allegedly wrote an English essay in txt spk shorthand, which baffled her teacher (Cramb, 2003). The article stated that the girl's essay began with the sentence:

> *My smmr hols wr CWOT. B4, we usd 2go2 NY 2C my bro, his GF & thr 3 :- kds FTF. ILNY, it's a gr8 plc.*
>
> Translation: *My summer holidays were a complete waste of time. Before, we used to go to New York to see my brother, his girlfriend and their three screaming kids face to face. I love New York, it's a great place.*

[6] Lukač, M. (2013, July 21). The history of txt spk and Queen Victoria [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://bridgingtheunbridgeable.com/2013/07/21/the-history-of-txt-spk-and-queen-victoria/.

In a 2007 article for the *Daily Mail*, John Humphreys compared txt spk 'vandals' with Genghis Khan, and accused them of 'pillaging our punctuation; savaging our sentences; raping our vocabulary.' Other accounts of the ongoing moral panic caused by the vile instant messaging shorthand are numerous. For years, scholars have been challenging such widespread txt spk misconceptions. One of the leading scholars in this field is David Crystal, who gave a number of talks and wrote a book *Txtng: the Gr8 Db8* in an attempt to dispute the myths of the new communication technologies.

Contrary to popular beliefs, Crystal claims that the language of instant messaging does operate according to rules, many of which have existed for decades or even centuries. According to Crystal (2008, p. 27) 'Texting may be using a new technology, but its linguistic processes are centuries old.' This claim has recently acquired a new dimension, with the uncovering of 20 notes hand-written by Queen Victoria in the last four years of her life (Styles, 2013).

The letters addressed to Victoria's Commissioner at Balmoral, James Forbes reveal the Queen's fondness for using abbreviations such as 'wh' for 'which', 'shd' for 'should', 'abt' for 'about' and 'wd' for 'would'. Spokesman Andrew Currie commented: 'The writing is quite untidy and the abbreviations are interesting—a sort of early form of texting that suggest Queen Victoria was 100 years ahead of her time' (Nash, 2013).

This fascinating collection soon to be auctioned off is definite proof of Queen Victoria's fondness of shorthand and rebuses alongside many of her contemporaries, among them the celebrated author Lewis

Carol. Such historical finds again show what linguists have been claiming for years: instant messaging shorthand is hardly a novelty, it has existed for centuries, and it has always been limited to a specific context and/or medium.

Who's to blame for literacy levels in England and Northern Ireland[7]

Although each new generation always seems to be worse than the previous one from time immemorial, those criticizing the young kids of today finally have some evidence to support their claims. The newest OECD Survey of Adult Skills ('Boosting skills essential for tackling joblessness and improving well-being, says OECD', 2013) shows disappointing results for levels of literacy and numeracy in England and Northern Ireland. Out of 24 countries where the survey was conducted, England and N. Ireland came in fifteenth on literacy (and young Americans were the lowest ranking among their peers!). An even more striking fact is that the literacy levels of young people are no better than of those who are leaving for retirement. The question that many seem to be asking is 'Are schools going backwards?'

The variables which were found to positively correlate with low literacy levels were: lower levels of education, ethnicity (Black), not having 'very good' general health, lower parental level of education, no computer experience in everyday life, occupation (services and shop and market sales), and job industry (human health and social work). For

[7] Lukač, M. (2013, October 24). Who's to blame for literacy levels in England and Northern Ireland [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://bridgingtheunbridgeable.com–/%202013/10/24/whos-to-blame-for-literacy-levels-in-england-and-northern-ireland/.

details see the report published by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2013).

The results have been widely discussed in the British media during the past weeks. Poverty and inequality are mentioned as possible reasons for the low performance on the survey of the British 16–24 year olds (Adams, 2013). Professor Chris Husbands, director of the Institute of Education, and Angel Gurría, OECD secretary-general, sent similar messages concerning the results which should hopefully be addressed: 'People are being left behind'. An obvious discrepancy exists between young people's potentials and skills acquired through the education system. Although the British system seems to work just fine for the high flyers, the question is what happens with all groups of children.

But, yes, a number of commentators blame sloppy shop signs, misspelt movie names, youth slang, and the 'dumbing down' effect of social media, which require us to express our thoughts in 140 characters or fewer. A *Telegraph* reporter (Doughty, 2013) also seems to blame neologisms: 'every time a *selfie* derivative arrives in the dictionary, another sonnet dies'. I am afraid that the grammar police will continue barking up the wrong tree of youth slang and computer mediated communication for some time. It is actually those who do not use computers on a daily basis that tend to score lower on literacy tests.

'Could care less' or 'couldn't care less'[8]

'Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn,' are Rhett Butler's famous last words to Scarlett O'Hara. Could you imagine a modern remake of *Gone with the Wind* in which Rhett would rather say 'Frankly my dear, I could care less'? ('God, no!', you say?)

Although the phrase *I COULD care less* is often criticised by the language guardians, editors, and usage guide writers, you might be surprised to find out that it has been around for almost as long as the 'original' expression it is often 'mistaken' for: *I COULDN'T care less*. The 'corrupted' *I COULD care less*, started being used already in the 1950s, as can be observed from the Corpus of Historical American English (Davies, 2010-), although, at that time, it was usually preceded by negative personal pronouns: 'No one COULD CARE LESS what a camel was like than young ladies at tea'. By the 1960s, the explicit negation was dropped altogether and nowadays sentences such as: 'I COULD CARE LESS what you feel or think about me' are part of accepted usage. Except for looking at language data from different corpora to tell us about when this particular usage appeared, a sure sign of it gaining ground are the complaints about it in letters to the editor. Sure enough, the first letter on the topic of *COULD care less* was published in the *Lawrence Daily Journal-World* on October 20, 1960.

What is so controversial about this expression? Its critics claim that it is not logical and that it is even absurd. If you use the expression *COULDN'T care less*, you are stating that you do not care at all,

[8] Lukač, M. (2014, March 24). 'Could care less' or 'couldn't care less' [Blog post]. Retrieved from (https://bridgingtheunbridgeable.com/2014/03/24/could-care-less-or-couldnt-care-less/).

therefore, caring less would be impossible. Its corruption *COULD care less* implies that the speaker does care, which implies the opposite of what she is trying to say. William Safire goes a step further in his *I Stand Corrected* stating that the expression *COULD care less* has become so widespread that a reversal has occurred in using '[the proper form] would be regarded as the sort of thing a visiting Martian might say'.

Regardless of such line of criticism, linguists offer several good explanations for why such a change occurred and why the expression is not illogical as it may seem to some. In her book *Talking Voices*, Deborah Tannen (2007, p. 52) explains that *COULD care less* is not the only example of its kind. Negations in phrases are occasionally dropped in speech, without affecting the hearer's understanding of the implied meaning. Other examples of this kind are:

'I won't pay more than I can help'	instead of	'I won't pay more than I cannot help' (more than I must)
'until every stone is unturned'	instead of	'until there is no stone left unturned'

Another argument has been put forward by Deborah Tannen and other linguists, such as Rebecca S. Wheeler (8.3 below), who claim that the entire formula is altered by dropping the negation and that it signals sarcasm.

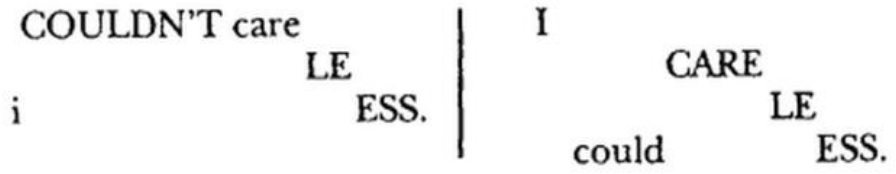


Figure 8.3 Two versions of pronunciation of *I couldn't care less* (From Wheeler, 1999, p. 7)

By shifting the emphasis in the sentence, the speaker reveals sarcasm, as in saying 'Oh yeah, as if there were something in the world I care less about'. Steven Pinker advocates the same position (Pinker, 1994b).

What are your thoughts on the usage of COULD care less? Does its acceptability vary depending on the context?

Censoring the 'G-word'[9]

Within the political correctness (PC) movements, many words addressing discrimination ended up on the banned list throughout the years. However, the PC vocabulary has a number of opponents as well, who rightfully claim that the PC movement is occasionally used to hide actual discrimination and inequality (Krugman, 2012), and, at other times, that it tends to go too far (you can easily find some entertaining PC dictionaries and word lists online, http://www.funny2.com/dictionary.htm).

The latest word to stir the PC controversy is 'girl', after BBC presenter Mark Beaumont used it to described a 19-year-old judo champion, Cynthia Rahming (Mardsen, 2014), in a documentary on the Commonwealth Games. The champion herself stated that she was not of-

[9] Lukač, M. (2014, June 30). Censoring the 'G-word'[Blog post]. Retrieved from https://bridgingtheunbridgeable.com/2014/06/30/censoring-the-g-word/.

fended by the word, but the BBC executives disagreed and decided to censor it. Two camps have been formed since, one supporting the BBC's censorship decision, and the other referring to it as another PC battle that had gone too far. HuffPost UK blogger B.J.Epstein stresses the differences in using the word 'girl' and the male equivalent 'boy': 'I would never refer to colleagues as "boys", nor would I call grown men "boys", and yet people, especially men, continually do this to me and to other women.'

On the other side, the Tory MP Phlip Davies criticised the censorship decision by saying that: 'We are going to end up in a situation where nobody is going to dare say anything lest some politically correct zealot deems it offensive.'

This discussion is neither new nor brought up by this incident alone. In 2004, the Ofsted head, David Bell, gave a speech to mark the International Women's Day, in which he stressed how language plays a significant role in discrimination, 'The use of the word "girl" is often used as an insult, meaning "not up to it" or "can't hack it" or "inadequate". It is naïve to think that this has no effect on girls.'

American and British author, Bonnie Greer (2004), gave a statement on this topic at the same time, saying that she found the phenomenon of calling grown up women 'girls' rather typical of the UK, and that it was among the most shocking things she had discovered after moving from the US in the 1980s.

To truly judge potential discrimination by using this seemingly neutral word, we need to go back to the context in which it was used. Mark Beaumont was taken aback after being floored by the judo cham-

pion, when he was heard saying 'I am not sure I can live that down – being beaten by a 19-year-old girl.' In this case, I would agree with Guardian's Naomi McAuliffe (2014) when she concludes that Beaumont was making a joke about feeling emasculated after a defeat by a young woman. Surely he should not have felt too surprised or emasculated since he did take on one of the best black belts in the country – regardless of her gender and young age.

Railway station or train station?[10]

One of the pet peeves of the British English-speaking language pedants has traditionally been the usage of Americanisms, which we have written and surveyed our readers about in our previous posts. In my research of the complaints about language use, I can safely say that criticism of Americanisms constitutes one of the major complaint trends among those who speak or model their speech on British English. 'Fall' is replacing 'autumn', 'bus' ran over 'omnibus', 'Mother's Day' is celebrated instead of 'Mothering Sunday'. Another phrase which seems to be on its way out is 'railway station' soon to be replaced by 'train station'. The BBC style editor Ian Jolly (2014) gives an account of the BBC's (accepted) usage of 'train station' and the audience's predominantly negative response to it. 'Railway station' predates 'train station' and it has been used almost exclusively in both American and British English prior to the 1930s when according to the data taken from the Corpus of Historical American English 'train station' first started to

[10] Lukač, M. (2014, November 12). Railway station or train station? [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://bridgingtheunbridgeable.com/2014/11/12/railway-station-or-train-station/

occur in wider usage in American English. The increase in frequency of ‘train station’ in American English seems slightly more delayed in the chart taken from the Google Ngram Viewer, but it clearly shows that in 1986 the frequency of ‘train station’ matched ‘railway station’ and its use has been soaring ever since.

Figure 8.4 The frequency distribution of *train station* and *railway station* in American English according to the Ngram Viewer

The same phenomenon seems to be now reflected in British English. In the British National Corpus, covering the period between 1980s and 1993, ‘train station’ is used mostly in spoken language, which is the door through which change usually enters language. According to the Google Ngram Viewer, the situation has dramatically changed since then. Those who are opposing the American invasion will be glad to see that ‘railway station’ is still in the lead, however, only by very few instances.

Figure 8.5 The frequency distribution of *train station* and *railway station* in American English according to the Ngram Viewer

One complaint from *The Times* about the usage of the phrase says: 'I recently heard Agatha Christie's Miss Marple instruct a taxi driver to take her to the "train station". Not in 1950s England, I think.' With BBC on board and corpus evidence, I wonder if it will survive in wider usage until 2050.

The future of English[11]

At the turn of the calendar year, we are usually making (soon-to-be-broken) resolutions and speculating about the future. It comes as no surprise that linguists have been exchanging their views on the future of English in the previous weeks, John H. McWhorter (2015) in his widely shared article, 'What the World Will Speak in 2115', and Bas Aarts and Laura Wright, together with an evolutionary biologist, Mark Pagel, in an episode of the BBC's *Word of Mouth*, 'How is English going to change in the future?' (O'Dea, 2015).

[11] Lukač, M. (2015, January 23). The future of English [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://bridgingtheunbridgeable.com/2015/01/23/the-future-of-english/.

To predict the future, as we might expect, the linguists turn to the past and the present changes affecting the English language. They all agree on certain aspects of the future evolution of the language: English is going to be more simplified, informal and regularised.

For a more nuanced description, we can take a look at some of the changes that are likely to occur based on the ongoing developments. As Mark Pagel describes, certain words are changing rather slowly, such as pronouns and numbers, whereas lexical words, such as nouns and verbs are changing considerably more rapidly. Bas Aarts is among the researchers analysing the changes in English through the use of corpora of naturally occurring language by tracking the increase and decline in the frequency of words and phrases. One such well-described change in the work of Geoffrey Leech is the decline in the usage of modal verbs (*shall, may, must, ought to*) and the increase in the usage of semi-modals (*be going to, have to, be to, need to, be supposed to*).

As a learner of English as a foreign language, I was taught (almost) never to use stative verbs in the progressive. It seems things are not so straightforward in spoken usage; to *be believing*, *wanting*, *wishing*, and notoriously *loving it* is on the rise due to colloquialisation and the function of progressives in hedging: 'You're being unreasonable' seems less harsh and face-threatening than 'You are unreasonable'.

The examples along the line of 'the doom of *whom*' do sound quite familiar. Some relatively newly emerging topics also include the development of comment clauses (such as *I think*) to pragmatic markers, and the perceived change in the usage of present perfect in spoken British English, also known as the emergence of the 'footballer's per-

fect': 'They've been brilliant, they were absolutely brilliant.' Paul Lambert (manager Norwich Town).

Many of these changes stem from spoken language and are likely to infiltrate written language over time. Whether they 'make it' into the written and standard varieties and whether the perceived changes are truly new and widely occurring phenomena, such as the 'footballer's perfect', remains to be seen.

During my recent stay at the University of Freiburg, I was introduced to a number of studies on frequency effects in language which might offer insights to major processes influencing language change such as obsolescence, grammaticalisation, and lexicalisation. Considering the growing number of studies and interesting findings in this field, one thing is clear, the future certainly does not look boring.

#Fundilymundily the language of the UK general election 2015[12]

With the UK general election just behind us, the talk of the language used in the debates still lies ahead. Last night, on the grammar phone-in of the BBC Radio 5's *Up All Night*, the presenter Dotun Adebayo discussed the use of political phrases, buzzwords and clichés in the run-up to the election with his regular guests on the program, Terry Victor, the co-author of *The Concise Partridge Dictionray of Slang and Unconventional English*, and Nevile Gwynne, the author of the highly prescriptive Gwynne's Grammar. The program is a rich source of complaints

[12] Lukač, M. (2015, May 11). #Fundilymundily the language of the UK general election 2015 [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://bridgingtheunbridgeable.com/2015/05/–11/fundilymundily-the-language-of-the-uk-general-election-2015/.

about perceived grammar mistakes, so it will certainly be a topic of future posts.

Callers submitted their favourite examples of obfuscating political doublespeak including *spare room subsidy* (as means of avoiding the word *tax*), *cost of living crisis* and the *squeezed middle*. On the same subject, in comparing the speech of politicians during a televised debate with a corpus of spoken British English, Tony McEnery and Robbie Love (2015) from Lancaster University discuss in an article the large discrepancies between the two. *Austerity*, for example, became such a high-frequency word in the analysed debate that it matched the frequency of the pronouns *your* and *these* in normal speech.

Although public pleas for simpler language and the plain English movement in politics seem to be consistent, some of the *Up All Night* listeners complained about the usage of colloquial English and slang expressions among politicians. Ed Miliband was criticised for saying 'Hell yes' and 'That ain't gonna happen' in a BBC interview, David Cameron was criticised for using the same infamous 'non-word' *ain't,* and Russel Brand's speech in political discussions was described as lazy for his 'dropping the *t*s from the English language'.

One of the main goals of the politicians' public appearances is appealing to the majority of their potential voters. Avoiding giving specifics and making obligations is, however, yet another important goal manifested in obfuscating lingo. This all creates an interesting mixture of occasional colloquialisms, which seem unnatural coming from the (often public-school) educated politicians, and ambiguous muddled jargon.

This election showed that politicians can also become linguistic innovators, sometimes inadvertently. The Scottish Labour MP Jim Murphy created the word *fundilymundily* while trying to pronounce *fundamentally* in a live BBC debate. Since then, an *Up All Night* caller claims, the word has entered common usage in Scotland. To check the life of this new word and the contexts in which it can be used, search for #fundilymundily on Twitter.

Murphy's Law and other mistakes prescriptivists make[13]

Linguists often debunk language prescriptions on the basis of their inaccuracy and their authors' misunderstandings of linguistic concepts (cf. Tieken, 2015b). One of the most commonly confused and wrongly exemplified prescriptions is the one against passive constructions, the so-called passivophobia. *Language Log*'s Geoff Pullum, Mark Liberman and Arnold Zwicky have diligently recorded and discussed many instances (http://www.lel.ed.ac.uk/grammar/passives.html# passive-postlist) of the wrongly defined and exemplified passive constructions in the period between 2003 and 2013 in 72 blog entries (and counting). Pullum (2010) went on to publish a full-length article 'Fear and Loathing of the English Passive' in the journal *Language and Communication*. Examples of passivophobia gone wrong include Michael Gove's memo on letter writing (Forsyth, 2013):

[13] Lukač, M. (2015, July 28). Murphy's Law and other mistakes prescriptivists make [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://bridgingtheunbridgeable.com/2015/07/28/muphrys-law-and-other-mistakes-prescriptivists-make/.

> Use the active, not the passive voice. Ministers have decided to increase spending on the poorest children. Poorer children are not having a harder time under this Government.

The BBC's News Styleguide (Allen, 2003),

> There were riots in several towns in Northern England last night, in which police clashed with stone-throwing youths. Youths throwing stones clashed with police during riots in several towns in Northern England last night.

and the fourth edition of the *Elements of Style* (Strunk & White, 1999):

> There were a great number of dead leaves lying on the ground. Dead leaves covered the ground.

None of the underlined sentences includes a passive construction. Existential clauses (*There were riots*…) in particular seem to be subject to wrong analyses.

Another type of an error found in prescriptive corrections runs even closer to the surface—the *incorrection*—a correction that includes a mistake itself. To explain how *incorrections* work John Bangsund (1992) of the Victorian Society of Editors in Australia introduced Muphry's Law, the editorial application of the better-known Murphy's law, which he defines in four points:

- if you write anything criticising editing or proofreading, there will be a fault of some kind in what you have written,
- if an author thanks you in a book for your editing or proofreading, there will be mistakes in the book,
- the stronger the sentiment expressed in (a) and (b), the greater the fault,

- any book devoted to editing or style will be internally inconsistent.

Here is an example taken from the recently published *Style manual for amendments* to bills of the UK's Office of the Parliamentary Counsel (2015) spotted by a Twitter user (Greenhill, 2015):

> The Lords of Commons Public Offices ("PBOs") have recently agreed to bring their punctuation styles more closely into line. So now, in both Houses, amendments will –
>
> - use double quotes;
> - not end with a full-stop.

Many more examples are available if you look up #MuphrysLaw on Twitter. For more instances of prescriptive fallacies, you can tune into British Council's YouTube channel and listen to the talk by Michael Rundell (British Council English and Exams, 2014), editor-in-chief of the Macmillan Dictionary. He discusses the extreme prescriptivists' lack of consideration for register variation, introduction of etymological and logical fallacies, and made up rules (including further discussion on passivophobia).

Migrants: the language crisis[14]

Our blog posts are almost always devoted to usage guides, their respective authors, usage problems, and our readers' attitudes towards usage. Sometimes, however, these topics touch on more general social debates.

[14] Lukač, M. (2015, September 15). Migrants: the language crisis [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://bridgingtheunbridgeable.com/2015/09/15/migrants-the-lang uage-crisis/.

In popular and scholarly publications on English usage from the 1970s onwards it has become quite common to discuss how we talk about people and how our way of referring to a particular group reflects their place in society. Are we referring to *air hostesses* or *cabin crew*, *actresses* or (*female*) *actors*, *the handicapped* or *the disabled*, *immigrants*|*migrants*|*refugees*|*boat, people*|*expats*? Anne Curzan devotes an entire chapter of *Fixing English* to the nonsexist language reform. The *Guardian*'s David Marsh takes on sexist and racist language in the ninth chapter of *For Who the Bell Tolls* with the title 'Political Incorrectness Gone Mad'. (There are many more possible references, but these two are lying on my desk.) Another battle is currently being fought against the language of intolerance. Although the migrant crisis is much more tangible than the *language* migrant crisis, words used surrounding social and political issues are essential when they contribute to people's actions or lack thereof.

Language used with the purpose of objectifying people is not a new phenomenon and neither is the commentary on it. A research group at Lancaster University conducted a study that focused on the construction of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK press over the period 1996—2006 (http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/projects/rasim/). Their findings might have as well been derived from the current news reports and the ongoing discussions. Just as Costas Gabrielatos and Paul Baker report in 2008, people's migration is still referred to in terms of natural disasters. 'Tidal waves' are threatening Europe, people are 'swamping' the UK according to Michael Fallon, Secretary of State for Defence, and a

'swarm of people' is jeopardizing the British economy and the country's high living standards according to the Prime Minister.

Charlotte Taylor, a linguist from the University of Sussex, gives an interesting insight (2015) into the usage of different terms for describing human migration from the Corpus of Contemporary American English. Whereas the word 'expat(riate)' commonly co-occurs with 'American' and 'British' – 'immigrants' are 'illegal', 'undocumented', 'Mexican' and 'Chinese'. Although chosen over the problematic word '(illegal) immigrant', the word 'migrant' is hardly neutral, and its negative semantic prosody seems to be on the rise judging from the current debates.

Some media houses have, however, recognised the linguistic problem and the fact that using particular words might foster social inaction. *The Guardian* (Marsh, 2015) has expressed its concern over the use of the word 'migrant', which denies people their humanity and identity, and is also highly unspecific. Al-Jazeera (Malone, 2015) has refused to use the word 'migrant' altogether.

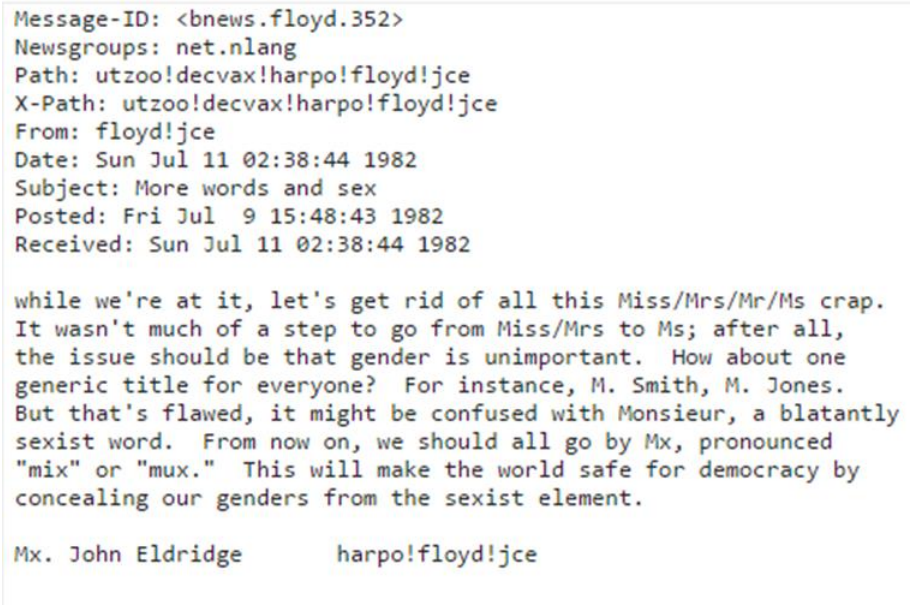
Whereas some might view such actions as 'political correctness gone too far', it is worth recalling that the same kinds of arguments were voiced when sexism, ageism, and racism were first challenged on a linguistic level. Francois Gemenne of the Centre for Ethnic and Migration Studies (University of Liege) summed it up appropriately in the Al-Jazeera discussion (): 'The language that we are using is really shaping the public perception of the situation.'

Adding the *Mx*: Gender-neutral titles and pronouns[15]

In the Q&A section of the *Chicago Manual of Style Online* (http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/qanda/latest.html) a question was posed about editing out *they* as a personal pronoun in reference to a transgender person. Here is the disputed sentence: 'During Harry's senior year, they were one of five contestants.' The answer provided on the website was 'since the author makes a point of explaining the use of they/them', 'to edit it out would be overstepping.'

We've written several times on this blog about the *singular they* usage problem, and we featured a blog post summarizing the findings of Klazien Tilstra's BA thesis on the changing attitudes towards the pronoun's usage. In the sentence above, however, singular *they* is not used as a generic pronoun, but as a pronoun in reference to a person not comfortable being addressed with masculine or feminine pronouns. Although it might catch some readers' attention, this usage is nothing new in the transgender community, along with the usage of the honorific *Mx* – a title devoid of gender qualifications following the M* pattern (*Mr*, *Ms*, *Miss*, *Mrs*). *Mx* is widely accepted by many UK companies and organisations and it has been in use since the 1970s. Here is a snippet from the 1982 Google Group Usenet archive advocating the usage of *Mx*, and giving guidelines on the title's pronunciation.

[15] Lukač, M. (2015, November 6). Adding the *Mx*: Gender-neutral titles and pronouns [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://bridgingtheunbridgeable.com/2015/11/06/adding-the-mx-gender-neutral-titles-and-pronouns/.



```
Message-ID: <bnews.floyd.352>
Newsgroups: net.nlang
Path: utzoo!decvax!harpo!floyd!jce
X-Path: utzoo!decvax!harpo!floyd!jce
From: floyd!jce
Date: Sun Jul 11 02:38:44 1982
Subject: More words and sex
Posted: Fri Jul  9 15:48:43 1982
Received: Sun Jul 11 02:38:44 1982

while we're at it, let's get rid of all this Miss/Mrs/Mr/Ms crap.
It wasn't much of a step to go from Miss/Mrs to Ms; after all,
the issue should be that gender is unimportant.  How about one
generic title for everyone?  For instance, M. Smith, M. Jones.
But that's flawed, it might be confused with Monsieur, a blatantly
sexist word.  From now on, we should all go by Mx, pronounced
"mix" or "mux."  This will make the world safe for democracy by
concealing our genders from the sexist element.

Mx. John Eldridge       harpo!floyd!jce
```

Figure 8.6 A conversation from the 1982 Google Group Usenet archive advocating the usage of *Mx*

This is a case in point of what Curzan in *Fixing English* (2014) refers to as politically responsive prescriptivism (‘rules/judgements that aim to promote inclusive, nondiscriminatory, politically correct, and/or politically expedient usage’) – you can read more on this topic in Stan Carey’s post (2015) on the *Macmillan Dictionary Blog*.

Although its usage is still in the process of being spread and accepted, *Mx*’s time is quite certainly coming (the *OED* is considering adding an entry for it [Eleftheriou-Smith, 2015]). As pointed out in the Merriam-Webster blog (‘A gender-neutral honorific’, n.d.), it wasn’t until 1986 that the *New York Times* fully adopted *Ms*, now the default form of address for women.

The descriptive backlash[16]

Last month *The Independent* published a story (Gillett, 2015) featuring an email etiquette rule by Jonathan Tisch, a hotel magnate. According to Mr. Tisch, the one word you should never use to start emails is 'I'. Referring to mentors, teachers and your own education is a common strategy when formulating prescriptive rules, and Mr. Tisch is no exception. He explains that this particular piece of advice was handed down to him by his former boss and mentor who claimed that 'whenever you're writing a letter — and now it applies to emails today — never start a paragraph with the word 'I,' because that immediately sends a message that you are more important than the person that you're communicating with.' What was interesting about this piece is the commentary that followed under the article itself and in social media. The like-minded readers were among the minority and most commenters expressed their disagreement ('I don't know about you but I know that I enjoy using a nice perpendicular pronoun every now and again.') or lack of interest ('Useless article') in the prescriptive advice.

In the survey Ingrid Tieken and myself conducted in 2015, we asked our respondents (some of them, we presume, including our readers) about their experiences in publicly voicing complaints about language. Most of them replied that the complaints they voiced were not complaints on 'wrong' usage, but on the pedants' complaints themselves.

[16] Lukač, M. (2016, January 31). The descriptive backlash [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://bridgingtheunbridgeable.com/2016/01/31/the-descriptive-backlash/.

Although there is no doubt about continuing needs for usage advice, the tables are steadily turning with the backlash against prescriptive advice on the rise.

Can your local accent hold you back?[17]

Do people need to change their local accents to get on in life? The answer is 'yes' according to those advocating a prescriptivist approach to language use who often emphasise that in professional settings and in job interviews local accents and nonstandard English can hold you back. Local accents seem to be a real obstacle for trainee teachers in the UK according to a recent study conducted by Dr Alex Baratta, a lecturer at the University of Manchester. Baratta interviewed trainee teachers both from the northern and the southern English universities and found that the ones from the north of England were told to modify and tone down their accents in the classroom by their teacher training mentors. He goes to conclude from the data analysed that intolerance towards accents constitutes 'the last form of acceptable prejudice' and that a culture of linguistic prejudice is part of the teaching profession in the UK. The study has received much attention from the press and it was reported on in *The Telegraph* (Espinoza, 2016), *The Guardian* (Weale, 2016), and *The Sun* (Cain, 2016). BBC Radio Cumbria featured a segment on the topic in which the host Kevin Fernihough (a dialect speaker himself) talked to William Hanson, an etiquette expert, and Jane Setter, Professor of Phonetics at the University of Reading. Surprisingly per-

[17] Lukač, M. (2016, May 17). Can your local accent hold you back? [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://bridgingtheunbridgeable.com/2016/05/17/can-your-local-accent-hold-you-back/.

haps, the two guests who respectively represented the prescriptive and the descriptive side of the debate agreed on their views regarding Baratta's study in stating that regional accents, as long as the speaker's words are pronounced clearly, should not be banned from the classroom or as Setter puts it 'What on Earth does it matter as long as the speaker is clearly spoken, it shouldn't matter that they have a regional accent.'

Appendix C

Flat adverbs survey

With this survey, we hope to collect data on the acceptability of flat adverbs, adverbs without the ending *-ly* as in *Go slow!,* for an article I am writing on the subject together with Morana Lukač. So we would like to ask you to fill in this brief survey for us, in which we will be asking you about the acceptability of a few sentences. We would also like to know a few things about you: just some general information to find out, for instance, if men and women respond differently to these sentences, and whether age makes a difference as well.

Filling in the survey won't take more than a few minutes. The survey is anonymous, and all information will be treated carefully. Thank you for taking the time to contribute to our research!

Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade (University of Leiden)

1. In what contexts is the following sentence acceptable in your opinion? Multiple answers are possible.

   That's a dangerous curve; you'd better **go slow.**

   - ok in informal speech
   - ok in informal writing
   - ok in formal speech
   - ok in formal writing
   - ok in netspeak (internet usage or chat language, texting)
   - unacceptable under any circumstances

2. In what contexts is the following sentence acceptable in your opinion? Multiple answers are possible.

   He did it **quicker** than he had ever done it before.

- ok in informal speech
- ok in informal writing
- ok in formal speech
- ok in formal writing
- ok in netspeak (internet usage or chat language, texting)
- unacceptable under any circumstances

3. In what contexts is the following sentence acceptable in your opinion? Multiple answers are possible.

   I don't want to commit myself to a long-term relationship, and **thusly**, I don't want to be financially responsible.

- ok in informal speech
- ok in informal writing
- ok in formal speech
- ok in formal writing
- ok in netspeak (internet usage or chat language, texting)
- unacceptable under any circumstances

4. In what contexts is the following sentence acceptable in your opinion? Multiple answers are possible.

   He described his daily routine **thusly**: 'I open my mail and I turn it over to the secretary to answer. I can go into my office now for an hour and that's a day's work.'

- ok in informal speech
- ok in informal writing
- ok in formal speech
- ok in formal writing
- ok in netspeak (internet usage or chat language, texting)
- unacceptable under any circumstances

5. If you disapprove of thusly as an adverb, why is that?

6. Flat adverbs are so-called 'old chestnuts' as far as usage questions are concerned, but we are also interested in new language features

that people are concerned about. So: what are your pet linguistic peeves?

7. Another question we are interested in is linguistic complaints such as those found in Letters to the Editor published in newspapers. Have you ever engaged in public discussions about language and grammar? Multiple answers are possible.

- No
- Yes: I sent a letter of complaint about language to a newspaper
- Yes: I phoned a radio or a television programme to discuss language
- Yes: I participated in a linguistic discussion in an online forum
- Yes: I commented on language use on Facebook, Twitter or other forms of social media
- Other

8. If you replied 'yes' to the previous question, do you remember what your complaint was about?

9. And if you replied 'Other', please specify where you did so, and how.

10. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- I'd prefer to leave this unspecified
-

11. What is your age?

- below 25
- 25 to 40
- 40 to 50
- 50 to 65
- 65 to 75
- over 75

12. Are you a native speaker of English?

- Yes
- No

13. If you are a native speaker of English, please specify of which variety. (In our research project, we currently only look at British and American English, so please don't be offended if we are asking you to tick 'Other'.)

- British English
- American English
- Other

14. If you are not a native speaker of English, please specify linguistic model.

- British English
- American English
- Other

15. What is your level of education?

- primary education
- secondary education
- university level

16. Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

Appendix D

List of newspaper sources for the Letters corpus

Australia
Cairns Post
Hobart Mercury
Maroochy Weekly
Sunday Tasmanian
The Age
The Australian
The Bulletin
The Citizen
Daily Telegraph
The Sunday Mail
The Sidney Morning Herald

Canada
Calgary Herald
Montreal Gazette
The Globe and Mail
The Ottawa Citizen
The Toronto Star
The Winnipeg Sun

Ireland

The Irish Times

New Zealand
AdMedia Magazine

UK
Bath Chronicle
Birmingham Post
Brentwood Gazette
Bristol Evening Post
Camarthen Journal
Daily Mail
Derby Evening Telegraph
Evening Express
Express and Echo
Financial Times
Gloucestershire Echo
Hull Daily Mail
Islington Gazette
Leicester Mercury
Lichfield Mercury
Lincolnshire Echo
Newquest Media Group Newspapers
North Devon Journal
Nottingham Evening Post
South Wales Evening Post
Sunday Herald
Sunday Telegraph
Telegraph

US
America
Charleston Gazette
Christian Science Monitor
Edmonton Journal
Los Angeles Daily News
Naples Daily News
Raonoke Times
South Bend Tribune
Star Tribune
Star News
The New York Times
The Providence Journal
The Virginian-Pilot and Ledger Star
The Washington Post
Topeka Capital
Tulsa World
Weekend Post

Dominion Post
Northern Advocate
Sunday Star Times
The Nelson Mail
The New Zealand Herald
Waikato Times
The Daily Telegraph
The Guardian
The Independent
The Spectator
The Sunday Times
The Times
The Western Mail
Wells Journal
Western Daily Press
Western Morning News
Journal
York Press

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Samenvatting

Tot het begin van deze eeuw heeft prescriptivisme als factor in taalvariatie en taalverandering weinig serieuze aandacht gekregen van taalkundigen, een paar belangrijke uitzonderingen daargelaten. Het onderzoek in dit proefschrift werd uitgevoerd in het kader van het project 'Bridging the Unbridgeable: Linguists, Prescriptivists and the General Public' van de Universiteit Leiden, onder leiding van professor Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade. Dit project is onderdeel van een groeiend aantal onderzoeken gericht op het schetsen van een meer gedetailleerd beeld van linguïstisch prescriptivisme in de Engelse taal. De vijf deelonderzoeken in dit proefschrift verkennen ieder een ander aspect van wat ik '*grassroots*-prescriptivisme' noem (cf. Heyd, 2014). Met grassroots-prescriptivisme wordt een type prescriptivisme bedoeld dat zich van onderaf ontwikkelt; met andere woorden, het refereert aan de prescriptieve inspanning van leken en hun bijdragen aan de metalinguïstische discussie. Meer specifiek richten de onderzoeken in dit proefschrift zich op het metalinguïstische commentaar van gewone mensen geuit in traditionele en nieuwe media in de vorm van brieven aan krantenredacties, telefoontjes naar radioprogramma's en discussies op online forums en blogs. In tegenstelling tot geïnstitutionaliseerd prescriptivisme, het zogeheten prescriptivisme van bovenaf, dat wordt opgelegd door instanties als taalplanningsorganisaties en overheidscommissies en -instanties, behelst grassroots-prescriptivisme de inspanningen van leken tot het bevorderen van de standaardtaalideologie.

Dit proefschrift is onderverdeeld in zeven hoofdstukken, waarbij het eerste en het laatste hoofdstuk de context beschrijven waarbinnen de vijf onderzoeken, de ieder ingaan op een verschillend aspect van grass-roots-prescriptivisme, hebben plaatsgevonden. De gebruikte analysemethoden werden grotendeels beïnvloed door de aard van de te analyseren data. De onderzochte data liepen uiteen van de ingezondenbrievenpagina van dagbladen (hoofdstuk 2 en hoofdstuk 3), gesprekken met Britse journalisten die zich met prescriptivisme bezighouden (§2.3) tot online vragenlijsten om de mening van het brede publiek over prescriptivisme te peilen (§2.4, §2.5.2 en §6.3). Daarnaast werden online discussies op blogs (hoofdstuk 4) en Wikipedia gebruikt (hoofdstuk 5). De verschillende discussies over specifieke taalgebruikskwesties (zoals het gebruik van *who* in plaats van *whom* in de objectpositie, *less* in plaats van *fewer* met telbare zelfstandige naamwoorden, enkelvoudig *they*, en het bijwoord *thusly*) werden vergeleken met de prescriptieve uitspraken in de *Hyper Usage Guide of English* (Straaijer, 2014), ook wel HUGE-database genoemd. Deze database bevat 77 taaladviesgidsen, uitgebracht in de periode 1770–2010 en werd samengesteld in het kader van het 'Bridging the Unbridgeable'-project (zie §4.3, §5.5.3, §6.3). Ook werden ultramoderne corpora van de Engelse taal, zoals het Corpus of Contemporary American English (Davies, 2008–), Global Web-based English (Davies, 2013) en het British National Corpus (2007) gebruikt als vergelijkingsmateriaal voor de corpusgedreven analyse. Wat het theoretisch raamwerk betreft, put dit proefschrift uit de vakgebieden taalattitudestudies, sociolinguïstiek en corpuslinguïstiek.

Hoofdstuk 2 heeft tot doel het identificeren van (i) de sociale groepen waartoe de grassroots-prescriptivisten behoren, (ii) de taalgebruikskwesties die worden aangekaart in de metalinguïstische debatten, en (iii) veranderingen, voor zover aanwezig, in de taalgebruikskwesties die in deze debatten worden besproken. Voor het beantwoorden van deze vragen heb ik verzamelingen van brieven aan de redactie van *The New York Times* (50 brieven) en *The Times* (105 brieven) over een periode van vier maanden (maart–juli) tussen 2000 en 2010 onderzocht. Daarnaast heb ik in 2015 samen met Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade een online enquête gehouden om inzicht te krijgen in hoe en waarom mensen deelnemen aan discussies over grassroots-prescriptivisme, zowel online als offline. Mijn bevindingen laten zien dat ondanks dat de sociale achtergrond van grassroots-prescriptivisten sterk verschilt, de deelname aan metalinguïstische debatten niet egalitair is. De schrijvers van de brieven aan krantenredacties zijn meestal hoogopgeleide mannen. Met andere woorden, de discussies over taalgebruik worden gedomineerd door mensen met 'cultureel kapitaal' om met socioloog Pierre Bourdieu te spreken. In de nieuwe media waren de genderverschillen minder uitgesproken, maar hier wezen de enquêteresultaten uit dat de niet-moedertaalsprekers onder–vertegenwoordigd zijn. Ondanks dat niet-moedertaalsprekers van het Engels moedertaalsprekers wereldwijd veruit in aantal overtreffen, is hun deelname aan de discussie over taalgebruik beperkt. Mijn voorzichtige conclusie is dat dit wordt veroorzaakt door twijfels over hun taalkundig kapitaal. De vergelijking tussen de Amerikaanse (*The New York Times*) en Britse (*The Times*) kwaliteitskranten geeft ruimte voor een voorlopig empirisch ondersteund

inzicht over de verschillen in de standaardtaalideologie tussen de twee landen. Dit onderwerp is tot nu toe slechts theoretisch verkend in Leslie Milroys artikel 'Britain and the United States: Two Nations Divided by the Same Language (and Different Language Ideologies)' (2001). Daar waar ingezonden brieven in de Britse krant blijk geven van taalpurisme, met name bezorgdheid over het groeiend aantal Amerikanismen in het Brits Engels, is politieke correctheid, wat Anne Curzan in haar boek *Fixing English* (2014) omschrijft als 'politically responsible prescriptivism' het meest besproken onderwerp in het debat over taalgebruik aan de andere kant van de Atlantische Oceaan. Vooral interessant zijn de veranderingen in de onderwerpen die worden besproken in het debat over taalgebruik. Spelling speelt daarin een centrale rol. Deze verschuiving is vooral toe te schrijven aan de zogeheten 'moral panic' met betrekking tot computergemediëerde communicatie. Ook interessant is de bevinding uit de online-enquête dat descriptivisme en een tolerante houding ten aanzien van taalgebruik vooral worden verdedigd door academisch geschoolde taalkundigen.

Hoofdstuk 3 beschrijft het onderzoek van 258 ingezonden brieven van over de gehele Engelssprekende wereld met als onderwerp 'de misplaatste apostrof', de zogenaamde '*greengrocer's apostrophe'*. De misplaatste apostrof heeft de laatste tijd veel aandacht gekregen met het oprichten van de *Apostrophe Protection Society* in 2001, een heel hoofdstuk in de bestseller *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* (2004) van Lynne Truss, en het wegvallen van de apostrof in bedrijfsnamen als Waterstones, Barclays Bank, Boots, Harrods en Selfridges. Met de corpusgedreven analyse van keywords en de belangrijkste semantische domeinen

probeert mijn onderzoek zowel de in de brieven besproken onderwerpen als de kenmerken van prescriptief taalgebruik in het algemeen te beschrijven. De analyseresultaten laten zien dat de brievenschrijvers hun (grotendeels subjectieve) beweringen met feiten proberen te staven. De analyse van de gebruikte taalkenmerken en de in de brieven besproken onderwerpen laat zien dat prescriptieve argumenten worden gedreven door extralinguïstische domeinen van het esthetische, het correcte, het gepaste en het ethische. De ingezondenbrievenpagina van een dagblad is een van de eerste voorbeelden van een discussieforum voor taalkwesties. Tegenwoordig vertegenwoordigen die pagina's nog maar een fractie van de discussie. De meest levendige debatten over taalgebruik worden online gevonden.

Hoofdstuk 4 beschrijft een voorbeeld van een dergelijk platform, het *Grammar Girl*-blog, dat ik '*usage guide* 2.0' heb genoemd. De vergelijking van de taalkwesties die worden behandeld in het *Grammar Girl*-blog met die in de HUGE-database heeft laten zien dat veel van wat er op de *Grammar Girl*-website te vinden is een voortzetting is van de 250-jaar oude taaladviesgidstraditie, ondanks de veranderingen die het nieuwe medium met zich mee heeft gebracht. Hoewel *Grammar Girl* het gesprek met haar lezers aangaat en bronnen zoals grammati–caboeken, taaladviesgidsen en taalkundige onderzoeken gebruikt, verschillen veel van de taalproblemen op de website niet van de onderwerpen die worden besproken in de traditionele taaladviesgidsen. De kwalitatieve analyse van 412 commentaren op de website onderzocht de taalkundige wijze van identiteitsconstructie onder de volgers van de website. Zij beschrijven zichzelf als 'beginners', 'experts', 'grammaticapoli-

tie' en 'trollen'. Opvallend is dat de twee gepolariseerde groepen, de prescriptivisten en de descriptivisten, niet veel verschillen in het soort argumentatie dat zij gebruiken. Zij droegen vergelijkbaar bewijs aan voor hun argumenten door te verwijzen naar onderwijs, logica en gezaghebbende taalkundigen. Daarnaast bedienden beide groepen zich in het nieuwe medium van het gebruikelijke anekdotisch bewijs over gebruikstradities en hielden zij de gevestigde kenmerken van de discours over taalgebruikskwesties in ere.

Hoofdstuk 5 beschrijft het vervolgonderzoek naar het grass–roots-prescriptivisme in de online-context. Het concentreert zich op Wikipedia als een plaats waar taalkwesties worden besproken en taaladvies wordt geformuleerd. Hoewel Wikipedia het grootste samen–werkingsproject in kennisontwikkeling en -deling tot nu toe is, is het niet zonder precedent in de taalkunde. Al in 1897 nodigde James Murray, de toenmalige hoofdredacteur van de *Oxford English Dictionary*, het grote publiek uit om bij te dragen aan de ontwikkeling van het woordenboek. Duizenden strookjes met citaten werden ingeleverd, waarvan er veel tot op de dag van vandaag in het woordenboek te vinden zijn. In de online-context werkt het publiek ook samen aan het produceren van online-woordenboeken als *Wiktionary* en *Urban Dic–tionary*. Wikipediaredacteurs, de zogeheten Wikipedians, daarentegen, werken meer onderling samen aan het schrijven van artikelen over taalgebruikskwesties. De samenwerking op Wikipedia is revolutionair in de zin dat Wikipedia een van de eerste platforms is waarop taalgebruiksregels gezamenlijk worden geformuleerd door zowel experts als leken. Een corpusgedreven vergelijking tussen Wikipedia-artikelen en de arti-

kelen in de HUGE-database laat zien dat de stijl waarin de traditionele taaladviesgidsen zijn geschreven meer verhalend en meer persoonlijk is. Bovendien, en wellicht niet verrassend, bedienen deze taaladviesgidsen zich van prescriptieve regels en stigmatiseren ze niet-standaard taalgebruik. Aan de andere kant, door de beginselen waarop de samenwerking op de pagina's van de online-encyclopedie zijn gebaseerd, geven de Wikipedia-artikelen een kritisch en actueel verslag op basis van het vak taalkunde en daadwerkelijk taalgebruik in plaats van op de uitspraken van individuele auteurs die zichzelf de rol van autoriteit hebben toegekend.

Hoofdstuk 6 onderzoekt het gebruik van het bijwoord *thusly*, dat over het algemeen wordt gezien als een hypercorrecte vorm van *thus*. Met behulp van corpusanalyse onderzoekt het hoofdstuk (i) de geschiedenis van de prescriptieve regel tegen het gebruik van *thusly*, (ii) de meningen van sprekers over het woord en (iii) het daadwerkelijke gebruik van *thusly.* De resultaten wijzen erop dat ondanks de al bijna honderd jaar gebruikte prescriptieve regel tegen het gebruik van *thusly* het woord in specifieke contexten gebruikt blijft worden, voornamelijk in het Amerikaans Engels. Daarnaast stijgt de acceptatiegraad voor *thusly* snel onder jongere sprekers. Ten slotte toont de analyse van het gebruik van dit woord in deze specifieke context aan dat het vaststellen van de frequentie waarmee een woord voorkomt over het algemeen slechts de eerste stap is in een onderzoek. Zo'n eerste stap zal moeten worden gevolgd door een verkenning van de daadwerkelijke taalkundige context en de regelmatigheden in het gebruik.

Dit proefschrift wil aantonen dat het grote publiek niet slechts een passieve ontvanger is van prescriptieve regels, maar actief deelneemt aan het debat over taalgebruiksadvies. De deelname aan dit debat gaat gepaard met barrières. Het debat wordt gedomineerd door degenen die worden gezien als bezitters van cultureel en taalkundig kapitaal, dat wil zeggen taalkundigen en hoogopgeleiden. Daar waar nieuwe media hebben bijgedragen aan het wegnemen van enkele van deze barrières blijven vele groepen mensen, met name de niet-moedertaalsprekers van het Engels, nog steeds uitgesloten van de metalinguïstische discussie. Eenentwintigste-eeuwse prescriptivisten, waaronder *Grammar Girl* en Bryan Garner, beginnen te vertrouwen op taalkundige data en betrekken taalgebruikspatronen in hun advies. Daarnaast beginnen taalkundigen zich in te laten met het grote publiek, iets dat zij in het verleden zelden deden. Langzaam maar zeker verandert het prescriptivisme, net als de taal zelf. De ondergang van het prescriptivisme is, zoals de resultaten van het onderzoek in dit proefschrift laten zien, echter hoogst onwaarschijnlijk.

Curriculum vitae

Morana Lukač was born on 23 February 1986 in Osijek, Croatia. She attended the Grammar School of Natural Sciences and Mathematics in that city, receiving her diploma in 2004. After secondary school, she attended the University of Osijek, where she obtained a secondary school teaching degree in English Language and Literature and Philosophy in 2009. She attended a joint MA programme in English and American Studies at the University of Graz and the University of Bamberg. In 2012, she graduated with an MA thesis in the field of critical discourse analysis, called *Germany's Recognition of Croatia and Slovenia: Portrayal of the events in the British and the US press*, which was published as a book in 2013. After working for a year as a lecturer at the Linguistics Department of the University of Zadar, in 2012, she joined the Leiden University Centre for Linguistics as a PhD candidate attached to the project 'Bridging the Unbridgeable: Linguists, Prescriptivists and the General Public' led by Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade. Since then Morana has been teaching courses in sociolinguistics, corpus linguistics, and computer-mediated communication at Leiden University, and working as a freelance editor of academic English texts.