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Leiden
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Setting the standard: norms and usage in Early and Late Modern Dutch (1550-1850)

Lismont, E.

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Chapter 3 – Prescriptivism

The many attempts of norm givers to spread codified norms into the language community can be captured under the umbrella term *prescriptivism*. As metalanguage that is set up to codify and maintain a standard of correctness, prescriptivism advocates linguistic norms that language users need to follow. According to Straaijer's (2017) definition in *Oxford Bibliographies*, linguistic prescriptivism comprises "the ideology and practices in which the correct and incorrect uses of a language or specific linguistic items are laid down by explicit rules that are externally imposed on the users of that language".

Since the relationship between metalinguistic activities and language use is the central object of investigation, this chapter provides the theoretical framework of this dissertation. I first navigate through the coverage of the concept prescriptivism, and I define how it is perceived in the context of language standardisation. I then turn to the potential impacts of prescriptivism on usage, where I review previous research into the effects of prescriptivism. I claim that studies systematically investigating the relationship between prescriptivism and usage are necessary for better understanding language standardisation processes.

1 Prescriptivism and language standardisation

The multiple volumes on the topic of prescriptivism that appeared in the last few years alone illustrate that prescriptivism is an actively studied subject in sociolinguistics (e.g. Chapman & Rawlins, 2020; Beal, Lukač & Straaijer, 2023; Yáñez-Bouza, Rodríguez-Gil & Pérez-Guerra, 2024 as the most recent volumes). The vitality of the topic does not come as a surprise, of course. Both in the present-day and in the past, language use is subject to value judgement, in which social power and cultural meaning of language is expressed. Prescriptivism is thus from all times and is everywhere. Metalinguistic commentaries and judgements on language use are obviously present in schools and other educational contexts (e.g. Peterson & Hall, 2023; Cushing & Snell, 2023;

Viðarsson, 2024), but the countless number of language blogs, social media pages, and memes on the topic indicate that prescriptivism's operating ground reaches far beyond the classic grammars, spelling guides, schoolbooks and other language advice publications that are often studied nowadays. In the first part of this chapter, I therefore delve into the different types and strands of prescriptivism.

1.1 Non-institutionalised and institutionalised prescriptivism

Evaluative judgements on what is considered 'good' and 'bad' usage are a natural part of human communication, as Cameron (2012 [1995], pp. 1-2) explains. She covers all metalinguistic reflections on the aesthetics or 'standardness' of usage, which are "born of an urge to improve or 'clean up' language", in the term *verbal hygiene*. Although this concept is employed as an umbrella term that comprises a wide array of metalinguistic practices, it is generally used to refer to activities that lack support from institutional endorsement (Cameron, 2023, p. 20). These metalinguistic efforts are often initiated by an individual agent, and may reproduce norms from language authorities, although they may also rely on local ideologies and community norms.

Non-institutionalised prescriptivism is typically transmitted in spoken communication (Curzan, 2014, p. 16). A common example is the interaction between parents and children, where the parents correct the language use of their offspring. Also efforts of *grassroots prescriptivism* (Heyd, 2014; Lukač, 2018; Lukač & Heyd, 2023) fall within non-institutionalised prescriptivism, since the concept comprises activities such as "writing letters to newspaper editors, calling radio stations and engaging in online discussions on topics related to usage" that are "initiated by lay members of the general public" (Lukač, 2018, p. 26). Since these comments are often transmitted only at a limited scale, with one language user telling the other how to talk, the influence of non-institutionalised prescriptivism is generally restricted to the social network of the prescriptive agent (Curzan, 2014, p. 16).

Although the distinction between non-institutionalised and institutionalised prescriptive practices is not strictly categorical, Cameron (2012, p. 3) distinguishes these acts of verbal hygiene from prescriptivism. It is argued that

the concept prescriptivism generally refers to the kind of verbal hygiene that “has been institutionally endorsed through publication” (Curzan, 2014, p. 16). As such, prescriptivism is defined as the institutional enforcement of elite linguistic norms promoting ‘standardness’ in language, which enforces the use of the norm in published works and disseminates it through education (Cameron, 2023, p. 20). This definition of prescriptivism conforms to what it also considered institutionalised prescriptivism.

According to the definition above, institutionalised prescriptivism requires the existence of a standard variety as the only correct form of language that is to be disseminated into society (cf. Curzan, 2014, p. 32). Since the ideology underpinning the ‘standardness’ of a variety emerged only in periods of Enlightenment and nation building in mostly Western European contexts of language standardisation, this definition relegates institutionalised prescriptivism to the eighteenth century, defining it as a phenomenon that exists solely in the context of “standard language cultures” (Milroy, 2007, p. 133). However, Cameron (2012) and Curzan (2014, p. 13) explain that prescriptivism is also a dynamic phenomenon that evolves along with broader socio-political and socio-cultural changes. Normative activities before the eighteenth century are therefore also considered as institutionalised prescriptivism in this dissertation. Since the grammarians of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries are responsible for what Haugen (1966) defines as the selection and codification of the standard language (cf. Rutten, 2019), these norms actually form the precursor to the standard language. While it is true that these early codifiers primarily aimed for spreading a ‘proper’ form of the language to a restricted group of language users, these norms were also institutionally “endorsed through publication” (Curzan, 2014, p. 16). As such, these early products of language codification are also captured under the term prescriptivism in this dissertation.

Strands of institutionalised prescriptivism

In her monumental work on institutionalised prescriptivism, Curzan (2014) argues that not all institutionalised prescriptivism has the same goal. She therefore distinguishes four different (but overlapping) strands of prescriptivism. The main strand that is directly associated with the context investigated in this study is *standardi[s]ing prescriptivism*. As the title suggests,

this strand concerns the codified norms of the standard language. It is the type of prescriptivism that claims there is only one correct form of language; the type that deems the standard variety better than all other non-standard varieties of a language (cf. also Lippi-Green, 2012). As such, the rules that are propagated within standardising prescriptivism “are more ‘laws’ than ‘etiquette rules’” (Curzan, 2014, p. 30).

The ‘etiquette rules’ Curzan refers to are found within the range of usage that is considered ‘standard’. The strand *stylistic prescriptivism* distinguishes stylistic differences in usage, often from an aesthetic point of view. Although different forms are thus considered ‘standard’, some usage expresses a more formal, educated, or a colloquial style of speaking or writing. Since each form contains social meaning, prescriptivism considers certain usage more preferred, for example, in formal writing (Curzan, 2014, p. 34). An example from modern-day Dutch is the variation in the order of the final verb cluster in a clause. Although the order in which the auxiliary verb *heeft* ‘has’ precedes (Example 1) or follows (Example 2) the past participle *gelogen* ‘lied’ are both considered Standard Dutch, and are often used interchangeably, stylistic prescriptivism prefers the former construction in formal styles of writing.⁴

(1) *De matroos gaf toe dat hij heeft gelogen.*

(2) *De matroos gaf toe dat hij gelogen heeft.*

‘The sailor admitted that he has lied.’

In practice, the distinction between *standardising* and *stylistic prescriptivism* is not always crystal clear. This is particularly due to the strong association of stylistic prescriptivism with ‘educated’ language use; the usage of “those who ‘know better’” (Curzan, 2014, p. 33). Since the codified norms of the standard language are often based on the usage of high-class educated writers, the distinction between what is ‘good’ or ‘preferred’, and what is ‘correct’ usage may be blurred sometimes (ibid.).

The third strand that Curzan (2014, pp. 36-38) defines is *restorative prescriptivism*. These activities aim for restoring earlier usage. This strand also shows overlap with the two aforementioned strands. In fact, standardising

⁴ Cf. e-ANS (e-ans.ivdnt.org), section 18.5.7.3.ii. (Nederlandse Taalunie, 2024)

prescriptivism is sometimes also known for being conservative, with grammarians prescribing older, conservative variants. Different from standardising prescriptivism, however, Curzan (2014, p. 37) defines restorative prescriptivism as a small category that promotes usage that is not standard and has no grounds in language use (anymore). The linguistic forms that are propagated within restorative prescriptivism therefore often “[live] in isolation in usage guides, with little to no life outside them”. Based on Curzan’s (2014, pp. 36-38) discussion, it seems that this strand mainly applies to the lexicon of a language. This also connects restorative prescriptivism to *purism*, which comprises the metalinguistic efforts set out to purify language use from foreign and other undesirable elements (Thomas, 1991, p. 12). Although purist activities may be visible in all domains of the language, they also particularly target the lexicon (ibid.). An example from Dutch are the attempts of Flemish purists to eradicate French influences from the Dutch lexicon, as is apparent, for example, in their propagation of the purist word *regenscherm* as an alternative for the commonly used French loan *paraplu* ‘umbrella’. Such invented forms do not have any ground in actual usage and prescriptions for these forms are therefore rarely successful.

Finally, Curzan (2014, pp. 38-39) defines *politically responsive prescriptivism* as a strand of institutionalised prescriptivism. This strand is particularly applicable to modern societies, which have increasing attention for inclusive and non-discriminating language use. While this strand of prescriptivism is typically not included in traditional prescriptive sources, Curzan (ibid.) explains that style guides and other institutional forms of prescriptivism may also adopt progressive prescriptions to respond to socio-cultural and socio-political concerns (cf. also Cameron, 2023). Although Curzan (ibid.) also notes that politically responsive prescriptivism may eventually become part of stylistic prescriptivism, this discussion raises the question of whether this strand is truly different from other strands.

By distinguishing these four strands, Curzan (2014, p. 13) argues that a nuanced look at the diverging goals aids in seeing prescriptivism as a dynamic phenomenon. Prescriptions that were initially set out to standardise the language may eventually become stylistic differences in usage. Investigating the impact of prescriptivism on usage is therefore also considering the goal of prescriptivism and the usage that is targeted. Whereas norms for standardising

Dutch were primarily aimed at a restricted high-class audience who needed to adhere to a 'proper' form of Dutch in the sixteenth to early eighteenth centuries, prescriptivism became more concerned with spreading the 'correct' form of language to the entire public from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards (cf. Chapter 2). As such, considering both the goal and the target audience of prescriptivism shows that it is a dynamic phenomenon that evolves along with the socio-cultural context in which standardisation takes place (Curzan, 2014, p. 13).

1.2 Prescriptivism versus descriptivism

When talking about prescriptivism, it is impossible to ignore its putative counterpart: *descriptivism*. With prescriptivism ascribing a higher value to one variety of the language, most of the time the codified standard (Crystal, 1997, p. 2), it is the malignant other which tells speakers and writers how they should talk and write. Descriptivism, on the contrary, is considered the rational and scientific approach that objectively describes how language is actually used. Although descriptive rules may also discuss the "well-formedness" of the language, this type of metalanguage particularly describes patterns of variation across different sociolinguistic factors, such as time, register, and individual speakers, without attaching a value judgement to any form of usage (Curzan, 2014, p. 21).

Prescriptivism and descriptivism are often portrayed as two opposing forces. The dichotomy into which these concepts are generally pushed, however, oversimplifies the complexity of the individual concepts (Pillière et al., 2018, p. 8). This is illustrated, for example, by scholars like Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2011), Hodson (2006), and Straaijer (2011). In their investigations of the metalanguage of notable eighteenth-century grammarians, they show that these norm givers are not always strictly prescriptive. Normative works often include descriptive statements for some linguistic features, while strongly prescriptive injunctions are found for other items. Ayres-Bennett (2020, p. 207) also points to the descriptive adequacy of the so-called prescriptive icon of French, the seventeenth-century Vaugelas, who in fact "reflect[ed] usage and its variation and change well". Since normative works may include accurate descriptive statements alongside comments on correctness (ibid., p. 187), prescriptive

works may thus also be descriptive. The opposite is probably also true. After all, a descriptive approach also implies selection; certain variants are discussed, while others remain unnoticed or are simply neglected by the grammarian. This selection of variants in descriptive grammars can thus also contain a prescriptive attitude and may imply that readers interpret the descriptive grammar prescriptively. Scholars like Beal (2004, p. 90) and Ayres-Bennett (2020, p. 194) have therefore argued for viewing the distinction between prescriptive and descriptive as a continuum or cline, rather than a simple dichotomy. The latter study, moreover, proposes to not only consider the metalanguage when evaluating the ‘prescriptiveness’ of a work, but also the intent of the writer and the effect of the work on usage (Ayres-Bennett, 2020; cf. also Ayres-Bennett, 2016, pp. 105-106).

In this study, I avoid the binary opposition between prescriptivism and descriptivism, and between prescriptive and descriptive as much as possible, since I do not determine the prescriptiveness of a normative work (cf. Ayres-Bennett, 2020). Only when discussing the prescriptions on individual linguistic items in the empirical chapters, I may refer to injunctions as ‘more prescriptive’ or ‘more descriptive’ when compared to another comment on the subject. This way of classifying prescriptions aligns with the view of positioning the two concepts on a continuum rather than a dichotomy.

A note on the applied terminology

As was indicated earlier in this chapter, *prescriptivism* acts as the central concept of this study. I employ the concept prescriptivism as an umbrella term for all the norm-giving activities by language authorities who spread language norms via publication. Since I rely on the standardisation model of Haugen (1966, 1972, 1987), I consider norm implementation as an inherent part of the standardisation process. This is opposed to the view of Milroy & Milroy (2012), who consider the broader transmission of language norms a separate ‘step’ of the standardisation process, following codification. Taking Haugen’s perspective implies that I consider normative practices of all codifiers in this study attempts for norm implementation.

This does not imply that I neglect the ideological turn of prescriptivism in the eighteenth century. While my operationalisation of the concept prescriptivism

also includes metalinguistic practices that enforce norms of ‘proper’ Dutch, the normative activities that align with spreading one ‘correct’ form of language to the entire language community, are specifically denoted with the concept *standardisation ‘from above’* (cf. Rutten & Vosters, 2021).⁵

Furthermore, when I discuss *(language) norms* in this dissertation, I refer to codified norms that are included in the metalinguistic commentary of grammarians but also to the language practice of the codifiers. With *prescription(s)*, conversely, I solely indicate the explicit and implicit commentary that norm givers formulate regarding a specific linguistic item (cf. Chapter 4).

This also implies that I do not explicitly address the concept *prescription* in the terminology of Milroy & Milroy (2012, pp. 22-23) to refer to a stage within the implementation of the standard language. While these reinforced attempts of norm dissemination, particularly via accessible normative works and schooling of the broader public, are considered in this study, I do not operationalise the different stages of implementation (viz. diffusion, maintenance and prescription) as the Milroys define them.

2 Possible effects of prescriptivism

Norm givers who formulate comments on how language should be used have the goal of having an impact on language use, of course. In the context of language standardisation, the aim of standardisers is to achieve a homogenous language that is used as the standard variety by the entire language community (cf. Haugen, 1966). In this section, I rely on previous empirical research to demonstrate that historical codifiers rarely attained such far-reaching effects in usage. However, with their normative efforts, these norm givers could also exert other influences on the language community.

⁵ Note that what I call *standardisation ‘from above’* is what some other scholars consider *prescriptivism*. See, for instance, the definition of Crystal (1997, p. 2): “prescriptivism is the view that one variety of language has an inherently higher value than other, and that this ought to be imposed on the whole of the speech community. [...] Adherents to this variety are said to speak or write ‘correctly’; deviations from it are said to be ‘incorrect’”.

2.1 Discursive effects

As previously noted in this chapter, standardisation ‘from above’ is typically defined as an eighteenth-century phenomenon. This primarily stems from the close link between the enforcement of a standard language and the rise of a standard language ideology during the era of nation-building processes (Rutten & Vosters, 2021, p. 65). This ideological component of standardisation, in which there is “awareness among language users of a ‘correct’, or canonical, form of language” can be seen as a discursive effect of prescriptivism (Milroy, 2001, p. 535). In fact, as was explained in the introduction of this dissertation, this ideological phenomenon is what Milroy & Milroy (2012, p. 19) consider as standardisation.

According to this theory, the prime achievement of standardisation ‘from above’ is thus situated at a discursive level. The effect of this ideological shift is first visible in the metalinguistic discourse, where an increase in normative activities is attested from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards. Rutten & Vosters (2021, p. 77) therefore argue that “standardi[s]ation from above is an intrinsically metalinguistic phenomenon”, with codifiers evaluating language use from a diglossic perspective of standard and non-standard forms (cf. also Rutten, 2019, p. 270). It is also at this time that a discourse community of grammarians with “common interests, goals, and beliefs” increasingly made codified norms available for non-elite audiences (Watts, 1999, p. 43). Although these normative efforts gradually spread through the broader community, they did not necessarily have a linguistic impact on usage. Rutten, Vosters & Vandenbussche (2014b, p. 11) argue that standardisation attempts ‘from above’ primarily made language users aware of the existence of a standard variety.

Stigmatisation

Although the standard variety contains social value as the only ‘correct’ language, codifiers can also ascribe other social values to linguistic features. These forms of metalinguistic evaluation are captured within the concept *stigmatisation*.

An example of metalinguistic stigmatisation from the Dutch context is the use of the masculine definite article *den* instead of the standard article *de*, as in shown in *den man* ‘the man’. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the article *den* was commonly used in Southern varieties of Dutch, and at the time of nation-building processes, codifiers also explicitly associated the article with language practice from the Southern part of the language area (Vosters, 2011; Rutten, 2011).

Another example that is frequently mentioned in the literature on the topic derives from Early New High German. Langer (2001, p. 213) illustrates that German grammarians first stigmatised the *tun*-periphrasis first as ‘bad poetry’, before the stigma intensified to ‘bad German’ in the eighteenth century. In this specific case, the metalinguistic stigmatisation of *tun* eventually led to the disappearance of the construction from Standard German. Such findings show that the dissemination of stigmatisation may result in a change in usage. A linguistic effect following on codifiers’ evaluations is by no means an evident result of stigmatisation, though. The effect of stigmatisation can just as well be limited to the discursive level, with codifiers simply spreading awareness of the stigma among language users.

Although codifiers can ascribe stigmas to variables from different domains of the language, such metalinguistic evaluations are particularly common for spoken features and accents. In a study on grammarians’ attitudes towards pronunciation in nineteenth-century English, for example, Wiemann (2024) shows that grammarians evaluate the absence of the post-vocalic /r/ as in *card*, i.e. [kɑ:d] instead of [kɑ:ɹd], as a feature of Londoners and Cockney speakers. Anderwald (2012; 2016), furthermore, indicates that these nineteenth-century grammarians also find the use of the progressive passive, as in *the bridge is being built*, ‘inelegant’ and ‘awkward’, as they associate the construction with the language use of the lower social classes. While such injunctions do not necessarily have an impact on actual language use, they probably create more awareness among language users of the social values that are assigned to certain (non-standard) usage.

The stigmatisation of (non-standard) usage can be classified according to the level of awareness that language users have of the stigma. In his *hierarchy of salience*, Labov (2001, pp. 196-197) distinguishes *indicators*, which are features

that vary but are not explicitly stigmatised, from *markers* and *stereotypes* (cf. also the indexical orders of Silverstein, 2003). The latter two types comprise features of which language users are aware of the social and stylistic stratification. While markers are subject to some degree of stigmatisation, stereotypes are strongly labelled features characteristic of particular social groups.

2.2 Linguistic effects

Apart from exerting a discursive influence on language users, codifiers can also have a visible impact on usage. The linguistic effects of prescriptivism are less evident compared to the discursive influence. For prescriptivism to manifest an influence in general usage, language users must first accept the variety and individual forms advocated by grammarians (cf. Haugen, 1966). A deliberate action of language users is therefore required to acknowledge prescriptive influence on language use.

Written versus spoken language

Linguistic effects of prescriptivism, with the influence of language norms showing in usage, can be observed in written and in spoken language use. It is important to acknowledge, however, that spoken usage is generally less susceptible to prescriptive influence compared to the written language. When comparing the written and spoken usage of individuals, larger variability is attested in speech than in writing. Due to this inherent variability of the spoken language, Milroy & Milroy (2012, p. 58) argue that historical prescriptivism was generally not successful in standardising the spoken language. Since the spoken language is in a constant state of change, they are convinced that “it is only in the writing system that a high degree of uniformity has been achieved” (Milroy & Milroy, 2012, p. 51).

Scholars like Anderwald (2018, p. 89) and Szmrecsanyi & Bloemen (2023, p. 83) also assert that prescriptivism may influence the written language (to some extent), while the spoken language is more resilient against these influences ‘from above’. This claim is also supported by one of the few studies that investigates the influence of prescriptivism on the spoken language. In their exploration of Quebec French, Poplack & Dion (2009), Poplack (2015), and

Poplack et al. (2015) illustrate that prescriptivism does not influence grammatical constructions, such as the subjunctive, the imperfect *si*-clauses, and the future tense, in spoken usage. The general conclusion of these studies is that spoken usage is subject to constraints that govern the use of variants, and prescriptivism generally fails in capturing this complex conditioning, thereby excluding any influence of prescriptivism on the spoken language, of course. (Poplack, 2015, p. 317; Poplack et al., 2015, p. 49).

In explaining why prescriptivism was generally not successful in standardising spoken usage, Milroy & Milroy (2012, p. 54) point to the written code that prescriptivism often targets. They argue that many prescriptions proposed for eighteenth-century English were “absurd when applied to speech”. This claim is exemplified by the prescriptive proposition of saying *It is I* instead of *It is me* (Milroy & Milroy, 2012, p. 29). A similar example can be found for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Dutch. In his study on the genitive case, Scott (2014, p. 113) clarifies that norm givers considered the prescribed synthetic genitive the ‘holy case’, which was to be used in higher registers, while codifiers did probably not expect to find the synthetic genitive in everyday speech. Although such examples indeed indicate that historical codifiers primarily aimed for standardising the written language, the lack of prescriptive influence in contemporary spoken usage also suggests that it is mainly the written code that is susceptible for prescriptive interference.

3 Investigating prescriptive influence

The interplay between imposed norms and actual usage has been the topic of a wide range of studies in historical sociolinguistics. The *Norms and Usage* volume of Rutten, Vosters & Vandenbussche (2014a), for example, showcases different case studies in European languages (viz. English, Dutch, German, French), which all illustrate the complexity of the relationship between prescriptive practices and usage. Although most of these studies compare codified norms with developments from a corpus of actual language usage, investigations of prescriptive influence vary greatly. In this section, I reflect on the diverging scopes and approaches to investigate prescriptive influence, on the one hand, and on the disparate findings that these studies yield, on the other hand.

3.1 Diverging scopes and approaches

Especially the English research tradition accounts for studies that are set out to investigate prescriptivism in a restricted scope, where the impact of one famous norm giver is put central. Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2010, 2011), for example, has worked extensively on the eighteenth-century bishop and grammarian Robert Lowth (1710-1787), while Hodson (2006, 2008) and Straaijer (2011) explored the grammar of Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), and Fens-de Zeeuw (2011) in turn investigated the work of the American Quaker Lindley Murray (1745-1826). While the study of Hodson (2006, 2008) particularly focused on the grammar itself, and the changes that were made between the different editions of the work, Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2011), Straaijer (2011), and Fens-de Zeeuw (2011) also compared norms to the language practice in the personal correspondence of the norm givers themselves.

Studies focusing on the influence of one iconic grammarian are also conducted for German and French. The impact of the seventeenth-century German codifier Justus Georg Schottel (1612-1676) is investigated by McLelland (2011, 2014), and the work and influence of the French *remarqueurs*, and Claude Favre de Vaugelas (1585-1650) in particular, is explored in studies of Ayres-Bennett (1987, 2014, 2018). In these investigations, the imposed norms are also compared to a corpus of language use, comprising texts from different genres and social backgrounds.

Studies with a broader scope, in which the norms of *multiple* codifiers are compared to a corpus of actual language use, have also been carried out for different languages, such as English⁶, French (e.g. Ayres-Bennett, 2004, 2014; Poplack & Dion, 2009; Poplack et al., 2015), and German (e.g. Konopka, 1996; Takada, 1998; Langer, 2001; Auer, 2006, 2009; Havinga, 2018). For Dutch, this approach is taken by Simons & Rutten (2014), Nobels & Rutten (2014), Vosters et al. (2014), Rutten & Vosters (2016), Krogull, Rutten & Van der Wal (2017), Krogull (2018), and Rutten et al. (2020). This large collection of references shows that a wide range of studies into the effects of historical prescriptivism

⁶ e.g. Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2002a; 2002b; 2009), Gustafsson (2002), Auer (2006; 2009; 2014), Auer & González-Díaz (2005), Yáñez-Bouza (2016), Hinrichs et al. (2015), Anderwald (2011; 2012; 2014a; 2014b; 2016; 2017; 2019; 2020)

has been carried out over the last few decades, yet no overall account on whether and to what extent prescriptivism was able to influence usage could be established so far (Rutten & Vosters, 2021).

The reason behind the lack of a broader understanding of prescriptive success may be partly related to the usage corpora that were investigated in previous research. In early studies in Dutch, for example, scholars focused strongly on the development of language norms without referring to what happened in actual usage (e.g. De Vooy, 1931). Even if empirical research was conducted, it was limited to the usage of the norm giver, whose language practice was simply equated with general usage, which constitutes a distorted picture of the success of prescriptivism, of course. It is not until the emergence of the field of historical sociolinguistics that researchers empirically correlate patterns in language norms to actual usage. Even more recently, many scholars investigating the effects of prescriptivism employ a multi-genre usage corpus, including genres with varying degrees of formality or editorial interventions, to discern differences in the extent to which language norms are implemented in usage.

Large differences are also observed when looking at the linguistic features that are investigated. Most researchers measuring the influence of prescriptivism do so for one or two linguistic features. In English studies, for instance, Gustafsson (2002) investigated the past participle forms, Auer (2009) explored the subjunctive, Yáñez-Bouza (2014) focused on the influence of prescriptivism on preposition stranding, and Hinrichs et al. (2015) analyse the use of relativisers. Auer (2009) also investigated the impact of codified norms on the use of the subjunctive in Austrian German, and the previously discussed study of Langer (2001) strongly concentrated on the disappearance of the auxiliary verb *tun* in German. Similar studies, albeit with a slightly larger scope, have also been conducted for French (e.g. Ayres-Bennett, 2004, 2014) and for Dutch (e.g. Simons & Rutten, 2014; Nobels & Rutten, 2014), where the focus was on a few features from different domains of the language. Although all these studies present a highly detailed account of prescriptive interference, the discussed possibilities of influence do not reach beyond specific spelling or grammatical features.

What probably also hinders an overarching account of prescriptive influence is the wide variety of periods and specific socio-historical contexts that are explored in studies of prescriptivism. In most research, the impact of

prescriptivism is investigated in a century that is considered important for the standardisation process. Scholars like Konopka (1996) and Takada (1998) respectively investigate the periods from 1720-1775 and from 1640-1700, and also McLelland (2011, 2014) focused on the influence of German prescriptivism in the seventeenth century. Other scholars investigate norm implementation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (e.g. Gustafsson, 2002; Auer, 2009; Yáñez-Bouza, 2016; Anderwald, 2014a, 2016), and still other studies examine the influence of prescriptivism in highly specific contexts within these broader periods, as Havinga (2018, 2019), for example, investigates the linguistic effect of the educational reforms of 1774 on Austrian German.

Determining prescriptive success in specific socio-historical contexts is also apparent in studies on Dutch. Most of the research that has been carried out for Dutch is strongly embedded within investigations of standardisation ‘from above’, and thus focused on the effect of deliberate language planning in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Krogull, Rutten & Van der Wal (2017), Krogull (2018), Rutten et al. (2020), and Krogull & Rutten (2021) investigate the effect of the national language policy that was imposed by the government on nineteenth-century Northern usage, while Vosters (2011), Vosters et al. (2014), and Rutten & Vosters (2016) explore the effect of language planning activities in the Southern Netherlands at the time of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (1815-1830).

With this overview, I aimed to show that, despite the numerous studies that are set out in different languages to answer similar questions of prescriptive influence on written usage, diverging approaches and scopes are taken for investigating the issue. Due to the focus on individual linguistic features, on the one hand, and on specific socio-historical and language-political contexts, on the other hand, an overarching account on prescriptive success is lacking for many European languages, including Dutch.

However, one of the most comprehensive studies on prescriptive success is provided by Anderwald (2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2016, 2018, 2020), who investigates the influence of prescriptivism in British and American English. Considering different features related to verb categories and verb morphology that were undergoing change in the nineteenth century, Anderwald systematically compares metalinguistic comments in a large corpus of

grammars, i.e. *Corpus of Nineteenth-Century Grammars (CNG)* to patterns of variation and change in different corpora with nineteenth-century usage data, such as *ARCHER* (Biber, Finegan & Atkinson, 1994), *CONCE* (Kytö, Rydén & Smitterberg, 2006), and *COHA* (Davies, 2010) (cf. Anderwald, 2012; 2016).⁷ Since these are multi-genre corpora, Anderwald is able to carefully map out differences in text frequencies between varying genres, including newspapers, fiction, drama, and ego-documents. Although focusing solely on the nineteenth century, these fine-grained analyses illustrate how adopting a more systematic method for measuring prescriptive influence enables us to understand various types and mechanisms of prescriptive success more effectively.

3.2 Elusive findings

Not only the methods and scopes of research into prescriptive influence differ, also the findings of these studies diverge greatly. In this section, I will show that some scholars detect clear and unmistakable influences of prescriptivism on historical language use, while other researchers cannot find any impact of codified norms on usage, which leads to disparate conclusions on the role of prescriptivism in language change.

Possible influence

Scholars identifying an influence of prescriptivism on usage discerned this impact primarily in language use and the normative practices of fellow grammarians (e.g. Konopka, 1996; Takada, 1998), or in the language use of other elite members of society, who were often connected to the circle of the norm giver who made the codifications. The latter is observed by McLelland (2014), who notes that Schottelius's prescriptions were sometimes simple reflections of actual usage, yet for a few spelling features, such as the spelling *um* instead of *umb*, the grammarian possibly succeeded in spreading the modern-day variant before it was dominant in writing practice. McLelland (2014, pp. 263-264), moreover, argues that these successful prescriptions were probably implemented gradually in usage, with the preferred forms spreading to writers

⁷ For some case studies, Anderwald also triangulates the findings from nineteenth-century norms and usage to developments in present-day British and American English, employing mainly the usage corpora *BNC* and *COCA* (Anderwald, 2016).

close to the circle of the authoritative norm giver before they reached the broader language community. Such a pattern of norm dissemination is reinforced by another scenario that is discussed in this paper, where Schottelius introduces the spelling *-kk-* instead of *-ck-* in words like *wecken* ‘to wake’. McLelland (2014, pp. 266-267) shows that the innovative *-kk-* forms were adopted in usage only after Schottelius’s prescription. Nonetheless, the new form was implemented only by elite writers, who used the spelling only for a short period of fifty years. The spelling did thus not get established in the long term, which implies that prescriptivism was only briefly successful in influencing (elite) usage.

Also the previously discussed research of Langer (2001) indicates that prescriptivism can be successful in influencing the disappearance of a stigmatised variant from written usage in German. Together with Elspaß (2005) and Langer (2014), however, this study also illustrates that the auxiliary verb *tun* remained in use in dialects and informal language use (of the lower social classes).

Furthermore, Gustafsson (2002), Auer & González-Díaz (2005), Auer (2006, 2009), and Yáñez-Bouza (2006, 2014) detect possible effects of prescriptivism on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English usage. While Gustafsson (2002) shows that the modern-day past participle of the irregular verb *to write*, i.e. *written*, was being standardised in usage due to prescriptive interference in the eighteenth century, codifiers at the time also influenced the English usage for other grammatical features. More specifically, eighteenth-century grammarians were successful in declining the use of preposition stranding (Yáñez-Bouza, 2014), and in temporarily reviving the use of the inflectional subjective (Auer & González-Díaz, 2005, p. 325; Auer, 2006, 2009). In both instances, the effect of prescriptivism was visible across multiple formal and informal genres.

Another example where prescriptivism manages to impact usage is found in case studies of Dutch. When investigating the relationship between norms and usage in eighteenth-century Northern Dutch, Simons & Rutten (2014, p. 67) observe “a clear and unambiguous influence of language norms on language use” for the deletion of the final *-n* as an orthographic variable, whereas no convincing impact of prescriptivism was attested for grammatical features, such as the marking of the synthetic genitive (ibid., pp. 68-69; cf. also Nobels & Rutten (2014) for

seventeenth-century Dutch). When investigating the effects of the imposed national language policy in the nineteenth century, Krogull (2018) observes an influence of the national language policy for different spelling variables, such as the spelling of the verb-final /t/ and of the word-medial and word-final /s/. However, not all orthographic features under scrutiny were influenced by the prescriptions of Siegenbeek (1804) (Rutten et al., 2020, pp. 265-267).

No influence

These examples in which prescriptivism appears successful in (temporarily) influencing usage are in sharp contrast with other studies on the topic. In their investigation of double comparatives, as in *more healthier*, Auer & González-Díaz (2005) point to a complete lack of prescriptive influence on usage, since these double comparatives disappeared from usage before they were even noticed by grammarians. Also McLelland (2011, 2014) reports on prescriptions of the leading grammarian Schottelius that did not find access to language use. Similar results are attested in nineteenth-century Dutch, where prescriptions for uncommon spelling variants did not gain ground in usage, as Rutten & Vosters (2010a, 2010b) illustrate for the spelling of the long *e* in the Southern Netherlands. With language use not adapting to the prescriptions, any influence of prescriptivism on usage is ruled out, of course.

Restricted or uncertain influence

In still other case studies, norms and usage are not entirely detached, though. More specifically, it appears that codifiers also succeed in capturing changes that were ongoing in usage. These changes are consequently reflected in their normative practice. This is indicated, for example, by Ayres-Bennett & Seijido (2011) and Ayres-Bennett (2004, pp. 193-201, 2014, p. 193), who argue that the prescriptions of *Remarqueurs* like Vaugelas generally followed changes that were well underway in language use. Also in the case of German, McLelland (2011, 2014, pp. 260-261) claims that, for some spelling features, the prescriptions simply backed the variants that were already widespread in usage, and as such, the codification of the norm actually followed the selection by language users. The fact that norms rather adapt to usage than vice versa is also shown in the *which*-hunting study of Hinrichs et al. (2015). This study relates the increase of the informal but prescribed relativiser *that* in English usage to

broader colloquialisation processes, and not to a direct impact of prescriptivism. Hinrichs et al. (2015, p. 831) conclude that prescriptivism followed an ongoing trend, and therefore probably aided only in “reinforcing and accelerating an existing trend in the direction of colloquiali[s]ation”.

In addition to studies that either hint at or rule out the possibility of prescriptive interference, case studies in English and Dutch also proved that it can be difficult to determine whether prescriptivism played a role in language change. For example, in her study on past tense inflections of irregular verbs in English – that is the variation between forms such as *leapt* and *leaped* – Anderwald (2011, 2016, 2019, pp. 98-99) notices that variation was often acknowledged by codifiers. Krogull et al. (2017) arrive at a similar conclusion for the use of neuter relativisers in Dutch. Due to the reigning variability in codified norms, it was in fact difficult to assess whether the increase of *hetwelk* ‘which’ in nineteenth-century newspapers was indeed induced by prescriptive injunctions.

Although the actual impact of prescriptivism is thus not always evidently ascertained, in cases where an influence can be assumed, research shows that the effects are often restricted to specific genres and text types. This is most notably indicated in the research of Anderwald (2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2016, 2019). In the case study on the rise of the passive with *get*, for example, she explains that this feature often appears in fictional texts because the *get*-passive is viewed as characteristic of spoken and informal language use. Although the construction is not fiercely criticised in nineteenth-century grammars, Anderwald (2016, 2017, 2019, pp. 96-98) claims that the negative comments of grammarians possibly facilitated the temporary slowdown of the form in fictional texts.

The most apparent example of text-type sensitivity of prescriptivism, however, is the case of the progressive passive as in *the bridge is being built*. Here, nineteenth-century grammarians noticed that these constructions started to replace older constructions like *the bridge is building*, and proscribed against the use of the progressive passive. Since the progressive passive was particularly salient in newspaper language, Anderwald (2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2016, 2019) argues that codifiers’ proscriptions only caused a temporary decline of the construction in the highly edited genre of newspapers. In overall, Anderwald (2019, p. 103) concludes that “[m]assive prescriptive criticism can obviously be

successful”, yet “a measurable influence is quite rare”. If it occurs, she continues, the effect is most likely small, restricted to specific text types, and visible only for a short period of time (ibid.).

As such, with prescriptivism clearly changing usage in some cases, and language use fuelling normative injunctions in other instances, the discussion in this section illustrated the complexity of prescriptive influence. However, determining the role of prescriptivism in language change is even more complex. As I already indicated earlier in this chapter, prescriptivism is a phenomenon that evolves along with other social, cultural, and political changes (cf. Curzan, 2014). That also implies that historical codifiers and language users operate in the same socio-historical context, which in turn may influence how prescriptivism and language users behave (Vosters et al., 2014).

To illustrate the matter, let us briefly review the study of Vosters (2011) and Vosters et al. (2014), who investigate the relationship between norms and usage in the nineteenth-century Southern Dutch. For different features that were investigated, nineteenth-century norms and usage were rapidly changing and developing in the same direction. Although an impact of prescriptivism could be assumed, Vosters et al. (2014, p. 96) claim that it is not prescriptivism, but the specific socio-political context that triggered the change in usage. After all, the investigated period also comprised the timeframe of the political reunification of the Northern and the Southern Netherlands into the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (1815-1830). The research of Vosters (2011) and Vosters et al. (2014) indicates that, (the period leading up to) the political reunification made Southern grammarians and language users adopting writing practices that were common in the Northern Netherlands at the time. Vosters et al. (2014, p. 96) therefore argue that investigations of prescriptive influence should “move beyond a simple dichotomy of norms on the one hand and usage on the other hand, [and] fully recogni[se] their shared basis in the broader sociolinguistic context in which they arose”. Not only the systematic comparison of norms and usage, but also the broader socio-political and socio-cultural changes are thus of prime importance when evaluating prescriptivism as the driving force of language change.

3.3 Possible determinants of prescriptive success

In the previous sections of this chapter, I argued that prescriptivism most likely had a discursive influence, with language users being made aware of the existence of a correct form of language from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards. I also tried to demonstrate that normative activities and prescriptive attempts do not necessarily have a linguistic outcome on language use. In fact, previous research shows highly disparate findings, which provide only limited insight into how influential historical prescriptivism actually was. Scholars note that not all features and contexts appear equally susceptible to prescriptive interference, and they have therefore argued that “prescriptive influence depends on multiple factors” (Kostadinova, 2020, p. 96). Also Rutten & Vosters (2021, p. 78) recently claimed that “there is no one-size-fits-all answer” to the question of prescriptive success. As such, to arrive at a broader overview of the impact of prescriptivism, Rutten & Vosters (2021) argue for more studies systematically comparing patterns in norms to language use. Furthermore, based on the disparate findings from previous research, they propose five (interrelated) factors that possibly interfere in the influence of prescriptivism. Since the role of these potential determinants is investigated in this study (cf. Chapter 4), the last section of this chapter gives an outline of the individual determinants.⁸

3.3.1 Chronology of language change

The first, and perhaps the most important factor that needs proper consideration is the chronology of language change. If we observe codifiers introducing, let us say, a new spelling variant, which is subsequently adopted by language users, this chronology of change enables a direct effect of prescriptivism initiating this change. I discussed one example before, with the German grammarian Schottelius spreading a spelling innovation to other elite writers, who used the form for a short period of time. Previous research has also indicated, however,

⁸ The discussion of the possible determinants of prescriptive success is based on the book chapter of Gijsbert Rutten and Rik Vosters in *The Cambridge Handbook of Language Standardization* (Ayres-Bennett & Bellamy, Eds., 2021). However, the link that I make between progressive and conservative norms and the S-curve of language change was not covered in their chapter.

that such a chronology of change, with codifiers possibly initiating changes in usage, is rare.

A more common scenario is where a change takes place in language use and is then captured by codifiers who comment on the change. Although this chronology of change does not allow for prescriptivism to initiate changes, it still allows codifiers to intervene in ongoing changes in usage. This is suggested, for example, in the research of Anderwald (e.g. 2014a, 2014b, 2016, 2019). She illustrates that grammarians proscribed against an innovation in usage, which may have (temporarily) slowed down the variant from increasing in usage. The research of Krogull (2018), for example, shows that codifiers can also prescribe forms that are already widespread in usage. By prescribing the form, grammarians may subsequently speed up the ongoing change in usage. Determining the chronology of language change is thus vital to ascertain whether prescriptivism could have influenced language use. If so, the chronology of change also reveals whether these norms were possibly able to initiate or merely accelerate or decelerate a change that was already underway in usage.

However, a right chronology of change, with prescriptions preceding a change in usage, is not sufficient to speak of prescriptive success. Auer & González-Díaz (2005) and Auer (2006) have pointed to the necessity of a time lag of a few decades between the promotion of a form in norms and the adoption thereof in usage. Even if that temporal correlation is right to allow for prescriptive influence, the chronology alone does not imply a causal relationship (Anderwald, 2016, p. 234). If a causal relationship is presumed without sufficient evidence, a misconception of prescriptive influence lurks, which Moschonas (2020, 2022, p. 40) characterises as the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy. He therefore emphasises the importance of demonstrating that “the change detected in the [usage] corpus is not due to any other factors, that other possibilities are excluded, that the change in question could not have occurred otherwise” to prove that prescriptivism is the driving force behind the change (ibid.).

Moreover, as the research of Anderwald (e.g. 2014a, 2014b, 2016, 2019) clearly indicates, prescriptive influence is often visible only in specific genres. She shows that highly edited genres, like newspapers, are more sensitive to prescriptive interference compared to informal, or speech-based genres (cf. also Krogull, 2018). Rutten & Vosters (2021, p. 79) therefore propose to not only carefully

determine the chronology of language change, but to also consider genre differences when investigating prescriptive impact.

3.3.2 Progressive versus conservative norms

As another potential determinant, Rutten & Vosters (2021) discuss the variants that are prescribed by grammarians, where it is relevant to distinguish between codifiers promoting progressive, incoming forms or conservative variants that are outgoing in language use. After all, many language users in the past and today believe that “at some time in the past, language was in a state of perfection”, which conforms to what Labov (2001, p. 514) defines as the *Golden Age Principle*. This pessimistic view on language change is also shared by many grammarians who aimed for language standardisation. With the general believe that all language change leads to decay, many grammarians thus praised archaic variants in their prescriptions, while innovations were rejected for usage.

There are some examples in which the prescriptions for historical constructions were successful, as is illustrated, for example, with the revival of the synthetic genitive in nineteenth-century Dutch. Although the synthetic genitive had been in decline for multiple centuries in favour of the analytical construction with *van* ‘of’, Krogull & Rutten (2021) showed that the construction increased again. This revival was probably caused by the conservative prescriptions of Weiland (1805) as part of the official language policy. Despite some successful examples, however, previous research has also observed that prescriptions for variants that have no grounds in language use (anymore) are generally less successful compared to norms promoting innovative variants that are backed by language use (e.g. Konopka, 1996; McLelland, 2014 for German; Rutten & Vosters, 2010a for Dutch).

Although historical codifiers generally prefer archaic variants, Anderwald (2012) shows that grammarians do not always criticise new and incoming writing practices. In her study, Anderwald (2012) relates codifiers’ criticism with the S-curve of language change. More specifically, she investigates the correlation between the codifiers’ stance towards the innovation in usage with the rate of the change and its stage on the S-curve.

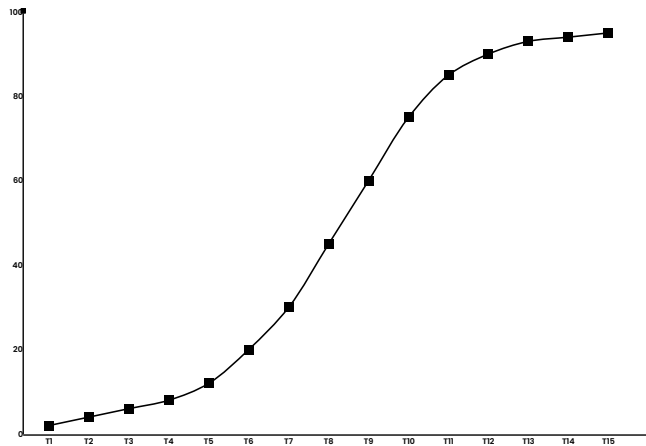


Figure 1: the diachronic distribution of an innovation in the shape of an S-curve

The model of the S-curve has its origins in the exact sciences. In 1838, a Belgian mathematical biologist, Pierre-François Verhulst, proposed a logistic function to depict the diachronic growth of a population (Bradley, 2001, p. 94). The logistic model has later also been applied by other sciences, for instance, in economics, where the curve represents the adoption process of innovations, new technologies or products. However, the most recognisable context with an S-curve pattern is perhaps the infection rate during the COVID-pandemic, where the curve represents the number of infections over time. Although only a few people were infected in the beginning, that number grew rapidly, with an increasing amount of people being infected and in turn also infecting someone else. The multiplication of that process represents the steep slope in the middle of the curve. Eventually, there are little people left to get infected, so the infection rate decreases. This slowdown marks the tail of the S-curve.

In the 1970s, the S-curve model was first used in linguistics, where it is applied to reflect the distribution of linguistic innovations (Anderwald, 2012, p. 41). Previous scholarship (e.g. Labov, 1994; Denison, 2003; Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg, 2017 [2003]) described language change as a process is marked by a slow start, a swift ascent, and a slow ending, which thus aligns with the trajectory of the S-shaped curve. Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (2017, pp. 54-55), moreover, distinguish different stages on the S-curve: (1) incipient changes

(below 15%), (2) new and vigorous changes (15-35%), (3) mid-range change (36-65%), making up the steepest middle part of the curve, (4) changes nearing completion (66-85%), and (5) completed changes (over 85%).

Figure 1 shows only an idealised graph of linguistic change. The different real-time changes discussed in Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (2017) illustrate how patterns of language change can diverge, with the S-curve not always being clearly pronounced, or with only part of the curve showing. Such deviations from the S-curve trajectory may, of course, point to a change that reversed or was eventually not completed, possibly due to the influence of external factors, such as broader social changes (*ibid.*, p. 78), or prescriptive interference (Anderwald, 2012).

Although thus highly insightful, S-curves may give an oversimplified picture of language change. This is particularly because these curves are generally drawn by positioning two variants in competition, or by visualising one variant's growing proportion over time. Especially in the latter case, it is important to realise that synchronic language use is always variable (Anderwald, 2012, p. 42). Anderwald (*ibid.*), following Kretzschmar et al. (2003), explains that, from a synchronic point of view, language change rather aligns with an asymptotic A-curve, where "one or few variants are exceptionally frequent, and many other options are equally (or almost equally) infrequent". As such, when choosing to plot the diachronic development of only one variant, and thereby neglecting the existing variation in usage, the growing proportion of the variant along the A-curve typically results in the S-curve pattern of change (*ibid.*). This does not counter the relevance of S-curves. As Anderwald (2012, p. 42) summarises in a footnote: "whichever way we conceptuali[s]e language change, S-curves are empirically real, and theoretically necessary".⁹

Turning back now to the correlation between normative commentary and the S-curve pattern of language change, Anderwald (2012, p. 38) classifies codifiers'

⁹ As will be elucidated further in Chapter 4, for each linguistic feature under investigation, I draw S-curves by weighing the absolute proportion of the incoming variant (i.e. the variant that ultimately became the standard variant) against those of the outgoing variant(s). Although this way of plotting the diachronic distribution of variants relies on the theoretical assumption of linguistic equivalence between the different variants (e.g. Denison, 2003, p. 65; Anderwald, 2012, p. 42), the rather narrow delineation of linguistic features in this study ensures the equivalence of the variants.

injunctions according to their preference for either conservative or new forms (cf. also Anderwald, 2016). In the diachronic investigation of multiple grammatical changes, she notices that these changes were situated at different stages of the S-curve in the nineteenth century. The rise of the *get*-passive, for example, occurred rather slowly, and only showed the beginning of the change at the time, while the progressive passive inclined rapidly in the nineteenth century, thereby portraying both the incipient and middle stages of the S-curve (Anderwald, 2012, pp. 33-34; 45). When these different stages and rates of change are correlated with normative commentary, Anderwald (2012, p. 44) argues that negative comments on the incoming forms arise as soon as grammarians observe the change, which appears to happen only when the change has progressed beyond the incipient stages. A rapid change in usage is therefore also picked up more easily by grammarians (ibid.).

Despite the general preference of grammarians for conservative forms, not all investigated changes were met with resistance in language norms. It is especially in the later stages of the S-curve, when the change is nearing completion, that codifiers start seeing older variants as incorrect (ibid.). Based on Anderwald's (2012) study, the possible determinant discussed here – progressive vs. conservative norms – therefore appears to be intertwined with the stage and the rate of the change under investigation.

3.3.3 Nature of the variable

Another factor that is most likely decisive in the implementation of language norms is the domain of the language that is targeted by prescriptivism. Previous research has suggested that orthographic features are more sensitive to prescriptive interference than grammatical variables. That is partly because spelling is only applied in the written language, which makes it an explicitly learned aspect of the language. It is therefore not surprising that spelling features are frequently discussed in different types of normative works. Prescriptions on orthography not only appear in spelling guides but are also found, for example, in schoolbooks. Since such works were often reprinted, Nevalainen (2014, p. 107) assumes that spelling prescriptions “reached the widest section of the population”. Although the great visibility of orthography does not mean that spelling norms were evidently adopted by language users,

earlier research (e.g. Takada, 1998, pp. 296-299; Ayres-Bennett, 2004, p. 224; McLelland, 2014; Vosters et al., 2014, p. 94; Krogull, 2018, p. 268) has suggested that prescriptivism appears to have a greater impact on influencing spelling than grammar. Due to the strong focus on spelling and grammatical features in research into the norms and usage, this difference in prescriptive influence is more apparent for these domains. However, the hypothesis could potentially be extended to other domains of the language, of course.

3.3.4 Complexity of the variable

As a second factor, Rutten & Vosters (2021) propose the complexity of the variable as a possible determinant for prescriptive influence. Whereas some features consist of a binary opposition of forms which are mutually replaceable without difficulties in linguistic embedding, other variables often encompass a range of possible variants and a complex linguistic embedding of variation. This is exemplified with the case of the neuter relative pronoun in Dutch. When investigating the influence of the national language policy on nineteenth-century usage, Krogull et al. (2017) and Krogull (2018) observed that Weiland (1805) prescribed at least four possible variants, i.e. *dat*, *wat*, *welk*, *hetwelk*, which use depended on the type of antecedent that the relativiser referred to. For example, in the context of an indefinite pronoun like *alles* ‘all’ as antecedent, the grammarian clearly preferred the relativiser *wat*, as in *alles wat ik gedaan heb* ‘all that I have done’. The results from a multi-genre corpus, however, revealed greater variability than was prescribed in norms, which makes an influence of prescriptivism on usage less probable.

It is crucial to recognise, of course, that while some features are portrayed as simply binary oppositions in norms, the reality of language use reveals a much broader spectrum of variation. The notion of A-curves underscores the importance of not being misled by the fixation on the two most frequent variants in usage. Although it is true that almost all linguistic features may indeed exhibit multivariate usage patterns, this does not negate the notion that certain features possess greater linguistic complexity than others. In fact, to uncover the complexity of linguistic features, language norms often provide valuable insights into the features that consist of structured variability, as also the example of neuter relativisers shows.

With the complexity of the variable as a possible determinant of prescriptive success, Rutten & Vosters (2021) thus hypothesise that prescriptions on binary features will get implemented in language use more easily compared to more complex variables.

3.3.5 Metalinguistic salience

As a final factor, Rutten & Vosters (2021) point to the importance of salience and indexicality. Whereas some linguistic features change below the radar of norm givers, and are therefore never commented on in grammars and other normative works, other changes in language use are highly salient in terms of metalinguistic attention and are thus vehemently criticised by grammarians. The latter type of features often undergoes negative stigmatisation in language norms. Anderwald (2012, p. 46) adds that features which rarely occur in language use are often stronger criticised by grammarians compared to variables that are highly frequent in language use. With large differences in the degree of metalinguistic attention that linguistic features attract, Rutten & Vosters (2021) hypothesise that language users are also more aware of these salient features, which possibly implies that prescriptivism is more successful in influencing usage; especially when compared to features that are barely criticised in normative works.

Note that Rutten & Vosters (2021) describe this determinant as ‘indexicality’. In line with Labov’s (2001) *hierarchy of salience*, and Silverstein’s (2003) *orders of indexicality*, they thereby primarily indicate features which are stigmatised in comparison to features that are not subject to social or stylistic evaluation. In this study, however, salience is operationalised differently in the sense of the amount of normative attention that is devoted to the feature (cf. Poplack et al., 2015, pp. 26-28). I therefore refer not to salience or indexicality, but to *metalinguistic salience* as a determinant of prescriptive success.

The strength of the metalanguage

The amount of normative attention necessitates an understanding of the nature of the metalanguage and explicit injunctions that are formulated by grammarians. After all, in their critiques, codifiers often go beyond expressing their preference for one linguistic variant over another. Their metalanguage

frequently encompasses judgements about variability in language use as well. More specifically, codifiers apply different strategies to explain away variability in usage (cf. Poplack & Dion, 2009; Poplack et al., 2015). While striving for form-function symmetry is probably their main goal, research by Poplack & Dion (2009) and Poplack et al. (2015) indicates that grammarians assign different functions to one form, highlighting the inconsistency between these injunctions.

In addressing variability in their metalinguistic comments, grammarians outright dismiss a disfavoured variant, or they assign the form to a different social, linguistic, or stylistic context. Declaring that *variant x is reserved for informal spoken usage*, for instance, signifies a register-based distinction in metalanguage. Such practices resonate with what Curzan (2014) calls *stylistic prescriptivism*. Britain & Trudgill (2005, pp. 184-187), moreover, apply the concepts of socio-stylistic and structural reallocation, the former also attributing variants to specific social or stylistic contexts, while the latter relegates the use of variants to a different linguistic context.

Moschonas (2020, 2022, pp. 4-5), discussing the characteristics of metalanguage, identifies different types of prescriptions: *correctives proper* and *permissives*. The latter embodies a more variable stance, accommodating linguistic variability within defined boundaries, and thereby supporting the reallocation of existing variation. Permissives are generally phrased as: *one may say or write X, under condition C₁, or Y, under condition C₂*, permitting for some degree of variation in language use. Correctives proper, on the contrary, are more rigid in that they do not allow for variation. In these prescriptions, grammarians delineate forms which are deemed correct or incorrect. Correctives proper typically adopt the following pattern: *one should neither say nor write X* (i.e. the prohibitive or proscriptive part); *one should say and write Y instead* (i.e. the normative or prescriptive part)', to which an explicative *because Z* part may be added (ibid.). Moschonas (2022, p. 33) points to distinct attitudes towards language variation encapsulated by these different metalinguistic practices. Since correctives proper are more direct in promoting forms that are deemed acceptable, Moschonas (ibid.) hypothesises that these strict prescriptions are “more ‘powerful’ than permissives” in their prescriptive impact on usage.

3.4 Conclusion

In sum, previous research indicates that an influence of prescriptivism on language use should not simply be assumed. An impact of codified norms on usage was often lacking, and when an influence was possible, norm givers often temporarily affected specific genres. To thoroughly examine the impact of norms on usage, studies like these are therefore best carried out on a multi-genre corpus, including both printed and handwritten texts with different degrees of formality, to determine the reach of the prescriptive effect. Furthermore, the possible determinants that were discussed suggest that different factors could play a role in the success of prescriptive interventions. Whether these factors actually contributed to the implementation of codified norms will be investigated in this dissertation.