

Welcome to Leiden

The idea to put together this pre-conference workshop *Attitudes to Prescriptivism* came out of the shared research interests of the organisers, who are all part of the project *Bridging the Unbridgeable: linguists, prescriptivists and the general public*. We are interested in how people react to prescriptivism in the anglophone world. The conference *Prescription and Tradition in Language* seemed a good opportunity to bring together academics who are also interested in this phenomenon, in English or other languages.

The aim of the workshop is to investigate attitudes towards prescriptivism and other normative actions, primarily from the point of view of the recipients of such actions, the language users themselves, such as the general public, institutions and specific professional groups (linguists, journalists, educators, bloggers, etc.). Our own focus is on English, but the workshop now happily reflects a much wider selection of languages.

Drafts of the papers will have circulated among the participants of the workshop beforehand. This way there was time for all participants to read them and prepare constructive remarks for the benefit of the papers' authors.

The programme is in the back of this booklet. We have 10 speakers, a nice round number, each in a 30-minute slot, with breaks for lunch and coffee/tea. The workshop is free for all conference delegates. The workshop will take place in the following location:

Lipsius Building, room 148

We hope to have a very fruitful workshop and we wish you an interesting, educational conference and a pleasant stay in Leiden!

The organising committee,

Robin Straaijer
Carmen Ebner
Viktorija Kostadinova
Morana Lukač

Prescriptivism in a Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) teaching context

Suzie Beaulieu, Université Laval, Québec

Standard French has traditionally been adopted as the target in French second language (L2) classrooms in North America (Etienne & Sax, 2009; Mougeon et al., 2002; Train, 2003). The standard is, however, only one of the many socio-stylistic realizations that French can take. Other varieties of French exist, mainly in its spoken form but also increasingly in informal writing genres found in electronic communication. Given that there is now a growing consensus among L2 scholars and teachers that today's L2 learners should be better equipped to use the target language in a variety of social settings (Lemmerich, 2010), the question of which linguistic model to adopt to achieve this goal in the French L2 classroom is an important one.

To answer this question in the context of a course designed for French L2 nurses in Western Canada, a verbal guise experiment was conducted with 53 French-speaking community members. They were asked to rate on a 5-point Likert scale the effectiveness and acceptability a series of interactions in which French L1 and L2 nurses addressed a French-speaking patient using either formal features (the standard norm) or informal features (the local norm). Semi-directed interviews with all participating community members followed to shed light on their reactions. The data analysis indicated that nurses who used formal language forms in their interactions were generally judged as cold and distant and received less favourable judgments than nurses who used the local norm.

The results suggest that a prescriptive attitude in favour of standard French as a sole yardstick for L2 production skills may not be serving learners' needs and that a *pedagogical paradigm shift* is in order. Implications of these findings for other L2 settings will also be discussed.

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The Relationship Between Usage and Perception: The Case of Catalan Relative Clauses

Joan Costa Carreras, Universitat Pompeu Fabra

This paper presents the results of a study on the relationship between the usage of (and the perception about) some specific types of relative clauses in Catalan by 26 university students (first year students) at the Pompeu Fabra University (Barcelona).

The data for this study were collected following standard methodology in variationist sociolinguistics, Labov (1966, 1972). The subjects were asked to participate in 30 minute informal interview; write a 400 word essay and do two exercises (cloze and multiple choice). In order to gather information about their perceptions, they were asked to answer three different surveys: the first one about their use of relatives related to the situation's formality; the second one, about the grammaticality of some relative structures, and the third one about the appropriateness of a specific set of relative structures independently of whether these were structures that they themselves used.

The paper presents the analysis of the relationships between the results of the exercises and the perceptions the 26 students have about the relative degree of acceptability of the different types of relative clauses with the goal of determining to what extent the students are aware about their own usage.

Key words:

relatives, functional syntactic variation, corpus linguistics, use perception, prescription

Language Watchdog BBC: How the BBC Balances Prescriptivism and Descriptivism to Meet the Needs of the Audience

Carmen Ebner, Leiden University

The British Broadcasting Corporation, commonly referred to as the BBC, often seems to have been assigned the role of the guardian of Standard English (Luscombe, 2009). Known for setting standards in pronunciation for years, BBC English has become an established term. Nevertheless, how language is used, in particular its misuse, has often been criticized by readers, viewers and listeners of BBC productions. Being considered an authority, but being at the same time targeted for abusing language by its recipients poses a difficult task for the BBC. John Allen, the author of the 2003 edition of the BBC News Styleguide illustrates this as follows: "Our use, or perceived misuse, of English produces a greater response from our audiences than anything else. It is in nobody's interest to confuse, annoy, dismay, alienate or exasperate them" (Allen, 2003: 7).

In order to investigate its stance on 'proper' English, an investigation of the 2003 BBC News Styleguide will be made. Styleguides are special publications aimed at journalists, editors and writers in media, which not only examine spelling, punctuation and style, but also prescribe certain usage. The differences to usage guides are still unclear and need to be explored in more detail. Additionally, the following questions will be addressed and answered in this paper.

- 1) How is the BBC News Styleguide structured?
- 2) Which specific usage problems are covered?
- 3) Why did the BBC not decide to use Fowler's Modern English Usage? Do the usage areas which are dealt with in the BBC styleguide correspond with Fowler?
- 4) How prescriptive/descriptive is the styleguide, in order to satisfy the needs of BBC listeners/viewers/readers?

By answering these questions, an attempt is made to assess the BBC's role as authority in language and its role as a language watchdog of British English.

References:

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Prescriptivism as a Nation Building Tool in the Upper Amazon: The Case of Shiwiar

Martin Kohlberger, Leiden University

The Jivaroan language family is a group of five closely related languages spoken in the Upper Amazon along the Ecuador-Peru border. Although the first contact between Europeans and Jivaroan people dates back to the 16th century, colonisation and missionisation of the Jivaroan areas was not begun until the very end of the 19th century (Harner 1984). However, despite colonisation and Christianisation, Jivaroan people have remained very politically motivated within Ecuador and Peru, and they have been actively engaged in the preservation of their language (Overall 2007). As a result, Jivaroan speakers welcomed attempts by SIL linguists to codify their language and by the 1960s orthographies had been developed for four Jivaroan languages: Shuar, Aguaruna, Huambisa, and Achuar.

The most geographically inaccessible group of Jivaroan speakers, the Shiwiar people of the Corrientes and Conambo rivers in Ecuador, although contacted in 1950 by missionaries, remained largely ignored by linguists and anthropologists, and until the 1990s were considered a subgroup of the Achuar people. However, since the Ecuadorean state recognised the Shiwiar as a separate nationality in 1992, they have strived to differentiate themselves culturally and linguistically from their Achuar neighbours.

As a linguistic system, Shiwiar and Achuar (together with the rest of the Jivaroan languages) are part of a dialect continuum. Despite small lexical and phonological differences, they are mutually intelligible. Therefore, it is understandable that Achuar orthography has been in use in Shiwiar areas since the beginning of government sponsored literacy campaigns. However, in 2002 the Shiwiar political organisation, the ONSHIPAE, published a small dictionary prescribing new rules for Shiwiar spelling and recommending the use of certain lexical items (Vargas Canus & Tsetsekip 2002).

Although it is not explicit in its goal, the dictionary was a clear attempt at establishing new prescriptive rules for Shiwiar which would distinguish it from Achuar. Although the ONSHIPAE hail this publication as a positive step in the advancement of the Shiwiar language and its differentiation from Achuar, the consequences it has had on educated speakers of Shiwiar has actually been negative. Because of these new prescriptive rules, Shiwiar speakers are led to believe that they have been speaking and writing their language wrong all along. In other words, they perceive that they are not proper speakers of Shiwiar even though they are native speakers.

In this paper, the role of prescriptivism as a nation building tool amongst the Shiwiar will be discussed. In particular, the orthography proposed in Vargas Canus & Tsetsekip (2002) will be examined, as well as the implications that this publication has had amongst educated Shiwiar speakers. It will be argued that although prescriptivism can be a powerful tool on the surface for language identity, it can also be very damaging for speakers' confidence in their use of the language.

References:

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Linguistic Prescriptivism in Letters to the Editor

Morana Lukač, Leiden University

Complaints about English language use have been present in the print media in the form of letters to the editor from the eighteenth century onwards (Percy 2009). Language-related letters to the editor are a channel through which the members of the public promote the standard language by stigmatizing the non-standard varieties. The users of non-standard forms are consequently discriminated against, because such usage is seen as “a sign of stupidity, ignorance, perversity, moral degeneracy, etc.” (Milroy & Milroy 2002:33). In their preference for one type of usage over another, the authors of letters to the editor use different types of both linguistic and non-linguistic arguments: from emphasizing the relevance of the aesthetic (1), to linking language to national identity (2):

- (1) “Now let me suggest that for the sake of euphony, also the split infinitive should be ruled out. Those who appreciate the “poetry of good prose” rarely use the split infinitive.” (Mar. 6, 1933, New York Times)
- (2) “There’s something terribly British and reassuring about well-written and well-punctuated writing.” (Mar. 16, 2013, Daily Express)

In this paper I focus on a classification of argumentation strategies in a diachronic corpus of language-related letters to the editor published in the English-speaking print media. Several authors have classified different types of arguments which appear in usage recommendations. Pullum (2004:7) focuses on the extra-linguistic arguments (nostalgia, classicism, authoritarianism, aestheticism, coherentism, etc.) of the critics he calls “linguistic ideologues”. Weiner (1988:178) classifies the theoretical arguments in recommendations in usage guides. Watts (2000) analyses language myths which arose during the first half of the eighteenth century and which contributed to forming of the ideology of prescriptivism. The findings presented in this paper expand on the aforementioned categories, and bring new insights through the application of a data-driven approach.

Key words: argumentations strategies, linguistic prescriptivism, corpus analysis

References:

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The French *Chroniques de Language* Between Linguistic Expertise and Prescriptivism

Dietmar Osthus, Universität Duisburg-Essen

France bears a long tradition of linguistic prescriptivism, linked to casuistic metalinguistic literature going back to Vaugelas (1647), Gilles Ménage (1672/76) and others. This type of normative discourse has survived until the 21st century, but it undergoes different effects of media change. With the emergence of mass media, since the late 19th century nationwide published newspapers contain a popular genre, the *chronique de langage*, directed mainly by people from the literary world, philologists and – in some cases – by linguists. Until the 1970ies these *chroniques* were among the most popular articles in the French press. Authors like Abel Hermant, Albert Dauzat, Marcel Cohen, Jacques Cellard or Claude Duneton have since marked the public linguistic conscience, responding to an obvious public need for normative orientation. Although there is a certain decline of this genre to be observed, metalinguistic discussion continues to play an important role in popular French media. The attitudes towards prescriptivism merit reflexion. Are there changes in normative attitudes during the last decades? Do these *chroniques* serve as prescriptive language usage guides, or are they – on the contrary – rather to be seen as popularized non-normative linguistics. The presentation will focus on some of the most popular *chroniques* and will show some perspectives on future research, for instance on the role of the *chronique de langage* in new multimedia communication.

The Contribution of *Folk Linguistics* to Language Teaching Education: A Proposal

Matteo Santipolo, University of Padua

This contribution, after shortly introducing *Folk Linguistics* by defining its domain of competence (cf. Preston 1999; Niedzielski, Preston 2003), will try to draw an outline of the advantages that can derive from its application to language teaching education from several viewpoints (Santipolo 2012). In order to do so, similarly to what happens with sociolinguistics, we will at first suggest to introduce a distinction between *micro-language* teaching studies – i.e. those that refer to the development of specific techniques to teach some aspects of language structure (morphology, phonology, vocabulary, etc.) – and *macro-language* teaching studies – i.e. those that reflect on language education from a broader, more epistemological and interdisciplinary, almost philosophical perspective (cf. Balboni 2011). The former typology of studies is often the direct consequence of the latter, since it lays its foundations and indicates its lines and directions of development. This distinction serves to better define the relation between *Folk Linguistics* and language teaching education, as language attitudes, being a fundamental component of speakers’ language identity (Berruto 2005) and their will and willingness to learn a new tongue, have an immediate and essential impact especially on the *macro* perspective described above. More in particular and more schematically attitudes towards language and towards language teaching and learning can be summed up as follows:

TEACHERS		STUDENTS
<i>of languages</i>	<i>of non linguistic subjects</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> attitudes towards linguistic correctness and what it means to know a language; attitudes towards the concept of language variation and variability in relation to models to offer to learners; opinions on how a language should be taught. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> attitudes and opinions towards bilingual students whose first language is not commonly considered prestigious; studying and learning a foreign language is the same as/different from studying and learning any other subject?; opinions about their role in relation to the process of acquisition of the local language by foreign students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> opinions on what a language is and what it means to know it; opinions on how a language should be taught and on which of its structural aspects (grammar, pronunciation, formal correctness, cultural dimension, etc.) should receive more attention, and on what methodologies should be adopted and employed; studying and learning a foreign language is the same as/different from studying and learning any other subject?; what are the analogies and the differences between learning an L1 and a foreign or second language?; as for their native language, what are the correct/up-to-date or trendy structures that should be taught to foreigners?; opinions on the foreign language – and culture – they are learning (e.g.: nice/ugly; useful/useless; etc.)

Each of these points will be discussed in detail and the advantages of their application in language teaching education planning and practice will be illustrated.

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Who Loves Prescriptivism and Why? Attitudes towards Language Correction in Latvian Society

Dace Strelēvica-Ošiņa, University of Latvia, Latvian Language Institute

In the pre-conference workshop, I will attempt to highlight certain aspects of attitudes towards language prescription in Latvia today, and towards those who are seen by the public as the agents of language correctness and correction.

My paper to be presented during the main part of the conference will discuss a theoretical framework attempting to account for the different manifestations of prescriptivism and purism (and the public reactions to them) in different cultures. In the anglophone world (as observed by D.Crystal, D.Cameron, etc.) the linguists are often blamed by the society for "not taking proper care about the language", while in the Latvian society they are sometimes blamed for "wanting to control the language and to put it into a straightjacket". No matter how exaggerated these public stereotypes are today, they are rather illustrative of the way the respective societies have felt about the linguistic theory and practice traditionally offered to them through education and other media. Besides, British prescriptivism in the past was mostly concerned with class-related linguistic differences, but Latvian prescriptivism – with influences from other languages. Seeking explanation for these differences, I have recently offered a following classification – human-oriented, language-oriented, and error-oriented prescriptivism (D.Strelēvica-Ošiņa 2010; [2011] 2012). The first term may be applied to the traditional British (as well as, e.g., Ancient Roman) prescriptivism where the grammatic features of the language used by a person would signal about their social "correctness". The second type, language-oriented prescriptivism, describes the situation of Latvia (and other similar communities, e.g. the Quebecois) where a nation has long had to strive for its independence, and manifests its patriotism by protecting its language from foreign influences (and where, most importantly, the xenophobic purism seems to mollify and civilize the interethnic controversies, rather than to ignite them). The third type, error-oriented prescriptivism, is a rather universal manifestation of prescriptivism which can concur with either of the first two types (thus, every culture seems to have its "favourite" language errors, real or imagined, that get most public attention throughout ages).

References:

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- Strelēvica-Ošiņa, Dace ([2011] 2012) Kāpēc mēs gribam, lai valoda ir pareiza? Ieskats preskriptīvisma vēsturē, teorijā un praksē. – Rīga: LU Latviešu valodas institūts

The Attitudes of the Recipients of Prescriptive Efforts: A Case of Two Public Discussions

Giedrius Tamaševičius, Institute for the Lithuanian Language

This contribution to the workshop presents a study that follows the formation and implementation of the SL ideology in Lithuania from the beginning of the 20th century to the present time. Three periods can be distinguished in the above-mentioned development: 1) the building of the independent Lithuanian state in the 1920s and 1930s; 2) Sovietization of Lithuanian society during the Soviet occupation (1940–41 and 1944–1990); and 3) the current period after the re-establishment of Lithuania's independence (since 1990). Most attention is given to the attitudes expressed in public discourse by the recipients of prescriptive efforts (writers, journalists, linguists and lay people).

Discussions about language and prescriptivism in Lithuania have been known since the beginning of the official state driven process of language standardization in the 1920s. During the first decades, reactions came mostly from the writers. Some represented the supporters of the prescriptive efforts, who expressed their loyalty to the authority of the normativists. The others, who were mostly young modernists, wanted to defend their right to make decisions about language in their fiction themselves. These prewar discussions came to a symbolic end just after the end of WW2. Since then the Soviet period can be distinguished by the absolute absence of these kinds of discussions. The silence was broken just after 1990 and in this presentation I want to focus on the two main public discussions about prescriptivism from the last period. The first was initiated by a young philosopher and future politician, Mantas Adomėnas. In 1995 in one cultural magazine he published a letter to the editor titled Against linguists. His criticism of prescriptive efforts received a response from five linguists in the same magazine. The second discussion originated from an interview with a sociolinguist of the younger generation, Loreta Vaicekauskienė, published in the main Lithuanian newspaper Lietuvos rytas in 2011. The critical ideas about prescriptivism here gave rise to many discussions in the media, not only from the side of the normativists, as was the case in the first discussion, but also from the side of the other linguists, writers, bloggers and journalists.

Language-Related Activism in the Greek Blogosphere: Mind the Gap Between Descriptivist Intentions and Prescriptivist Practices

Anna Vasilaki, University of Athens

In the field of linguistics the term ‘prescription’ is used to signify a set of metalinguistic practices which aim at regulating language use. Traditionally prescription has been considered as a lay people’s practice, in contrast to description, which is regarded as the typical preoccupation of trained linguists. ‘Prescriptivism’ is the idea that linguistic behavior adheres – or ought to be adjusted- to more or less common standards. However, when we use language, we implicitly or explicitly express attitudes, to standards which are formulated in accordance to a variety of values: epistemological, cultural, political, ethical, aesthetic. And, although our standards may vary from one person to another and from one community to another, prescriptivism seems to be a common principle of human behavior (linguistic or other); in the words of Deborah Cameron, ‘we are all of us closet prescriptivists’ (Cameron 1995).

In this paper attitudes to prescriptivism are being investigated through the examination of language-related activism, a normative metalinguistic practice which may be exercised by language users regardless of their degree of ‘metalinguistic/metapragmatic awareness’ (Silverstein 1979, 1981; Niedzielski and Preston 2003). I will argue that the kind, and the quality, of the language-related activism which a person or a group exercises depend upon one’s intentions, and upon how these intentions are realized. To this end, I will analyze the communicative practices of a group of Greek language-related blogs, who have been members of a distinct blogging community during the last decade. Each blog’s thematic, stylistic, narrative and argumentative choices, as well as its use of medium, along with the bloggers’ explicitly stated intentions, are examined as parts of a broader ‘performative argument’.

The analysis of the activists’ explicit and implicit metalanguage shows that the bloggers have been expressing contradictory attitudes to prescriptivism, at both an intrapersonal and an intragroup level. Moreover, the analysis provides strong indications that such ‘performative contradictions’, revealed through participation in language-related activism and through analysis of one’s discourse, may help both trained and folk linguists raise their metalinguistic and metapragmatic awareness.

PROGRAMME

9.30 WELCOME & OPENING

- 10.00 Morana Lukač *Linguistic Prescriptivism in Letters to the Editor*
- 10.30 Carmen Ebner *Language Watchdog BBC: How the BBC Balances Prescriptivism and Descriptivism to Meet the Needs of the Audience*
- 11.00 Martin Kohlberger *Prescriptivism as a Nation Building Tool in the Upper Amazon: The Case of Shiwari*
- 11.30 Joan Costa Carreras *The Relationship Between Usage and Prescription: The Case of the Catalan Relative Clause*

12.00 LUNCH BREAK

- 13.30 Matteo Santipolo *The Contribution of Folk Linguistics to Language Teaching Education: A Proposal*
- 14.00 Suzie Beaulieu *Prescriptivism in a Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) Teaching Context*
- 14.30 Dietmar Osthus *The French Chroniques the Langage Between Linguistic Expertise and Prescriptivism*

15.00 COFFEE BREAK

- 15.30 Anna Vasilaki *Language-Related Activism in the Greek Blogosphere*
- 16.00 Giedrius Tamaševičius *The Attitudes of the Recipients of Prescriptive Efforts: A Case of Two Public Discussions*
- 16.30 Dace Strelēvica-Ošiņa *Who Loves Prescriptivism and Why? Attitudes towards Language Correction in Latvian Society*

17.00 DRINKS

Prescription and Tradition in Language

Leiden, June 2013



Universiteit Leiden