

## Introduction

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Any language which has developed a Standard form is also likely to have developed a dichotomy between what someone for some reason thinks users *should* do, and what they actually do in practice. Prescriptive norms are one thing, but actual usage is another. Opinions about the *best* modes of expression usually develop after variants have evolved, with language-users told to prefer this or that variant for a host of reasons, none of which are linguistic *per se*. Yet some areas of language escape conscious prescriptivism, even though trends can still be discerned whereby uniformity of some sort is more or less achieved in practice.

In this volume on *Late Modern English Norms and Usage*, both kinds of normativity are explored: the conscious, “thou shalt use language like this or be damned” sort, and the less overt but nevertheless agreed consensus of “this is how we use language when doing this kind of activity”, be it framing a want-ad in a newspaper, naming a product new on the market, or writing a will. The first is labelled prescriptivism, was and still is taught in schools and upheld by the official administration; the second occurs in language for special purposes situations, where not knowing the linguistic conventions incurs a negative judgement. In both cases, how the norms were arrived at is not obvious, and precariously situated, by which we mean that norms are always open to challenge and subject to drift over time. The essays in this volume explore how these norms came into being, and what people thought of them during the period.

Gabriella Mazzon (*The Fictionality of Standard English. Construction of Language Norms in 17th- and 18th-Century Britain*) presents a résumé of the literature on the first kind, prescriptivism,

providing the social context for subsequent essays. Arguments for prescriptivism, however contradictory, were a product of the prevailing sociopolitical concerns of their times, and shifted accordingly.

Lynda Mugglestone (*Enchaining Syllables and Lashing the Wind: Samuel Johnson, Thomas Sheridan, and the Ascertainment of Spoken English*) examines the phenomenon of prescribing pronunciation. Pragmatically speaking, it is probably easier to prescribe (or achieve consensus about) written language than spoken, because not only do the *best* sounds have to be selected and agreed upon, speakers also have to be persuaded to adopt them. No easy task if they do not happen to already exist in their idiolects. Mugglestone shows how Dr Samuel Johnson and Thomas Sheridan, amongst the most influential prescriptivists during the period, actually held opposing views. Johnson changed his mind about pronunciation, on the one hand wanting to stabilise the language yet on the other presenting in his *Dictionary* the variants he knew were in use, or that he could see had been used historically. This led him to question his rival Sheridan's right to peddle a single, elite accent as a model to be emulated – Johnson spoke with a Lichfield accent himself; and Johnson's biographer James Boswell, who initially had tried to exchange his Scottish accent for Sheridan's elite *polite* version, ended up siding with Johnson.

Journalism also played a role in enforcing standard pronunciation ideology. Massimo Sturiale (*As The Times Goes by: The Codification of (British) English Pronunciation and the Press*) examines comments on the *correct* pronunciation of English as revealed by *The Times* Digital Archive 1785-2009 (although the time period for his research was limited to the years 1785 to 1899, because the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century establishment of the BBC introduced a new element in the debate on pronunciation). Sturiale searched *The Times* for collocates such as “proper pronunciation” and “vulgar accent”, and found that regional accents seem to have drawn the most criticism. Provincialisms were undoubtedly stigmatised during the period, and it can be deduced that 18<sup>th</sup>-century prescriptivism resulted in 19<sup>th</sup>-century prejudice, as exemplified, for example, by newspaper want-ads for employees “with good accents only”.

Carol Percy (*Fixing English in British India: Baptist Missionary Perspectives in Bengal to 1835*) examines attitudes towards the

teaching of English and its varieties in India. Indians learnt Christian scripture for whatever purpose (for admission to the heavenly hereafter as promised by the missionaries, or for admission to the English-speaking privileged social group here on Earth) via the English spoken by missionaries, who, being from the lower classes, spoke regional varieties with regional/lower-class accents. She finds an abundance of differing opinions from individuals, the East India Company, the government, as well as from the Baptist Missionary Society's representatives in Bengal, expressing a complex relationship between Britishness, the English language, culture, education, religion, and control.

The second kind of normative usage is that which comes about less self-consciously but is no less forceful in terms of effect. Laura Pinnavaia and Barbara Berti (*Adumbrating Word Combination: Metalexicological Description in 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-Century English Grammars for Native Speakers*) examine the treatment of lexical and grammatical words in the extraordinarily large amount of English grammar books published for native speakers. Pinnavaia and Berti identify the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century as the point at which grammarians began to describe the syntax of English, as opposed to that of Latin, and observed that meaning derived from context. Certain grammars treated collocation and dependency, both syntactical and lexical, showing, for example, how the meaning of phrasal verbs was not the sum of the meaning of their components. Before modern concepts of chunking could be retrieved from electronic corpora, late modern grammarians were already demonstrating that certain words kept certain company in the Standard dialect.

Marina Dossena (*“Terms of Art and Manufacture”: An Early Investigation into Late Modern English Dictionaries of Specialised Discourse*) considers words new to dictionaries during the period. After Johnson, and possibly because his dictionary held the high-register monopoly, many specialised dictionaries were published to cater for different kinds of users. Dossena discusses the overlap between encyclopaedias and dictionaries aimed at people seeking various kinds of technical knowledge, and focuses on one anonymous work that happens to have survived aimed specifically at Italian immigrants to America who would need to know such standardised things as the names of jobs (“press-feeder”, “mercier”), or how to apply for a post. Linguistic prescriptivism here takes up a different

role, with management of expectations the practical purpose: what a sample letter might look like, how to pronounce technical words, how to hold a conversation.

Laura Wright (*From Lavender Water to Kiss Me, You Dare!: Shifting Linguistic Norms in the Perfume Industry, 1700-1900*) examines perfume nomenclature precisely because it was not an essential commodity, relying on language to move units. Commercially-sold perfume underwent a technological shift during the period as smells became synthesised chemically. However, an accompanying narrowing of nomenclature had nothing much to do with manufacture; perfume names were more likely to have been the product of a specific network of innovative individuals. The language of marketing is also found to have been subject to normative pressures.

Finally, Giovanni Iamartino (*Current Research Trends in Late Modern English and Prescriptivism*) provides an annotated overview of recent work on Late Modern English and Late Modern English prescriptivism. This is intended to provide background material for the essays in the volume and highlight cutting-edge research in the field: important monographs and special issues of academic journals are briefly commented on, but conference series and recent research projects on Late Modern English and/or prescriptivism are also mentioned.

All in all, the essays in this *Textus* issue may be said to provide interesting insights into a still largely unexplored but crucial period in the history of the English language.