

Detecting Prescriptivism's Effects on Language Change: The Corpus-Linguistic Approach

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1 Introduction

The aim of the present study is twofold. First, I present a theory of prescriptivism which relies on the recognition of the types of speech acts performed in and through metalinguistic texts such as traditional grammars, textbooks for language teaching, usage and style guides, language advice columns in newspapers, etc. The prescriptive acts thus identified are analyzed as “performatives” (Austin 1962); hence the “performative theory of prescriptivism”. Under the perspective of this theory, I then provide an overview of the relevant sociolinguistic literature, concentrating on corpus-linguistic approaches to detecting prescriptivism's effects on language change. Accordingly, my twofold aim is: to review the relevant literature from the perspective of a theory that allows for contrasts and comparisons; and to test the theory against well-studied cases. One should not be apologetic about either procedure; both are common in theoretical linguistics.

A performative theory of prescriptivism should differentiate between at least two types of prescriptive acts: *correctives* and *permissives*. Correctives aim at eliminating variation; permissives, at restraining it. Correctives and permissives, I argue, are the elementary units for the quantitative study of prescriptivism within a variationist paradigm. Their definition presupposes the elementary notion of a sociolinguistic variable. Prescriptive acts presuppose variation, which they try to constraint. Whether, when and how variation is thus constrained is an empirical issue that has to be decided for each particular case. Correctives and permissives are but special categories of speech acts and, as such, they are also “exposed to infelicity” (in the sense of Austin 1962:

20); thus, in addition to “internal” language forces, pragmatic factors should be taken into account to explain why some prescriptive acts have been successful while others were not and, possibly, could not have been. Pragmatic factors have mostly to do with the *reproduction* of correctives.

It is argued that prescriptive acts should not be studied in isolation. Correctives and permissives tend to form *repertories*, i.e. more or less coherent groups of prescriptive acts, which are usually guided by a common ideology or are subject to a general tendency (such as purism, vernacularization, classicization, panification, uniqueness, westernization, *Ausbau* or *Einbau* planning, etc.; cf. Fishman, 2006). The evolution of the repertories provides evidence for concomitant developments in the language thus prescribed.

As said, I concentrate on corpus-linguistic approaches and, most specifically, on large-scale historical studies. I have excluded from consideration experimental studies, despite their many merits (they are synchronic, straightforward, and they manage to catch prescribing in the act). For Preston (2018), who would have certainly subsumed prescriptivism under his catch-all “regard” label, experimental studies should go “whither” the methodology of the Implicit Association Test conducts them. But Schmitt (2019), Hubers et al. (2020), the studies in Kristiansen and Grondelaers (2013), and many others—too many to be reviewed here—are all examples of experimental ingenuity so varied that could not be subsumed under a single laboratory label. I have also excluded from consideration corpus-aided studies that do not seek to *prove* or *disprove* prescriptivism’s effects but rather wish to *narrate* the undertakings and the achievements, real or imaginary, of prescriptivism—thus, more often than not, presupposing prescriptivism’s effects. Such studies abound in today’s standardology.

The corpus-linguistic studies I consider seek to correlate two types of corpora: a metalinguistic corpus (consisting, e.g., of prescriptive grammars) and a linguistic one (typically, a large historical corpus in which changes in variation attributed to prescriptivism can be traced). Both the metalinguistic and the linguistic corpus may consist of several subcorpora. I will say of the relevant studies that they follow ‘the two-corpora design’, irrespective (or ‘irrespectively’?) of the number of subcorpora they employ. The following studies will be reviewed: Langer (2001); Auer (2009); Poplack (2015); Hinrichs, Szmrecsanyi & Bohmann (2015); Anderwald (2016b); Havinga (2018).

The performative theory of prescriptive metalinguistic acts provides a grid on which a comparative analysis of the reviewed studies can be carried out. The comparison will be based on the following methodological considerations:

- 1) What counts as prescriptive? Do the studies in question differentiate between permissives and descriptive statements (constatives), on the one hand, and between correctives and permissives, on the other?

- 2) Do they account for variation in the metalanguage, i.e. for differing, conflicting even, instructions for the use of each variant?
- 3) Do they take into account the repertoires in which correctives and/or permissives co-occur?
- 4) Do the changes induced by correctives correlate with a more general trend (such as colloquialization), a language reform, or a 'corpus-planning'?
- 5) Do the studies in question account for changes in speech or only in written, standardized varieties?
- 6) Is there a statistical correlation between metalinguistic and linguistic corpora or is the attested change attributed to prescriptivism by exclusion of other factors?

The performative theory of prescriptive acts is presented in the next section; it has been adapted from Moschonas (2001; 2008; 2019; 2020b) and Moschonas & Spitzmüller (2010). The studies under review are summarily presented in sections 3.1–3.6 below; then, on the basis of the above methodological considerations, they are compared in sections 4.1–4.6.

Some of the studies reviewed below attribute specific linguistic changes to prescriptivism; others show prescriptivism's effect to be negligible. Our comparative analysis confirms that, overall, despite their occasional shortcomings, the quantitative corpus-linguistic studies demonstrate a *limited* effect of prescriptivism on language change. "Limited effect" is admittedly an evasive phrase and it will only be clarified in the concluding section 5.

2 Prescriptive Metalinguistic Acts

In usage and style guides, one comes across linguistic advice such as the following:

- The word *less* may not be used for countable items, as in the sign over the supermarket express lane which restricts customers to TEN ITEMS OR LESS; the sign should read TEN ITEMS OR FEWER.
- A modifier may not contain a dangling participle, such as *Lying in bed, everything seemed so different*, where the implicit subject of the participle lying (*I*) is different from the subject of the main clause (*everything*)
(cited in PINKER, 2014: 364.0/652).

Following the terminological preferences of J.L. Austin (1962), I will call such instructions *correctives*. A corrective is a directive speech act with a metalanguage-to-language direction of fit.¹ I distinguish between two types of cor-

1 For the category of speech acts called 'directives' and the notion of 'direction of fit', see Searle

rectives: *correctives proper* and *permissives*. In their simplest form, correctives proper consist of three parts: a *prohibitive* (or *proscriptive*) part ('one should neither say nor write X'); a *normative* ('one should say or write Y instead'); and an *explicative* ('... because Z'). Permissives,² on the other hand, also consist, in their simplest form, of three parts: a *permissive* part ('one may say or write X as well as Y'); a *normative* part, which usually states a condition on the usage of the X/Y variants ('X should occur under condition C₁ and Y under condition C₂'); and an optional *explicative* ('... because Z'), which usually repeats the normative/conditional part. The first of the examples cited above is a permissive: *fewer* [X] should occur with count nouns [C₁] and *less* [Y] only with non-count nouns [C₂]. The second instruction is an example of a corrective proper: dangling participles are not allowed [X]; instead, the subjects of the participle and of the main clause should be different [Y].

Now that the reader has been acquainted with the notion of a corrective through popularized examples from English, allow me to switch to my native language, Greek, from which I will draw all remaining examples in this section. The Greek language is particularly suitable for the study of prescriptivism, given the varied attitudes and movements in the long and adventurous history of its standardization and re-standardization (see, among others, Lavidas, 2019; Moschonas, 2019; Pagani, 2014; Horrocks, 2010; Mackridge, 2009; Georgakopoulou & Silk, 2009). The English-only reader could only benefit from his/her acquaintance with another language.³

(1979). A metalanguage-to-language direction of fit means that the perlocutionary effect of correctives is ultimately locutionary (i.e., a change in linguistic behavior). The metalanguage-to-language direction of fit was not foreseen by Searle or by other taxonomists of speech acts; but compare with the twin notions of 'repair' and 'correction' in conversation analysis (Schefflo, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977).

- 2 The term 'permissive' is not an innovation per se, since it has been used also in other contexts: in philosophy, in speech act theory (Bach & Harnish, 1979, recognize permissives as a subcategory of directives), even in the literature of law linguistics (see for instance Marmor, 2013: 50); nevertheless, here it is used with a very specific content as opposed to a proper corrective in a process of language prescription.
- 3 For a sample of metalinguistic resources in Greek, see Moschonas (2001). In Babiniotis (1998) one finds lots of examples with overt explicatives; see, e.g., the entries for *κοινοτοπία* vs *κοινοτυπία*, "commonplace"/"truism", or *ορθοπαιδικός* vs *ορθοπεδικός*, "orthopedic", etc.; cf. his compendium of correctives: Babiniotis (2014).

For metalinguistic resources in French: The website "Dire, ne pas dire" of the Académie française, <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/dire-ne-pas-dire>, contains language instructions which have, more or less, the canonical form of correctives ("On dit" [Y], "On ne dit pas" [X], preceded by an explanation); cf. also Académie Française (2014–2019).

For English: One should consult the huge database of usage guides in the Project 'Bridging the Unbridgeable' at the University of Leiden; see Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2020).

Here are the first four examples of correctives proper that are listed conveniently as dictionary entries in a usage guide for Greek; they all deal with orthography:

The correct form is:

- αλαζονεία [Y] and not αλαζονία [X] ('arrogance');
 αλλεργία [Y] and not αλεργία [X] ('allergy');
 αμπέχωνο [Y] and not αμπέχονο [X] ('army coat');
 αντικρίζω [Y] and not αντικρύζω [X] ('to come in view of').

ANAGNOSTOPOULOU & BOUSOUNI-GESOURA, 2005: 31

And here are four examples of permissives from the same usage guide:

- αεροπορικώς [X] (adverb [C₁])—αεροπορικά [Y] (adjective [C₂])
 ('by plane—plane [adj.]');
 ενδεχομένως [X] (adverb [C₁])—ενδεχόμενα [Y] (adjective [C₂])
 ('possibly—possible');
 επομένως [X] (adverb [C₁])—επόμενα [Y] (adjective [C₂])
 ('hence—next');
 κυρίως [X] (adverb [C₁])—κύρια [Y] (adjective [C₂])
 ('mainly—main' [adj.])

ibid.: 94–95

Notice that in all the above examples no explicative is provided. Omitting the explicative is quite common: in many instances no justification is offered for a corrective; or the explicative provides what appears to be a circular justification ('one should not say or write X, because it is not advisable—correct, proper, appropriate, idiomatic, etc.—to say or to write X'); or it invokes a more general "rule", to which the corrective at hand is not but an instance. The very format of Anagnostopoulou & Bousouni-Gesoura (2005), with short entries listed alphabetically, suggests that no explicatives are necessary. As a matter of fact, in grammars and usage guides, correctives rarely appear in their canonical, full forms (Moschonas & Spitzmüller, 2010: 23–26). More often than not, correctives are *elliptical* (missing a part, i.e. X or Y are not both specified, or no Z is offered).⁴

Correctives also differ as to their specificity. We distinguish *type correctives* (general instructions) from *token correctives* (specific instructions); again,

4 A systematic study of explicatives falls outside the scope of the present study.

a token-instruction may be offered as an example to a more general type-instruction, i.e. ‘ x_1, \dots, x_n should be avoided as tokens of X ’; or ‘ y_1, \dots, y_m should be preferred as tokens of Y ’; or a token corrective may simply be an instance of a general “rule”, i.e. of a general type-instruction.

Let us see examples of the above distinctions. The following is a full token corrective:

It is most natural and practical for an inflectional language such as Greek [Z_1] to use the word $\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\rho\omicron$ [Y] instead of $\epsilon\upsilon\rho\acute{\omega}$ [X] (‘euro’) with its unusual for Modern Greek nouns ending $-\acute{\omega}$ [Z_2]

Paraphrase from: BABINIOTIS, 1998: 695–696; the corrective has been unsuccessful: the form $\epsilon\upsilon\rho\acute{\omega}$ has prevailed completely.

On the basis of this corrective, one can form the elliptical ones:

- Do not use the word $\epsilon\upsilon\rho\acute{\omega}$; use the word $\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\rho\omicron$ instead [$X/Y/\emptyset$];
- Do not use the word $\epsilon\upsilon\rho\acute{\omega}$ [$X/\emptyset/\emptyset$];
- Do not use the word $\epsilon\upsilon\rho\acute{\omega}$, because it is an unnatural word [$X/\emptyset/Z$];
- Do use the word $\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\rho\omicron$ [$\emptyset/Y/\emptyset$];
- Do use the word $\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\rho\omicron$, because it is a most natural word [$\emptyset/Y/Z$],

all of which are token correctives. Correspondingly, the following would be *type* elliptical correctives:

- Do not use words which are unnatural for an inflectional language such as Greek [$Y/\emptyset/\emptyset$];
- Do use words which are natural for an inflectional language such as Greek [$\emptyset/Y/\emptyset$],

where the explicative is turned into a normative (as pointed out already, it is not unusual for a normative to overlap with the explicative).

Permissives can also be elliptical, type, or token. With respect to the permissives cited above concerning the $-\alpha/-\omega\varsigma$ adverbial ending, one can form the type permissive:

The ending $-\alpha$ should be restricted to the plural of adjectives when there is a corresponding adverbial form in $-\omega\varsigma$,

which, by the way, does not correspond to actual usage (many forms in $-\alpha$ can be used as both adjectives and adverbs). Notice however that elliptical permissives can be turned into correctives proper:

Do not use the forms in -α (αεροπορικά, ενδεχόμενα, κύρια, επόμενα ...) as adverbs [X/Ø/Ø].⁵

Indeed, any permissive can be turned into a corrective, by stating that the condition for a variant to occur has been violated. In most cases, the corrective is already implied in the permissive, and for this reason I will not refrain from calling both correctives proper and permissives by their general name: *correctives*.

Permissives are usually functional in character; each variant in a permissive instruction is restricted to a domain, assigned a function, or is assumed to have a certain stylistic load. One may also postulate free variational permissives of the form

X or/and Y.

However, permissives positing a 'free', unconditional variation are difficult to come up with in traditional prescriptive grammars. Prescription does not tolerate variation; variation should be either eliminated or conditioned.

It should be stressed that both types of correctives (both correctives proper and permissives) are *prescriptive* acts. As we will see below (section 3.6; but see also the examples in fn. 5), it is a common fallacy to confuse correctives—permissives especially—with descriptive statements. Indeed, prescriptive statements often masquerade as descriptive (or 'constatives', according to Austin's more fanciful terminology; Austin, 1962: 3). One has to be aware of their difference in illocutionary force (directives vs. assertives). And one cannot know what the force of a particular statement is unless one is aware of variants

5 Both my reviewers interpret as a descriptive statement the permissive that restricts -α to the plural of adjectives and -ως to adverbs. One reviewer thinks that variants in -α are ambiguous: "αεροπορικά can be an adjective or an adverb depending on the context". The other reviewer thinks that "these variants represent different grammatical categories. This means that their variation is functional, as there is no choice for the speakers".

As already pointed out, permissives rarely allow for "free variation", their aim being to condition variation. The reviewers, I am afraid, have fallen victim to the principle of 'form-function symmetry' (cf. *infra*, section 4.1), which seems to motivate permissives. Actually, there is "a choice for the speakers", since the adverbs in -α are not ungrammatical or ambiguous. For example, one finds 76 instances of αεροπορικά, unambiguously used as an adverb, in the Greek Web Corpus ElTenTen. In many instances, the adverb tends to co-occur with the verb συνδέομαι, in examples such as συνδέεται αεροπορικά με την Αθήνα, "with connecting flights to Athens". (On the other hand, ElTenTen shows 2,965 instances of αεροπορικώς. There are no clear cases of αεροπορικά used as an adverb in The Corpus of Greek Texts, CGT, where 63 instances of αεροπορικά and 23 instances of αεροπορικώς were found.)

that are omitted or mishandled, or of alternative variants that are hidden from view, or of the “larger system of discourse and enterprise” (Silverstein, 1979: 193) within which particular statements are issued; not unless, that is, one has become *critical*, one way or another, of the statements in question. It is not only permissives that can be easily transformed to correctives proper; almost any descriptive grammatical statement could be interpreted as prescriptive, i.e. as a corrective, under particular circumstances. In things linguistic, one can very easily switch from ‘this is how things are’ to ‘this is how they should be’.

An extreme case of elliptical correctives should also be mentioned; they may be called *correctives by omission* [Ø/Ø/Ø]. It would not be preposterous to posit a category of zero-correctives (of non-instructions, non-mentions, or non-statements), i.e. correctives by omission, because they are actually operative in prescriptive grammars, precisely through their absence. To cite an example familiar to the Greek reader: the most authoritative grammar of Modern Greek, Triantaphyllidis et al. (1941), has been rightly criticized for not mentioning at all the learned, high-variety adjectives ending in -ης/-ες, such as ο/η ακριβής / το ακριβές (masc./fem./neut. ‘precise’) as well as the Ancient Greek participles in -ων/-ουσα/-ον, such as ο προκύπτων τόκος (‘the resulting interest’), οι τρέχουσες εξελίξεις, (‘current developments’), etc. It is implied, *through* their omission, that these forms should not be used at all, or that they should be avoided; they are proscribed by omission (Moschonas, 2019: 14).⁶

Or by inadvertence. Prescriptivism is also a perceptual phenomenon. Which variation becomes perceptible is an open question; but *some* variation is certainly presupposed. The aim of prescriptive acts might very well be to limit or to completely eradicate variation; ironically though, prescriptivism presupposes the variation it aims at eliminating. Correctives proper aim at raising awareness of the variants X and Y with the aim of replacing X by Y; permissives aim at raising awareness of X and Y with the aim of differentiating or conditioning the use of X and Y. In the case of correctives proper, variation is considered to be “abnormal”; it is also thought to be “transitional”: it exists at an intermediate stage between two exclusive uses (X or Y, but not both). In the case of permissives, variation is considered “normal”, “conditioned”, “stable” (rather than “transitional”), and inclusive (X or Y or both) (Moschonas & Spitzmüller, 2010: 36). In any case, prescriptivism presupposes the variation it aims at controlling.

6 For more examples of “proscription by omission”, see Anderwald (2016b: 92, 115; 2018: 92). See also below, section 3.3, on variants that have become “invisible” through omission (Havinga, 2018).

Of course, not all variation is perceptible to prescriptivists; but prescriptivists may also contribute to making some variation perceptible. Prescriptive acts are always about variation. It is precisely for this reason that correctives and permissives qualify as the elementary units for the quantitative study of prescriptivism within a variationist paradigm.

But although correctives presuppose variation, some care should be taken to differentiate them from the sociolinguistic variables they are loosely associated with. In a prescriptive statement, 'X' and 'Y' are mentions; in a sociolinguistic variable, X and Y are uses. There can be linguistic variants with no corresponding mentions just as there can be metalinguistic mentions which are not associated with any existing variants. Indeed, it is a prerequisite of certain types of change, i.e., "change from below", that some variation passes unnoticed. And there must be "limits to language awareness" (Silverstein, 1977), i.e. unfathomed aspects of language that cannot be prescribed. Prescriptivism is about those characteristics of language that can be and have been talked about—roughly those covered in traditional grammars, dictionaries, usage guides, and other reference works that inform the folk-linguistic understanding of how language functions. As Pullum's critique of prescriptivism was so eager to show (see, e.g., Pullum, 2009), it is not unusual for metalinguistic discourse to be empirically void, i.e. to not correspond to any empirically certifiable variants. The relationship between correctives and linguistic variables is diagrammed in Figure 12.1.

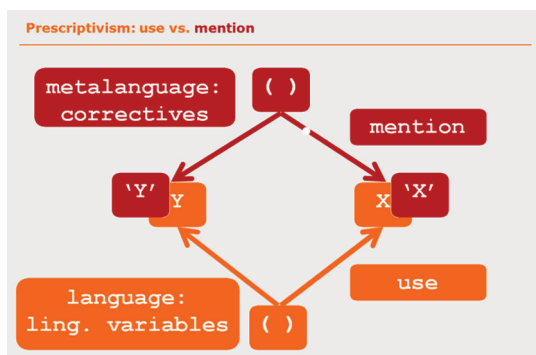


FIGURE 12.1 Correctives and sociolinguistic variables

The established classification of sociolinguistic variables can be transferred, *mutatis mutandis*, to correctives—restricted, by definition, to perceptible variants. Depending on the sociolinguistic variables they mention, correctives can also be two-valued, three-valued, or multi-valued; they can be discrete or continuous; and they can index variants at all levels of linguistic analysis. In Moschonas & Spitzmüller (2010), correctives in the Greek and the German press were classified into the following categories: Lexicon, Phrase-

ology, Morpho-Syntax, Semantics, Discourse/Pragmatics, Stylistics, Orthography/Spelling, Phonology/Pronunciation (and Miscellaneous). The classification mirrors a convenient division in linguistics as much as available metalinguistic data. Needless to say, the term ‘variant’ will be used here regardless of the internal or external factors that have brought about a particular linguistic form or feature.

Let us now consider the following set of correctives:

- “Μη γράφετε σε Greeklish. Χρησιμοποιείτε το ελληνικό αλφάβητο” (i.e., do not use the Latin alphabet for writing Greek [X]; always use the Greek alphabet [Y]);
- One should neither say nor write ‘ο Α είναι αυτός που ήρθε’ [X] (‘it is A who came’); rather, one should say or write ‘ο Α ήρθε’ (‘A came’) [Y], because ‘είναι αυτός που ...’ is a Gallicism/Anglicism [Z] (Haris, 2003: 171–175);
- The voiced stops should be pre-nasalized [X] within a word in intervocalic position [C₁], unless the word is of foreign origin [C₂], in which case the voiced stops should not be nasalized [Y]; e.g., the word βίντεο should be pronounced [ˈvideo] [Y] and not [ˈvindeo] [X], because it is a foreign word [C₂] (Lypourlis, 1994: 33–36).

The first corrective in the above list should be classified as orthographic; the second one is phraseological/syntactical; the last one is phonological. Each has been obtained from a different source. The first one is an instruction commonly addressed to “commenters” on websites and internet forums.⁷ The other two correctives come from authors with different ideological backgrounds and presumptions about Modern Greek usage. Yet, all three correctives share the ideological presupposition of *linguistic purism*. The motive behind all three is to “cleanse” the language. The latter corrective also displays an attitude of “inverse purism” (Moschonas & Spitzmüller, 2010: 34–35), urging that “native” and “foreign” words be kept apart through their proper pronunciation.

We will not be able to diagnose a common attitude, or a common ideological presupposition, or a motive, or a regard, or a guiding principle, or a driving force behind a corrective, unless we examine it within the group to which it naturally belongs. Correctives do not appear in isolation. They form *repertoires*,⁸

7 See, e.g., the guidelines on the website of the Greek journal LIFO, <https://www.lifo.gr/team/bitsandpieces/34287>.

8 Contrary to a well-known permissive that distinguishes a *repertory* from a *repertoire*—“*repertory* is a *repertoire* while *repertoire* is a list of [works]” (sic), according to a WikiDiff—, I do not differentiate between the two.

which are usually subject to a more general principle or tendency (e.g., purism). Corrective repertories are sets of correctives, which are grouped together in a corpus of prescriptive metalinguistic texts such as usage guides, traditional grammars, language-education textbooks, etc. Corrective repertories, one may assume, prevail among certain literary circles over a certain period of time. The evolution of such repertories provides evidence for concomitant developments in the language thus prescribed.

One may assume that correctives proper are more effective than permissives, or that explicit corrective instructions are more powerful than implicit or elliptical ones, or that correctives are more influential when they occur within a repertory. Generally, the efficacy of a corrective would be a function of its content, its type (corrective proper, permissive, type/token, elliptical, explicit/implicit, corrective by omission), and the repertory it belongs to.

One final comment. In order for correctives to be felicitous, they need to be heard. They need to be reproduced, propagated, multiplied. A group of language *connoisseurs* is necessary. Experts, “language mavens”, and teachers are needed, but their authoritative judgement is powerless without copyists, students, followers, devotees. All these agents act as *intermediaries*. To reach a wider audience, correctives need to be reproduced over different media and platforms. Accordingly, in order to estimate the real *strength* of a corrective—its weight, its persuasiveness, its propensity to influence followers and language users, its spread in metalinguistic texts—, it is not sufficient to count its occurrences in grammar books or in other authoritative texts. One should also take into account the number of its *reproductions*. (But one could also argue for the opposite view, i.e. that correctives are in constant need of reproduction precisely because they are weak; think for a moment of the 20th century fossilized English prescriptivism.)

3 The Corpus-Linguistic Approach

In this section I will review some representative studies which employ corpus-linguistic approaches to detecting prescriptivism's possible influence. The studies concentrate on different correctives, languages, and periods, but they all raise and try to answer the more general question whether prescriptivism is at all successful or whether language change is ruled by internal forces only or by social forces other than prescriptivism. The studies in question employ similar research procedures and provide comparable “measures” for assessing the “success of prescriptivism” (Anderwald, 2014a).

A standard corpus-based⁹ research procedure for diagnosing the effects of prescriptivism is reviewed and explained in Auer (2006; 2009: 4–11). First, a corrective (or a repertory of correctives) is selected and traced in a corpus of metalinguistic texts published over a particular period of time. We will call it the ‘metalinguistic corpus’. The metalinguistic corpus consists of traditional grammars, usage guides and similar prescriptive texts. Then a historical corpus of the language is analyzed with the aim of detecting differences in the prescribed usage. We will call it the ‘language corpus’.¹⁰ One should be able to discern two phases in the language corpus, one before (language₁) and one after the publication of the metalinguistic texts (language₂). If the percentages in the use of a preferred variant v_1 (i.e., of the variant mentioned in the normative part of a corrective) have increased significantly or, alternatively, if the percentages in the use of a proscribed variant v_2 have significantly decreased, then the change in the percentages could be attributed to the influence of the corrective—provided there is no better explanation. Similarly, if the percentages of the variants v_1 and v_2 mentioned in a permissive vary according to the conditions imposed on them in prescriptive metalinguistic texts, then the changes in question could be attributed to the permissive—all other factors being excluded. This corpus-based procedure is diagrammed in Figure 12.2.

Auer discusses three conditions on this research design: First, there should be a “geographical and temporal parallelism” between the metalinguistic and the language corpora (Auer, 2009: 7).¹¹ Second, large-scale historical corpora are

9 In earlier work (Moschonas 2020a; 2020b), I used the terms ‘corpus-based’ and ‘corpus-driven’ indiscriminately, without paying much attention to an established distinction in the literature (see Tognini-Bonelli, 2001: chapters 4–5; Biber, 2009). Overall, the studies presented in this section should be more appropriately described as ‘corpus-based’ rather than ‘corpus-driven’, since “their primary goal of research is to analyze the systematic patterns of variation and use” for those linguistic features that are “pre-defined” in a metalinguistic corpus, to slightly paraphrase Biber (2009: 193). Half of the works reviewed here characterize themselves as ‘corpus-based’ (Auer, 2009; Hinrichs, Szmrecsanyi & Bohmann, 2015; with Anderwald, in 2016 and related works, alternating between ‘corpus-based’ and ‘corpus-linguistic’); the other half do not even bother to name their research approach as either ‘-based’ or ‘-driven’. I use ‘corpus-linguistic’ as the general term.

10 Auer employs the terms ‘precept’ and ‘usage’ corpora. Konopka (1996), who is credited with having initiated the corpus-based research procedure in the field of German standardology, had used the terms *Sprachreflexion* and *Sprachgebrauch*. ‘Metalinguistic’ and ‘language’ are simpler terms.

11 I would add that the metalinguistic texts should, somehow, be accessible to the authors of the texts compiled in the language corpus. It is only necessary that the metalinguistic

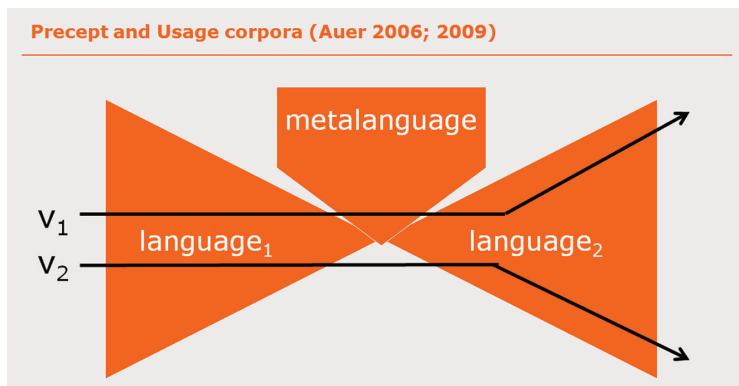


FIGURE 12.2 The corpus-based approach to detecting prescriptivism's effects

necessary in order to detect any changes in usage. More specifically, the language corpus should be quite extensive to cover both periods, before and after the publication of the works compiled in the metalanguage corpus. Third, it is necessary that one allows for a “time lag” before one can discern a change in usage (Auer 2006: 18; 2009: 71); obviously, some time is necessary for the uptake of the correctives, if they are going to be at all effective.

Auer did not just compose a state of the art review of the then available literature; she did not just help codify the corpus-based procedure to detecting prescriptivism's effects on language usage; she also provided a well-documented comparative study of English and German prescriptivism in the eighteenth century. To this study we now turn our attention.

3.1 Auer (2009)

Auer's (2009) book is a corpus-based study that seeks to investigate the effect of prescriptive grammars on the use of the subjunctive in British English, Standard German, and Austrian German during the “age of prescriptivism” (i.e., the eighteenth century). I will only present here the part of her study concerning British prescriptivism.

The English ‘precept’ (metalanguage) corpus, which covers the eighteenth century, contains 71 grammars, retrieved from the database of Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO). Auer places particular emphasis on what are recognized as the “most influential grammarians” (pp. 33 ff.), although she does not disregard “specialist studies of the verb” (pp. 38 ff.) and accounts by “radical”

texts be within the reach of the authors; whether the authors actually made use of them is part of what has to be demonstrated.

grammarians (pp. 41 ff.) Her qualitative analysis of the treatment of the subjunctive in all those grammars shows that a) “eighteenth-century grammarians had great difficulties establishing what the subjunctive was”, mainly because of their “reliance on models of Latin grammar” (p. 52); and b) the grammarians recognized that the inflectional subjunctive was on the decline and prescribed its revival (p. 85). The first point is of particular importance. We have already warned of the possible mismatch between metalinguistic mention and actual language use (see Figure 12.1). The mismatch between metalanguage and language in the case of the English subjunctive could have reduced the effectiveness of prescriptivism.

For her ‘usage’ (language) corpus, Auer used the British part of the ARCHER corpus (A Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers), which contains texts from 1650 to 1990, comprising altogether 1.7 million words. The corpus allows for genre and gender classifications.

Auer finds that from 1650 to our days the inflectional subjunctive is steadily declining in British English. However, from 1700 to 1849 there is a slight increase in its use, from 24.1% (1700–1749) to 24.9% (1750–1799) and then to 25.8% (1800–1849) (p. 70, Table 3.2). It is this slight rise, or rather, the suspension of the decrease in the use of the subjunctive, that is attributed by Auer to the influence of the prescriptive grammars. The use of the inflectional subjunctive is diminished from 1850 onwards.

The graph in Figure 12.3 provides a clearer illustration of the type of results obtained by the corpus-based approach followed by Auer. The graph compares the use of the subjunctive *were* with the use of the indicative *was* (in contexts prescribed for the subjunctive). The lines for each variant mirror each other, as it is to be expected of variants that are mentioned as exclusive in correctives proper. The two lines cross at about the time (1700) prescriptivism is supposed to take effect. (For reasons that fall outside the scope of Auer’s research, this trend has been reversed in the twentieth century.)

In the last chapter of her book (pp. 157 ff.), Auer examines prescriptivism as part of the standardization processes in England, Germany and Austria. With the exception of Austrian German (pp. 170–171, 187), she does not consider the correctives concerning the subjunctive as belonging to a repertory. She argues that the variation in English was stylistic in nature, with the subjunctive functioning as a “politeness marker” (p. 186), whereas German variation was mainly dialectal; but this is a conclusion that might well reflect a casual prescriptivist attitude, since “it was dialectal forms that the [German and Austrian] grammarians objected to” (p. 132); it might also have been forced on Auer by the fact that her corpus for German only registers geographical variation; cf. Pickl (2010: 264).

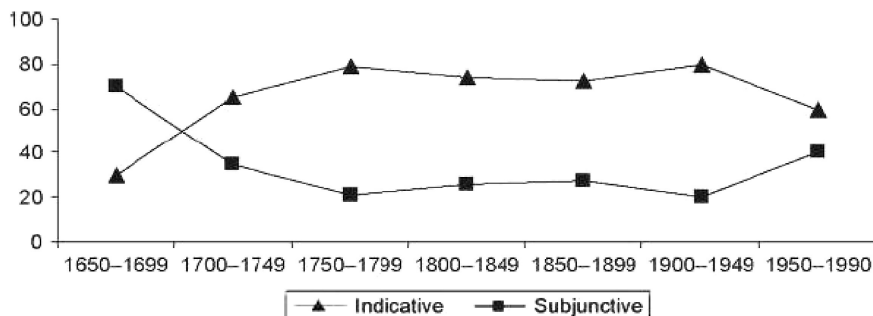


FIGURE 12.3 The development of 3rd person past indicative and subjunctive (*was* vs. *were*) AUER (2009: 78, FIG. 3.2)

Notwithstanding its occasional weaknesses, Auer's (2009) study has greatly contributed to consolidating the corpus-based approach to detecting prescriptivism's effects. According to Auer, the first to apply the corpus-based approach in the field of German standardization were Konopka (1996), Takada (1998), and Langer (2001); These forerunners were followed, in the field of English standardization, by Facchinetti (2000), Gustafsson (2002), and González-Díaz (2003); cf. also Auer & Gonzalez-Díaz (2005).¹² Auer herself elaborated on the two-corpora design proposed by Marek Konopka (1996).

From those earlier studies I single out Langer (2001), which I will review in the next section. Nils Langer and Anita Auer seem to have established a trend within historical sociolinguistics—certainly within the Historical Sociolinguistics Network (HiSoN). The latest addition to the literature they have influenced is Havinga (2018). Anna Havinga was a student of Nils Langer; she also elaborated on work by Auer (2009:163 ff.) concerning the standardization of Austrian German. Havinga's work will be reviewed in section 3.3.

3.2 *Langer (2001)*

One of the rare virtues of Langer's (2001) monograph is that it reviews itself. Its introductory chapter states the argument clearly and guides the reader through the chapters that follow, while the last chapter recapitulates the argument on the basis of empirical research presented in the intermediate chapters.

Section 1.3 (pp. 6–8) defines the linguistic variable under study: the auxiliary (or 'periphrastic') *tun*. This construction was chosen "because of its ungrammatical status in standard German, on the one hand, and its grammaticality and frequent occurrence in non-standard colloquial German and modern

12 In her short account of the early literature, Auer fails to mention Dekeyser's (1975) study.

dialects, on the other" (p. 6). Sentences such as *Ich tue schon den ganzen Tag lang lesen*, 'I've been reading all day', are not acceptable in today's Standard (written) German; they are associated with a lower social status, despite—or even because of—the fact that "*tun* is a common property of all West Germanic languages" (p. 9).

Langer's argument has the form of a complex disjunctive syllogism. His major premise is that the change in the use of *tun*, if not influenced by prescriptive grammarians, could have been the result of a) "system-internal reasons", or b) of "sociolinguistic identification", or c) it could have been random (cf. Langer 2001: 4). But his analysis of Early New High German rules out the first possibility; his analysis of the distributional patterns of language use with regard to text type and region rules out the second possibility; while the third possibility has no explanatory value. It has to be accepted then that the change in the use of *tun* is the result of the grammarians' influence.

In accordance with this argument, Langer, in part I of his book, investigates a language corpus consisting of 127 Early New High German texts in order to "establish patterns of the distribution of *tun* with regard to region, time and text type" (Langer 2001: 9). His analysis reveals that the auxiliary *tun* was evenly distributed with respect to region, time, and text type; it occurred in approximately 50 % of all texts and regions (pp. 8–9, 46, 65, 69). Thus, "the ungrammaticality of *tun* in standard German was not due to an independently occurring, general decrease of the use of the construction" (Langer 2001: 220).

Having excluded the possibilities of a language-internal or/and a variationist explanation, Langer proceeds, in Part II of his book, to examine a corpus of metalinguistic texts from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, with the aim of detecting the influence of metalinguistic comments on the stigmatization of *tun*. The metalanguage corpus consists of 139 texts, dating from 1531 to 1849. It comprises not only grammars (written by major grammarians as well as by lesser ones; addressed to the native speaker as well as to the foreign learner), but also dictionaries, phrase books, usage and style guides, guides to epistolary writing, and manuals of rhetoric. Since the *tun*-construction was widely used in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, before prescriptivists started commenting on it, but disappeared afterwards, it is reasonable to assume, Langer argues, that prescriptivism in this case has been effective. In correlation with specific types of metalinguistic texts, Langer postulates three major stages in the stigmatization of *tun*: "the feature is slowly but progressively stigmatized as bad poetry (1640–1680), as bad written German (1680–1740), and, finally, as bad German [*simpliciter*] (after 1740)" (Langer 2001: 10, 176 ff.).

Tun's falling into disgrace is paralleled to the fate of two related "prescriptivism predictors" (to borrow a term from Hinrichs, Szmrecsanyi & Bohmann,

2015): polynegation and double perfect. All three morphosyntactic constructions are ungrammatical in standard German but they were widely attested in modern and Early New High German dialects (Langer, 2001: section 3.3) Langer compares the metalinguistic comments on all three constructions. He provides a rough estimate of the strength of the correctives for each one of them, taking into account whether the construction is mentioned at all in a metalinguistic text; whether it is frequently mentioned; whether there is a correlation between comment and major grammarians; whether the comments are always negative; or restricted to specific types of metalinguistic texts; or occurring in chronological clusters; whether they are original or the result of plagiarism (p. 141). The three constructions were not proscribed with the same force nor did their usage follow the exact same trajectory, and Langer is hesitant to generalize from the findings for *tun* towards the stigmatization of other constructions (p. 9)—although having done so would have given more credibility to his notion of ‘purism’ as a driving force behind prescriptivism. Langer concludes that “one needs to postulate results for individual constructions, rather than suggesting an overarching, automatic influence” (p. 9).

The next study to be reviewed is the most recent one: Havinga (2018). Havinga did not merely adapt an established research design to her study of standardization in eighteenth-century Austria; she revised the design to take into account elliptical correctives that do not contain a prohibitive part. Her research shows the role of prescriptivism in “invisibilizing” a dispreferred variety.

3.3 *Havinga (2018)*

The main subject of Havinga’s research is the effect that the Austrian linguistic and educational reforms of 1774, promoted by the empress Maria Theresa and implemented by influential eighteenth-century grammarians, had had on written Austrian German.¹³ Her starting point is the discrepancy between spoken Austrian German, which has to this day retained certain Upper German variants, and written Austrian German, which has been standardized on the model of Upper Saxon German that came to be called ‘High German’. Havinga argues that prescriptivism led to the “invisibilization” of those features of spoken Austrian German that did not conform to the Standard.

The linguistic variables examined by Havinga are three: *e*-apocope, alternative forms of [*wir/sie*] *sind/seyn*⟨*d/t*⟩, and the morphology of past participles. Of those three variables, the first and the third are complex ones: *e*-apocope is

13 Some parts of this section are taken verbatim from my review of Havinga (2018): Moschoinas (2020a).

examined in three linguistic environments: fem. sg., masc./neutr. dat., and pl., while past participles vary with respect to both the prefix *ge-* and the ending *-t/-et*.

Havinga's metalanguage corpus consists of grammars written by the notorious eighteenth-century grammarians von Antesperg, Gottsched, Popowitsch, von Felbiger, and Adelung (see Havinga, 2018: chapter 3 for a survey of prescriptions in various grammars, and p. 95 for a summary presentation). The language corpora in which the trends concerning the selected variants are traced are three: a) reading primers (*Nahmenbüchlein*), b) issues of the newspaper *Wienerisches Diarium*/*Wiener Zeitung*, and c) handwritten petitionary letters. The three corpora form a distance-proximity scale (Havinga, 2018: 4–6); *ex hypothesi*, to each type of text, prescriptivism has differential access, with its access decreasing in the less formal text types. It could be argued however that reading primers should have been included in the metalanguage corpus, as they are overtly prescriptive—prescriptive *by example* (Moschonas, 2019: 8–9, 37). Petitionary letters, on the other hand, provide a measure of whether the reform—a change from above—had reached the wider population, while at the same time they document changes from below.

Havinga's main results can be summarized as follows: overall, *e*-apocope in fem. and pl. nouns and the verb form *seynd* disappear from formal genres in the second half of the eighteenth century; the dative *-e*, in comparison, was implemented later and less consistently. The absence of the prefix *ge-* in past participles was clearly avoided by the mid-eighteenth century.

The changes in usage patterns are attributed to at least two events: the publication in 1748 of *Grundlegung einer Deutschen Sprachkunst* by Johann Christoph Gottsched (the authority on German in the second half of the eighteenth century) and Maria Theresa's 1774 school reform (implemented mainly by Johann Ignaz von Felbiger), a reform which introduced Gottsched's norms in public schools. The changes in usage originating in reading primers seem to spread through the other two corpora, although in varying degrees. Overall, newspaper texts—among other texts written by the educated classes—are shown to contribute to the selection as well as the dissemination of particular variants (cf. also Havinga 2019).

No statistical “correlation” between the metalanguage and the language corpora is provided by Havinga. Nevertheless, one could argue that a statistical test is not necessary, because language reforms, when successful, introduce sudden and abrupt changes which are salient and can be easily attested.

Havinga concentrated on variants that have been *erased* (Irvine & Gal, 2000) from language ideologies and also perhaps from the linguists' consciousness. The true merit of her research lies in her study of elliptical correctives, even of

correctives by omission: the forms of spoken Austrian German are simply disregarded by the prescriptivists. The proscribed forms are “invisible variants”, i.e. variants for which there are no available historical records, not even in prescriptive metalinguistic discourse. Havinga has contributed to shifting the paradigm from the domain of the visible, of what is talked about (the domain of metalanguage) to the invisible, to what remains implicit and unrecorded (in both language and metalanguage); see also Havinga (2015) as well as the contributions in Havinga & Langer (2015).

3.4 *Anderwald (2016b)*

In this section I concentrate on Anderwald's book *Language Between Description and Prescription* (2016). Several papers by Anderwald, such as Anderwald (2011; 2012a; 2013; 2014a), form part, in revised form, of this book, while others, such as Anderwald (2018), revise parts of it.

Unlike most studies of English prescriptivism that concentrate on the eighteenth century (“the age of prescriptivism”), Anderwald's focus is on the nineteenth-century English grammars and on nineteenth-century language change. Anderwald claims as a novelty of her book its “language-first” approach (p. 15), by which it is meant that the language corpus is prioritized over the metalanguage corpus: Anderwald first explores the historical distribution of the linguistic variants and then documents the metalinguistic comments and the instructions on usage (through permissives mostly) found in the grammars.¹⁴ This shift of focus ensures that the question whether prescriptivism has affected language change should not be prejudged; it also allows Anderwald to observe how grammar writers responded not only to language changes taking place in their times but also to the prescriptions of earlier grammarians.

The metalanguage corpus consists of 258 grammar books, 125 published in North America (mostly in the U.S.) and 133 in the British Isles. For its contribution to grammaticography only, this volume by Anderwald has been hailed as “the first book-length study to investigate nineteenth-century grammar writing and language change with a focus on verbal categories and verb morphology” (Hundt, 2018: 299).

Anderwald offers an innovative measure of a corrective's *strength*. Data from the metalanguage corpus are usually presented summarily in area graphs, such as the one in Figure 12.4, which lists the number of mentions of the past tense of *burn* in American grammars.

14 We have seen Langer (2001) doing just that: the first part of his monograph analyzes the language corpus and the second part is devoted to the metalanguage one.

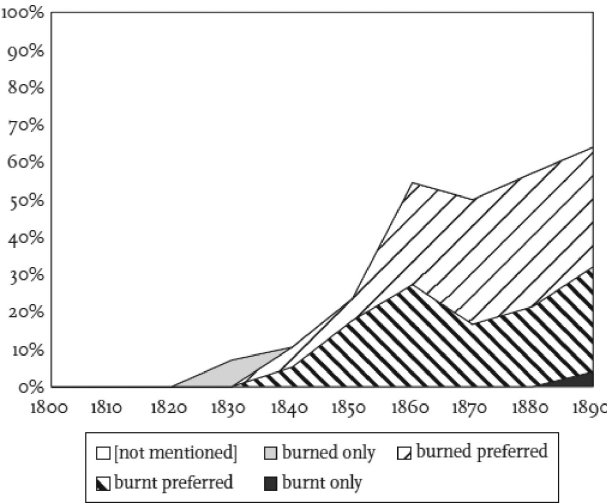


FIGURE 12.4 Past tense of *burn* (American grammars)
ANDERWALD (2016B: 128, FIG. 4.12)

The conclusions Anderwald (2016b: 127) draws from this graph are the following:

burn is not included in the list of irregular verbs by the majority of grammar writers until the 1860s. Where *burn* is included, however, grammar writers quite accurately acknowledge it as a variable lexeme. The proportion of grammarians in favour of *burned*, rather than *burnt*, increases until the 1870s, and then remains essentially stable. This again means that grammar writing basically lags behind developments in real language.¹⁵

Clearly, area graphs such as the one above allow Anderwald to express generalizations that hold for a large number of grammars and also to quantify somehow the strength of the correctives. This is a clear advantage over earlier works (but see above for a similar classification of metalinguistic comments in Langer, 2001). The method could be modified to identify correctives that belong to one and the same repertory and also establish which repertory was prevalent

15 The table accompanying the graph of Figure 12.4 (Anderwald, 2016b: 269 [Appendix]) reveals that the time sequence for “*burned* preferred” (a permissive) is: 0-0-0-0-1-1-2-2-5-8 (total: 19 mentions), while for “*burned* only” (a corrective) there is only one mention in 1830; respectively, for “*burnt* preferred”: 0-0-0-0-1-3-3-1-3-7 (total: 18 mentions), while for “*burnt* only” there is only one mention in 1890. This looks more like a draw. But, of course, one’s reading of a graph is already one’s own interpretation.

during a time period. The only disadvantage in the area-graph depiction of how metalinguistic mentions are distributed is that it makes all correctives look as if they are parts of an authorless complex permissive.

Anderwald draws from several language corpora, but mainly from the Corpus of Historical American English (COHA) and from the Corpus of Nineteenth Century English (CONCE), for American and British English respectively. Data from the Helsinki corpus as well as from ARCHER (A Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers) are drawn mainly from secondary sources. For comparisons with the present-day situation, she also consulted the following corpora: the British National Corpus (BNC), the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), and the Brown family of corpora.

The features investigated in successive chapters (and also in a series of overlapping papers) are: variable past tense forms, the *be*-perfect, the use of the progressive, the progressive passive, and the *get*-passive. Variable tense forms are treated in chapters 3–6. Anderwald accounts for the variation between <a> and <u> in the past tense of verbs such as *sing* and *sling* as well as the variation between strong and weak declension of verbs such as *thrive*, *sneak* and *drag* (Chapter 3; see also Anderwald, 2011; 2012a; 2012b; 2013). Variation between the <t> and the <ed> endings in the past-tense form of verbs such as *dream* (which also changes its stem vowel) and *burn* (which doesn't) are treated in Chapter 4 (cf. Anderwald, 2012a; 2014b). Chapter 5 is devoted to the variation of the perfect auxiliary between *be* and *have*, as in *I am/have arrived*, *The bird is/has flown* (cf. also Anderwald, 2012a; 2014c). In chapter 6, Anderwald turns to the active progressive, which was in the rise in the nineteenth century and most of the grammarians, especially in Britain, were very positive about it, seeing in it a symbol of national superiority (cf. also Anderwald, 2012a; 2016a). Chapter 7 examines the variation between passivals (*The King was dressing*) and the progressive passive (*The King was being dressed*); the latter form was heavily criticized in the grammars of English, while the *get*-passive (e.g., *He got shot*), was only rarely commented on (see also Anderwald, 2012a; 2014a; 2014d).

Although the correctives in nineteenth-century grammars for each of the above linguistic variables seem to form a repertory, Anderwald evaluates the success or the failure of prescriptivism on separate grounds for each variable. Overall, Anderwald does not share the view that prescriptivism had a significant impact on usage. She finds "prescriptive success [to be] on an almost negligible scale". Her analyses, she concludes, "have produced only little evidence of an influence of prescriptive grammar writing on actual language change" (Anderwald, 2016b: 245). In a later reappraisal of prescriptivism's success, Anderwald (2018: 103) maintains that

[m]assive prescriptive criticism can obviously be successful

- on specific text types [...]
- for a short time [...]
- on a small scale [...];
- overall, prescriptivism may halt a decline (of a conservative feature), or slow down an increase (of an innovative feature), but only temporarily. Finally,
- overall a measurable influence is quite rare. In my case studies, it could be detected (with extreme good will) in only 2 out of 11 lexemes, and 2 out of 5 periphrastic constructions.

Anderwald bases her conclusions on “correlations” of grammarians’ judgments with actual language use, as recorded in historical corpora. However, for two characteristics to be correlated it is necessary that they are quantifiable. Obviously, the occurrences of particular variants in historical corpora and, subsequently, the changes in their use over time, are countable; however, which characteristics of the metalanguage corpus should be quantified is an issue that remains unclear. As we have seen, Anderwald and most of the researchers before her count the number of metalinguistic mentions (or non-mentions) in grammars. As pointed out already, treating grammar textbooks as a collective body of texts, makes authored correctives look as if they are part of an authorless collective permissive. Each individual grammar is treated as if providing a yes/no/maybe answer to a proper corrective; but the “sum total” of these answers is an illusion, it occurs in no grammar, and even if it did, it would have the force of a permissive. Clearly, a more adequate measure of the *strength* of the correctives is required. After all, an increase in the number of mentions might be an indication that the correctives remain ineffective. In order to measure the strength of the correctives, one has to take into account how correctives are disseminated and multiplied through a complex network or connections between grammars (Busse, Gather & Kleiber, 2020). One has to take note of the work of intermediaries (writers of usage guides or language-education materials, authors whose literary works have been singled out as exemplary, reviewers, reform implementers, teachers, etc.). Anderwald admits as much: “we also need in-depth comparisons with other prescriptive sources of the time, such as usage guides (cf. Schröder & Busse, 2006), book reviews (in the spirit of Percy, 2009), or newspaper columns” (Anderwald, 2016a: 76).

The studies reviewed so far employ some kind of *descriptive* statistics. The number of occurrences of specific variants in the language corpora as well as the percentages of mentions in the metalanguage corpus are calculated and then displayed side by side. The “correlation” between the language and the

metalinguage corpora is a task assigned to a qualitative analysis. We will now turn our attention to studies which employ *inferential* statistical models in order to reach conclusions about prescriptivism's effects.

3.5 *Hinrichs, Szmrecsanyi & Bohmann (2015)*

In their joint paper (2015), Hinrichs, Szmrecsanyi & Bohmann examine the variation of relativizers in restrictive relative clauses, i.e. the choice between *that* and *which* in subject position (*This is the house ___ caught fire*) and between *that*, *which* and \emptyset in object position (*This is the house ___ Jack built*). Their starting point is that the "alternation among restrictive relativizers in written Standard English is undergoing a massive shift from *which* to *that*". Their aim is to diagnose whether this shift has been "regulated by prescriptivism".

The language corpora used are the four corpora, two for British and two for American English, in the Brown family, covering the period from 1961 to 1992. The authors employed a data extraction algorithm that gave them a total of 16,868 instances of restrictive relative clauses with a non-animate antecedent, 11,130 with the relativizer in subject position and 5,738 in object position.

The authors did not use a well-defined corpus of metalinguistic texts. However, they consulted several usage and style guides that give advice on relativizer choice, such as Strunk & White's *The Elements of Style*, the following excerpt from which inspired the title of their paper:

That is the defining, or restrictive pronoun, *which* the nondefining, or nonrestrictive. [...] The use of *which* for *that* is common in written and spoken language [...]. Occasionally *which* seems preferable to *that* [...]. But it would be a convenience to all if these two pronouns were used with precision. Careful writers, watchful for small conveniences, go *which*-hunting, remove the defining *whiches*, and by so doing improve their work.

STRUNK & WHITE, 1979: 59

Strunk & White's permissive, as Hinrichs, Szmrecsanyi & Bohmann (2015: 810) noted, does not contradict the findings reported in descriptive grammars such as Biber et al. (1999: 615–616, 620–621):

With animate heads, *which* is rare, while *that* is more common, especially in conversation. [...] A more important difference is that *which* commonly occurs with non-restrictive relative clauses [...]. In contrast, *that* rarely occurs with non-restrictive relative clauses. [...] Stylistic association is another important factor, leading to marked register differences.

Which has more conservative, academic associations is thus preferred in academic prose [...]. In contrast, *that* has more informal, colloquial associations and is thus preferred in conversation and most contemporary fiction [...]. [The zero relativizer] has colloquial associations and thus is more common in conversation and fiction than in expository registers. [...] The frequent use of the zero relativizer in news and academic prose is somewhat surprising.

Hinrichs, Szmrecsanyi & Bohmann (2015: 809, 816 ff.) analyzed all 16,868 tokens of restrictive relative clauses in the Brown corpora with respect to more than thirty independent variables, which they called “predictors”. The predictors fall into three categories: “language-internal predictors”, such as the length of the relative clause, “language-external and stylistic predictors”, such as genre or real time, and “prescriptivism-related predictors”; the latter are cases of variation regulated by prescriptivism. There are four prescriptivism predictors: a) stranded prepositions (i.e., ending a sentence with a preposition) as proportion of all prepositions used, b) the frequency of split infinitives (such as *to boldly go*), c) the proportion of verbs in passive vs. active voice) and d) *shall-will* ratio. Correctives for all these “predictors” are very common in usage and style guides (“do not end a sentence with a preposition”, “do not split infinitives”, “avoid passives”, “use *shall* only for first-person subjects”). Thus, the “prescriptivism-related predictors” provide a measure of the propensity to follow any of those correctives given that one follows the permissive restraining the use of the relativizer. In other words, put in our terminology, the “prescriptivism-related predictors” measure the tendency of correctives to form a repertory.

The authors used regression modeling (mixed effects logistic regression; see pp. 820 ff.) to explore the factors that condition relativizer choice. A first model dealt with the factors affecting \emptyset vs. *that/which* in object position and a second model tested the factors affecting *that* vs. *which* in both subject and object positions.

The most important findings are the following (pp. 822 ff.): There is no statistical correlation between choice of \emptyset and any of the prescriptivism predictors, while variation of \emptyset vs. an overt relativizer is also insensitive to “language-external and stylistic predictors”. There is indeed a significant drop in the frequency of *which*-selection between the 1960s and the 1990s, mostly in favor of *that* but also of \emptyset . The choice of *that* is favored mostly in American English. As for genre, it is mostly fiction that favors *that* but not “general or learned prose”, which favors *which*. Of the four “prescriptivism-related predictors”, only two, passives and stranding, correlate significantly with any of the outcomes surveyed, but none of them reaches significance for the prediction of the choice

of Ø: “the choice of zero is simply not affected by prescriptivism”. This is how the authors evaluate the results of their statistical analysis (p. 829):

we have provided circumstantial evidence on the nature of the influence of prescriptive grammar on language use: we are convinced that it does exert a potentially strong influence on the linguistic choices made by actual language users. But rather than spreading evenly as a monolithic force throughout the morphosyntactic system of Standard English, prescriptivism operates at multiple sites at once, and the effects of the various prescriptive rules that we have considered follow trajectories that are quite distinct from one another.

However, contrary to their own categorical statement, the authors seem to suggest that prescriptivism can affect language use only because and only when it runs parallel to a larger stylistic drift, in this case: colloquialization, or more precisely, “colloquialization-cum-Americanization” (pp. 830–831):

the ideas of prescriptive grammarians, handed down through usage guides and the educational systems of the English-speaking world, had the effect of massively reinforcing and accelerating an existing trend in the direction of colloquialization. [...] the increase of *that* in British and American [Standard English] is a case of ‘colloquialization from above’ [a term suggested by Christian Mair].

It could be the case then that prescriptivism (i.e., prescriptive metalinguistic discourse) has simply *followed* a more general trend; that standards have adjusted to this trend rather than the other way around. The authors did not compile a metalanguage corpus in which changes in metalinguistic discourse could be traced. Schröder and Busse (2006), Schaffer (2010) and others who have studied the evolution of English usage guides speak of such a turn towards a milder, liberal prescriptivism, which respects colloquialism and responds to some variation—a prescriptivism which “advocates the informal”; but cf. Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2020: 120 ff.). Such a “colloquial”, more permissive prescriptivism could have affected as well as been affected by the changes in relativizer choice reported in this study.

Be that as it may, Hinrichs, Szmrecsanyi & Bohmann (2015: 806) have stated only too well the predicament of those who set sail to study prescriptivism-mediated change: “that a causal connection between linguistic precepts and observed usage is assumed, but cannot be proven [or ‘proved’], to exist”.

3.6 Poplack (2015)

In this section I concentrate on Poplack's paper "Norme prescriptive, norme communautaire et variation diaphasique" (2015). Several other papers by Poplack and her associates, such as Poplack & Dion (2009), Poplack, Lealess & Dion (2013), Poplack et al. (2015), also explore the issue of "normative injunctions on variant choice"; I could not review them all here in any detail. These papers are the products of collaborative work that has been carried out within an impressive research project run by the Sociolinguistics Laboratory of the University of Ottawa; the project is entitled "Confronting prescription and praxis in the evolution of grammar" (<http://www.sociolinguistics.uottawa.ca/projects/praxis.html>).

Poplack (2015) employs three metalanguage corpora:

a) The corpus called the *Recueil historique des grammaires du français* (Poplack et al., 2015). This corpus contains 163 French grammars published between 1530 and 1998. The publication of the grammars fall into five periods: I. 1500–1699, II. 1700–1799, III. 1800–1899, IV. 1900–1949, V. 1950–1999. The historical analysis of grammars shows considerable *metalinguistic* variation, i.e. there are important changes in the way grammatical phenomena are treated, both synchronically and diachronically. The grammars have been analyzed for the way they treat the variants of several morphosyntactic variables. A discourse analysis of the relevant excerpts brings out differences in terms of stigma, salience, the transparency of the prescriptive rule and the social meaning assigned to the variants. The way metalinguistic comments were classified approximates the categories of correctives postulated in section 2 of the present paper. All "pertinent mentions" to the competing variants were taken into account; non-mentions (correctives by omission) were also accounted for. The rules governing usage were classified into "absolute" (correctives proper) and "conditional" (permissives) (Poplack et al., 2015: 25). Pertinent mentions were categorized in ways revealing of "the preoccupations of grammarians with respect to specific variables and variants" (Poplack et al., 2015: 25). Such preoccupations are the unifying forces of repertoires.

In addition to the *Recueil historique des grammaires du français*, Poplack (2015) also uses the following two *metalanguage* corpora: b) the *Recueil contemporain d'outils pédagogiques pour l'enseignement du français*, a collection of reference works recommended by the Quebec Ministry of Education; and c) a speech corpus representing the teacher norm.

Poplack (2015) also uses three *language* corpora: a) *Le français en contexte: milieux scolaire et social* is a speech corpus that contains recordings of senior high school students in three registers: the *vernacular*, which corresponds to spontaneous everyday conversations collected at home or in other informal set-

tings; *informal school* speech, collected during informal interactions at school (e.g. during breaks); and a register called *hyperformel*, which contains samples of the speech of students during their final examinations in language. b) The *Corpus du français parlé à Ottawa-Hull* contains recordings of spontaneous speech of the 1980s and corresponds to the community norm (*la norme d'usage communautaire*). c) Finally, the corpus *Récits du français québécois d'autrefois* contains audio recordings of the 1940s and 1950s and corresponds to an older phase of the community norm.

Poplack (2015) takes into consideration a whole repertory of permissives conditioning usage in *français québécois*. The following linguistic variables were investigated in all three metalanguage and all three language corpora: 1. the use of the subjunctive vs. the indicative; 2. the variable forms of future tense ('synthetic': using the future tense form; 'periphrastic' ['futur proche']: using the construction *aller* + V; and using the present tense form with future meaning); 3. the variable forms of negation (*ne* + a negative marker such as *pas*, *jamais*, *personne*, *aucun*, etc. vs. negative constructions with *ne* omitted); 4. possessives (*à* vs. *de*; according to the prescriptive rule, *à* should only appear before a personal pronoun); and 5. the use of *si* + *conditionnel* vs. *si* + the imperfect (the former construction being stigmatized in prescriptive grammars).

It should be pointed out that this is only a rough description of the linguistic variables considered—more precisely: of the metalinguistic *mentions* of linguistic variables. It is not uncommon for prescriptive grammars of French to treat each variable as a complex permissive, distinguishing several subcategories and nuances of meaning and function, real or imaginary; for example, Poplack finds in prescriptive grammars 619 "governors" that demand the use of the subjunctive, while at least 76 gradations of meaning were attested. This is an enormous number of distinctions. They were all taken into account in the analysis of the language corpora, which were also tested for social and stylistic stratification. The main hypothesis, in its most general formulation, was that prescriptivism, backed by a strong teacher's norm, would outweigh the attraction of the vernacular variants that are predominant in the community norm (Poplack, 2015: 315).

But this hypothesis was not confirmed. Poplack employed multivariate analysis and variable rule analysis for testing the significance of the results, the most important of which can be summarized as follows: There is no uptake on the prescriptive rules regulating the use of the subjunctive and the future, whether by the community, by the pupils, or, more surprisingly, by the teachers. Preference for the subjunctive is attested for only 4 out of the 619 governors that "demand" it. The 'synthetic' future only occurs in negative constructions. (p. 315). With regard to possessives and negation, the students favor the stan-

dard variants in the school context, as it would be expected of them. Nevertheless, the students do not follow the rule that prescribes the use of the imperfect in *si*-clauses, not even in the 'hyperformal' register. Teachers, for their part, use much more often *ne* (the standard variant) and much less *à* (the vernacular variant) compared to the community norm. With regard to all five variables, Poplack (2015: 316) concludes that

neither the type of prescriptive rule, nor the degree of prescriptive stigma assigned to variants, nor the power of the teachers' norm, nor even the risk of failing their exams make it possible to predict with any certainty the usage of the students.

What is it then that accounts for students' and—to a certain degree—teachers' usage? Poplack's analysis of the linguistic data reveals that speech is governed by a powerful set of tacit variable constraints, which remain beyond the grasp of prescriptivists:

The evidence we have presented concerning the *conditioning* of variants, i.e. the underlying grammar of variability, reinforces our firm conviction that it is the community standard that prevails over all other influences.

POPLACK, 2015: 317

Other studies within the project "Confronting prescription and praxis in the evolution of grammar" have concentrated on the same or different variables, and they have come up with similar results; see Poplack & Dion (2009) for future tense variants; Poplack, Lealess & Dion (2013) for the subjunctive; Poplack et al. (2015) for references to other studies. Poplack & Dion (2009: 581) also stress the failure of prescriptive grammarians to condition variation (concerning future forms in French) in the ways their permissives prescribe: "It follows that the normative tradition wields little authority over the spoken language"; cf. Poplack et al. (2015: 49): "prescriptive injunctions have had little if any effect on usage that we have been able to detect".

I can only speak with admiration for the work done by Shana Poplack and her associates. Their studies employ multiple corpora, of both written and oral "texts"; they are not limited to a single corrective, but rather exhaust the whole repertory into which correctives belong; they use inferential statistics in order to "measure" the effects (or, as it turns out, the non-effects or the *limited* effects) of prescriptivism "in apparent time". Above all, they are written with a critical but non-polemical spirit which, to my view, represents the best tradition of sociolinguistic scholarship.

4 Comparisons

In section 2 of this paper, I introduced the notion of correctives in order to define prescriptivism in a precise and, certainly, non-dismissive way. Correctives were defined as the elementary units of prescriptivism. They can be studied on a par with the linguistic variables they prescribe. They can be quantified and used for “measuring” prescriptivism’s characteristics, its spread, and, possibly, its effects. Correctives are performatives, not true/false statements; they have a metalanguage-to-language direction of fit through which they exercise whatever influence they have on language. A performative theory of prescriptivism cannot predict the precise factors at play in particular historical occasions; it does predict, however, that the success or failure of at least some prescriptions can be accounted for by pragmatic factors.

The theory of correctives has helped us present in a unified manner the relevant literature on the effectiveness of prescriptivism. We have concentrated on corpus-linguistic approaches, and, more specifically, on studies which do not simply narrate the undertakings and the achievements of prescriptivists but rather try to *prove* whether attested changes in language use can be at all attributed to the influence of prescriptivists. We have elucidated the reasoning of the relevant studies and detected some of their pitfalls. We are now in a position to answer the questions we posed at the end of the Introduction concerning prescriptivism’s effects on language change.

4.1 *What counts as prescriptive*

Given that the relevant studies aim at “quantifying” prescriptivism, the lack of precise, operational definitions of what constitutes a prescriptive metalinguistic act is rather surprising. The researchers speak indiscriminately of “prescription” or “proscription”, of prescriptive or proscriptive or normative “statements”, of metalinguistic “comments”, of “advice”, of prescriptive “injunctions”, of “norms” or “prescriptive norms”, of “acceptable”, “preferred”, “favored”, or “unacceptable” and “rejected” forms or uses.

We have seen that most of the corpus-linguistic studies reviewed in section 3 do not differentiate between the two types of correctives (correctives proper and permissives). There seems to be some difference in the usage of the terms ‘prescriptive’ and ‘proscriptive’, corresponding roughly to the difference between ‘permissive’ and ‘corrective proper’, but no precise definition is to be found in the works that hint at such a distinction. However, it seems that almost all of the studies reviewed—with the possible exception of Langer (2001)—concentrate on permissives rather than correctives proper. Certainly, the difference between a corrective proper and a permissive signals a difference

in attitude.¹⁶ The uptake of a corrective might be affected by its type, correctives proper being more straightforward and, perhaps, more “powerful” than permissives.

Permissives have an elusive character. They can be easily confused with constatives. One should be constantly reminded that the illocutionary force of permissives is that of prescriptive, not of assertive, acts. For this reason, the scarcity of unconditional permissives in both prescriptive and descriptive grammars should not surprise us. There is a strong tendency on the part of the grammarians to functionalize variation. Descriptive grammars of the functional type are assumed to do just that: account for variation by assigning different functions to variants, according to the doctrine of ‘form-function symmetry’ which would assign to each form a different function (Poplack, van Herk & Harvie, 2002: 88–89; Poplack & Dion 2009: 557; Poplack, Lealess & Dion 2013: 189). Permissives are also subject to this doctrine. The huge number of “governors” and “meaning gradations” (i.e., conditions, both morphological and semantic, on specific forms) in the permissives discussed by Poplack (2015) reveals an extreme case of prescriptivism that places increased demands on language users; and, as a result, it fails.

Typically, even if they do not explicitly state that one variant is preferred over the other, permissives may still *imply*, especially in the context of traditional grammars, that one or the other variant is the preferred one: permissives are conditional either explicitly or by implication. Cross-categorization is also possible; as we have seen, a permissive can be easily turned into a corrective proper, by stating that the condition for a variant to occur has been violated.

The explicative parts of correctives, which might also signal a difference in attitude, have likewise not been the subject of systematic research. Although particular “prescriptions” or “proscriptions” are analyzed quantitatively in most of the studies considered, their metalinguistic explanations (the explicative parts of correctives) have only been subjected to qualitative analyses and intuitive interpretations. To be fair, all of the studies compared in the previous section offer some insight into the ideological presuppositions that lay hidden behind specific prescriptions; see, e.g., Langer (2001: 134 ff.) on the “syntac-

16 I have employed this distinction in order to delineate different phases in the standardization of Modern Greek; Moschonas (2019) shows how the quite “permissive” attitude of Triantaphyllidis et al. (1941), a seminal grammar that set the norm for Standard Modern Greek, came to be understood as descriptive rather than prescriptive, despite the fact that a series of school grammars and subsequent usage guides originating from this seminal work employed a much more “corrective”—i.e., proscriptive—attitude.

tic stigmatization by prescriptive grammarians", Anderwald (2016b, 246–248) on the "underlying premises of prescriptivism", or Poplack et al. (2015: 35–43) on "the prescriptive strategies for factoring out variability". I would agree with Anderwald (2016b: 246) that the 'form-function symmetry'¹⁷ is the most notable doctrine "that recurs across grammars and across time"; it is a doctrine that prescriptivism openly or tacitly endorses. Its importance, I would add, lies in the fact that this very same doctrine is also espoused by descriptive, functional approaches to language.

Finally, the construction of a rich metalinguistic corpus is subject to a limitation that is inherent to the corpus-linguistic approach, namely that only what's *in* a corpus, only what has become explicit through metalanguage, can be brought under study. Elliptical correctives, and especially correctives by omission, do not manifest themselves fully, they are never completely entextualized. We singled out Havinga (2018) as a study of prescriptivism that deals systematically with variants that are not talked about in metalinguistic discourse and have become "invisible". Langer (2001: 221) tasked himself with "resolving the mystery of the missing *tun*", i.e. why the most influential grammars of the early seventeenth century contain no mention of *tun*. Anderwald (2016b: 92, 115; 2018: 92) also provides examples of "proscription by omission".

4.2 *Variation in the Metalanguage*

All the studies reviewed treat variation at the usage level. Yet variation is observed not only in the prescribed language but also in the prescribing metalanguage.

Let's recall the types of metalinguistic variation that the relevant studies take into account. Anderwald (2016b: 246) notices in her corpus of metalinguistic texts

that criticism of phenomena undergoing language change was not categorical, that individual grammars were not consistently critical, that criticism rose and fell over time, and that different national schools of grammar writing evolved over the course of the nineteenth century.

Poplack et al. (2015: 21) also stress the existence of considerable metalinguistic variation in their *Recueil historique des grammaires du français* (RHGF):

¹⁷ Anderwald (2016b: 246), following Zwicky (2009), prefers to call this doctrine 'the principle of one right way'.

Inevitably, some RHGF grammars adopt a more prescriptive stance, others are more descriptive, and some [later] grammars are even somewhat informed by linguistic theorizing. Likewise, some may target foreign learners while others are directed more towards native speakers. A single grammar may incorporate a variety of perspectives; indeed, even the author's avowed aims for his[/her] own work may not correspond to the content.

Auer examined 71 eighteenth-century grammars, some written by “early grammarians”, others by the “most influential” grammarians, by “specialists”, by “radical” grammarians, or by female grammarians (Auer, 2009: 28–47), and found “a great variety of accounts of the subjunctive with respect to morphology, syntax and semantics”. Langer (2001: 176–213), as we have seen, detected three distinct stages in the stigmatization of *tun*, which suggests an aggravation of prescriptivism as it extends to successive registers. Havinga (2018) reports not only changes in the usage patterns of the variants she considers but also a clear *shift* in the way variants are prescribed (a shift marked by the publication of Gottsched's grammar and consolidated with Felbiger's school reform). Only Hinrichs, Szmrecsanyi & Bohmann (2015) seem to deal with the stock examples of a fossilized prescriptivism, characteristic perhaps of 20th century English usage guides.

It seems that in order to account for metalinguistic variation, one has to take into account *prescriptivism types*, i.e. features that are common to a whole group of correctives. One could certainly distinguish a (more) *proscriptive* from a (more) *permissive* type of prescriptivism, depending on the types of correctives (correctives proper or permissives) that form the majority in each case. The studies reviewed in this paper (with the possible exception of Langer, 2001) seem to deal mainly with *permissive types of prescriptivism*.

Other types of prescriptivism could also be associated with distinct patterns of metalinguistic variation. A mild and relatively *stable prescriptivism* with minimal variation across metalinguistic texts, prescriptive writers and time—a unanimous prescriptivism, so to speak—is a possibility, which, however, could only be contemplated as a limiting case. There are situations and linguistic communities in which prescriptivisms *compete* fiercely and their supporters are divided into camps under different ideological flags. And there are periods of *metalinguistic shifts*, when a newer prescriptivism becomes dominant and new groups of professionals acquire authority over linguistic matters. The period of the Greek Language Question, with its two antagonistic standards, *katharevousa* (the high-variety standard) and *demotic* (the vernacular standard), provides a clear example of competing prescriptivisms; the subsequent

resolution of the diglossia situation in Greece, with an administrative and educational reform which abandoned *katharevousa* and established *demotic* as the official language of the Greek state in 1976 (Horrocks, 2010: 438–470; Mackridge, 2009), is also a case of a *metalinguistic shift*.

To go back to the studies under review: Maria Theresa's 1774 school reform (implemented by Felbiger), also marks, according to Havinga (2018), a shift towards a standard-to-be (modeled after High German). But none of the other works reviewed here report on competing prescriptivisms or on any major shifts in the metalinguistic discourse: no major fights, no ideological battles, no critical events are recounted. The studies considered do account for some metalinguistic variation, yet they seem to implicate or presuppose that the most common and the most Platonic type of prescriptivism is a relatively stable and invariable one, a prescriptivism which, once established, continues to exercise its influence uninterrupted. This is a supposition one should be skeptical about, an invariable metalanguage being as inconceivable as a language without variation.¹⁸

Variation in the metalanguage might be an indicator of active virus rules (Nicholas Sobin), of zombie rules (Arnold Zwicky), or even of parallel grammars (Anthony Kroch); or it might be an indicator of separate and perhaps competing repertoires; of prescriptivism following diverging paths; of differing ideologies about the “directionality of standardization” (Joseph, Rutten & Vosters, 2020: 173–174). To find out, we need to examine metalinguistic variation within and across repertoires, i.e. classes of correctives which, perhaps, conform to more general principles, are guided by similar motives, and prevail, retreat, or compete, for a certain period of time, within a community of language professionals.

4.3 *Repertoires*

Auer's (2009) study is about a single grammatical “phenomenon” or “category”, the subjunctive, whose place, however, within the systems of English and German moods is not left unexplored (Auer, 2009: 17–26, 88–92). Anderwald (2016b; also in a series of related papers) surveys almost the whole system of English verb forms and constructions that relate to the weak-strong/regular-irregular dimension, also accounting for the *be*-perfect and various construc-

18 That prescriptivism is relatively invariant is perhaps a prejudice that stems from the fact that it is mainly the 20th century English prescriptivism that has attracted the attention of (English) critical sociolinguistics; or it might be a presupposition of the two-corpora design, which, in its standard application, requires that the metalinguistic corpus be completed *before* any change is detected in the language corpus (the “time-lag” constraint).

tions with the progressive. Poplack (2015), Poplack & Dion (2009), Poplack et al. (2015) consider representative “phenomena” from various grammatical systems of French (with emphasis on the verbal morpho-syntax). Yet, despite the fact in none of these studies are the correctives—and the linguistic variables corresponding to them—examined in isolation, the results concerning the effects of the correctives are always presented and evaluated individually.

As we have seen, Langer (2001: 9) provides a rationale for treating correctives on an individual basis; although he compares the stigmatization of *tun* with similar processes affecting polynegation and the double perfect, the three constructions do not seem to form a repertory; they are brought together for the purpose of analogy as a step in a complex argument that seeks to eliminate possibilities unrelated to prescriptivism.

In a similar manner, Hinrichs, Szmrecsanyi & Bohmann (2015) focus on restrictive relativizers, but they also explore four more “prescriptivism-related predictors” (stranding, split infinitives, passives, *shall-will* alternation). The researchers claim that some of the predictors “are quite old”, while others “were added to the prescriptive core fairly recently” (Hinrichs, Szmrecsanyi & Bohmann, 2015: 807). The predictors are treated differently from the focus category: while the relativizer is the dependent variable, the predictors are handled as independent ones. The predictors that correlate with the focus category could then be considered to form a “repertory”. As we saw above, of the four predictors, two (stranding and passives) were found to correlate with relativizers. But this was a correlation in use, in the language, not in the metalanguage. So, it remains unclear whether the “prescriptive core” forms a repertory in the sense of a group of co-occurring correctives recurring in a metalinguistic corpus (the authors, we should be reminded, did not use a metalinguistic corpus).

Finally, each corrective in Havinga’s (2018) study deals with a different grammatical category, yet together they seem to form a repertory—or a representative *sample* of a repertory—, at least in the sense that a) the preferred variants are the ones recommended by most grammarians after Gottsched; and b) their being used consistently in the school primers is the result of conscious planning (Felbiger’s school reform). What seems to keep Havinga’s correctives together is that they recommend variants that are contrasted to what has become ostensibly absent, i.e. the invisible, dispreferred variants that are ideologically associated with spoken Austrian German.

It seems then that most of the studies we have reviewed concentrate on a series of correctives—and linguistic variables—each of which is treated independently of the rest—i.e., independently of the repertory it probably belongs to. Because they employ representative samples of grammatical phenomena, the studies by Poplack et al., by Anderwald, and by Havinga come the closest

to researching whole repertoires. Anderwald's use of area graphs to measure the "strength" of prescriptivism could also be used to establish correlations between correctives; the correlations are expected to be higher among correctives that belong to the same repertoire.

Finally, it should be pointed out that, despite the fact that most of the studies reviewed here deal with individual correctives which are explored independently of their repertoires, none of the studies refrains from conferring judgement on the success or the failure of prescriptivism in general.

Repertoires are suggestive of standardization trends. One must know the repertoires that prevail during a certain period before one can ask whether the metalinguistic trends correlate in any way with actual usage trends.

4.4 *Usage Trends*

Is a corrective more successful when it follows a usage trend and less successful when running against it? If the former, then its success should not be overestimated; if the latter, then even a partial success in reversing a trend constitutes significant evidence for the strength of prescriptivism. Hinrichs, Szmrecsanyi and Bohmann (2015) proclaim the success of prescriptivism which follows or runs parallel to a trend such as colloquialization; such a success should not be overestimated. On the other hand, Poplack and her associates stress the complete dissociation of prescriptive norms from community norms; again, the failure of prescriptivism in this case should not be overrated either.

Most of the studies reviewed in section 3 deal with persistent but relatively mild cases of prescriptivism. In contrast, Havinga (2018) takes into consideration the effects of a language reform, i.e. of a systematic attempt by a government to change language practices through its educational mechanisms. As we saw, the language reform was marked by a metalinguistic shift, i.e. a methodical change in standards; and it introduced new usage patterns on a mass scale. Language reforms should not be dismissed as collective delusions. They are quite common in "comparative standardology" (Joseph, 1987: 13–16; Auer, 2009: 11–14). The 1976 language reform in Greece (mentioned above) is another case at hand.

4.5 *Speech vs. Written Corpora*

Apart from the works by Poplack and her associates, the studies reviewed in this paper have tested prescriptivism against historical corpora consisting mainly, if not exclusively, of *written* texts. In so doing the researchers have reproduced the written-language bias for which prescriptivism is famous. A language corpus consisting mainly of written texts could, of course, be justified on the ground that it is mainly the written language that is the target of prescriptivism. But this

answer begs the question whether prescriptivism has any far-reaching influence on language in general. To answer this question, speech corpora need to be consulted. Testing for the effects of prescriptivism only on written corpora could also be blamed for circularity, since written language is, by definition, the product of prescription.

4.6 *Inference*

Schleef (2003: 73) points out in a review of Langer (2001) that

at no point in the book is the reader confronted with sound statistical correlations between language use and metalinguistic comments. Langer does not prove cause and effect; he tries to rule out other factors to reach his conclusion.

Schleef did not reveal what he meant by “sound statistical correlations”. In the majority of the studies reviewed here (Auer, 2009; Langer, 2001; Havinga, 2018; Anderwald, 2016b) some kind of descriptive statistics is employed which allows the researchers to speak vaguely of having “correlated” the metalanguage corpus with the language corpus. However, correlation is a notion that belongs to *inferential* statistics. Inferential statistics require modeling and testing the results for significance. But even in descriptive statistics, the characteristics to be “correlated” have to be both quantifiable. We saw that this is not always the case; the features of the metalinguistic corpus are rarely quantified.

Anderwald speaks of “deducing a causal relation from a temporal correlation” (2016b: 118) and of “a temporal correlation [being] a prerequisite for a causal relation” (2016b: 234). In the two-corpora design, there should indeed be a “time lag” between the metalanguage and the language corpora, as Auer has pointed out. But a time lag is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for establishing a causal relation. The *post hoc ergo propter hoc* is a well-known fallacy in logic. In order to prove the success or the failure of prescriptivism, it has to be shown additionally that the change detected in the language corpus is not due to any other factors, that other possibilities are excluded, that the change in question could not have occurred otherwise. In other words, it needs to be shown that language change would not have occurred without exposure to prescriptivism, standards, ideologies, institutions, media—a counterfactual condition.

Perhaps Schleef (2003) got it all wrong: perhaps the only way prescriptivism could be proved effective is by excluding all other possibilities. But then—unless, of course, all possibilities have been exhausted—the reasoning behind large-scale corpus-driven quantitative studies will be subject to the so-called

“false dilemma fallacy”. There might be a causal factor other than prescriptivism which has escaped the attention of the researcher.

5 A Tentative Conclusion

Is prescriptivism successful? Can we detect with any certainty the consequences of prescriptive instructions for language change?

One is tempted to interpret the results of the relevant studies jointly as indicating a *limited* effect of prescriptivism on language change. I am well aware, however, that this statement is equivocal: it can be interpreted to mean that prescriptivism is indeed successful, if only to a limited degree; but it can also be taken to imply that prescriptivism fails, because its effects are limited.

One is not entitled to interpret the results of the reviewed studies in an additive manner. We simply cannot lump together cases from different languages, different linguistic communities and different periods in order to come up with a generalization concerning prescriptivism's overall effect. There are, as we have seen, both theoretical and practical difficulties in isolating and quantifying the (internal and external) factors which interact, create variation and determine language change. We are left then with the, admittedly, not very helpful idea that prescriptivism is successful when it succeeds and unsuccessful when it fails.

But one does not have to be unequivocal about the success or the failure of prescriptivism. One can maintain a more reserved position. To paraphrase Anderwald (2018: 103): prescriptivism can only or mainly affect writing rather than speech; it can remain effective only as long as it is kept alive by a group of devoted *literati*; and its effects are reversible.

Standardization is the conduit of corrective instructions, carried over by the literate members of a society to aspiring new members. Having identified prescriptivism through repertoires of correctives, and having recognized the role or prescriptive repertoires in the definition—pragmatic and metapragmatic—of a standard language, we can now start thinking of a standard language as a superposed variety, which has to be learnt gradually after language acquisition and has to be re-learnt by each new generation of speakers—or, rather, of speakers becoming writers. Then, absolutely compatible with such a scenario, emerges the image of a prescriptivism that succeeds and fails and succeeds again, a Sisyphean prescriptivism, which could be studied in apparent time.

But this is the aim of another paper.

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