

Anna D. Havinga: Invisibilising Austrian German

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Invisibilising Austrian German. On the Effect of Linguistic Prescriptions and Educational Reforms on Writing Practices in 18th-Century Austria, by Anna D. Havinga, de Gruyter, Berlin/Boston, 2018, ISBN 978-3-11-054629-3, XVI + 256 pages, €99,95 / \$114.99.

The influence of prescriptivism on language, its effects on language change, the force it acquires in the process of a language's standardisation, are more often than not taken for granted. It is not only prescriptivists who believe strongly in the power of prescriptivism. Those who study prescriptivism, i.e. theorists of standardisation or historians who concentrate on a language's "external history", also seem to take prescriptivism very seriously; they would not deny a prescriptivist's most elementary presupposition: the faith in oneself. No matter how harshly prescriptivism is judged when contraposed to descriptive linguistics, most linguists would not question its effectiveness.

The documentation of case studies and the development of techniques which could prove or disprove prescriptivism is, I would think, a relatively new trend in historical sociolinguistics. To Havinga's *Invisibilising Austrian German* one could readily cite this precedent: Langer (2001) on the stigmatisation of auxiliary *tun*. Nils Langer was Havinga's supervisor; the book under review is a revised version of Havinga's thesis. The two have also joined forces in editing Havinga & Langer (2015), a volume which launched a wider project on invisible languages, under-the-radar varieties, and silenced variants. Of this wider project, Havinga's book forms a natural part. Havinga herself contributed to Havinga & Langer (2015) an early and partial version of her thesis: Havinga (2015); see also Havinga (2016).

Anita Auer (2006; 2009), with her work on the development of the subjunctive in English and German, has also set another precedent. Auer did not just compose a state of the art review of the then available literature; she did not just provide a well-documented comparative study of English and German prescriptivism; she also helped codify the procedure which we may now call "the corpus-driven approach to testing prescriptivism's effects", a procedure also followed by Havinga. Langer and Auer were Havinga's immediate precursors. Of course, there were others before them (Auer elaborated on models by Marek Konopka, 1996, *et. al.*). And others were to come. In the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Historical Sociolinguistics*, Poplack, Jarmasz, Dion and Rosen (2015) published a multiple-corpora study of Standard Canadian French. One cannot help but be impressed by the sheer magnitude and the intricate methodology of their project; still, a project within the corpus-driven approach. Anderwald's (2016) comprehensive study of nineteenth-century English prescriptivism also belongs to this tradition.

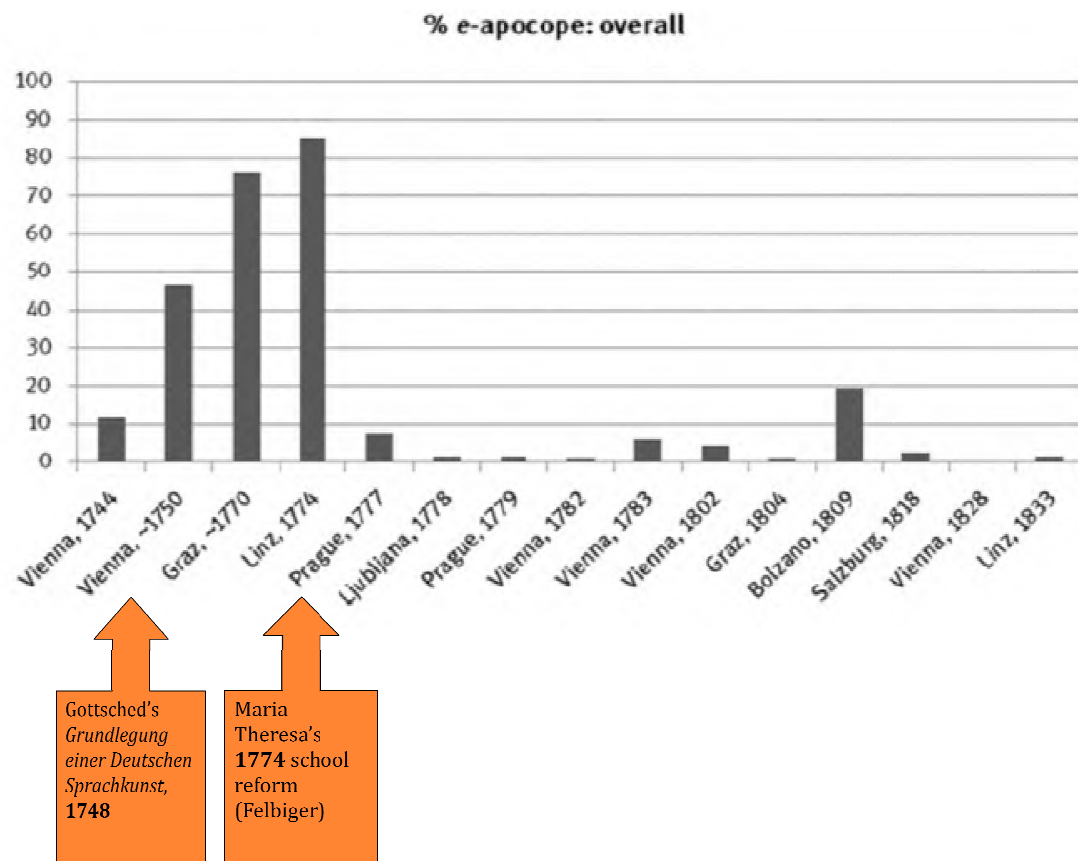
The corpus-driven approach to testing prescriptivism's effects is reviewed and explained in Auer (2006). First, a linguistic feature or a "phenomenon" – a linguistic variable – is selected from within what Auer calls a "precept" corpus, which consists of metalinguistic texts (such as prescriptive grammars or usage guides) published over a certain period of time. Then a historical corpus of the language – the "usage" corpus – is analysed with the aim of detecting differences in the prescribed usage *after* the period of the "precept" corpus. If,

let's say, the percentages in the use of a proscribed variant have decreased significantly, then the decrease could be attributed to the influence of prescription – provided there is no better explanation.

We can now see how Havinga's study fits into this design. 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 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 precept corpus consists of grammars written by 18th-century grammarians, namely the five *Johanns*: Johann Balthasar von Antesperg, Johann Christoph Gottsched, Johann Siegmund Valentin Popowitsch, Johann Ignaz von Felbiger, and Johann Christoph Adelung. The usage corpora in which the trends concerning those 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; *ex hypothesi*, to each type of text, prescriptivism has differential access, with its access decreasing in the less formal text types.

Havinga's main results can be summarised as follows: overall, *e*-apocope in feminine and plural nouns and the verb form *seynd* disappear from formal genres in the second half of the 18th 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-18th century.

To see how Havinga's study fits into the cadre of the corpus driven approach (as codified by Auer and others), one can consult the example in the following diagram (adapted from Havinga 2015; also on p. 120 of the book under review). The graph shows the trend in *e*-apocope in reading primers. After 1774, the use of the ending *-e* increased significantly, which led to the almost complete replacement of this East Upper German characteristic by the preferred forms with the "Lutheran *-e*". The change in usage patterns can be attributed to at least two events, which are accounted for by the precept corpus: the publication in 1748 of *Grundlegung einer Deutschen Sprachkunst* by Gottsched (the authority on German in the second half of the 18th century) and Maria Theresa's 1774 school reform (implemented mainly by Felbiger), a reform which introduced Gottsched's norms in public schools. Let us just keep in mind that the change in usage is pretty straightforward in the case of school primers, since they themselves could be considered "precept" texts; it is not as straightforward in the other two corpora of newspapers and of petitionary letters, as it should be expected.



Indeed, the changes in usage originating in reading primers seem to spread through the other two corpora, although in varying degrees. Havinga studied the newspaper *Wienerisches Diarium*/*Wiener Zeitung* for the three variables in question, in order to evaluate the role that newspapers played in the selection and dissemination of language norms. This newspaper had adopted the final -e in plural forms before it was prescribed by contemporary 18th-century grammarians. Following the general trend, the use of dative -e was, however, less consistent in the newspaper corpus, with a qualitative analysis revealing preferences being associated with individual correspondents. 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 (Havinga 2019). Finally, petitionary letters are employed in Havinga's study as a "control" case; they provide a measure of whether the reform has reached the "general public", and they also document changes from below; they record the "audibility" of an invisible language, its ability to penetrate into mediated and prescribed written discourse.

I wouldn't have done justice to Havinga's original and sophisticated research were I to restrict myself to just showing how Havinga's study fits an already established design. Havinga's book contains also: a methodological preamble which centres on the balance between standardisation from below vs. standardisation from above; a comprehensive introduction to the German and Austrian standardisations; a comparative analysis of 18th-century prescriptive grammars; an eloquent recounting of Maria Theresa's school reform; a discussion of journalism's role in the consolidation of a standard (cf. Havinga 2019).

All these subjects are organised wisely into successive chapters. The introduction discusses the methodological issue of how to deal with prescriptivism within historical sociolinguistics, especially concerning varieties which have remained invisible not only in formal genres and registers but also to modern-day researchers. It clarifies the objectives of the study and provides an overview of the research's purpose, methods and conclusions. Chapter 2 gives a very comprehensive account of "Language, Enlightenment and education in 18th-century Austria". Chapter 3 presents the five grammarians' norm prescriptions with respect to the variables in question (*e*-apocope, *sind/seyn(d/t)* forms, past participles); the chapter has a completely symmetric structure: each of the five sections devoted to each grammarian is divided into three subsections, one for each variable, thus forming, so to speak, a 5X3 table. The structure is informative, allows for comparisons, while at the same time facilitates reading.

The changes in usage are attributed not only to the normative work of 18th-century grammarians, but also to the implementation of Maria Theresa's educational reform of 1774. Chapter 4, the biggest in the book (pp. 95–222), begins by describing the main actors and dates in the Empress's school reform and then presents the results of the research on each of the three corpora (reading primers, newspapers, petitionary letters) for each of the three variables. Again, the chapter has a completely symmetric organisation which allows for going back-and-forth and helps display similarities and differences. Despite – or because of? – the table-like organisation of its main chapters, the book reads easily, like a story narrated with as much detail as is necessary for keeping the reader's interest. Each chapter builds on the one preceding it while gradually leading to a climax (Conclusions). Havinga's lucid and engaging style has contributed to the book's readability. She might have the researcher's obsessive preoccupation with order; but she also knows how to tell a story (a major qualification for a historical linguist, I would say).

The originality of Havinga's research is not limited to the improvements she makes to an existing research design. Unlike other corpus-driven studies of prescriptivism, Havinga considers multiple variables in multiple corpora, which have been selected so as to capture different phases in the dissemination of grammatical norms. The research allows for a time lag (Auer 2006: 48; 2009: 71) between the precept and usage corpora under the hypothesis that prescriptivism follows, roughly, the path from metalinguistic texts to linguistic ones: from prescriptive grammars to educational materials (reading primers), mediating texts (newspapers), and texts of mediated literacy (petitionary letters).

The book's originality lies in the author's selection of variants that have been *erased* (Irvine & Gal 2000) from language ideologies and perhaps also from the linguists' consciousness. The denial of variation and the privileging of the standard written form characterise the prescriptive and the "descriptive" discourse alike. Havinga confronts the task of having to talk about what is not talked about, of recording what has passed unnoticed, of bringing to the fore the invisible. A discourse analysis is required of what is not in discourse. Let me first try to explain this paradoxical task.

The typical corrective instruction in prescriptive metalinguistic texts tends to have the canonical form 'you should not say or write *this*; you should say or write *that* instead' ('do

say/write X, do not say/write Y'). Alternatively, prescriptive instructions sometimes take the form 'you can say *this* or *that* under such and such conditions' ('do say/write X under condition C₁ and Y under condition C₂'). Let us call the instructions of the former type *correctives* and the instructions of the latter type *permissives*. Of the works we mentioned in this review, correctives (i.e. instructions with a strong proscriptive part) are the subject of Langer (2001); permissives are the subject of Poplack *et al.* (2015). The variables considered by Havinga do not fall neatly in either category: *e*-apocope and the *seynd/t* forms were only accepted by Antesperg, while the *ge*-prefix of past participles was considered to be compulsory by all five grammarians. The grammarians who allow both *-t/-et* endings for past participles seem to heavily restrict their use through complex permissives; e.g., Adelung accepts ending *-t* in active ind., while prescribing *-et* in active subj., inf., and passive as well as in higher registers (cf. Havinga's Table 7 on p. 95). We could assume that corrective instructions tend to be more effective than permissive ones. We may also assume that, in time, correctives that had been infelicitous turned into permissives. Or, following Poplack *et al.*, we could altogether dismiss the prescriptivist's claim that he or she can condition language variation together with the descriptivist's claim that he or she can differentially describe it.

Whether correctives are more powerful than permissives is a subject for investigation. There is, nevertheless, something that both correctives and permissives have in common. The instruction to replace X by Y or to condition X away from the usage pattern of Y has the disadvantage that it brings to the attention of the speakers and writers so instructed the very variant that has fallen into disfavour. This is paradoxical enough; it implies that, in a way, prescriptive instruction is self-destructive: in order to erase X, X has to become salient. But what if X, the disfavoured variant, is not mentioned at all, what if it is implicit or absent from metalinguistic discourse? Could its absence from the precept corpus account for its absence in the usage corpus? This, I think, is the major issue that Havinga had to deal with. It is at the same time a methodological and an empirical issue. The empirical issue is the disappearance of Austrian German from the written and public domain, its becoming indistinguishable from the visible variety. But the methodological issue is much more complicated and Havinga faces it right from the beginning: "not everything that was language use was written down, not everything that was written down was considered worthy of preservation at the time of writing and not everything that was meant to be preserved was retained to the present-day. Historical linguists need to make do with what survives but historical sociolinguists are also tasked with trying to work out what did not survive or was never written down in the first place" (p. 1 of the Introduction).

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Overall, the study under reviews inherits, revises and improves upon the received paradigm of corpus-driven approaches to the study of prescriptivism. It is a most-welcome addition to a relatively new field of historical sociolinguistics that undertakes to prove or disprove prescriptivism's effects with the use of precise quantitative and qualitative tools (it is only unfortunate that Havinga does not provide tests of statistical significance for the many results she presents in Chapter 3). Havinga's monograph could serve as a guide for studying other invisible variants and varieties in other domains (Havinga & Langer 2015). It

contributes 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). The shift requires reflexive awareness, it forces the sociolinguist to confront what she or he is not even aware of. And this, dealing with one's own deep-seated beliefs and misconceptions, is certainly the most difficult step in the descriptive approach to prescriptivism.

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