LANGUAGE AND VALUE

THE PLACE OF EVALUATION IN LINGUISTIC THEORY

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Abstract

It is a central claim of modern linguistic theory that linguists do not prescribe, but describe language as it is, without pronouncing on correctness or judging one variety better than another. This attempt to exclude evaluation is motivated by a desire to be 'politically correct', which hinders objective analysis of language, and by an ill-advised imitation of the natural sciences, which obstructs the discipline's progress towards becoming a science in its own right. It involves linguists, as users of a valued variety, in self-deception and disingenuousness, distances them from the concerns of the ordinary language user, and betrays a failure to understand the involvement of social values in language, the nature of language itself, and the limits of linguistic science. On a wider scale, linguistics reflects society's devaluing and mechanisation of language. Despite growing concern expressed in the literature, and the incoherence that becomes apparent when linguists attempt to address social problems using a theory that regards language as an autonomous object, newcomers to the discipline continue to be taught that anti-prescriptivism is the natural corollary of a scientific approach to language.

This thesis suggests that the way out of these difficulties is to rethink the meaning of 'theory' in linguistics. If we take the reflexivity of language seriously, building on M.A.K. Halliday's notion of 'linguistics as metaphor', we are reminded that a linguistic theory is made of language. Metalanguage must use the experiential and interpersonal meaning-making resources of everyday language. It follows that a linguistic theory cannot escape being evaluative, because evaluation is an inherent part of interpersonal meaning. If we fail to notice our own metalinguistic evaluation, this is because language disguises its evaluative meanings, or perhaps we are just not used to thinking of them as part of the grammar. To achieve clarity about the involvement of value in language, we need to turn our metalanguage back on itself – 'using the grammar to think with about the grammar'. Some ways of doing this are demonstrated here, turning the resources of systemic functional linguistics on linguists' own language. The circularity of this process should be seen not as a drawback but as a salutary reminder that linguistics is an interpretive rather than a discovery process. This knowledge should help us revalue language and make a place for evaluation in linguistic theory, paving the way for a socially responsible and productive linguistics.

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The question that remains is whether we can envision any more constructive way to address questions of language and value. I would like to think there is something between the apocalyptic discourse of those verbal hygienists who seem to believe that language is both the cause and the solution for every social ill, and the Panglossian complacency of the 'leave your language alone' approach. What, though, might that something be?

(Deborah Cameron, 1995, *Verbal Hygiene*)

Chapter One Introduction

Devaluing language is the besetting sin of modern orthodox linguistics.

In standard introductory courses, students are told that linguists – adherents of the new science of linguistics which is founded on the belief system of Chomsky's generative grammar – do not prescribe, but describe language objectively, in the way their colleagues in the other sciences describe natural phenomena. This enterprise has produced a new kind of metalanguage which looks impressively scientific but fails to connect with everyone's ordinary experience of using language.

The essence of language is its wholeness. To talk about it at all we have to split it into 'components', but if we lose sight of the whole we cease to talk sense about it. More than any other discipline, linguistics demands *integrity*: wholeness or soundness. Because value is part of language, we cannot leave it out for very long: if we do, it soon becomes clear that we are not paying attention to real language in its social context. Far from being value-free, linguistics is a moral enterprise: it confers an obligation to treat language as valuable and value-laden, because language goes around with people (Roy Harris 1997:238), and because language is our means of giving value to experience. The one thing linguistics cannot be is objective, in the sense of the describer outside the thing described. As language users, we are part of the whole that we study; there is no getting outside the circle. What language does metalanguage must also do, and to recognize this should be the first lesson of linguistics.

Where this is not recognized, the discipline suffers from keeping up a pretence. Linguists turn a blind eye to evidence of theoretical incoherence. They ignore the inconsistency of claiming not to make value judgements and then going ahead and making them anyway. They lose touch with the ordinary language user's experience of language, which is also their own experience, and because they have lost touch their metalanguage cannot describe that experience believably. They tell themselves they are applying linguistics to real-life problems, when often what they are doing is setting up technicalities as credentials and then falling back on commonsense knowledge to talk about these problems.

The anti-prescriptive stance in linguistics has given rise to endless re-runs of the'prescriptive versus descriptive' debate, with no really satisfactory solution being suggested, although there

is much concern expressed in the literature about the discipline's failure to deal with questions of language and value, with Cameron's *Verbal Hygiene* (1995) being perhaps the most penetrating of many critiques. Cameron's question, cited as epigraph to this thesis, reduces the issues to their essence (1995:223). She pictures the two extremes, 'apocalyptic' and 'Panglossian', as tinged with insanity, which is very much the way layperson and linguist see each other – if they notice each other at all. Her question demands an answer. She, however, does not presume to offer one, but only suggests some 'principles' that might help reduce 'the damaging polarization of lay language-users and linguists' (1995:227), these being: that we can legitimately make value judgements (but with the understanding that not all judgements are equally valid); that we should demand reasons for rules; that we should look out for the hidden agenda; and that we should acknowledge the facts (1995:224-7). These suggestions, sensible and useful though they are, do not seem to me to go to the heart of the matter. What is needed is a close inquiry into the nature of the theory that has led to a view of language so much at odds with the ordinary language user's experience.

The wording of Cameron's question is significant, though. She does not suggest that the answer might lie 'some*where* between' the two extremes, but rather that it might be 'some*thing* between', and she emphasizes this wording by repeating it: 'What, though, might that something be?' She plainly does not hold out much hope of finding a happy mean but rather suspects that what is needed is a fresh approach. This might require more drastic revision of our ideas than her 'principles' suggest. The reason why a compromise is not ultimately a satisfactory solution is that in practice it usually means juggling the two incompatible roles of 'value-free' theorist and prescriptive teacher. The disjunction between theory and practice involves linguists in self-deception and blocks progress, as Clyne succinctly observes:

> If the weakness of recent applied linguistics has been its separation from linguistic theory, so has the weakness of recent theoretical linguistics been its separation from real human problems. ... Application without theory is mere methodology (an error much of applied linguistics has fallen into). Theory without application is mere speculation (an error which much of theoretical linguistics has fallen into). (1987:242)

It is this split between theory and practice, between language and society, that is the problem. Linguists are inclined to assert that they 'take language as it is, rather than saying how it should be' (Hudson 1981:335). But in practice this means talking about language as though it could be

separated from its users and its social functions, both in formulating grammatical theory and in the everyday practice of the discipline.

Cameron has suggested that 'The whole issue of norms requires a less ad hoc and more sophisticated treatment than it has on the whole received from sociolinguists' (1990:86), and this is true in any practice of linguistics. Simply dealing with social issues as they arise is not going to work if linguistics itself suffers from basic conceptual delusions about the nature of language and of its own metalanguage. Anti-prescriptivism is not just an over-reaction against an excessive insistence on value: it is the outward symptom of a whole syndrome of misunderstandings, category mistakes and theoretical confusions about language and value. Linguists use the term *prescriptivism* to mean 'forcing foolish beliefs about language on other language users'. But being prescriptive is not just evidence of a desire to control others by manipulating their language, it is also evidence of respect for the value of language. It is a metalinguistic activity common to all language users, linguists included. A linguist who is indignant about the social and political implications of the generic third person pronoun (inserting '[sic]' after any use of *he* to signify humanity in general, even when the text long pre-dates feminist consciousness-raising) is just as prescriptive and just as concerned about the value of language as any heavy-handed traditional grammarian.

As the prescriptive versus anti-prescriptive debate is plainly going nowhere useful, the way forward must be a rethinking of the nature of the linguistic enterprise itself. It may be that what is wrong is that linguistic theory is unsound, lacking integrity. To deal with questions of language and value requires a kind of theory that does not treat language as separable from the social context. And further, we need to ask what it means to have a 'theory' of language in the first place. In other words, what are we doing when we use language to talk about language? What are the possibilities and what are the limits? At what point do we begin to lose touch with reality? We need to think about what exactly we mean by *theory* when we are talking about a social semiotic system rather than a physical or biological system. Then we might develop a proper understanding of the place of evaluation in that theory.

In this thesis I have considered some of the perspectives such an investigation might take. I have looked for a start at the growing body of critical literature within the discipline. The problems various critics discuss can be summed up in the claim that

> Far from having the (largely illusory) objectivity of the natural sciences (which it likes to claim), modern linguistics constantly projects into its analysis of language the biasses and assumptions of a particular cultural tradition, even while overtly disavowing them. (Roy Harris1987:130)

Challenging an orthodoxy requires support, so I have drawn on the opinions of a wide range of authors who are not happy with the discipline's current disavowal of its own ideological stance. I have taken seriously the need for a critical approach. Hymes is one who has made this point forcefully, stating that

> The point to be reiterated is that use of linguistics must include a critique of linguistics. *Unexamined acceptance of existing forms of linguistics would be mistaken and misleading*. (Hymes 1983:183, original emphasis)

It seems to me that the 'existing forms' – those currently considered 'mainstream' or 'orthodox' – are based on the following interconnected beliefs, all of which lead to denial of the involvement of value in language or of the linguist in evaluative practices:

(i) Language can be studied in isolation from its context.

(ii) Meaning is separate from language.

(iii) The relation of form to meaning is arbitrary.

(iv) A change in 'surface' features does not affect meaning: different surface features are just different ways of saying the same thing.

(v) Different surface features are nothing but differing arrangements of a universal grammar built into the brain.

(vi) The design of language preexists its use in society; it is not shaped by society's use of it; rather, language exists and we find uses for it.

(vii) All varieties of language are therefore in essence equally good for whatever purpose we put them to; it is mere social convention to consider one form better than another.

(viii) Therefore linguists are justified in rejecting evaluative attitudes to language and in believing that if society could be taught the 'facts' about language, unfair evaluation of language varieties would disappear.

My discussion of evaluation in language calls into question the above beliefs, which are characteristic of formal approaches to linguistics, in particular Chomskyan generative linguistics. I have examined the effects of this belief system where it comes into contact with real-world

problems and tries to contribute to their solution. As an example of this I have focused in particular on one central text, Labov (1969). In selecting this text, and others, I have taken into consideration Halliday's discussion of 'the problem of examples', in which he points out that 'ideally every example should be a whole text', but that failing this it is advisable to select a well-known one (1994a: xxxiii). This allows the analyst to refer to the whole text without having to reproduce it in full, and to analyse portions knowing that the reader is aware of the whole. Labov (1969) is well-known in the discipline, has been highly influential, and is easily available for consultation in a number of reprinted versions as well as in the original.

Because systemic functional linguistics (SFL), associated with the work of M.A.K. Halliday, explicitly rejects beliefs (i) to (vi) in the list above, and has doubts about (vii) and (viii), it seems to me to be the most promising theory for dealing responsibly with questions of language and value and contributing meaningfully to language matters beyond academia. I have therefore used this theory throughout the thesis, as support for the criticisms that I am making, for analysing a variety of texts, and for suggesting new ways of dealing with questions of value.

Systemic functional grammar (SFG) is understood and used primarily as an aid to textual analysis, but it has a secondary use which is less well-known: it is a means to understanding the language of the theory-makers themselves. Halliday is not the first to take the reflexivity of language seriously, but to the best of my knowledge he is the first to have built it into his theory as an integral part of the linguist's working methods (1992, 1996, 1997). His approach makes it possible to put into practice Hymes's advice that the discipline should 'apply the principles of a critical, reflexive perspective to its own work' (1983:194). Critique is worth little, however, if all it means is acknowledging our own ideological positionings and then continuing to subscribe to a theory that is designed to deny the belief system that drives it. If we accept that our belief systems are construed by language, then we can explore them by examining the language in which they are construed, including our own metalanguage. Davidse observes that 'One of M.A.K. Halliday's most original contributions to linguistics has been to reveal the dialectic between grammar and grammatics, the theory of grammar' (1996:367).[1] Halliday has shown that we can 'use the grammar to think with about itself'. This does not just mean 'using language as

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1 'As a way of getting round the problem [of confusion over the meaning of *grammar*] I started using the term *grammatics* ... This was based on the simple proportion grammatics : grammar :: linguistics : language' (Halliday 1996:2-3).

its own metalanguage', which we are of course obliged to do, because 'there is nothing else we can do'; it means turning the explicit metalanguage we have developed for describing the categories, functions and systems of natural language back on our own language in order to gain a clearer understanding of how that language makes meaning and thus how our theories are constructed (Halliday 1992:32). Besides this, 'thinking grammatically' links linguistics with the living of life, helping us clear up confusions in our ways of construing experience:

> I have found it useful to have "grammatics" available as a term for a specific view of grammatical theory, whereby it is not just a theory about grammar but also a way of using grammar to think with. In other words, in grammatics, we are certainly modelling natural language, but we are trying to do it in such a way as to throw light on other things besides. (Halliday 1996:34)

Equipped with a grammar designed for such a purpose we can do more than just admit that our theories about language are ideologically constructed: we can demonstrate explicitly *how* our values get involved in our language about language. I have used this method throughout the thesis to analyse examples of linguists' own language in terms of SFG and its latest direction, Appraisal theory, as well as through ordinary traditional understanding of grammar. The various linguists' writings I refer to throughout the thesis are therefore being used not only as literature to furnish support for my arguments, or to argue against, but also in many cases as the data I am analysing to show the involvement of the authors' language in construing their theory, their particular way of seeing language.

In my discussion I have been obliged to use the labels *linguist* and *linguistics* without differentiating amongst the many different styles and affiliations that exist within the discipline, although I am aware of the problems inherent in using the generic "the linguist". Hasan, for example, has complained about the use of this term *linguist* to mean 'those legitimized as "the linguist" by their domination of the field' (1999:35). Sampson also mentions the difficulty of settling on a suitable pair of terms to refer to two schools of linguistic thought:

> This book is intended to illustrate the nature and strengths of the empirical style of linguistics which has come to the fore over the past decade. I shall need a convenient term to refer to the very different linguistic tradition which predominated from the 1960s to the 1980s, and even now is very much alive. To refer to it negatively as 'unempirical linguistics' clearly would not do. I shall use the phrase *generative linguistics*. This term has been widely used and I believe it is broadly acceptable to most or all of the members of the tradition in question. It identifies that tradition through one of its positive features: the goal of

> specifying the structures of languages via formal systems which 'generate' all and only the valid examples of a language . (2001:11)

My criticism is directed generally at 'the linguist' whose linguistics is based on an acceptance of points (i) to (viii) above – in other words, primarily those working in *formal* or *generative* linguistics, the kind of linguistics accepted as basic by the standard orthodox introductory texts, a few of which are sampled in 2.3 below, rather than *functional*. (There is of course no absolute division into *formal* and *functional* – the difference is one of emphasis.) I have also used the term *linguist* simply to mean academics working in the discipline of linguistics. Hasan calls attention to the sociologist Bourdieu's perception of 'the' linguist, with 'his objectivist preoccupations' (1999:44), and I think it is reasonable to assume that the linguist might be viewed this way by any academics in other disciplines who have taken an interest in linguistics: sociologists, social anthropologists, psychologists, and literary scholars, for example. It is a perception not so very different from that of the ordinary language user who, on learning that there is a kind of person called a *linguist* also learns that this is not just a 'language expert' but also 'a person who is impartial about language so does not get involved in advising on matters of correctness'.

The term *layperson* also needs some elaboration. I have used it to refer not just to 'any person who has not studied linguistics', but to the subset of informed laypersons interested in and able to follow academic discussions about language. I am thinking particularly of academics in literary studies, or education. This makes the term *layperson* a little incongruous, as academics are by definition not 'lay', but I have preferred it on the whole to the negative sounding *non-linguist*. I intend by it the audience for linguistics that Matthiessen and Halliday refer to as 'thoughtful people as a whole' (1997:27).

Because I have used systemic functional grammar to analyse texts and to generally 'think with', I have of course used much of its terminology. Explanations are provided where space allows, and otherwise reference is made to the relevant section of the standard text, Halliday (1994a).

As a brief personal note, and in the interest of declaring my values at the outset, I will point out that this thesis comes from a background of literary and educational interest in language and is based on seven years' acquaintance with the discipline of linguistics: beginning with the Chomskyan formal model; becoming disillusioned with that (sharing with Robinson 'an increasingly exasperated sense of its inadequacy for my purposes', 1975:ix); and being saved

from complete discouragement by the fortuitous discovery of Halliday's work. It is a record of an experience which has yet to be fully digested, and the reader will therefore notice a certain inconsistency in the tenor, making itself felt particularly in the personal pronouns referring to *linguists*, which alternate between *they* and *we*. A near-decision to abandon linguistics is responsible for those in the third person plural, and a renewed enthusiasm for the subject, inspired by the insights and good sense I have found in the systemic functional model, is responsible for those in the first.

The following is an outline of the perspectives taken in each chapter. Chapter Two reviews some of the background literature – paying particular attention to the source of much of the damage, the standard introductory text in linguistics – and lists and discusses some of the growing body of critical literature within the discipline. Chapter Three takes various perspectives on the doctrine of anti-prescriptivism and the meaning of *prescriptive*. Chapter Four looks at how our failure to theorize value and evaluation coherently leads to practical difficulties when we apply the findings of linguistics to real-world problems, taking well known texts as examples, in particular Labov (1969). Chapter Five takes a step back to examine the discipline's imitation of the natural sciences, as being the source of some conceptual misapprehensions leading to the attempt to exclude value and evaluation. Chapter Six uses Halliday's Token and Value grammar to explore a basic function of language – conferring value on experience (which is by extension a basic function of *meta*language – conferring value on language), and claims that Chomsky's claims about grammar are based on a failure to take into account the part this natural language process plays in his own theorizing. Chapter Seven suggests that Halliday's notion of 'linguistics as metaphor' provides an opening for a coherent view of evaluation in linguistic theory. Chapter Eight explores some ways it does this, whether we might view evaluation as part of the grammar, and why we miss it in our own metalanguage. In conclusion, Chapter Nine briefly lists some implications of taking this new perspective.

The overall aim of this thesis is to explore what it means to do linguistics in such a manner that theory and practice form a coherent whole, instead of resorting to makeshift because we are afraid to admit evaluation.

Chapter Two Conflicting values in the literature

This review of perspectives on the prescriptive approach to language, drawn from a variety of literature, lay and expert, forms a background to the discussion in the following chapters.

2.1 Prescriptive and anti-prescriptive literature

Perhaps the clearest evidence of the gap between lay and expert approaches to language is the way the literature is polarized, with very little crossover between lay and expert varieties. The difference is not only in register (a difference in level of technicality is to be expected), but also in *field* (what they find interesting and important about language), *purpose* (what they want to do with language) and, most of all, *evaluative stance,* (which is very much to the fore in lay literature but purportedly absent from the linguist's). A new student of linguistics is likely to find little to build on in his or her previously acquired knowledge about language, whether from home or school or from academic disciplines outside linguistics.

2.1.1 What the layperson is reading about language

An area of literature that is scorned or at best ignored by linguists is the reading matter that the layperson interested in language is likely to turn to. Cameron observes that

> Metalinguistic activities and beliefs have received, at least in urban western societies, less attention than they merit. For it is surely a very significant fact about language in these societies that people hold passionate beliefs about it; that it generates social and political conflicts; that practices and movements grow up around it both for and against the *status quo*. We may consider the well-attested fact that many people, including those with minimal education, read a dictionary for pleasure; that there is a vast market for grammars, usage guides and general interest publications, radio and TV programmes about the English language; that many large-circulation newspapers and periodicals (such as the *Reader's Digest*) have a regular column on linguistic matters. (Cameron1990:92)

I believe Cameron is making an important point in calling attention to this literature, and I have thought it worthwhile to detail some of it here.

The works that interest language lovers outside linguistics may be divided into two categories: books of curious facts and usage handbooks. There is some crossover, as the editor of one of them observes: 'a taste for collecting language facts goes hand-in-hand with a pleasure in "getting things right"' (Urdang 1991:vii). A contributor to the *Linguist* Internet mailing list refers to what outsiders like to know about language as 'little linguistic cutenesses' (17 June 1994, 5.700), and linguists are particularly prone to dismiss people's interest in the 'correct' origins of words and phrases – as Hutton observes: 'Etymological speculations outside academically institutionalised linguistics continue to flourish to this day, but for the most part they are regarded as the mad alter-ego in the attic' (1998:195). However, although such matters may bore linguists they are of absorbing interest to the lay language enthusiast.

The 'curiosity' genre is a prolific one. Books of this kind abound on such subjects as slang, euphemisms, proverbs, catch phrases, palindromes, and origins of words and phrases. *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* is a well-known example, now into its fifteenth edition (1995[1898]). The following is a list of some other typical examples, from a university library reference shelf: Shipley (1945), *Dictionary of Word Origins*; Thomson and Irvine (1960), *Collins Everyday English Usage* (partly a dictionary of correct usages and partly a collection of curiosities, such as word origins); Byrne (1974), *Mrs. Byrne's Dictionary of Unusual, Obscure and Preposterous Words. Gathered from Numerous and Diverse Authoritative Sources by Mrs. Byrne; edited, with an introduction by Mr. Byrne*; Radford and Smith (1981 [1945]), *To Coin a Phrase: a Dictionary of Origins*; Du Gran (1984), *Wordsmanship: A Dictionary* (a humorous work that supplies fancy words as substitutes for plain ones, for the purpose of cutting a dash in smart society); Room (1985), *Dictionary of Confusing Words and Meanings*; Urdang (1991), *A Fine Kettle of Fish and other Figurative Phrases*.

On the same library shelf along with the 'curiosities' are a large number of usage handbooks. Emonds observes that 'Linguists out of contact with the teaching of English might think that the handbooks are a dusty reminiscence of a past age and of past attitudes, and no longer meet some demand of the market. But this would be the wishful thinking of the ivory tower' (1986:110-1). Indeed, advice books for the anxious proliferate and are very marketable, being used by not only lay but also academic readers, who presumably do not share linguists' perceptions that these books are unscientific and worthless. I examined a random selection of these and my conclusion was that although there is much in them that is passé and unscholarly and sometimes just plain

wrong, there is also much that a linguist who keeps an open mind on the question of value could share and build on.

I comment first on four that exhibit many of the faults that have set linguists against them: Herbert (1935), Kahn and Ilson (1985), Elster (1999), and Bruton-Simmonds (1990). Herbert's *What a Word!* (1935) epitomizes the extreme style of prescriptive advice: confident assertion of preferences, often coupled with refusal to give reasons for them; an overemphasis on Latin and Greek etymology; a thoroughgoing political incorrectness; and an insistence on the observance of rules understandable only to those who have had a privileged education. It is hard to know how seriously to take any of this, given the ironic tone characteristic of the genre, and some evidence of humanitarian concerns that belies the gatekeeping:

> A little knowledge of Latin and Greek, Bobby, would be useful to every citizen, for every citizen uses a little Latin and Greek every day. I affirm boldly that the elements of these ancient tongues should be taught more widely, not less, than they are to-day; and not only in the private but in the State elementary and secondary schools. They are valued, where they are valued at all, as instruments of 'culture' and mental discipline for the rich. I hold that they should be part of the 'practical' education of the people, equipping the citizen for ordinary life, whether the citizen is to be a poet or a plumber. (1935:163)

While Latin and Greek might not be everyone's idea of what the working class needs, the ideal of a metalinguistically educated public is still alive:

> The time is here when all communicators, public ones especially, should be held accountable for how they use the coin of daily communication. ... "Explain your use of this passive" should cause no more surprise than "Explain your use of this percentage rate". If people are bright enough to learn the language of money ... they are bright enough to learn the language of language. (Bolinger 1980:387)

It is easy, from the vantage point of sixty years of changing attitudes, to criticize the prejudices Sir A.P. Herbert displayed. But while it is tempting to laugh at a remark like

> I have been asked, Bobby, to say exactly *why* I object to "commence", and I am told that the answer of other objectors has been "I really don't know. It just obviously provokes objection". And a good reply too. (1935:91-2)

it is also tempting to point out that it bears an uncomfortable resemblance to that cornerstone of mainstream modern linguistics, 'native speaker intuition'.

Fifty years later, in another example of British prescriptivism, we find political correctness tempering the claims to authorial infallibility. But there is still an undercurrent of self-righteousness. Kahn and Ilson's *The Right Word at the Right Time: A guide to the English language and how to use it* (1985) is a large volume (688 pages), arranged dictionary-style, with entries covering a comprehensive range of typical 'word worries'. It is a *Reader's Digest* publication, which suggests a middle-class readership troubled by the kind of anxieties about language this book seeks to allay (but also serves to inflame). The qualifications of some of the contributors are mentioned: six are lecturers in English, three in linguistics (Jenny Cheshire, Peter Hawkins, Alan R. Thomas) and one in phonetics (J.C.Wells). (The involvement of the linguists is interesting – perhaps not all would endorse the underlying sentiments of this book.) The introduction commences:

> Why bother with the right word? 'People understand me well enough' is the typical response of the uncaring speaker to any criticism of his usage – that is, of the way he talks or writes. But do people understand such a speaker well enough? And even if they do, what is their impression of him or of anyone who speaks and writes in a sloppy, careless way? Much the same, probably, as their impression of someone who is sloppily dressed. Using the right word at the right time is rather like wearing appropriate clothes for the occasion: it is a courtesy to others and a favour to yourself – a matter of presenting yourself well in the eyes of the world. (1985:7)

and concludes with some unashamed triumphalism:

> English today is closer to being a World Language than any other language has been in history. It is the international language of science, of pilots and sea-captains, and frequently of diplomatic, sporting and trade contacts. It is used, and even cherished, by untold millions whose mother tongue is quite different. This should be at once a source of pride to those whose mother tongue is English and an inducement – perhaps even an obligation – to use the language well. (1985:7-9)

Notable in this book are some of the salient features of usage manuals that have set linguists against them: the emotive language, generalised value judgements and pandering to prejudices – especially the equating of bad English with personal scruffiness (*sloppy* is the prescriptivist

epithet *par excellence*), low standards, and lack of national pride. Another typical feature is the suggestion that we should emulate the language of eminent persons.

The third example, Elster (1999), *The Big Book of Beastly Mispronunciations : The Complete Opinionated Guide for the Careful Speaker*, is a large volume (426 pages) which includes an eight-page list (419-26) of authorities and other sources cited or consulted: many dictionaries (British and American, such as the Oxford English Dictionary and Webster's); a number of usage handbooks; the 1980s and 1990s *State of the Language* anthologies by Michaels and Ricks; and diverse writers, including H.L. Mencken, Ralph Waldo Emerson, R.W. Burchfield, H.W. Fowler, Bill Bryson, Kingsley Amis, Vladimir Nabokov, and William Safire. It starts by sorting the sheep from the goats:

> When it comes to pronunciation, there are two types of people: those who don't give the subject a second thought and those who do. This book is for those who do. (1999: ix)

and attacking those who would have us all be goats:

> Telling us to pronounce words however we please and claiming that no one cares about how they are pronounced is an insult to our intelligence – and an invitation to disaster. Would you trust an driving instructor who told you not to worry about the rules of the road? ... The sad truth is that lots of people mispronounce words every day and plenty of other people notice. (Just listen to all the folks around you who say pro-*noun*-ciation instead of pro-*nun*-ciation!) And because we know that other people take note of how we speak, most of us *do* care about pronunciation. (1999:x)

The fourth example, Bruton-Simmonds's *Mend Your English, or What You Should Have Been Taught At Primary School* (1990), is one that has been popular in South Africa. The chapter headings indicate the tenor: 'Flabby English'; 'Ruins of High Precision'; 'Distinctions and Avoidances of the Educated'; 'Warning Against a Modern Trend of English'. An Appendix entitled 'Different Englishes' seems to promise some enlightenment, but turns out to be a tirade against linguists:

> Yes – to the glory and vitality of English, there are regional differences in English, but do not accept the sophism propagated by half-thinking academics and fully used by incompetents to gloze mistakes in their writing, that there are *different Englishes*, one as good as the other. (1990:125)

Much of the explanation this book contains is mere justification of personal beliefs; for example, some rather dubious explanations of how the infinitive works are backed up by the claim: 'I have said it before and I say it again: Grammar is based on logic and commonsense' (1990:119). The rule-based grammar it promotes seems to me unlikely to be of real use to its intended readership, English second-language learners in South Africa. In common with the foregoing three examples, this author is much concerned to express his views about the deterioration of the English:

> Those who blunt this instrument (particularly through broadcasting) spoil a treasure that belongs to us and our children, and they should be classed with the most dangerous public enemies, and condemned to ridicule. (1990:3)

It is easy to criticise the apocalyptic discourse and other faults of prescriptive language experts and less-than-experts who write for the lay public. However, the advantage the usage handbook writers do have is that their works are being used: this fact alone makes it important to take them seriously. Bruton-Simmonds (1990), for example, received enthusiastic reviews in the South African press. The following is a list of some other popular and scholarly handbooks to be found on the university library shelf, a barrage of ideas about language that are largely the antithesis of what linguists in general believe, or claim to believe. These are the works a variety of readers outside linguistics turn to for information and for advice. The former of course shades into the latter: if I look up the pronunciation of *Clapworthy* (see below), would it be possible to say whether I am asking how it *is* pronounced or how *to* pronounce it? The handbook writer would not think it necessary to answer this question, which is where he or she differs essentially from the linguist, who would claim that a phonetic description of a word is the former only. This is perhaps why, rather than consult a linguist, the linguistically insecure might be more inclined to consult the following:

K.Hudson (1977), *The Dictionary of Diseased English* and K.Hudson (1983), *The Dictionary of Even More Diseased English* (which list words people react badly to; for example, *caring*, which is listed as causing offence because, according to K.Hudson, people take it to mean 'nosy-parkerish'); Bryson (1987), *Penguin Dictionary of Troublesome Words* (in which Bryson sides

with anti-academic lay language enthusiasts, dismissing traditional grammarians: 'Once you have said that in correlative conjunctions in the subjunctive mood there should be parity between the protasis and apodosis, you have said about all there is to say on the matter. But you have also, I think, left most of us as confused as before', and also gets in a dig at 'structural linguists, some of whom regard the conventions of English usage as intrusive and anachronistic and elitist', 7); Adey et al (1989), *Word Power: the South African Handbook of Grammar, Style and Usage* (which tries, as many of these works do, to steer a course between prescriptivism and permissiveness, claiming its approach 'is not a prescriptive one, although words and forms of expression that are unacceptable in South African usage are clearly indicated', 6 – something of a contradictory statement); Vallins (1968[1951]), *Good English: How to Write It*; Flesch (1960[1946]), *How to Write, Speak and Think More Effectively* (whose author claims 'This book will do for you exactly what its title promises', vii); Bailie and Kitchin (1979), *Newnes Guide to English Usage: Essential for everyone who wants to speak and write better English* ('intended to be a concise but comprehensive guide to good English ... in which everybody will find something of value', 6); Todd (1997), *The Cassell Dictionary of English Usage* (aiming 'to provide helpful, unambiguous guidance ... and to avoid any terminology that might be familiar only to the linguist', viii); Partridge (1940), *A Dictionary of Clichés* ('Having formerly been a graceless sinner in this matter of clichés, I know how useful a dictionary of clichés could be to others', Preface); Rogers (1985), *The Dictionary of Clichés* (a more recent collection which is inclined to pardon sin and even excuse it: 'the cliché has a bad name as an overworked and therefore banal expression ... however, clichés can serve as the lubricant of language', Preface); Partridge (1957 [1947]), *Usage and Abusage: A guide to good English* (dedicated to 'Dr C.T. Onions, C.B.E., from whose lucid lexicography, severely impeccable etymologies and humanely corrective syntax I have learnt more than I can fittingly express'); Thody and Evans (1985), *Faux Amis* (a guide to avoiding making a fool of yourself in French); Miller (1971), *BBC Pronouncing Dictionary of British Names* (which contains the information that *Clapworthy* is pronounced [klæpərɪ]); Jones (1917), *Everyman's English Pronouncing Dictionary, containing over 58 000 words in International Phonetic Transcription*; Rees (1970), *Rules of Printed English*; Bebbington (1970), *An English Handbook* (which is not intended to be 'primarily prescriptive or proscriptive', but contains a large dose of both nevertheless: 'After all, the use of English should be concerned with the misuse', ix-x); the well-known Strunk and White (1962[1918]1959), *Elements of Style* ('Get the *little* book!', xii); and finally, of course, the two canonical prescriptive handbooks (though perhaps not as prescriptive as the people who use

them): Gowers's *Complete Plain Words* 1973), which is 'elegantly and wittily written', so that it 'affords to the reader profit as well as pleasure' (editor's preface, iii), and Fowler's *Modern English Usage*, which more than others has kept pace with change, because of updating and editing, first by Ernest Gowers (second edition,1965) and then by R.W. Burchfield (third edition,1996), and even has its own concordance, Greenwood (1969), *Find it in Fowler*, which gives this work a ring of authority on a par with the Bible and Shakespeare.

Not all writers of advice handbooks are committed prescriptivists. One who appears to be in two minds, or hedging his bets – at one moment pouring scorn on prescriptive attitudes to language and at another upholding them – is Howard, *New words for old* (1977); *Weasel Words* (1978); *The State of the Language* (1986). Some linguists are moving into the advice field and producing works that are based on better and more up-to-date observations of language, and are more temperate in their advice style. One is Crystal (1984), *Who Cares about English Usage? An entertaining guide to the common problems of English usage*, which tackles common anxieties, such as the split infinitive, rather than dismissing them, but differs from the prototypical usage handbook in emphasizing tolerance, and the need to lighten up:

> There will always be social division, and so there will always be linguistic variety. We can't remove this variety, but we can learn about it, and try to understand the way it shapes our attitudes and outlook. At the very least, it's a pleasant enough way to pass the time. At best, some good might come out of the enterprise, in the form of greater linguistic – and therefore social – tolerance. It's no coincidence that 'communication' and 'community' are closely related words. (Crystal 1984:11)

A similar work is Andersson and Trudgill (1990), *Bad Language,* which admits that 'questions of language attitude and evaluation ... are important' (1990:4), yet manages not to be narrowly prescriptive. These two works seem genuinely desirous of bringing outsiders in rather than scaring them off with rebarbative rules. The positive note is a welcome change from the doom-laden warnings about errors which Bolinger has remarked 'is like the concentration on sin in an old-time religion' (1968:279). Similar change can be seen in the Crystal encyclopaedias (1987;1995). An interesting new development of the advice handbook is the 'self-help' kind, such as those produced by linguists Tannen (1995) and Haden Elgin (2000), applying linguistic knowledge not so much to perfecting your language as to living your life well.

Besides books of facts and handbooks offering advice, there are many varieties of metalinguistic literature that the public turns to for information and entertainment, as Cameron observes (1990:92, quoted above). General books range from those in the complaint tradition of George Orwell's *Politics and the English Language* (1946) to those in what might be called the *celebratory* tradition. Two typical examples of the latter are Bryson (1990), *Mother Tongue: the English Language*, and McCrum, Cran and MacNeil (1992), *The Story of English*. The front cover of Bryson (1990) carries an endorsement by Ruth Rendell: 'The sort of linguistics I like, anecdotal, full of revelations, and with not one dull paragraph', and the back cover describes the book as a 'hymn to the mother tongue', 'a delightful, amusing and provoking survey, a joyful celebration of our wonderful language, which is packed with curiosities and enlightenment on every page'. For the kind of reader who buys this book, language is a source of pleasure and amusement. This is the more attractive face of prescriptivism. Something outsiders suspect linguists of missing, along with delight in language, is wonder at its complexities. Bryson supplies plenty of wonder, and humour:

> How big is the English language? ... the revised Oxford English Dictionary of 1989 has 615 000 entries. But in fact this only begins to hint at the total. ... And then of course there are all the names of flora and fauna, medical conditions, chemical substances ... one of which, incidentally is said to be the longest word in the English language. It begins *methianylglutaminyl* and finishes 1 913 letters later as *alynalalnylthreonilarginylserase*. I don't know what it is used for, though I daresay it would take some rubbing to get it out of the carpet. (1990:139)

McCrum et al. (1992) also conveys a sense of wonder. Described on the cover as 'The International Bestseller', it celebrates change and variety in English, yet with some harking back to a golden age of clear values and beliefs, especially in the first episode of the BBC television series of the book, in which, against video footage of the bombing of London, Spitfires in air battles, and naval landings, Dr Robert Burchfield, former editor of the OED, recalls with wry nostalgia 'the finest hour for BBC English – the voice of Britain resounding with authority and defiance':

> When the war broke out I happened to be in Wellington, New Zealand. I heard Neville Chamberlain speak – but the announcer to me was just as important as Neville Chamberlain. It was really some quite extraordinary equation. It used to stand alone like some great isolated supreme power of language – so that what it said was both correctly said and was the truth. (My transcription.)

Both the complaint and the celebratory traditions are represented in the 1980 and 1990 editions of Michaels and Ricks' *The State of the Language*, two anthologies of general articles on English by a variety of language specialists. The first is introduced thus:

> To write about the English language is to discover something about who we are and who we are not, and this is true not only in what we say but also in how we say it. The language is our most excellently revealing thing. For some it is our chief philosopher, for others our best historian. Even as we complain about its declining powers – and, as we decline, we are tempted to complain – we remember those powers, and, thereby, begin a little to redeem them. But what flourishes so well under criticism as our English language? Only our rose bushes, perhaps, which the world knows we love. (Michaels and Ricks 1980:xiii)

The linguist who dismisses all this literature as ignorant nonsense risks losing touch with much that is of real concern to the ordinary language user and therefore legitimately part of language.

2.1.2 The linguist's anti-prescriptive response

Anti-prescriptive linguists are unfortunately inclined to focus on the complaint rather than the celebration when discussing lay ideas about language. Cameron observes that

> In the discourse of linguistics ... the term 'prescriptivism' has a particular value attached to it, a negative connotation that is almost impossible to avoid. ...The typical attitude to it among linguists runs the gamut from despair at prescribers' ignorance to outrage at their bigotry. (1995:3)

'Admirably prescriptive' – Bruton-Simmonds's description of an entry in *Chambers 20th Century Dictionary* on *due to* versus *owing to* (1990:63) – is a collocation that can be presumed to be entirely absent from the linguistics literature.

Bloomfield was one of the earliest and most influential of objectors to prescriptivism. He had a low opinion of schools: 'Their attitude is authoritarian; fanciful dogmas as to what is "good English" are handed down by educational authorities and individual teachers who are utterly ignorant of what is involved' (1935:500). De Beaugrande comments that Bloomfield 'was intensely bent on establishing linguistics as a "science" ... His book fostered in American linguistics a spirit of confrontation not merely against rival approaches, but also against prevailing philosophy, pedagogy, language teaching and the humanities at large' (1991:58-9).

Perhaps the first book for the general reader that emphatically pronounces the anti-prescriptive stance is Hall's *Leave Your Language Alone!* (1950). For the revised edition (1960) he changed this inflammatory title to *Linguistics and Your Language*. He did not, however, change or even tone down the following statements:

> There is no such thing as good and bad (or correct and incorrect, grammatical and ungrammatical, right and wrong) in language.
>
> A dictionary or grammar is not as good an authority for your own speech as the way you yourself speak.
>
> All languages and dialects are of equal merit, each in its own way.
> (1950:6/1960:6)

For students a decade later, a first encounter with the idea that the prescriptive approach to language is wrong might have been a chapter entitled 'Notions of correctness' in a widely used textbook (Quirk 1962), which describes popular ideas as the 'doctrine of original linguistic sin', and complains that 'in spite of all that linguistic science has done, and tried to do, during the past hundred or so years, such unrealistic attitudes to language, and many such artificial, over-simple or archaic rules for using it, do still persist ' (1962:318).

The anti-prescriptive literature is as varied in tenor as the prescriptive. Much of it is splenetic:

> The common viewpoint held by these doom sellers and their followers is that English is being brutalized and barbarized to the point where now it must be decaying under our very pens. If you gauge there is still time left to read beyond their dark prefaces, you may be disturbed to discover that you are one of the ruthless barbarians pulling down the linguistic supports of our language with your 'careless, sloppy, uneducated, illiterate usage'. (Boyd 1988:12)
>
> Maven, schmaven! Kibbitzers and nudniks is more like it. ... Most of the prescriptive rules of the language mavens make no sense on any level. They are bits of folklore that originated for screwball reasons several hundred years ago and have perpetuated themselves ever since. (Pinker1994:373)

A whole chapter of Pinker's popular book is devoted to ridiculing the 'language mavens' (1994:370-403). A subtler attack – irony rather than sarcasm – is Pullum's satire on the 'linguistic fascists' (1991:111-119), in which he denounces a 1980s US campaign to amend state

constitutions to make English the official language. Aitchison's is a gentler approach: she is known for attempting to give linguistics a more friendly face. However, her well-meaning 'sweeping away the cobwebs' in her 1996 BBC Reith Lectures raised some ire in Britain: 'Her ideas are a frontal assault on the rules of the English language'; 'the speech patterns you endorse are the direct result of downright bone idleness'; 'I was saddened to hear you use the unattractive Americanism *kilOmetre*' (Aitchison1997:97-105).

Some anti-prescriptive literature makes an effort to investigate the prescriptive approach thoroughly rather than just condemn or ridicule. Such a study is Bolton (1984), a critique of George Orwell's writings on language, unusual amongst anti-prescriptive literature in that it takes on a widely respected author rather than an obvious charlatan. A reviewer of Bolton's book says that 'Orwell's views on language 'hold phenomenal power for many writers and academics' and that although 'Orwell's standing as a linguistic seer should finally be tossed "into the dustbin where it belongs"... the Orwellian view of language is still alive and well with John Simon, Edwin Newman, and hordes of other reformers whose ignorance of linguistic realities, even in 1987, is every bit as profound and arrogant as Orwell's was forty years ago' (Daniels 1987:162).

Other varieties focus on the damage the prescriptive approach can do to *people*. This is the main focus of Pullum's article referred to above: 'The hallmark of the English First literature is not a desire to cherish the English language ... but a hatred and suspicion of aliens and immigrants' (1991:117). Lippi-Green (1997) tackles accent discrimination in the United States educational system, information industry, workplace and judicial system against blacks and ethnic minorities. She demonstrates how 'standard language ideology in the US functions like a silent but efficient machine' and how 'its practitioners are terribly skillful at coercing consent and participation from those groups who suffer the most under the weight of language ideology'. However, she makes it clear that she is not 'a language anarchist'; she is not against value systems per se, but against value systems that are forced upon others (1997:242-3).

A particularly interesting example of the anti-prescriptive approach is Emonds (1986). This article is, as far as I know, unique in its exhaustively detailed use of formal proofs to demonstrate that the prescriptivists' understanding of grammar is faulty.[1] It assumes acquaintance with

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[1] Halliday offers several brief *functional* demonstrations of the inadequacy of prestige grammar,

Chomsky's 'Principles and Parameters' model, and acceptance of Chomsky's claim that humans are endowed with a universal genetically programmed grammar which makes language learnable. Emonds's argument is that prestige constructions involving personal pronouns whose case is determined according to the rules of Latin grammar, such as 'Mary and *he* (*him) are late'[2] and 'I'm sure it was *he* who did it' (1986:96;113) are in conflict with the rules of this internal grammar and are therefore unlearnable. Despite his anti-prescriptive stance, Emonds does not confine himself to describing the rules but supports his case with the rhetoric characteristic of prescriptive literature, making it clear he wants speakers to adopt the forms *he* considers 'correct': 'the mentally fogged purveyors of proper English'; 'the whole prestige sham' ; 'a dusty reminiscence of a past age and past attitudes'; 'a hodge-podge of inelegant and unprincipled makeshift stratagems to protect a device used to reinforce class differences' (1986:95-116).

An notable expression of the anti-prescriptivist stance is Hudson's 'manifesto, *Some issues on which linguists can agree* (1981), which sets out the results of a survey of 'what linguists at large actually believe'. This list was compiled to 'show the world that linguistics does after all have something to say of practical importance'; however, it is unlikely that it *reached* much of the world at large, as it appeared in the *Journal of Linguistics*. It aimed to offset the perception that linguistic theory was becoming 'increasingly fragmented and decreasingly dominated by a single orthodoxy'. Compiled from the results of a questionnaire sent to 29 linguistics departments in British universities and polytechnics, the list was intended for use in two seminars on the relevance of linguistics to schools. 46 British linguists accepted most of the 83 statements, and 18 accepted all 83. Hudson says that 'It seems reasonable to claim that other linguists are *likely* to accept these statements' (1981:333-5). The first item on the list of 83 statements, under the heading *The linguistic approach to the study of language*, is

> 1. (a) Linguists describe language empirically – that is, they try to make statements which are testable, and they take language as it is, rather than saying how it should be. (In other words, linguistics is descriptive, not prescriptive or normative.)

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for example, on the use the hypercorrect form *It is I* (1994a:125-6), and on the 'double negative' (2002).

[2] It is a convention in linguistics to use an initial asterisk to denote a form that is ungrammatical.

and related to this, under the heading *Language, society and the individual*, is

> 2.1 (a) Language is amenable to objective study, with regard both to its structure and to its functions and external relations.

Other statements related to the anti-prescriptive doctrine are

> 2.2 (d) There is no evidence that normal human languages differ greatly in the complexity of their rules, or that there are any languages that are 'primitive' in the size of their vocabulary (or any other part of their language), however 'primitive' their speakers may be from a cultural point of view.
>
> 2.2 (f) The present position of English as a world language is due to historical accidents rather than to inherent superiority of the language's structure.
>
> 2.3 (a) Spoken language developed before written language in the history of mankind, and it also develops first in the individual speaker; moreover, many languages are never written. These factors lead most linguists to believe that in linguistic theory priority should be given to spoken language, and many linguists give further priority to the most casual varieties of spoken language, those which are least influenced by normative grammar.
>
> 2.4 (b) Change in a language is normally a matter of becoming different, rather than better or worse.

and 3.2e, which is somewhat contradictory:

> 3.2 (e) Spelling is probably the most immutable part of English, and the part where prescriptivism is most easily accepted by linguists. (1981:335-341)

Hudson's intention was to demonstrate that 'linguistics really is making some progress, in a cumulative way, and we are not just lurching from one "paradigm" to another' (1981:333). On the other hand, Halliday and Fawcett observe that 'issues' are often seen as matters that divide people, so that the 'current issues' approach to discussing any phenomenon tends to reflect relationships of an adversarial kind (1987:xi). However, Hudson's document does have the merit of setting out issues in the form of categorical statements that are set up for negotiation, rather than in the persuasive rhetoric of much of the anti-prescriptive literature. (The anti-prescriptive approach is discussed in more detail in 2.3, below.)

2.2 Critical discussion of language and value

There is much critical literature on this topic, centred on the *prescriptive/descriptive* debate and coming at it from a variety of perspectives. Many of the issues and viewpoints mentioned in the following rapid review of the literature are taken up in more detail in the following chapters.

2.2.1 Historical background

Hutton criticises the current widely accepted view of modern linguistics as a liberation movement resulting from 'the overthrow of the categories of traditional, i.e. Latin-based, grammar and the rise of "autonomous" linguistics' (1998:189) which 'has created a kind of blindness to the social reality'. He suggests that there is a need to 'make comprehensible again old debates or controversies', and complains that 'in the simplifications of contemporary textbooks, many of these debates appear as phoney wars between reason and blindness' (1998:198-9). The following are some texts that help restore a sense of proportion.

Overviews such as Robins (1990) and de Beaugrande (1991) are invaluable, because a major problem is that we often read the interpreters, the contemporary textbooks, rather than the primary texts. More specifically focused on the phenomenon of prescriptivism are Leonard (1962 [1929]) and Thomas (1991). Leonard's *The Doctrine of Correctness in English Usage 1700-1800* is an exhaustively researched record of the development of the prescriptive urge in English, including various 'ireful combats' (1962:14) over theoretical issues such as the 'genius and right nature of English' (1962:32). Thomas's *Linguistic Purism* (1991) looks at the phenomenon from a broader perspective, tracing fluctuating attitudes to purism in the development of linguistic theory, and making it clear that 'no language is exempt from the impact of puristic intervention' (back cover) and that 'recent investigators of purism have noted the absence of an adequate theory of purism' (1991:9). Edwards (1994) suggests that linguists have misread prescriptivism as a specific historical aberration of English; rather, it is an ineradicable part of any language and therefore something linguistic theory has to take into account, whatever language we are describing.

Accounts of the rise of standard English can be found in many works. A basic reference is Milroy and Milroy's chapter on *Standard English and the complaint tradition* (1999:24-46). Other

accounts are Greenbaum's *Good English* (1988:1-19); Pennycook's *Spreading the word/ disciplining the language* (1994:107-144); and Crystal's *The rise of prescriptive grammar* (1995:78-9). A controversial account is Crowley (1989), which surveys language debates in 200 years of British history (with a back cover blurb quoting from a review by Roy Harris: 'a great work of demythologisation, which puts the concept of standard English in its proper historical perspective'). Honey, however, attacks this work as a 'rewriting of history' and gives a different version explaining *How it really happened* (1997:59-117). He claims that 'it is simply not true that standard English, as an identifiable model which carried the prestige which caused it to be taken as a model, came into being in the nineteenth century'; points out the dangers of 'inappropriate projection back into the past of the political and other concerns of the present'; and observes that although the term 'standard English' is of recent origin, the concept is ancient, and that 'a standard variety of English, both spoken and written, was recognised as existing before the end of the sixteenth century' (1997:60;70;75). The belief that prescriptivism is a freak of British linguistic history should perhaps be treated with caution. More relevant perhaps is the recent history of the debate in Britain over teaching grammar in schools: the Milroys give details of the Kingman and Cox reports and related issues during the 80s (1999:131ff), as does Cameron (1995:85ff., *The grammar "panic"*). Christie (1999a:156-8) also assesses this debate and relates it to similar debates in Australia.

Introductory texts in linguistics usually include a brief history of prescriptive attitudes to English, simplifying the issues and thus inevitably distorting them. Fromkin and Rodman, for example, imply that Bishop Lowth was single-handedly responsible for many of the well-known shibboleths in English ('Lowth, influenced by Latin grammar and by personal preference, prescribed a number of new rules for English', 1993:15). A corrective to this view can be found in Quirk and Stein: 'we cannot blame Lowth and his contemporaries for all the pet notions we have been discussing. The trailing preposition, for example, is called by Lowth "an Idiom which our language is strongly inclined to"' (1990:229). Fromkin and Rodman have apparently been swayed by 'personal preference' themselves: any account of the prescriptive/descriptive debate is bound to reveal the standpoint of the writer. Even the scholarly Leonard does not restrict himself to recounting the prescriptive grammarians' views but also evaluates them: 'not being scholars in linguistics, these men were quite unaware that scholarship is a condition precedent to intelligent judgement, and their legislation was "emphatic in exact proportion to their ignorance"' (1962: 43).

2.2.2 The *prescriptive* versus *descriptive* debate

Hudson's first 'issue on which linguists can agree' (1981, 1(a), quoted above, 'Linguists describe language empirically...' etc.) does not find universal unqualified acceptance. That it is a far from settled matter is evidenced by the many debates it has given rise to in the literature. An example of such a debate is to be found in several issues of the journal *English Today*, a publication of the kind which 'may include contributions from professional experts, but are not read primarily by experts and cannot be classed as scholarly journals' (Cameron 1995: viii). An article in January 1988 entitled *The word-watchers* sparked a heated debate which ran in this journal through 1988 and 1989 against a background of the Kingman and Cox reports and the question of whether or not to teach grammar and Standard English in schools. Some well-known contributors to this interesting social document were John Sinclair, Sidney Greenbaum, Braj Kachru and David Crystal. Puzzlement was the reaction of one reader:

> if the linguists really describe the way people actually speak (and write), they will surely be able to see how they ought to speak and write. A prescription is good and useful as far as it is description-based. I don't know why the term prescription should always be pejorative. (*English Today*, October 1990:61)

Burchfield, however, has observed that 'The battle between the prescriptivists and descriptivists is far from over and looks likely to continue into the twenty-first century' (1990:357). And indeed it does continue, as the title of Garner (2001) suggests: *Calling for a truce in the descriptivist-prescriptivist wars*. Garner complains about 'the pedagogical irrelevance of modern linguistics' and says that 'Despite the decades-old campaign to convince the public that no uses of language are inherently better than others, literate people continue to yearn for guidance on linguistic questions' (2001:7).

Two widely cited texts in the literature discussing prescriptivism are Milroy and Milroy's *Authority in Language* (1999 [1991,1987]) and Cameron's *Verbal Hygiene* (1995). The Milroys' is the standard reference on prescriptivism and the 'complaint tradition' in general and on the long-running debate over the teaching of Standard English in Britain in particular. In the 1991 edition the Milroys pointed out that

> Advances made by linguists in descriptive grammar have not for the most part been understood outside linguistics. Indeed ... general linguists are sometimes actually blamed for what has often been seen as a decline in standards of English teaching. (1991:49)

and the situation was apparently no better when they came to update this section for the third edition. They refer to a 1998 article in the *Guardian Weekly* which blamed Oxford undergraduates' misspellings in part on 'professional linguists' for their 'relativist' view of correctness, complaining that 'the problem has not been seriously addressed because many professional linguists withheld help and support when asked for it' (1999:42-3). In response to this sort of criticism from the public the Milroys attempt to legitimize some varieties of prescriptivism and thus reconcile the anti-prescriptive professional persona with the prescriptive pedagogic one.

Cameron suggests that splitting prescriptivism into two 'Types' as the Milroys do licenses linguists to be prescriptive in one area of their discipline, such as critical discourse analysis, while continuing to disparage the public's language concerns, and it saves them from having to face the question of how to find a theoretical place in the discipline for norms and values. The Milroys' book is a useful study of prescriptivism, but not very profound, offering as it does simplistic ad hoc solutions to a complex problem (as is discussed further in 4.3.3, below). It lacks the intellectual clarity of Cameron's investigation, which looks squarely at the problem of 'the gulf between linguists and lay language-users' (1995:xi) and obliges us to

> wonder whether linguists have thrown the baby out with the bathwater, by criticizing not just silly rules, but the entire evaluative discourse to which these rules belong. The typical response of a linguist faced with somebody like Dummett or Rees-Mogg is not merely to take issue with the specific (and, let us grant, often eccentric) value judgements he is proposing, but to deny that there could be any legitimate interest in questions of linguistic value. (1995:xiii)

Cameron defines the problem and indicates the direction we need to go in to find a solution:

> if linguists are to engage more productively with non-linguists, we need to think seriously about our own use of evaluative terms: both about the fact that we do actually use them, in spite of protestations to the contrary, and also about which terms we use and how. (1995:233)

> we cannot stand aside from the popular discourse of value. Attitudes cannot be changed by fiat, but only by persuasion; and persuading people to any point of view or course of action depends not only on telling them what is true to the best of your knowledge, but also on engaging their sense of what is right. (1995:235)

> Very many language users hold passionate convictions about what is right in language, and conversely about what is wrong with it. Unfortunately, the strength of passion with which verbal hygienists express their views and pursue their goals is not often matched by the strength of their arguments. If this is to change, and if linguistics is to make any contribution to changing it, we must acknowledge people's genuine concerns about language, understand the desires and fears that lie behind their concerns, and try to work with them, not against them. (1995:236)

What particularly distinguishes Cameron's book from others on the topic of prescriptivism and makes it clearly the best overview is the way it links the social issues with the theoretical, where others are inclined to focus on one or the other. Because of this she is able to see that the problem may have much to do with the linguist's own metalanguage. This is a vital insight for getting to the root of the problem.

There are other texts which add useful material to the discussion. One for students is *Good and bad English* in Graddol, Leith and Swann (1996:338-371), which focuses primarily on the Standard English and grammar-in-schools debate in Britain. Two texts which explore the wider social background are Edwards (1994) and Pennycook (1994). In *The prescriptive urge* (1994:146-174), Edwards laments the fact that 'language planning is subservient to the demands of non-academic interests, with social and political agendas' and that professional linguistic assistance counts for so little and suggests that 'linguists – despite their traditional reluctance to prescribe, despite their sense that language change is a constant and natural process, despite their view that broad usage is the ultimate criterion of "correctness" – might bring their skills to bear and might, by their contributions, forestall other, less disinterested action' (1994:172-4). He also makes the important and much overlooked point that talking to the public would be good for the *linguist*: 'One result of professionals attempting to reach the 'others' is a more substantial grounding of the professionals' own discipline. ... the very exercise of communicating with the public is salutary for the subject, in just the same way that teaching a topic one knows very well to essentially uninformed students can be' (1994:207-8).

In *Linguistics as a European cultural form* Pennycook (1994:117-126) observes that 'from a position that claims legitimacy through its status as a Western science, linguistics distances itself from questions concerning society, culture and politics ... and at the same time prescribes both a particular view of language (monolinguistic and phonocentric) and particular forms of that language' (1994:126), and in *The disciplining of applied linguistics* (1994:126-129) he says that his 'concern is not so much with the descriptive adequacy of linguistics (though clearly there are many problems here) as with the effects of its claim to descriptive adequacy'. He is concerned that linguistics 'posits a series of core meanings and truths that are not in the hands of the everyday language user' and this results in 'limitations on thought and action imposed by applied linguistics' (1994:125-7).

To conclude this section I will mention two journal articles that take the debate into new contexts, providing a broader view of the question of language and value: Bolton and Hutton (1995) and Chambard (1994). Bolton and Hutton's *Bad and banned language* (1995) takes the discussion of prescriptivism into the realm of a different kind of 'bad' language: the language of triad secret societies in Hong Kong, which 'can in some circumstances constitute a serious criminal offense' (1995:159). They explore the social issues surrounding attitudes to triad language, suggesting that censorship is not a perfect solution, because 'the repression of bad language helps lay the social foundation of its badness', but lauding the way the government takes the public's objections seriously because it 'feels it cannot simply deny responsibility for the fears and beliefs of ordinary citizens' (1995:181). They contrast this with the way linguistics deals with (or rather, does not deal with) this kind of problem, criticising Labov, Trudgill and others for being out of touch with people's fears. For sociolinguists the vernacular may be 'something vigorous and vivid, and the proper focus of real sociolinguistic fieldwork', and linguistic taboos 'the quaint artifacts of linguistic naïveté', but 'in the context of Hong Kong ... the consideration of taboo language and the vernacular of street gangs involves far more than the study of linguistic variation and innovation. For successive Hong Kong governments, this language has been perceived as not simply something "bad", but as a discourse associated with riots, revolution, and resistance to the colonial administration' (1995:178). They deplore the uselessness of some of the theoretical linguist's key tenets in the face of real social problems: 'The Saussurean distinction between synchronic and diachronic, which was introduced to break the link between usage and etymology, collapses when we look at lay linguistic beliefs and

explanations, i.e. lay metalinguistic behaviour' (1995:162). They do, however, find use for Halliday's theory of 'anti-language' (1976), because it takes proper cognisance of the social.

Chambard's *La parole dévaluée* claims the devaluing of language is not just an oddity of linguistics but part of a wider social problem. She believes that 'we are living in a civilization of devaluated speech' (1994:67). She complains of *la déperdition de la valeur attachée aux mots* ('the loss of the value attached to words'), among young people especially, and claims that *Les notions de "mot juste", d'expression "propre" ou "impropre", ont pratiquement disparu* ('The concepts of the 'right word', the 'appropriate' or 'inappropriate' expression, have practically disappeared') (1994:68). She also targets the empty and impersonal speech of television broadcasting, and argues that this has much to do with speech being 'devalued':

> *Pour des jeunes nés dans ce contexte, tout cela porte atteinte à la confiance dans le langage, au sentiment que la parole a une valeur, qu'elle révèle celui qui la profère, qu'elle est à la fois communication et action, moyen et lieu d'échange, que par elle on se fait comprendre et que l'on comprend.*
> ('For young people born and brought up in this context, all this undermines confidence in language: the feeling that speech has value, that it reveals the person who utters it, that it is at the same time communication and action, means and locus of exchange, that by its use we make ourselves understood and we understand.' (1994:72-3, my translation.)

2.2.3 Radical dissent

In the literature critical of the orthodox stance there are some strong expressions of dissent. The general argument is that 'Linguistic enquiry is inherently ideological; and the claims of scientific objectivity and autonomy themselves only function as component parts of the linguistic ideology dominant today' (Joseph and Taylor 1990: Title page). There are pleas for notice to be taken: 'The whole issue of norms requires a less ad hoc and more sophisticated treatment than it has on the whole received from sociolinguists' (Cameron 1990:86).

Aitchison is one who has put forward more publicly than most, particularly in the1996 BBC Reith Lectures, the view of the linguist as an impartial observer of language who finds 'interesting' the language forms others are enraged at, and the opinion that 'many people, including some of those in positions of power, are back in the dark ages over understanding how it works' (1997:9). However, not only was the popular audience not entirely won over, as is

evidenced by the letters of criticism she received in response to the lectures (1997:97-105), neither were all linguists. Love points out the anti-prescriptive linguist's failure of logic:

> Nor are people likely to be taken in by the absurd assertion that linguists 'realized' a long time ago that 'no part of language is ever deformed or bad', and that anyone who disputes this is a crank. There is no fact of the matter here: we are in the realm of taste and judgement, and the lay language-user's taste and judgement as to what is 'good' or 'bad' in language are in principle no more or less worthy of attention than the professional linguist's. It is simply not the linguist's business to be pronouncing on matters of this sort. (1998:208)

He puts the debate into a broader perspective, suggesting we do not yet understand how the recent emphasis in linguistics on the role of nature rather than nurture 'affects the traditional humanist engagement with languages as cultural phenomena', and concludes: 'That the question needs to be squarely addressed is perhaps the chief lesson of *The Language Web*' (1998:208-9).

An article that does address the question squarely is Hymes (1983), who observes how difficult it is in doing linguistics to keep the social in sight while of necessity decontextualising the language, and how easy it is to lose sight of what Singh calls 'the inherent unity and coherence of the entire human enterprise' (1996b:3). Hymes criticizes linguists for their failure to overcome 'the separation between questions of language and value that has characterised the development of modern linguistics in the United States' (1983:191). His development of this theme is worth quoting at length:

> Values have been taken as obvious, taken for granted, or else excluded on principle, so far as linguists themselves are concerned. The uses of language have been postulated as everywhere essentially equivalent, rather than being investigated. Indeed, one of the central tenets of the liberalism of modern linguistics has been the essential equivalence in use of all languages studied by linguists, despite the abundant evidence to the contrary. Some even think it the mark of a radical to denounce attention to differences of this sort. Inequality in speaking is to be overcome, it seems, by denying that it exists. I cannot explain this deep-seated hostility on the part of even cultural materialists toward facts that one would think a Marxist would be the first to see, except as a projection of a professional bias (all languages are equal in the sight of linguistics) and a reaction against the prejudices of society at large, prejudices which do equate difference with inferiority. But I cannot see any way for a science of language to contribute to the transformation of a situation of linguistic inequality that it does not recognize as existing. I see no possibility of a truly social science of language on the basis of this attitude, an attitude that I would call militant, not radical. For it

> is essential to this attitude that social shaping of verbal means and abilities is denied. Amidst all the costs of inequality and exploitation, language is privileged, on this view, and remains unscathed. (Hymes1983:191)

In the same volume Romaine argues that the linguistic equality doctrine hampers real research: 'Since linguists have traditionally tended to assume not only the equivalence of all languages with respect to their referential adequacy and power, but also an idealized and undifferentiated universal competence of the native speaker, we know very little about the upper and lower limits of expressive resources which languages have and which speakers can avail themselves of within particular languages' (1984:112). Again in this volume, Dressler points out the prescriptivists' ambivalent attitude to language change: language death (which we are licensed to worry about) is not a different kind of thing from language change (which we are not). Rather, 'Language death is a very specific type of language change' (1996:195). Interestingly, he observes that a 'symptom of the terminal decay is the lack of puristic reactions against this massive interference... . Imperfect speakers ... fail to notice such "corruptions", and older fluent speakers seem to have given up correcting them. This reflects a change in language attitude...: the recessive, decaying language is considered as worthless, not worthy of being properly transmitted. Such attitudinal change produces a relaxation of social, sociolinguistic and linguistic norms' (1996:199). Singh's own contribution to this volume (1996b) and his collection of critical essays (1996c) examine from a variety of perspectives the problem of how linguistics can engage with its social context.

Critics' objections to the orthodoxy fall into two categories: the social – its failure to be of practical use to the people it claims to be concerned about, and the theoretical – the inconsistency, incoherence and illogicality of some of its basic tenets. The most outspoken criticism of the latter kind, and the most far-reaching in its implications, comes from Roy Harris, who contends that the linguist must acknowledge kinship with the lay language user; a reversal of the linguistic-scientist-versus-ignorant-layperson approach. In a sweeping attack on today's core linguistics, he condemns the 'mythology of the language machine' which 'makes the genetic endowment of *homo sapiens* entirely responsible for how language works'; reduces 'linguistic description to the analysis of formal patterns'; 'divorces the linguistic form of discourse from its social causes and effects'; 'tells of linguistic rules buried deep beyond the reach of consciousness, and formulates them in arcane algebras beyond the grasp of lay understanding'; and, in brief, 'dehumanises language' (1987:173). He links the mechanisation of linguistic theory to a wider

social ill, of the kind observed by Chambard (above),[3] in a passage that outdoes the most apocalyptic of the prescriptivists' pronouncements:

> The society which feeds and feeds off this mythology is a society in which public communication has manifestly given up on language. The very style of presentation renounces the truth in advance. It is a society which looks into the screened eyes of its newscasters and need look no further than those saccadic responses to understand that one can no longer believe what the President of the United States says about international terrorism, or what the local police say about the protection of the community, or what the news bulletin says about either, or about anything else. What is said is no longer even said to be believed, but to be reported as having been said. The primary function of language is now metalinguistic. Society already reaps the whirlwind of the language machine. (1987:173)

Harris's relentless yet scholarly exposé of logical flaws at the heart of Western linguistic theory – the 'language myth', discussed in 5.1, below – is a corrective to many unquestioningly accepted tenets of orthodox linguistics. *The Language Makers* (1980) claims that 'language-making involves much more than merely the construction of systems of signs. It is also the essential process by which men construct a cultural identity for themselves, and for the communities to which they see themselves as belonging' (1980:Preface). In *The Language Myth* (1981) he demonstrates that 'a great deal of impressively authoritative modern theorising about language is founded upon a myth' and that the 'rapid metamorphosis [of linguistics] into "science", by fiat of the dominant academic figures in the subject, constitutes one of the most revealing and disturbing episodes in the intellectual history of the twentieth century' (1981:Preface). Following this, *The Language Machine* (1987) connects the mechanization of linguistics with that of society and criticizes the 'computer-age mythology' which licenses the Chomskyan idea of 'a biological language machine within us' (1987:Preface). He is concerned about the loss of value and the pretence at objectivity: '*any* categorisation of usage into

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In a passage too long to quote here (but of which the following gives the gist), Chambard makes a connection similar to Harris's: *Qui parle, d'ailleurs, derrière ces visages dont les yeux, braqués sur le prompteur, feignent de vous regarder ...? ... le discours est sans origine; nul émetteur l'assume ... le destinataire aussi est anonyme ... Parole de rien et, véritablement, parole de personne* (1994:72). ('Besides, who is speaking, behind those faces whose eyes, fixed on the teleprompter, pretend to be looking at you ...? ... the discourse comes from nowhere; no sender claims it ... the receiver is also anonymous ... Words about nothing and, in truth, words belonging to nobody.' My translation.)

"grammatical" and "ungrammatical" involves a social value judgement of some kind, and it is idle to pretend otherwise' (1987:143). He gives the anti-prescriptive stance short shrift, saying

> there is no reason why prescriptive linguistics should not be 'scientific', just as there is no reason why prescriptive medicine should not be. But twentieth-century linguists, anxious to claim 'scientific' status for their new synchronic discipline, were glad enough to retain the old nineteenth-century whipping-boy of prescriptivism, in order thereby to distinguish their own concerns as 'descriptive', not 'prescriptive'. When the history of twentieth-century linguistics comes to be written, a naïve, unquestioning faith in the validity of this distinction will doubtless be seen as one of the main factors in the academic sociology of the subject. (1980:151-2)

The condensed essence of Harris's critique can be found in his reply to his critics (1997), in which he describes his 'integrational' linguistics as 'a pragmatics of self-understanding and a basis for lay linguistic therapy rather than ... part of a university curriculum' (1997:310).

There is an extensive literature of similar radical rethinkings and objections related to the question of value in linguistic theory. Some noteworthy examples, taking a variety of perspectives, are Robinson (1975) *The New Grammarians' Funeral*; Itkonen (1978) *Grammatical Theory and Metascience*, which explores the philosophical, logical and methodological issues of normativity in linguistic data; Roy Harris *On redefining linguistics* and Love *The locus of languages* in Davis and Taylor (1990); articles on *Linguistic ideologies* by Taylor, Crowley, Joseph and Cameron in Joseph and Taylor *Ideologies of Language* (1990:9-93); Taylor (1997) *Theorizing Language* (in particular the chapter on *Normativity and linguistic form*; and Hutton (1998) *Semantics and the 'etymological fallacy' fallacy*. This last explores the way the linguist's *synchronic/diachronic* distinction excludes aspects of language the ordinary language user values. Hutton presents a convincing case for rethinking this distinction. He states that 'etymology and etymological awareness have played a key role in twentieth century politics of language' and suggests that linguists' attempts to ignore this fact 'reveal professionally constructed.... ignorance of the socio-political complexity of ideologies that make use of etymology, and intolerance of views that diverge from those of the academic expert'. He argues that etymological speculation is 'in a sense part of the language itself' (1998:195-99). Relevant also to questions of language and value are two recent works which take new critical angles on Chomsky's generative linguistics and innatist theory of language, Sampson (1999) *Educating Eve*, and Sampson (2001) *Empirical Linguistics*.

Finally, Halliday's writings and the body of systemic functional literature associated with these are an implicit (and occasionally explicit) critique of formal orthodox linguistics, putting criticism into practice by finding ways of talking about language that differ from those of orthodox theory. This literature is not reviewed here, because it is the rationale, justification and support system for the following chapters.

2.2.4 Prescriptivism debated on the air and in cyberspace

It is of course not only in the published literature that the *prescriptive/descriptive* debate plays out. Prescriptivism is also a topic of interest on the air and in cyberspace. In a radio programme, *Word of Mouth*, which has been aired on South African English radio (*SAfm*) for many years, linguists serving as panellists tread a fine line between satisfying the listeners' demands for a prescriptive response to their questions and observing the anti-prescriptive tenets of their discipline. Space does not allow further discussion here of the relevance of such a programme to the debate and the problem of how to narrow the gap between the linguist and the lay language enthusiast. I will mention only that when panellists have occasionally tried to broach matters to do with theoretical linguistics, listeners have reacted in a way that can be gauged from the following letter sent to the presenter after a discussion of Chomsky and of Pinker's then new book (1994):

> Dear Mr Orr
> Because I have always been interested in language and phonetics I have rushed through my early morning ablutions every Sunday to enjoy your Word of Mouth programme – but I and many of my friends have found the last two Sundays a thorough bore, especially this last one. Please leave Tromski's very boring theories to be discussed elsewhere and allow your programme to be conducted by interesting schoolmasters and lecturers who discuss things of interest to normal speakers of English. Yours sincerely (illegible), Rosebank, 22 Sept. 1997.

The age, nationality and social class of the correspondent can also be gauged from this; i.e. seventy-to-eighty (*ablutions*, *schoolmasters*), British expatriate, middle-class. Linguists are plainly handicapped in addressing this kind of audience, which has fixed ideas as to what it wants to hear about language: curiosities and correctnesses. As the presenter observed, essentially what the listeners wanted to hear was 'more of the same' (personal communication).

A completely different set of respondents, who did not want more of the same, debated the *prescriptive/descriptive* issues on an Internet forum, the *Linguist List*, from 9 May to 1 August 1994, and again from 12 November 1997 to 27 January 1998. Each of these debates drew comments from some 50 linguists, about half of them from the United States, and the others from the UK, Germany, Spain, Norway, Bulgaria, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Africa. The debates are recorded in the *Linguist List* archives, and are an interesting record of recent opinion in unedited form. Cameron says she has 'profited throughout the writing of [her] book from regular forays into cyberspace' because 'people are very unguarded about expressing their views there, and [she] take[s] those views as a useful indication of current concerns and the range of opinions they support – always with the proviso that net-users represent a fairly narrow social stratum' (1995: 237n.5). The *Linguist List* debates indicate that the anti-prescriptive approach occasions considerable malaise. The views expressed by the participants take the form of, on the one hand, intemperate dismissal of prescriptive concerns and, on the other, hesitant admission that linguists may have got some things wrong. As is characteristic of Internet discussions, no consensus is reached, and the debates peter out without anything being said that might constitute a real answer to Cameron's question, which would mean rethinking the basic premises of orthodox linguistic theory.

2.3 Introductory texts in linguistics

To complete the survey of anti-prescriptive texts in 2.1.2, I have looked at what is likely to be the student's first encounter with the anti-prescriptive doctrine: the introductory text in linguistics. These texts merit separate discussion because, whereas the literature discussed above is primarily addressed to the converted, the introductory literature represents an interface between the worlds of the layperson and the linguist. I have drawn my observations from a survey of the way the topic of prescriptivism is introduced to beginners in sixteen introductory texts, British and American, published over some forty years: Hockett (1958), Hall (1964), Crystal (1971), Langacker (1973[1967]), Lyons (1981), Hudson (1984), Aitchison (1987[1978]), Radford (1988), Finegan and Besnier (1989), Fromkin and Rodman (1993[1978]), Pinker (1994), Akmajian, Demers and Harnish (1995[1979]), Trask (1995), Napoli (1996), O'Grady, Dobrovolsky and Katamba (1997), and Radford, Atkinson, Britain, Clahsen and Spencer (1999). (I am aware of a certain unfairness in lumping these together: there is of course much variation in style and

approach amongst these texts. The lumping-together is justified only on the basis that all place considerable emphasis on the anti-prescriptive doctrine.)

Many of these texts present the topic right at the beginning, and some devote a large number of pages to it. None of them omit it altogether. The one that has the least to say about it – only one paragraph on the subject – is Radford et al. (1999). All apparently believe that pointing out the *prescriptive/ descriptive* difference is essential as a basis for beginning to study linguistics. These texts are aimed primarily at students, but some are also intended for a wider readership, lay or academic. I have included Pinker (1994) because, despite not being designed as a textbook, it is being used by lecturers who find its popular style appeals to their students.[4] The treatment of the topic varies depending on the amount of space given to the subject, the intended readership, and the degree of dogmatism of the author. I examined these texts in order of dates of publication but could discern no particular trend (linguists have been emphatic about this topic for the past forty years),[5] other than that the rhetoric of some of the more recent texts is quite extreme; particularly that of Fromkin and Rodman (1993), Pinker (1994), Trask (1995) and Napoli (1996), whereas some of earlier date take a more scholarly approach: Hall (1964), Crystal (1971) and Langacker (1973), for example, deal with the subject of prescriptivism in considerable depth and without over-simplifying the issues. Crystal observes that 'In contrasting a new approach with an old, it is all too easy to paint a picture in black and white, whereas the reality of the situation is in many shades of grey' (1971:39), and Finegan and Besnier (1989), in discussing prescriptivism in a final chapter, give some serious consideration to lay attitudes. My cursory survey necessarily risks over-generalization: not all the problems I mention are to be found in all of the texts I examined, but I believe the features I have identified are sufficiently typical to merit concern. I have illustrated mostly from those that use the most obvious techniques of persuasion. Space

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For example, a person who lectures to 'elementary school teachers' writes that Pinker's book is 'useful in getting across the message', and that 'by comparison, most of the class struggled through Halliday and Hasan, who much more than Pinker attempt to relate their theory to teaching' (*Linguist List* discussion, 22 June 1994, 5.761).

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Roy Harris describes this as 'the anti-prescriptivist witch-hunt in modern linguistics' (1987:128). The increase in stridency can be clearly seen when comparing Fromkin and Rodman's 1993 (fifth) edition with their 1978 (second) edition. The more recent edition makes 'prescriptive grammars' a separate section with bold heading, adds 'scare quotes', and has additional paragraphs on the subject and a cartoon illustrating the supposed foolishness of prescriptivists.

does not allow for discussion here of changing trends in the teaching of linguistic theory over the past forty years, but I would link the increasing emphasis on anti-prescriptivism in the texts I examined to the trend that de Beaugrande has observed: the way that 'recent Kuhnian textbooks invest steadily greater effort and hyperbole in making the development of linguistics fit one "normal" paradigm' (1991:369n.2).

Besides its obvious function of providing instruction, the introductory text also functions as a rite of passage into a new social group. It thus provides evidence of the process by which adherents of the lay theory of language, which is primarily prescriptive, are persuaded to abandon their beliefs and adopt a new way of seeing language. Christie (1999a) discusses this kind of initiatory process in another setting. Referring to Bernstein's model of the pedagogical process (1996), and exemplifying from the discourse of the English literature classroom, she shows how instructional discourse is reinforced by regulative discourse[6] and how, by being obliged to satisfy evaluative criteria, the student is 'apprenticed to the ideal pedagogic subject position' (1999a:178). She points out that 'evaluation is the key to pedagogic practice' (1999a:160) and demonstrates that in the literary classroom its 'purpose is to develop certain moral positionings' (1999a:172). The process that is revealed in the introductory linguistics texts listed above appears to be similar: linguists writing for students are not only teaching them methods of describing language but also, and crucially to the success of these methods, inculcating in them a particular value system. This value system is the belief in 'the scientific method', tending to a naive positivism (echoing Hudson's 'Issue' 1(a), which states that linguists 'take language as it is', 1981:335). The regulative element in the text, suggesting that linguistics reveals the facts rather than just one possible construal of those 'facts', discourages individual response (which is of course further curtailed by the assessment process). Wolf and Love observe that

> Although linguistics tends to present itself as a culture-neutral science of language, the enterprise is based not on *ab initio* consideration of the phenomena under investigation, but on a projection of certain preoccupations about language derived from a particular tradition of linguistic thought. (1997:1)

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6 Halliday uses the terms *exposition* and *injunction* for these two kinds of discourse (1994a:390). Instructional discourse is description and explanation, while regulative is the kind designed to persuade and control. The relationship between the two and the ways they combine are exhaustively analysed in Halliday's 'silver' text (1994a:368-91).

Introductory texts, therefore, while purporting simply to pass on scientific knowledge, are indoctrinating students into a belief system. This phenomenon has been commented on by Lawson, who observes that

> Theoretically 'neutral' introductory linguistics textbooks often act as vehicles of indoctrination into a certain theoretical viewpoint; not only is the text's ideology apparent in the first chapter, but what that theory sees as its antithesis is also revealed and argued against. (2001:1)

An important preliminary step in the process of indoctrination is persuading the student that the traditional prescriptive approach is wrong, as Cameron observes:

> The very first thing any student of linguistics learns is that 'linguistics is descriptive, not prescriptive' – concerned, in the way of all science, with objective facts and not subjective value judgements. Prescriptivism thus represents the threatening Other, the forbidden; it is a spectre that haunts linguistics and a difference that defines linguistics. (1995:5)

In the following section I consider some of the salient features of these texts, first examining the picture that is built up of the linguist's difference and separateness from the ordinary language user, and difference from grammarians of the past, and then identifying some of the features of the regulative register that appear in these texts, revealing the way the genre combines indoctrination with instruction.

A major concern of these texts is to reject the image of the prescriptive traditional grammarian and replace it with that of the linguist as the detached scientist:

> The reason why present-day linguists are so insistent about the distinction between descriptive and prescriptive rules is simply that traditional grammar was very strongly normative in character. The grammarian saw it as his task to formulate the standards of correctness and to impose these, if necessary, upon the speakers of the language. (Lyons 1981:48)

> The notion of absolute and unchanging 'correctness' is quite foreign to linguists. ... A linguist would note with interest, rather than horror, the fact that you can have your hair washed and set in a glamorama in North Carolina, or your car oiled at a lubritorium in Sydney, or that you can buy apples at a fruitique in a trendy suburb of London. (Aitchison 1987:13)

The emphasis on the new, scientific approach tends to obscure the fact that all grammatical analysis today owes a debt to earlier grammarians. Much of the 'strongly normative character' that linguists object to is most evident in isolated shibboleths, which unfortunately distract from the real achievements of the past. When referring to traditional grammar, introductory texts focus on a narrow range of prescriptive grammatical dislikes, such as split infinitives, double negatives, *between you and I*, *who* for *whom*, *shall* and *will* not differentiated, *like* used as a conjunction, *due to* as a prepositional phrase, prepositions at the end of sentences, and so on. A favourite is the argument over *It is I* versus *It's me*, which is mentioned, for example, by Hockett (1958:5), by Akmajian et al. (1995:5) and by Lyons (1981:61), and prompts a whole paragraph of fulminations by Trask ('bizarre invention','cobbled together', 'ridiculous campaign'; 1995:160-1). The examples are similar to those on Crystal's list of the top ten 'pet hates' from a 1986 survey of letters to a BBC language programme: 1. *between you and I*; 2. split infinitives; 3. misplaced *only*; 4. *none* followed by a plural verb; 5. *different to/than*; 6. sentences ending with prepositions; 7. incorrect use of *shall* and *will*; 8. *hopefully* used as sentence modifier; 9. *who* where it should be *whom*; 10. double negatives (Crystal 1995:194). The public have become unduly sensitized to these particular points of grammar, and the authors of the introductory texts seem just as excessively aware of them. Unfortunately, the linguist's harping on these minor niggles sends the message that *all* evaluation of language is foolish, and this obscures legitimate worries about language, and distracts students from giving proper consideration to the role of evaluation in linguistic theory.

It also distracts from proper consideration of the roots of linguistics, starting with the classical grammarians. Robins suggests that 'almost every textbook of English grammar bears evidence of a debt to Thrax' (1990:35), and he devotes thirteen pages to description of the *Téchnē Grammatikē* and works arising from it, concluding that the achievement of the ancient Greek grammarians 'is strong enough to deserve and to sustain critical examination. It is also such as to inspire our gratitude and admiration' (1990:47). He says that it is appropriate to reflect sympathetically on

> the very great achievements of successive generations of Greek scholars in devising and systematizing a formal terminology for the description of the classical Greek language as it was written and read aloud (and they set their sights no higher), a terminology which ... became the foundation for nearly two thousand years of grammatical theory... . From the resources of a language not

> previously required to embody precise metalinguistic statements the Greeks had hammered out ... a detailed and articulated technical vocabulary for grammatical description. (1990:46)

This terminology includes such things as 'precise and correct observations' on phonetics, a rich description of morphology, distinction of word classes, analysis of sentence structures and description of syntactic relations and semantic functions (Robins 1990:11-47), building the foundations for all grammatical description to follow. Crystal (1971) is unusual amongst the introductory texts in giving the beginner a balanced picture of the place of traditional grammar:

> It is true that many features of traditional theories and descriptions of language have proved to be unhelpful or positively misleading, and one of the main stimuli for the development of linguistics was a reaction against this. On the other hand, it is equally true that many of the principles and procedures of modern linguistics are foreshadowed – sometimes only implicitly, but sometimes in chasteningly explicit detail – in the work of earlier scholars. ...When linguistics began to develop in the early decades of this century, there was a natural and reasonable reaction against much of traditional study. This, however, led to many of the valuable insights of this study being ignored or their importance minimized. (1971:39)

This contrasts with others that emphasize dismissal:

> a new approach to English grammar ... inevitably implies a radical house-cleaning... . There are a great many rules of old-fashioned prescriptive grammar that need to be swept into the dustbin... (Hall 1964:442)

Many introductory texts give the impression that it is only now that linguists are getting things right. Aitchison dismisses the classical grammarians in one sentence: 'This attitude [i.e. the prescriptive emphasis on the best written language] began as far back as the 2nd century B.C. when scholars in Alexandria took the authors of 5th-century Greece as their models'. She says that 'this belief in the superiority of the written word has continued for over two millennia', but 'linguists regard the **spoken** language as primary, not the written' (1987:13-14). This last statement shows how an evaluation may be tucked away within apparently objective language, so that students feel they are reading a 'scientific' text, and are unaware of being subtly positioned to accept a certain viewpoint. To say that spoken language is *primary* could of course just mean that it comes first, chronologically, in the individual and in the species; which would be an objective, though banal, statement. But to *regard* spoken language as primary implies an

evaluation; here *primary* means 'first in importance'. However, Aitchison does not use the wording 'linguists regard the spoken language as *more important than* the written', because that would be too obviously evaluative, and *primary* has a suitably technical ring to it. Thus the student learns to relegate concerns with written language to second place, not as an evaluative choice but as a scientifically objective procedure, an advance on the mistakes of the past.[7]

The targeting of petty details of prescriptive grammar suggests that discrediting earlier opinions is the main concern of some of these authors – referred to by Lawson as 'rites of legitimization' (Bourdieu's term), 'the killing of one's linguistic "fathers"' (2001:10). The dismissal of the achievements of the past discourages the student from intelligently assessing what earlier grammarians did or did not achieve. Robinson, however, is of the opinion that

> Chomsky's contribution is small by comparison with the advances made in Athens and Alexandria and represented in the security, the commonplaces of words like our *verb*, *noun*, *sentence*, *word*, but that is the common fate of genuine contributors to an established discipline. (1975:35)[8]

Restoring the balance like this might give students a sense of proportion and free them to question new ideas. Instead, we have a situation where many may well know nothing about traditional grammar except that it is 'the bad stuff we have been taught to reject'. To take an example, Finegan and Besnier, explaining transformations in generative grammar, say that 'Traditional grammars discuss imperative sentences as having an 'understood' *you* as subject' and they then turn to the (improved) generative explanation: 'In some transformational analyses of grammar, this understood subject is accounted for by postulating *you* in the underlying structure and deleting it by a transformational rule' (1989:155). A student who had not been coached to accept the equation 'traditional grammar = bad, unscientific grammar' might want to argue that the technicality of the new explanation adds nothing very helpful, and serves only

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7 This analysis is not intended to imply Machiavellian cunning on the part of Jean Aitchison. It is, on the contrary, a major argument of this thesis that linguists are *not* sufficiently aware of the extent to which the theory they espouse is a construct of their own use of language.

8 De Beaugrande contrasts Newmeyer's claim that 'on the basis of [Chomsky's] idealization, more has been learned about the nature of language in the last 25 years than in the previous 2500' (1980:250) with Firth's 'to dismiss two thousand years of linguistic study in Asia as well as in Europe ... is just plain stupid' (1957:139) (1991:369).

to dehumanize language. It might be argued that the traditional way of understanding the imperative mood is better, because it includes the interpersonal meaning. If ordered to 'Take out the garbage', the addressee might ask '*Who* are you telling to take out the garbage?' and the answer would be 'I am telling *you* to take out the garbage', which is a reasonable demonstration that the speaker's sentence did indeed have an understood *you* as subject. That the word 'you' is superfluous has a contextual explanation – we know very well that it is the recipient of the message who is being thus instructed (he or she is being addressed by a speaker, or reading a notice or set of instructions). But instead of talking in terms of *speakers meaning things* the student has been conditioned to talk in terms of *(bits of) language doing things*, autonomously: 'The reflexive transformation requires the presence of the subject NP ... If the imperative transformation were to apply first ... it would delete the subject NP you ...' and so on (Finegan and Besnier 1989:156).

Students who learn to describe language in terms of formal rules are unlikely to question whether there might be better ways: *the very possibility of evaluation is eliminated by the claim that evaluation has been eliminated from the linguist's description.* Instead of being encouraged to develop some sense of the history of the discipline, some variety of perspective and versatility of approach, and a healthy scepticism in regard to the latest methods, students are put under heavy pressure by many of these texts, particularly the more recent, to favour the new. Napoli (1996), for example, is touted by its back-cover blurb as 'unique among texts today in that it brings the reader face-to-face with current cutting-edge theories'. This is an example of the regulative register 'projecting' the instructional (as discussed below) – particularly as the back-cover blurb is often the section of a book that is read first.

Linked to the dismissal of past achievements is a narrow Anglocentric view of history, which treats prescriptivism as a peculiar aberration of English. Where introductory texts do give some historical background, the focus is on the 18th century in England. One example of such background is a paragraph in Pinker's chapter on 'The Language Mavens' – not an unbiased account: 'The scandal of the language mavens began in the eighteenth century... increasingly fastidious rules that no refined person could afford to ignore... hobgoblins... these eighteenth century fads' (1994:373-4). As it is likely that all languages have preferred and dispreferred forms that speakers insist on (Thomas 1991), some discussion of prescriptivism in languages other than English might provide a more balanced view of the phenomenon. Trask is one who

does mention purism in other languages and at other times (Spain, France, Italy, ancient Rome), but with the intention of pouring scorn on 'a body of conservative opinion' that complains about 'ugly, sloppy, illiterate new usages' (1995:165) rather than of considering why this way of talking about language persists, despite linguists' best efforts, and whether it might have a linguistic as well as a social function.

A major concern in these texts, then, is to emphasize the *difference* of linguistics from past forms of language study:

> It is important to stress the differences between this approach and the views of language to which you are likely to have been exposed at school. (Hudson 1984:8)

> One frequently meets people who think that linguistics is old school grammar jazzed up with a few new names. But it differs in several basic ways. (Aitchison 1987:12)

Having detached linguistics from its past, the introductory texts go on to detach the linguist from everyday concerns, painting a picture of a scientist who is unlike ordinary language users:

> First, and most important, linguistics is **descriptive**, not prescriptive. Linguists are interested in what is said, not what they think *ought* to be said. They describe language in all its aspects, but do not prescribe rules of 'correctness'. ... The notion of absolute and unchanging 'correctness' is quite foreign to linguists. (Aitchison 1987:12-13; emphases in original); In sharp contrast, when linguists speak of rules, they are not referring to rules from grammar books. (Akmajian et al.1995:7); To a linguist or psycholinguist, of course, language is like the song of the humpback whale (Pinker 1994:370); To a scientist, the fundamental fact of human language is its sheer improbability. (Pinker 1994:371)

Contributing to this distancing effect is the 'straw man' technique of singling out for attack a small selection of the most intransigent prescriptivists and the most absurd of their concerns:

> Today our bookshops are filled with books by language "purists" ... Edwin Newman, for example ... rails against those who use the word *hopefully* to mean "I hope" ... (Fromkin and Rodman 1993:15); Prescriptive grammarians have ... declared that it is ungrammatical to say *It's me*, and that the only acceptable form is *It's I*. ... Can you imagine looking at a bad photograph of yourself and exclaiming *Good heavens! Is that really I?* (Trask 1995:160)

The American film critic John Simon is the prototypical target, as his virulent prose is easy to criticize. Pinker, for example, rightly points out the tastelessness of Simon's comment that 'The English language is being treated nowadays exactly as slave traders once handled the merchandise in their slave ships, or as the inmates of concentration camps were dealt with by their Nazi jailers' (1981:97, quoted in Pinker 1994:385). However, Pinker is not above tasteless comparisons himself: 'the [prescriptive] rules survive by the same dynamic that perpetuates ritual genital mutilations and college fraternity hazing' (1994:374). Antagonism to the prescriptive approach is seen to warrant name-calling, for example:

> very many worthy persons ... "saviors" of the English language (Fromkin and Rodman 1993:15); transparently insane ... self-appointed experts ... ignorant or crazy ... little group of fanatics ... (Trask 1995:160-1); Maven, shmaven! *Kibbitzers* and *nudniks* is more like it (Pinker 1994:373); the jeremiads [sic] wailing about how sloppy language leads to sloppy thought are themselves hairballs of loosely associated factoids and tangled non-sequiturs. (Pinker 1994:399)

It ironic that the claim to be a dispassionate scientist is accompanied in texts such as Pinker's by persuasive rhetoric of the most impassioned kind. A personal style is appropriate for addressing beginners, but some of these writers lose their scientific detachment when criticizing the prescriptivists for being unscientific. Others, however, take a detached approach, treating prescriptivism as a subject worthy of study in itself. Hockett , for example, suggests that: 'A particular linguist may become interested in the whole phenomenon of correctness, and may study this in the same objective way he might examine Greek verbs ...' (1958:5).This is more 'scientific', but it has the effect of creating distance; putting the linguist on a different plane from the ordinary language user, who comes perilously close to being treated as a laboratory specimen. Hockett does not deny that 'as a *user* of language, the linguist is bound by the same conventions of his society as everyone else is', nor does he 'deny the reality of the distinction between correct and incorrect': it is just that 'the linguist is not particularly interested in such questions' (1958:5). This is to distance the linguist not only from ordinary language users, but also from him/herself as an ordinary language user, leading to the 'split personality syndrome' which I discuss further in Chapter Three.

I move on now to discuss some rhetorical features of these texts, using Christie's method of analysis, mentioned above. She refers to a suggestion of Halliday's that a text may be considered

metaphorically as functioning like a clause. Bernstein (1996) uses the clause grammar concept of *embedding*: seeing the instructional discourse as being contained within the regulative, as one clause may be contained within another. Christie prefers to conceptualise the regulative register as *projecting* the instructional (1999a:160-1): 'the secondary clause is projected through the primary clause, which instates it as a locution or an idea' (Halliday 1994a:219). She finds a parallel to this process in the English literature classroom, where the regulative register will be foregrounded at the beginning of a course and remain foregrounded while the teacher's goals are being made clear and becoming accepted by the students, after which the instructional register will come to the fore, and the regulative may disappear (though continuing to operate implicitly).

The idea of *embedding* focuses on the difficulty of separating the two registers, whereas Christie's representation of the relationship as one of *projection* focuses on the fact that there is a sender of the instruction, reminding us that the instruction is not a self-generated entity:

TABLE 2.3 Projecting clauses

I think	*the answer is forty-two.*
projecting clause	projected clause
regulative	instructional

I believe	*language is an instinct.*
projecting clause	projected clause
regulative	instructional

Hers is therefore a better description for the purpose of my argument, because it calls attention to the fact that a human being's values and beliefs are involved in the instruction. (It is interesting to note that Wolf and Love, quoted above, also use the word *projection*, in a non-technical sense, to describe this involvement, as does Roy Harris, quoted in Chapter One, above, 1987:130.) Halliday describes the notion of *projection* as 'the logico-semantic relationship whereby a clause comes to function not as a direct representation of (non-linguistic) experience but as a representation of a (linguistic) representation' (1994a:250), i.e. not *The answer is forty-two*, but *I think || the answer is forty-two*. His definition reminds us that the projected clause is twice removed from direct experience. If we conceptualize the genre of 'introductory text' as based on the same kind of construal as a projecting clause, then this should warn us against being too ready to accept it as 'pure description', an objective representation of reality.

In Christie's data (1999a), regulative discourse includes such locutions as: 'I want you to ah, look at the part ...'; I really want you to know ...'; Right, now it's crucial...'; And I think what I want you to know is...', and apart from these obviously regulative devices she lists numerous other grammatical features that work to build shared comprehension, shared interpretation and shared judgement (Christie 1999a:166-7). Of the introductory texts I surveyed, the one that most clearly, even exaggeratedly, foregrounds the regulative register is Napoli (1996). This author has apparently tried to recreate in her text the feeling of being physically present in her class and being personally addressed, so her language contains many features characteristic of typically spoken rather than written style: second person pronoun, colloquialisms, imperatives, and teacher-style interrogatives (questions to which the teacher knows the answer, not genuine ones, and questions whose function is to check to see the class is still 'with her'):

> Okay, let's move on ...'; 'What type of morpheme is *each*?'; 'we'll talk about diminutives later'; 'Let's go on now ...'; 'What steps do you think ...?'; 'Do you see how ...?'; 'Okay, now make a list of nouns ... Keep going. And going. And going.'; 'Be careful ...' [and so on] (1996:183-187)

These locutions are similar to the ones Christie (1999a) records. However, where they are quite natural in her data (teacher-talk for secondary students), their use in the written mode for tertiary students is decidedly marked.

A prime position in a text from which regulative discourse can project the instructional is of course the preface.[9] Napoli's is addressed alternately to students and to teachers, and it emphasizes the importance of an introductory course in linguistics:

> Face the facts: Most people who study linguistics take only a single course in it – the introductory course. The introduction-to-linguistics course at an institution should, therefore, be the one the most effort goes into, not the least. It should supply as comprehensive a vision of the core of linguistics as possible. This is a teacher's one shot at most people – a linguist's one chance to get them to understand how language works. Please, let's take careful aim. (1996:vi)

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9 Of course, projection is not defined or recognized by its position in a clause or text; the concept is logico-semantic, not structural (Halliday 1994a:250).

The tenor of the last two sentences does not manifest confidence that the facts will speak for themselves, and in fact the author is quite open about 'selling' an angle on the facts:

> What defines the field of linguistics is not just the material that linguists study, but the way they look at data, the manner in which they argue, and the range of conclusions they find sensible... . Linguists...have an unmistakable mindset, and this book tries to give you an insight into a linguist's way of looking. (1996:vii)

It is Napoli's mindset that projects the knowledge she is trying to put across, and colours it strongly, in the same way that the literature teacher Christie studied was not just putting a text in front of the students and asking them to look at it objectively, but was projecting it through the way he himself wanted it to be read. However, nowhere in the data Christie quotes does the literature teacher harangue his students the way Napoli does her readers: 'You tell me: If you can remember a time when someone corrected your speech in your native language, who was that person? Did that person explain why what you said was in need of correction? Did that person explain why the alternative offered was better?' (1996:293), nor does he use overt emotional blackmail as Napoli does, commenting on educational inequity in the US: 'And if you're enraged at that fact, again, join the club' (1996:294). It is almost impossible to isolate examples of the purely instructional register from Napoli's text, as the regulative projects virtually every paragraph. The following are examples from just two pages on semantic features:

> Now, I mentioned ... Do you think ... Before you answer that ... Let's look at an even more drastic case ... I'm not trying to argue that ... we might well be surprised ... Thus I believe it is worthwhile ... Yes, gender matters here ... please try not to let your ideas about societal structure influence your answer...Okay, let's return to ... Consider... Arrange ... Can you figure out?' (1996:464-5)

Fromkin and Rodman (1993), in contrast, confine the explicitly regulative discourse to two chapters, Chapter 1 (*What is Language?*), with sections on *Linguistic Knowledge and Performance*, *Descriptive Grammars*, *Prescriptive Grammars*, and so on, and Chapter 7 (*Language in Society*), with sections on *The "Standard"*, *Language Purists*, *Banned Languages*, *Black English*, *Language and Sexism*, and so on. Most of this book is in the instructional register: 'Rule **a** states that a Verb Phrase can be a Verb followed by a Noun Phrase' (1993:88); 'Languages with OVS, OSV and VOS basic word order are much rarer' (1993:111); 'the nonnasal or oral stops are also called plosives...' (1993:193), and so on. However, as Christie points out 'while the instructional register comes to be foregrounded, the regulative register

continues to operate tacitly' and 'the success with which the instructional register comes to the fore is a measure of the continuing implicit operation of the regulative register' (1993:161). In teaching linguistics this is particularly true, because every theory of linguistics construes the data from its particular angle, and it is only by being persuaded to take the desired angle that the student can be taught to see the object the instructor sees. Napoli's book, for example, 'is about the structure of language, ... not about the structure of society' (1996:295), and so the student is regulated to see language as structure independent of meaning. As Christie observes, 'the evaluative rules transform the pedagogic discourse into practice, creating the field of reproduction of knowledge, and the associated process of acquisition' (1999a:160).

In the texts I examined, the ratio of regulative to instructional discourse varies, and the regulative is realized by a wide variety of evaluative resources, not all of them linguistic. One of the most immediately evident is the use of typographical features, such as bold-facing:

> **Equality: all grammars are equal** (O'Grady et al. 1997:6, heading); linguistics is **descriptive**, not **prescriptive** (O'Grady et al.1997:6); The contrast that is relevant here is the one that holds between **describing** how things are and **prescribing** how things ought to be (Lyons 1981:47); linguistics is **descriptive**, not prescriptive (Aitchison 1987:12); this curious but very widespread view is called **prescriptivism** (Trask 1995:160); the important thing is that **it describes, not prescribes** (Napoli 1996:293);**Our reasons for choosing a standard have nothing, in fact, to do with the structure of language per se** (Napoli 1996:294); **all varieties of a given language are equally good so far as linguistics is concerned.** (Napoli 1996:295)

Bold-face serves to draw attention to key pairs in these texts. **Descriptive** and **prescriptive** are identified as strongly favoured and strongly disfavoured, and other pairs, such as **competence** and **performance** (Fromkin and Rodman 1993:11-12) and **synchronic** and **diachronic** (Aitchison 1987:18), being typographically marked in the same way, are likely to be similarly assessed by the student. Other typographical resources for persuasion are 'scare quotes':

> the 'best authors' of classical times (Aitchison 1987:13); the linguist is bound to observe and record 'incorrect' forms as well as 'correct' ones (Hockett 1958:5); the "prestige dialect"; using it "properly"; language "purists"; (Fromkin and Rodman 1993:15); the 'correct' way to speak these two languages. (Radford et al.1999:17)

and the occasional exclamation mark:

> a certain self-styled socio-cultural elite (= pedants!) (Radford 1988:7); we do not use prescriptive terminology such as 'correct/incorrect' (yes, that is a *prescriptive* statement!) (Radford 1988:8); And traditional grammar, after all, had its origins in the description of the literary dialects of Ancient Greece! (Lyons 1981:50)

A powerful yet subtle regulative device is Fromkin and Rodman's use of multi-modality. Their section on **Prescriptive Grammars** begins with a cartoon (1993:14) showing an archetypal pedant schoolmaster attempting to correct the English being spoken by a smart young female student and ending up looking foolish. The schoolmaster is balding and moustached, wearing a tweed jacket, bow tie, glasses and a solemn expression. The young woman has blonde hair in an attractive bob and is wearing a close-fitting mini-skirted dress, fishnet tights and a cheerful expression. As the three frames progress from left to right, the master is increasingly backgrounded, becoming smaller and smaller, while the young woman comes closer and becomes larger. In the final frame, the schoolmaster's words are in smaller print, and no longer in a bubble intruding on her speaker bubble, giving the impression that he is now left mumbling to himself in the background. The impact of the cartoon is increased by its prestigious location near the beginning of the first chapter of a widely-used introductory text. Plainly such an illustration has little to do with teaching the objective description of language and much to do with promoting an ideology: it is difficult to argue with an image, and to argue with this particular one would place the objector in the same camp as the tiresome old schoolmaster.

Of the *linguistic* methods of persuasion in these texts, the most obvious is explicitly evaluative lexis, some of it strident:

> loud howls went up from outraged purists (Hall 1964:9); guardians of the English language; elitist (Fromkin and Rodman 1993:15-16); transparently insane (Trask 1995:160); so browbeaten by the 'experts' that they self-consciously trot out comical locutions (Trask 1995:161);We would all be better off if these ridiculous and wrong-headed notions could be dumped on the scrap heap and forgotten. (Trask 1995:162)

and some of it mild:

> this complacency, and an atmosphere of fallacious dogma (Crystal 1971:38); misplaced terminological pedantry (Lyons 1981:46); the liberating effects of taking a descriptive approach to language (Hudson 1984:8); the bad old days of prescriptive grammar (Hudson 1984:57); fundamental misconceptions; muddled

> thinking; the uninformed (Radford 1988:7-8); some imaginary scale of superiority; all varieties of language are absolutely equal as instruments of communication and thought (O'Grady et al. 1997:6); The views of lay people about language are often quite simplistic. (Radford et al. 1999:17)

In some of these texts the effect of the evaluative lexis is subtle and unlikely to call itself to the reader's conscious attention. Hockett, for example, says that 'there are several points which often make trouble for the beginner. ... in part ... they have to do with the difference between the lay attitude towards language and the orientation of the specialist' (1958:3-4). It is the contrastive lexis that validates the linguist's position: he or she has an *orientation*, whereas the layperson has only an *attitude*. The British National Corpus (BNC) reveals some of the company these two words keep, and this data helps demonstrate how the student is being conditioned to adopt the desired view of the difference between the linguist and the layperson. A search for *orientation* finds 1049 instances; for *attitude*, 6012. *Attitude* is about six times more common: it is an everyday word. Fifty samples (randomly selected by the BNC quick search facility) reveal its use in a range of contexts, spoken and written, informal and formal, some bureaucratic. Only one is technical. Interestingly, about a third of the usages (16 out of 50) are recognizably negative, many preceded by a negative Epithet. Some examples are: *a/an unhealthy / lax / derogatory / unfavourable / negligent and Philistine / overbearing / anti-female / dictatorial* attitude. The fifty samples randomly selected for *orientation* are almost all from formal written contexts: technical, scientific, academic and clinical. There is no evidence of negative colouring; the usages are neutral, and in many instances are preceded by a Classifier: *a/an axial / grain / compass / task / relative domain / people / library and information / visual / sexual / homosexual / cultural / religious / political / empirical / theoretical / philosophical* orientation.[10] The following samples give an idea of the two typical registers:

> His *attitude* to England seems terribly confused, as one might expect from a person who despises royalty but brandishes the cross of St George. (CHB 2606 *New Musical Express*)

> With translucent or transparent rocks, the depth of field of low power zoom binocular microscopes can be used advantageously for three-dimensional study of included bioclasts and replacement fabrics in cherts, and *orientation* of fluid and crystal inclusions in evaporites. (H9S 561 *Techniques in Sedimentology*)

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10 *Epithet* and *Classifier* are functional grammar terms, Halliday (1994a:184ff.).

This brief display of the collocations of the two words reveals the motivation for Hockett's (no doubt unconscious) choice and the likely regulative effect on the learner: he or she is being taught that the lay approach is grounded in the everyday and may have negative connotations, while the linguist's is scientific, technical and dispassionate.

Lexis is of course not the only or even the prime regulative method in these texts. Those which are most obviously directing the reader's sympathies make much use of Mood choices other than declarative; choices that are particularly marked in academic text:

> How can this be so? (Trask 1995:160); why should a usage which seems so natural and unremarkable to most of the population attract such hostility from the rest? (Trask 1995:163); Why do some people say that *ain't* is not only substandard but not even a word? It most certainly is a word ... So what could anyone mean to call it a nonword? Why would someone want to ban this word from speech?(Napoli 1996:294); Why am I doing this? (Napoli 1996:295); Let's begin with a fundamental question (Napoli 1996:293); let's stick to the history of things for a moment; Face the facts (Napoli 1996:vi); now make a list of nouns (Napoli 1996:183); Obviously you need to build in some kind of rules, but what kind? Prescriptive rules? Imagine trying to build a talking machine by designing it to obey rules like 'Don't split infinitives'... (Pinker 1994:371)

Finally, to round off this list of the more immediately noticeable regulative resources, I will mention the intrusive interpersonal remarks to be found in some of the texts that address the reader directly in the first person:

> And that, I am convinced, is the driving force behind the campaign for *whom* (Trask 1995:162); I hope to have convinced you of two things (Pinker 1994:400); I suppose I must explain that it means "unbiased" (Pinker 1994:402); The question, I hope, makes no sense to you. (Napoli 1996:294)

I have highlighted the overt evaluative techniques in some of these texts, but on the whole the genre is characterized by the unmodalized categorical statements typical of instructional discourse. This unhedged style is in some cases also used to present opinion as fact. Bloor and Bloor review some research that suggests that writers presenting new and controversial views seldom make 'bald, confident statements' (1995:231-2), but there are many of these statements in these texts (suggesting perhaps that these writers consider their views to be uncontroversial), for example, on the nature of linguistics:

> linguistics ... is descriptive ... it describes what is rather than what ought to be ... descriptive linguistics is non-judgemental, it does not make judgements (Hudson 1984:7-8); linguistics is descriptive, not prescriptive (Aitchison 1987:12); Linguists object to prescriptivism (Fromkin and Rodman 1993:16); Prescriptivists also condemn perfectly normal utterances (Trask 1995:161); the important thing is that it describes, not prescribes. (Napoli1996:293)

and on the nature of language:

> Language is not a cultural artifact (Pinker 1994:18); The complexity of language ... is part of our biological birthright; language is the product of a well-engineered biological instinct (Pinker 1994:19); *The Language Instinct* (Pinker 1994 – title); No grammar, therefore no language, is either superior or inferior to any other (Fromkin and Rodman 1993:14); all known languages are at a similar level of complexity and detail (Akmajian 1995:8); all varieties of language are absolutely equal. (O'Grady et al. 1997:6)

In these texts such statements can be made with confidence because the regulative register is broadly present in the overall framing of the text. Lawson points out the power of controlling metaphors that underlie a text for beginners and 'prepare the reader to view language in a certain way' (2001:13).[11] Pinker's treatment of language as an 'instinct' is a particularly powerful example of such a frame, and framing all these introductory texts is the idea of 'science'. Another powerful frame is 'political correctness'. Such frames can effectively restrict what might be considered proper topics of discussion; it is the way writers 'insulate their viewpoint from meaningful dissent' (Lawson 2001:14).[12] In the first paragraph of the preface of Napoli (1996) the student is in effect warned that there are limitations on what may be considered acceptable ways of talking about language: 'Some of our most damaging racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic prejudices are based on our linguistic ignorance and our utterly stupid ideas about language'

11

Lawson targets in particular the metaphor of 'language as biology', pointing out that 'the very first words in both these texts [Lyons (1981) and O'Grady et al. (1989)] make an explicit link between biology and language' (2001:9). Other introductory texts he discusses are Hockett (1958), Pinker (1994) and Fromkin and Rodman (1998). It is interesting to note that the regulative approach he identifies – the emphasis on the biological basis of language – coincides with insistence on anti-prescriptivism.

12

The idea of the instructional as *framed by* the regulative is a metaphorical variation on the idea of its being *embedded in* or *projected by* the regulative. *Framing* seems to me a less satisfactory metaphor than *embedding* and *projection*, because these are concepts drawn from the grammar.

(1996:v), which sends the clear message that the first thing to learn in linguistics is not to be found guilty of harbouring any of *those*. Radford also puts the reader in a position where to argue would look foolish: 'it is hard to see how anyone could defend the *prescriptive* approach' (1988:8).

Christie observes that 'Students feel the force of the moral imperative at work on them, and sometimes challenge it' (1999a:175). She recounts how the teacher she observed was prepared to listen to students who argued, but not to change his mind about the rightness of the world view he was persuading them to take up; the students who were successful were those who did indeed 'take up particular values and adopt particular perspectives' (1999a:173) and reproduce them in written answers. Students encountering the orthodox doctrine that 'all languages are equal' might want to argue, but their chances of success in the discipline could be severely curtailed should they do so.

One reason for the success of the pedagogical process represented by these texts is, ironically, that students initiated into the social group of linguists working in the generative-formalist paradigm (which is the model most of these books are teaching) are being taught a theory that does not equip them to analyse how language is being used to fit them for membership. Because this theory puts the evaluative elements of language out of bounds and reifies language as an object separate from and largely beyond the control of its users (in fact, control, associated with the prescriptive model, is actively discouraged), students cannot make any use of their new scientific understanding of language to examine the way the (often thoroughly *un*scientific) language of the introductory books is being used to control *them*.

Christie (1999a) argues that English studies are aimed at inculcating values in students rather than teaching them explicit, replicable methods of analysis. It is therefore to be expected that regulative discourse would predominate in the teaching of literature. What is surprising is that the teaching of *linguistics*, which purports to be scientific and objective, should also rely heavily on the regulative resources of language. The adoption by some of these authors of the prescriptivists' own tendency to belittle those whose opinions on language they do not share is also surprising. This coercion of the student runs contrary to the stated aim of these introductory writers, which is to look objectively at language, without the subjective bias typical of the lay

approach to language. A wiser approach to beginners, and one more consistent with the linguist's own doctrine of objectivity, would be to tell them that

> The linguist, of course, has the responsibility of observing and describing the language; and just as he does not pass judgment on language, so also he does not, qua linguist, pass judgment on those who pass judgment on language. (Halliday et al.1964:172)

Lawson complains that beginners' attention is drawn 'towards uncontentious issues and trivial discussions' and that the debate is framed 'as one between the current theory and "flaky" other options, rather than between competing viable world views' and he suggests that

> Since ... theories of language do not always disagree on trivial matters, but often on deep philosophical grounds, it would seem to be of utmost importance to an introduction to linguistics that the basic questions be topics of discussion which are not constrained or confined by what one particular theory views as proper. (2001:13-14)

The chief problem with the way the texts I examined introduce the topic of prescriptivism is that they treat it as a problem to which linguists have found an easy solution. As Hutton observes, 'In the simplifications of contemporary textbooks, many of these debates appear as phoney wars between reason and blindness' (1998:199). Yet the IS-OUGHT puzzle underlying the prescriptive/ descriptive debate is one of the basic epistemological questions. This is not to suggest that beginners should be embroiled in complex philosophical debates, but that proponents of current orthodox theory who take the responsibility for introducing students to linguistics should not close the door to the possibility of other ways of talking about language.

The next chapter looks at the concept of *prescribing* in more depth and from a discourse analysis perspective.