

LINGUISTIC PRESCRIPTIVISM

An evolving field

Joan C. Beal, Morana Lukač and Robin Straaijer

1. What this handbook is about

Our goal in putting together this volume was to produce a widely usable handbook that provides a comprehensive, useful and accessible overview of the developing field of linguistic prescriptivism. The aim of the project is to provide an account of the current *status quo* of the field, mapping the hitherto relatively uncharted territory of prescriptivism and thus to mark its two-decade transformation into a prolific field of study within linguistics. We have attempted a broad coverage in terms of not only theoretical and methodological approaches, but also institutional contexts in which prescriptive efforts can be both observed and studied, as well as geographical and historical breadth. To do this, we have attracted authors who were able to write chapters on prescriptivism in relation to specific languages, as well as on the treatment of linguistic prescriptivism in specific sub-disciplines of linguistics.

It has become apparent that linguistic description, perhaps particularly where language-in-use is concerned, carries normative, even prescriptive implications by virtue of its authority. This means that in order to satisfy scientific requirements, linguistics as an academic discipline needs to be able to reflect on its influence on the very phenomenon that it studies. In other words, the appearance of a handbook such as this further marks the evolution of linguistics into a fully self-aware discipline. It is therefore our opinion that prescriptivism can no longer be a fringe topic in the description of language in society, but that it should be a necessary component of studies in this field. This necessity is illustrated by the fact that only Mesthrie et al.'s *Introducing Sociolinguistics* (2009) has seemed to consider prescriptivism as a necessary and obvious part of the study of language. However, the call to study prescriptivism had been sounded before by Cameron (2012/1995), who argued that “verbal hygiene is deserving of serious study because ... it is ‘there’” (p. 11).

At the same time, this volume also aims to look ahead and even take a flight forward, not eschewing new developments and views within the field of prescriptivism studies, views which may yet be controversial among linguists and scholars in other areas of linguistics. We believe that this movement forward is necessary for the further acceptance and development of prescriptivism studies and linguistics more generally. As a part of this stance, it was our explicit intention to include voices and topics that have historically been overlooked. This has, among

other things, led to consciously trying to move away from the Anglocentric focus of much of previous research on prescriptivism published in English, leading to the chapters in Part III “Prescriptivism across languages and cultures” (see also below). In addition, we wanted to include topics that bring forward marginalised communities, such as speakers of minority languages (e.g. Breton) and the LGBTQIA+ community. In this, we have endeavoured to give voice to academics from within the communities – or (at the very least) their allies – in which these topics are most relevant. Whereas we strove to gain access to “other voices” from understudied languages and social groups, many remain unrepresented, among them, for example, sign languages, which have, until recently, been largely absent from discussions in sociolinguistics. Although we had attempted to find authors to address these topics, to the best of our ability, we have only partially been successful. In charting out our discipline, we are thus aware of many gaps that remain and hope that the publication of this handbook serves as impetus for further change and widening debates, which would reflect the ongoing disciplinary transition away from the Eurocentric and other forms of bias (spoken languages over sign languages, majority groups over minority groups, languages of colonialism over languages of the colonised people) in both their overt and covert forms.

In the following sections of this Introduction, we outline the history of prescriptivism as an area of linguistic research. We first briefly address the antipathy to prescriptivism voiced by theoretical linguists during most of the previous century, and then consider the role of language-ideological, historical and historiographical research in prompting a fresh look at prescriptivism. In addition, we chart the growth of prescriptivism studies in the twenty-first century, address the kind of audience we envisage for this book, and introduce the streams of research covered in the main text of the handbook.

2. The changing view of prescriptivism in linguistics

Whereas the prescriptive approach to language goes back several centuries, the linguistic, scientific study of prescriptivism – or more correctly, linguists’ antipathy towards performing such studies – can logically only have started after modern descriptive linguistics had come to be established as a scientific discipline in its own right. This establishment of linguistics is widely agreed to have had its beginnings in the early twentieth century following the lectures of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) (Saussure et al., 1916). After the establishment of what descriptive linguistics is, we already quickly come across what appears to be the first mention of prescriptive grammar (Bryan, 1923), which was soon followed by the first overt contrast between descriptive and prescriptive approaches, voiced by Otto Jespersen ten years later¹:

The chief object in teaching grammar today ... would appear to be to give rules which must be obeyed if one wants to speak and write the language correctly—rules which as often as not seem quite arbitrary. Of greater value, however, than this **pre-scriptive** grammar is a purely **descriptive** grammar which, instead of serving as a guide to what should be said or written, aims at finding out what is actually said and written by the speakers of the language investigated, and thus may lead to a scientific understanding of the rules followed instinctively by speakers and writer.

Jespersen, 2006 [1933], p. 4

The adjectives “prescriptive” and “descriptive” have since remained closely connected to the field of linguistics, as is evident from the way that the OED mentions these specifically under

the respective entries – also noting the classic dichotomy just mentioned. To illustrate, the OED entry for “prescriptive” starts with the following definition:

1a. That prescribes or directs; giving definite, precise directions or instructions. In later use frequently *spec.*: that lays down rules of usage in language or grammar.

In *Linguistics*, opposed to *descriptive* (see *descriptive adj.* 3b).

OED, *sv.* “prescriptive”

The OED entry for “descriptive” starts with a general definition: “**2a.** That describes the way something is, rather than expressing judgement, presenting ideals, prescribing rules, etc.; that describes something or someone in an objective and non-judgemental way”. In addition, we also find multiple definitions that refer to language or linguistics, such as: “**2b.** *spec.* That describes the way language is used, without prescribing rules or referring to norms of correctness. Contrasted with *prescriptive, normative*. Sometimes overlapping with sense *A. 3b.*”, and the following two longer definitions:

2c. *Philosophy and Linguistics.* Designating that aspect of the meaning of an utterance which relates purely to the presentation of facts, rather than to the expression of attitudes, the effecting of an action, etc.; esp. in *descriptive meaning*. Also: of or relating to such meaning; (of a word or utterance) having (only) such meaning. Cf. *emotive adj.* 3, *prescriptive adj.* 1c, *performative adj.*

3b. *Linguistics.* Designating a branch of linguistics concerned with describing the structure of a language at a given time, without reference to other languages or other historical phases; of or relating to this branch of linguistics. Cf. *synchronic adj.*, *structural linguistics n.* at *structural adj.* *Compounds.*

Contrasted with *historical* and *comparative linguistics*, and also (especially in later use) with *theoretical linguistics*. Sometimes overlapping with sense *A. 2b.*

OED, *sv.* “descriptive”

The OED does provide an interesting point of nuance under the entry for “prescriptive” in one of the senses listed: “**3.** Arising from or recognized by long-standing custom or usage; prescribed by custom. Now *archaic*”, providing something of a bridge between the prescriptive and the descriptive in terms of usage.

Synchronic linguists’ attitudes towards the study of prescriptivism remained more or less unchanged throughout of the twentieth century. However, the critical study of historical prescriptivism goes back at least to the 1920s. As noted above, Bryan’s use of the term *prescriptive* with reference to eighteenth-century grammarians predates the OED’s first citation of the word in this sense, which is the extract from Jespersen (1933) cited above. Bryan also published an account of George Campbell’s (1776) *Philosophy of Rhetoric* in a paper entitled “A Late Eighteenth-Century Purist” (1926), which also made reference to Lowth, Priestley and Webster. Whilst Bryan uses his account of Campbell to “illustrate ... the futility of attempting to direct or restrain usage”, he ends by stating that his “collection of material has ... both curious interest and historic value” (1926, p. 370). The most influential of these early studies of eighteenth-century prescriptivism was S. A. Leonard’s *The Doctrine of Correctness in English Usage 1700–1800* (1929). Leonard’s argument for the value of studying prescriptive texts is much stronger than Bryan’s, and resonates with the contributions in this volume:

The business of the student of language is to take account of such prescriptions as facts of significance in his [sic] study, important facts like any other set of human feelings and notions manifest in norms of conduct and behavior.

Leonard 1929/1962, pp. 244–245

Leonard's study includes an appendix with notes on over 300 issues discussed by eighteenth-century writers on language, and, given the resources available to him at the time, refers to an impressive range of grammarians. Later scholars have taken issue with him on matters such as his failure to acknowledge the diverse backgrounds and motivations of eighteenth-century grammarians (Beal et al., 2006), and the false dichotomy he creates between the 'scientific' approach of Priestley and the prescriptivism of his contemporaries (Hodson, 2006). They have also noted the influence of Leonard's work on many twentieth-century histories of English; Beal argues that Leonard's influence led to the eighteenth century being defined as the age of correctness, "a period only fit to be trawled for instances of malpractice" (2004, p. 89). The problem was that many readers failed to look beyond Leonard's account to examine the original texts. Pullum noted in 1974 that "Lowth in particular is more mentioned than read by the majority of grammarians today" (1974, p. 63) and his re-evaluation of Lowth's grammar in a major linguistics journal is a rare example from that period of an objective and balanced account of eighteenth-century prescriptivism.

It may not have been until well after the establishment of sociolinguistics and related sociological-linguistic fields of inquiry such as critical discourse theory, that linguistics as a discipline more broadly was able to acquire the self-awareness that is also required in those subfields of linguistics. Within sociolinguistics, Haugen (1966) laid the groundwork for a more pragmatic view of eighteenth-century (and later) grammarians. He proposed four aspects of standardisation: selection of a norm, codification of form, elaboration of function and acceptance by the community. Codification was precisely what the eighteenth-century grammarians were doing: in Haugen's view, this was a necessary development in the standardisation of the language. Haugen's model was to prove highly influential in sociolinguistics: Milroy and Milroy developed this further in their (1985) *Authority in Language*, a work which in turn had substantial impact in the field of language ideology. Milroy and Milroy note that "*prescription* becomes more intense after the language undergoes *codification* ... because speakers then have access to dictionaries and grammar-books, which they regard as authorities" (2012 [1985], p. 22). In the Milroys' view, what they term *prescription* is something that sociolinguists should study objectively as an important aspect of language ideology. In other fields, it was perhaps the need for the relatively new discipline of linguistics to be regarded and acknowledged as scientific that caused the concomitantly required descriptive character to become somewhat of a dogma. This may in turn have led to prescriptivism becoming somewhat of an academic taboo in linguistics, particularly in its more formal and structural subdisciplines.

Although, as Hodson (2006) points out, there were some scholars² in the second half of the twentieth century who challenged the monolithic view of eighteenth-century grammars that was Leonard's legacy, attitudes did not begin to change until the very end of the twentieth century – for a large part with for example Deborah Cameron's highly influential *Verbal Hygiene*, first published in 1995. Cameron's account of verbal hygiene, a term that she coined, goes beyond earlier accounts of prescriptivism to include socially motivated constraints on linguistic usage involved in what was then termed 'political correctness' but is now, as Cameron explains in her chapter in this volume, often criticised as 'wokeness'. For most of the twentieth century, as Cameron suggested, prescriptivism represented "the threatening Other, the forbidden" and argued that "[t]he linguist's (often extreme) distaste for prescriptivism is ... an

ideologically non-neutral one dependent on value judgements that are ‘highly resistant to rational examination’” (Cameron, 2012, p. 5). This resistance is evident in that Cameron’s ideas only found some wider purchase years later, in the early twenty-first century.

The change in attitudes towards prescriptivism started, not in sociolinguistics, but from scholars in historical linguistics / history of linguistics, independently minded scholars, and from the careful study of the actual prescriptive texts such as grammars and various types of dictionaries. Slowly, the dogmatic distinction between linguistic *prescriptivism* and *descriptivism* became – among a certain group of linguists – “increasingly seen as artificial, reductive, and a hindrance to a complete and nuanced understanding of usage” (Straaijer, 2017). It was in fact one of the editors of this volume, Joan Beal, who – referring to previous studies on eighteenth-century English grammars – argued that “far from being uniformly “prescriptive” would be better described as occupying different points on a prescriptive–descriptive continuum” (Beal, 2004, p. 90). This popularized the idea under historical linguistics, that the purely prescriptive and descriptive points of view are better seen as the end points of a continuum rather than as a dichotomy. Around the same time, Wolf Peter Klein problematised the relationship between descriptive and prescriptive approaches to language use even further by arguing, based on the history of German grammars, that there is in fact no purely descriptive linguistic practice (Klein, 2005). Klein also included a message for linguists, cautioning them that even descriptive work always possesses a non-descriptive dimension, and that linguists who are aware of this will work in a way that is more reflective and truer to reality, than those who do not pay attention to these horizons of linguistic activity (Klein, 2005, p. 401).³ Klein’s warning seems to imply that not only can linguistics no longer ignore prescriptivism as a topic of inquiry if it is to be taken seriously as a self-aware academic discipline, linguistics is in fact intrinsically and inescapably connected to prescriptivism.

Nevertheless, despite these developments, there are still modern introductory textbooks on linguistics that question the value of studying prescriptivism.⁴ John Lyons’ *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics* includes a section headed “linguistics is a descriptive, not a prescriptive science” in which Lyons writes “The linguist’s first task is to *describe* the way people actually speak (and write) their language, not to *prescribe* how they ought to speak and write. In other words, linguistics ... is *descriptive*, not *prescriptive* (or normative)” (1968, p. 43). A very similar section can be found 33 years later in Justice (2001). The first chapter, entitled “What is Linguistics,” includes a section on “prescriptivism vs descriptivism”, in which Justice writes: “rather than *prescribe* to students how they should speak a language, linguistics is mainly concerned with *describing* how people actually speak” and “what you will soon see, hopefully, is that prescriptivism ignores reality” (2001, p. 5). We even find similar statements in one of the latest introductory textbooks to the history of English. In their chapter on late modern English, Hejná and Walkden (2022) write “[p]rescriptivism is in opposition to descriptivism”, and “[l]inguistic research as carried out in academia is descriptive, not prescriptive” (p. 62).

3. The growing body of research on linguistic prescriptivism

The growing interest in linguistic prescriptivism has been marked most notably by a recent proliferation of research on the topic, as well as by the organisation of six consecutive international conferences on prescriptivism during these first decades of this century.⁵ Several collections that comprehensively contrast case studies focusing on prescriptivism (first only with respect to English, and later also across other languages) arose from this series of international conferences on prescriptivism, and we will briefly discuss them here. The conferences (or *colloquia*, as the earlier ones were humbly called) started from a desire to explore alternative approaches to the

study of English as well as the nature of prescriptivism in its own right. Whereas the conferences were initially largely embedded within English historical linguistics, their scope grew, as did the diversity of the approaches to the phenomenon.

In the introduction to the proceedings from the 2003 colloquium “Histories of prescriptivism” at the University of Sheffield, the editors lamented that the linguistic view of the history of prescriptivism – mainly exemplified by eighteenth-century (English) grammars – was deplorably “monolithic” (Beal et al., 2006, p. 1), and that it was this view that acted as a spur to the organisation of the colloquium. Their aim was to show alternative views on these historical texts. The editors also observed that “[d]espite the fact that during the course of the twentieth-century linguistics moved beyond structuralism, the view that linguistics should be a ‘scientific’ discipline untainted by ‘prescriptivism’ was to persist until challenged in the 1990s” (Beal et al., 2006, p. 1). A similar aim was expressed in the edited volume resulting from the 2006 colloquium “Perspectives on Prescriptivism” at the University of Catania in Ragusa (Italy). In the introduction, the editors express that they “wished to widen the different perspectives from which to look at linguistic prescriptivism”, as well as investigate “the attitude of 21st-century scholars and language guardians” (Beal et al., 2008).

The conferences then evolved to include interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, and wider social perspectives, as well as extending their coverage to languages beyond English. Carol Percy and Mary Catherine Davidson’s volume, based on papers presented at the 2009 conference “Prescriptivism & Patriotism” at the University of Toronto (Canada), is an early example of broadening the study of prescriptivism. The editors articulate this new ambition in their introduction as follows:

This collection ... introduces readers to approaches from a range of disciplines, periods and languages on the question of what constitute attitudes and norms in many frameworks of collective identity. International in scope and illustratively wide ranging in approach, contributions from scholars both specialist and interdisciplinary explore the roles of cross-cultural contacts in shaping language norms, offer comparisons in language planning ..., track popular attitudes toward contact languages ... and trace the ideological forces at work.

Percy & Davidson, 2012, p. 2

The volume deals with prescriptivism, norms and attitudes in the English language from several regions of the world from historical, contemporary and postcolonial perspectives; it includes references to other languages and introduces related topics of language policy and national identity.

The 2013 Prescriptivism conference, held at the University of Leiden (The Netherlands) yielded two publications. The first was the special issue of the *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, edited by Robin Straaijer (Straaijer, 2016a), based on papers presented at the workshop “Attitudes to Prescriptivism”. As “[t]he workshop turned out to open up a wider avenue of investigation than expected”, Straaijer writes in the introduction, “[t]he resulting diversity is reflected by the articles in this special issue” (Straaijer, 2016b, p. 234). This special issue shows a very useful diversity, both in terms of the languages covered and the topics. It includes articles about a variety of languages: Catalan, English, French, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Shiwiar, a language spoken in Ecuador. In addition, it deals with a fairly wide range of topics: prescriptivism and journalism, nation building and national identity, language education and the role of linguists in the practices and processes of prescriptivism in different societies with different historical hinterlands.

The second publication, Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade and Carol Percy's edited volume, includes papers presented at the actual conference the theme of which was "Prescription and Tradition in Language". In 22 chapters, this volume highlights the variety of contexts in which prescriptivism and standardization can take place, and it includes Basque, Chinese, Dutch, French, Frisian, German, Icelandic, Lithuanian, Macedonian and Russian, as well as African languages spoken in the Gulf of Guinea. Its aim is similar to ours, in that – across several sections (theoretical/general, historical and modern) – it sets out to crystallize "key interrelationships between standardization and prescription and between ideas and practices", through a variety of "case studies across languages and cultures" (Tieken-Boon van Ostade & Percy, 2017, p. 1).

Don Chapman and Jacob D. Rawlins' volume results from the 2017 conference "Value(s) and Language Prescriptivism" at Brigham Young University in Park City (Utah, USA). Implicitly referring to the preceding conferences, the editors explicitly frame their volume as the next chapter in an evolving and expanding line of inquiry into various aspects of linguistic prescriptivism, in that it "continues to examine social connections to language evaluation as a follow-up to the examinations of nationalism, traditions and norms", adding that the volume in particular focuses on values (Chapman & Rawlins, 2020, p. 2).

One of the questions to be answered was "How do individuals frame language evaluation into their self-perception, conduct and identity?" (Chapman & Rawlins, 2020, p. 1). With this question, the volume brings forward, once again, the notion that Cameron already introduced in 1995 in the first edition of *Verbal Hygiene*, namely that linguists should be interested in language evaluation since it is a part of language use. As we have noted, this is one of the main ideas that provided the impetus for the creation of the present handbook. The introduction by Chapman and Rawlins shows an interesting development with regard to the acceptance of the limitation of the prescriptive–descriptive binary, which they describe as follows:

One insight that is shared among nearly all the authors in this volume is that the binaries that characterize prescriptive discourse – prescriptivism/descriptivism, correct/incorrect, standard/nonstandard – are inadequate for investigating the complexity of the phenomenon.

Chapman & Rawlins, 2020, p. 2

This comment seems to show that since the problematic nature of this binary was first brought forward, some 25 years earlier, this shortcoming is now much more widely accepted, at least among linguists.

The theme of the 2021 Prescriptivism conference, held at the University of Vigo (Spain), was "Modelling Prescriptivism: Language, Literature, and Speech Communities", illustrating the ever-widening scope of prescriptivism studies. The edited volume of papers from this conference is still under production at the time of writing this introduction, but the conference presentations covered a range of languages and speech communities including Greek, Icelandic and several inner- and outer-circle varieties of English, as well as prescriptivism in various historical periods and contexts, from eighteenth-century letter-writing manuals and grammars to twenty-first century dating websites. The theme of prescriptivism in literature was investigated in papers that concerned the representation of prescriptive attitudes in literature, and prescriptive constraints placed on authors by critics and copy editors. This wider range of topics is also reflected in the coverage of the present volume.

While presenting wide-ranging and highly engaged and engaging scholarship, the publications mentioned here are not, however, comprehensive handbooks intended for university students or indeed anyone seeking an introduction to the field of linguistic prescriptivism.

The publications concerned offer more specific insights and are consequently perhaps better suited for specialists in the field or those with particular interests in the languages addressed in the collections.⁶

In spite of the current popularity of prescriptivism as a topic, no English language collection to date presents a serious overview of the field in theoretical, methodological, geographical and historical breadth, which is why we felt there was a need for this volume. Although we were not able to identify any overviews on linguistic prescriptivism in handbook or textbook format,⁷ the English language – at least – has been well covered in scholarship on prescriptivism (not least, as our list of works below shows, in other Routledge linguistics books series). According to Robin Straaijer's entry on Linguistic Prescriptivism in *Oxford Bibliographies* (Straaijer, 2017), books on prescriptivism in the English language have largely focused on historical-linguistic studies and studies on prescriptive genres (such as grammars, usage guides and dictionaries). A few have provided overviews that solely focus on prescriptivism, such as Anne Curzan's *Fixing English: Prescriptivism and Language History* (Curzan, 2014) and Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade's *Describing Prescriptivism: Usage Guides and Usage Problems in British and American English* (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2019). The most renowned works in the field provide accounts of prescriptivism in the context of language standardization/language ideology, including James and Lesley Milroy's *Authority in Language: Investigating Language Prescription and Standardisation* (Milroy & Milroy, 2012 [1985]), or investigate it as a social phenomenon, as do Deborah Cameron's *Verbal Hygiene* (Cameron, 2012 [1995]), Rosina Lippi-Green's *English with an Accent* (Lippi-Green, 2012), Richard Watts's *Language Myths and the History of English* (Watts, 2011) and Lynda Mugglestone's "Talking Proper": *The Rise of accent as a Social Symbol* (Mugglestone, 2007 [1995]).

In other languages, the topic of prescriptivism has been included in monographs and several collections on standardizing attitudes to particular languages have been published recently. These include Anđel Starčević, Mate Kapović and Daliborka Sarić's *Jeziku je svejedno* ("Language could care less") (Starčević et al., 2019), Wendy Ayres-Bennett and Magali Sejjido's *Bon usage et variation sociolinguistique: perspectives diachroniques et traditions nationales* ("Good usage and sociolinguistic variation, diachronic perspectives and national traditions") (Ayres-Bennett & Sejjido, 2013), Vladimir Kozyrev and Valentina Černjak's *Современная языковая ситуация и речевая культура: учебное пособие* ("Modern language situation and speech culture: Training materials") (Kozyrev & Černjak, 2012), Regula Schmidlin's *Die Vielfalt des Deutschen, Standard und Variation* ("The diversity of German: standard and variation") (Schmidlin, 2011), and Jürgen Erfurt and Gabriele Budach's *Standardisation et destandardisation: le français et l'espagnol au XXe siècle* ("Standardisation and destandardisation: French and Spanish in the twentieth century") (Erfurt & Budach, 2008).

Although the number of works on prescriptivism in other languages attests to the topic's popularity, the contents of these works are not as a rule accessible to English monolingual readers, or indeed anyone unable to read works in the languages concerned. Our aim is to present the most recent insights on the study of prescriptivism across linguistic contexts seeing that the field is continuously growing – as the titles above illustrate – within and beyond scholarship in and on English. Moreover, the topic of prescriptivism is relevant to a number of subfields with whose lines of research it often converges, including language policies, attitudinal studies in linguistics and sociology of language, as well as critical linguistics. By broadening the contexts of linguistic prescriptivism to include areas of study such as language policy and the sociology of language, we hope to attract interested readers from those fields and to promote interdisciplinary research on linguistic norms and prescriptions. In addition, by including languages that have traditionally not been the focus of analysis within this field of research, we

aim to attract readers who may be interested in prescriptive efforts outside their well-explored context, namely, highly standardised European languages. This broadening is important, not only for the obvious reason that these other languages deserve more study generally, but also because the role of linguists in processes of standardisation and prescription in these (national) languages is often different from what we are used to seeing in the languages that have traditionally received more attention.

4. Structure of this book

The structure of the handbook generally follows the pattern of other handbooks in this series, with the chapters thematically divided into three parts. Part I includes chapters on theoretical and methodological approaches to prescriptivism and on frameworks within which prescriptivism has been studied. The first two chapters, by Pullum and Cameron respectively, grapple with important theoretical and ideological issues. Pullum makes the distinction between normative and prescriptive approaches to language, arguing that linguistic description is inevitably and rightly normative, and that some “prescriptive” usage guides are based on empirical research. Cameron’s account of verbal hygiene, as in her (1995) book on the subject, presents an account which goes beyond ‘top-down’ prescriptivism to include practices intended to avert discrimination, including discussion of the current culture wars concerning ‘wokeness’. Chapter 3, by Watt, Levon and Ilbury, deals with the problem of accent discrimination in the UK, providing an account of research which not only investigates this phenomenon but also presents solutions for the problem. Chapters 4 and 5 provide accounts of resources and methodologies for research on prescriptivism. Yáñez-Bouza describes historiographical resources for the study of prescriptivism and gives detailed accounts of three historical databases and the research that has made use of them. Szmrecsanyi and Bloemen investigate corpus-based approaches to prescriptivism, especially with a view to determining whether such research can prove or disprove the effect of prescriptive rules and recommendations on usage. Chapters 6 and 7 turn to prescriptivism in World Englishes. Peters considers prescriptivism in inner-circle Englishes, focusing particularly on Australia and Canada, whilst Schneider discusses the role of prescriptivism in the emergence of New Englishes. Chapters 8 and 9, by Dollinger and Hickey respectively, provide accounts of pluricentricism and the debates and controversies concerning this. Hickey gives a comparative and contrastive account of prescriptivism in two pluricentric languages, English and Spanish, whilst Dollinger considers the influence of national identity on prescriptive attitudes and practices in the case of Austrian German.

Part II explores contexts in which prescriptive efforts can be observed and studied. These chapters primarily intend to describe prescriptivism and prescriptivist attitudes, actions and norm-setting in a variety of social contexts, and/or revolving around particular themes. While the chapters in Part II do deal with different languages or language varieties, and include studies of genres of traditional prescriptivist literature, these are not the primary focus. The chapters in this part of the book should primarily be seen as dealing with prescriptivism as an aspect of psychological and social practices. As such, the chapters lean on the exploration of prescriptive and proscriptive ideologies, and prescriptivist attitudes, actions and norm-setting, both of those that set or enforce these norms and those that are expected to adopt or challenge and resist them. The first chapter of Part II by Tieken-Boon van Ostade explores what a usage guide is, including the history and development of the genre over its more than 200-year history. She discusses the formal features of these publications – how they compare to other types of linguistic publications such as grammars and style guides – and looks at the people who write them. Chapters 11 and 12, by Peterson and Hall, and Cushing and Snell respectively,

explore the effects and implications of prescriptive policies in different educational settings. Peterson and Hall investigate the language policies concerning English of universities in the Nordic countries of Europe by evaluating the official policy documents of these institutions to discover what varieties of English are valued and how the English proficiency of non-native speakers from various territories is evaluated. Cushing and Snell look at prescriptive ideologies and practices at schools in the UK. They investigate the role of teachers in the guarding and policing of ideologically driven language policies. Focusing on marginalised speakers, they show that policies for the implementation of prescriptions for “standard English” in education are insufficiently self-aware and uncritically disconnected from language users’ geographic origin, social class, or ethnic heritage, with far-reaching consequences that go beyond language. In Chapter 13, Bradley investigates the norm-setting force of the social and linguistic notions of binary gender. He finds that linguistic prescriptivism and judgements act as code for non-linguistic ideologies, and that the acceptability of the gender-neutral pronoun *they* in English is related to how gender is conceptualised and to the position of power – or powerlessness – of users. Chapters 14 and 15, by Lukač and Heyd, and BurrIDGE respectively, both deal with the notion of grassroots prescriptivism, which looks at the bottom-up, or what could be called distributed forms of enforcement of language norms. Lukač and Heyd illustrate the dynamic of digital grassroots prescriptivism with a study of the online metalinguistic discussions on the pronunciation of the internet coinage *imgur* on the platform Reddit. They conclude that users defend their opinions by referring to internalised forms of correctness, often based on orthological analogy, logic or the standard language ideology. BurrIDGE investigates public attitudes towards the perceived influence of American English on Australian English and shows how the concept of taboo can help deconstruct prescriptive ideologies as well as better understand them and those who hold them. Having first-hand experience in Australia with grassroots prescriptivism and resistance (even hostility) towards linguists’ mediation of knowledge around the subject of perceived Americanisation of Australian English, BurrIDGE shows that people who practice grassroots prescriptivism (unconsciously) base their judgements on a notion of purity, and that language is a proxy for national or societal identity. Lastly, in Chapter 16, Lukač and Stenton investigate the practices of professional copy editors. They look beyond the stereotypical function of this vocational group as mere enforcers of stylesheets and creators of hyperstandardisation in published texts, and draw attention to the copy editor’s mediating role in the production of edited texts, specifically in academic discourse. They suggest that, rather than merely reducing variation and standardising texts, editors have various rationales for the variety in their editing practices.

Part III focuses on the geographical contexts of prescriptivism. Although prescriptivism has been cast as a largely universal phenomenon (although admittedly one born out of Northern, Eurocentric sociolinguistic theoretical frameworks), much research in the field has been confined to English and occasionally other European languages. As already explained, our ambition was thus to broaden the geographical coverage of this handbook to reflect the differences that shape some of the many realities that exist across languages and cultures. Given the changing intellectual landscape and the repeated calls today for decolonialising the approaches to sociolinguistic analysis, our aim was to ponder and distinguish between different meanings and manifestations of prescriptivism. The terrain of research on prescriptivism is indeed changing, and exploring different expressions of it allows us to problematize and interpret the concept anew. Hallberg (Chapter 17) gives us insight into the diglossic context by exploring standard language ideology in the Arab-speaking world. Gafter and Mor (Chapter 18) lay out the development of prescriptivism in Modern Hebrew, paying particular attention to the complexities involved in the Israeli prescriptive discourses. Kaschula, Mokapela, Nkomo and Nosilela (Chapter 19) trace the

lineage of standardisation and prescriptive efforts in African languages in South Africa, giving insight into the country's complex socio-political and historical context beginning with the country as a colonial entity, through apartheid, up to today's democracy. Klöter (Chapter 20) explores a pluricentric linguistic context and takes stock of five polities attempting to define and implement linguistic standards for Chinese, namely, the People's Republic of China (PRC), Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore and Taiwan. Wee and Samosir (Chapter 21) interrogate different theoretical models of World Englishes and their applicability to the study of prescriptivism in Southeast Asia. In examining the past and present literary norms in Russia, Mustajoki (Chapter 22) theorizes the tension between the notion of correctness promoted via prescriptive ideologies on the one hand and the ease of communication and readability on the other. Starčević, Kapović, and Sarić (Chapter 23) draw on their taxonomy of prescriptive ideologies to address the key characteristics of prescriptivism in Croatia. Manchec German (Chapter 24) showcases a new context in which prescriptivism can be studied with few, if any, predecessors in literature, by focusing on Breton, a severely endangered language spoken in West Brittany. The two final chapters demonstrate how the study of prescriptivism adapts to different data and their analysis. Walsh and Humphries (Chapter 25) provide an analysis of metaphors in meta-linguistic texts taken from both French and Quebecois contexts. Finally, Lismont, Rutten and Vosters (Chapter 26) turn to address the rise and development of institutionalized prescriptivism in Dutch, quantitatively exploring the relationship between language norms and actual usage.

All in all, discussing prescriptivism with nuance and self-awareness is important, even if only so it allows us to more easily reconcile the different natures of our jobs as linguists and editors, and more easily justify our editorial choices to our contributors.

Notes

- 1 This extract from Jespersen is also the first citation for 'prescriptive' with reference to grammar in the OED. However, the first citation for 'descriptive' as an antonym to 'prescriptive' is much earlier. Whitney (1860–63) in a paper about the phonetics of Sanskrit refers to "a phonetical science which delighted itself with subtleties, and of which the strong tendency was to grow from descriptive to prescriptive" (p. 394, cited www.oed.com sv descriptive).
- 2 Hodson cites Sugg (1964), Elledge (1967) and Azad (1989). Pullum (1974) is, of course another example of these intermittent voices crying in the wilderness.
- 3 The original German text reads as follows: 'Wer weiß, dass sein deskriptives Tun immer auch eine nicht-deskriptive Dimension besitzt, wird reflektierter und realitätshaltiger arbeiten als derjenige, der diesen Horizont der sprachwissenschaftlichen Tätigkeit – aus welchen Gründen auch immer – unbeachtet lässt.' (Klein, 2005, p. 401)
- 4 We were alerted to this somewhat surprising discovery when one of the editors (Robin Straaijer) peer reviewed a paper for the to-be-published volume, based on papers from the 2021 Prescriptivism conference "Modelling Prescriptivism: Language, Literature, and Speech Communities", held at the University of Vigo (Spain). The (draft) text of that paper read as follows:
'Textbooks ... impress on students that there is really no room in linguistics to study prescriptivist rules because they "tend to focus on a small set of shibboleths" (Brown and Miller 2016: 16), are "elitist and socially divisive" (Radford 2020: 2), and have "little to do with the actual working of language" (Brinton 2000: 8).'
- 5 However, since the peer review was double-blind, we are as yet unable to cite the source of this information.
- 5 The conferences were held in Sheffield (UK) in 2003, Ragusa (Italy) in 2006, Toronto (Canada) in 2009, Leiden (The Netherlands) in 2013, Park City (USA) in 2017, and Vigo (Spain) in 2021.
- 6 Nevertheless, they do jointly set the scene for the publication of the present handbook, which is perhaps unsurprising as their editors are largely united in this handbook's editorial board.
- 7 There seems, however, to be a German-language book that does something like this in Thomas Niehr, Jörg Killian and Jürgen Schiewe's 52-chapter edited volume *Handbuch Sprachkritik* (Niehr et al., 2020).

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