

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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PLENARY SPEAKERS

Prescriptivism, Education, and the Public: Lessons Learned

Anne Curzan (University of Michigan)

For more than two decades, I have been working through a fundamental question facing linguists studying prescriptivism: How can we *effectively* challenge deeply entrenched ideologies of language correctness in both education and the public discourse? The question asks us to consider the language we ourselves use and the relationship of academic research and public scholarship.

An important step in challenging ideologies of language correctness has been the historical work to reveal how these ideologies developed and have been perpetuated, as well as the comparative work to understand how usage does and does not correspond to prescriptive guidance. This research provides a critical foundation to challenge the status quo. At the same time, we as linguists and educators must provide viable, persuasive alternatives for how to think and talk about language “correctness,” how to teach—or not—standardized English, and how to encourage language curiosity over gate-keeping.

The previous sentence, and its call to linguists to provide a viable alternative, assumes a prescriptive enterprise in our public scholarship, in the spirit of Deborah Cameron’s argument in *Verbal Hygiene* that we should ask not whether to prescribe but “who prescribes for whom, what they prescribe, how, and for what purposes” (11). This talk, focused on the U.S. context, considers current debates about teaching standardized English in writing classrooms and the ideologies that linguists and non-linguists share and don’t share about standard and nonstandard varieties, “grammar,” and prescriptive rules about what constitutes “good usage.” I then offer lessons learned from my experiences as a public-facing linguist and higher education leader about what is required to intervene effectively and present a different path forward.

From 19th-century letters to 21st-century social media: Strategies of critique and justification in language commentary on French

Emma Humphries (Queen's University Belfast)

France is often considered to be a 'special case' of prescriptivism, in some ways more extreme than in other geographical contexts. In part, this is due to the long history of codifying and metalinguistic texts produced on the French language. Studying the texts which form part of this tradition provides insight into how language is viewed and portrayed. In particular, analysis of the imagery, tropes and metalanguage used in language commentary reveals the extent to which the judgements and comments made are underpinned by prescriptivism.

Given the longevity of the genre of language commentary, examining it across two or more time periods offers an important perspective on the evolution of linguistic ideology. A diachronic, comparative approach makes it possible to trace both stability and change in attitudes towards standard and non-standard language varieties and in constructions of linguistic authority. It also allows us to observe how tropes first used by seventeenth-century grammarians are reused by nineteenth-century language experts and reinterpreted by twenty-first-century bloggers. Essentially, we will explore how similar or different the strategies of critique and justification of 'good' and 'bad' usages are in nineteenth-century language advice publications compared to twenty-first-century social media commentary.

To address this question, I will draw on four dialogic sources (*Le Courrier de Vaugelas* (1868–1881), *Courrier des internautes* (2011–2017), *Langue sauce piquante* (2004–2017), and *Bescherelle ta mère* (2018–2019)). This focuses the discussion on two key periods of societal change in France. The late nineteenth century saw the introduction of free, compulsory education; the twenty-first century has witnessed the rise of digital platforms that democratise linguistic discourse. Importantly, the use of dialogic forms of language commentary offers us two viewpoints: not only that of language 'experts' (which we can similarly access in traditional monologic metalinguistic texts), but also that of the audience, comprising readers ranging from language enthusiasts through to the elusive 'ordinary' language users.

Prescriptivism through the back door: How standard language ideology is perpetuated in popular culture

Linda Pillière (Aix-Marseille Université)

While grammars and usage guides explicitly promote “correct” forms of language, there exist numerous covert manifestations which operate more subtly and of which the linguistic community remains unaware. This presentation will explore how standard language ideology is perpetuated within mainstream fiction, both through the interventions of copy editors, but also within the narratives themselves where characters correct one another or where other varieties of language or accents are presented as “nonstandard”. Finally, reference will be made to films and TV series where one variety is also presented as “correct”, thus shaping public attitudes towards language variety. In all these instances, prescriptive attitudes are reproduced and reinforced even in the absence of explicit reference to formal linguistic rules.

The tyranny of the red pen: Prescriptivism and politics

Loreta Vaicekauskienė (Vilniaus universitetas)

This talk explores prescriptivism as a political tool. At its centre are school-based corrections of language ‘errors,’ examined through a broader lens of cultural policy and language teachers’ professional identity.

Prescriptive practices are universally sustained not only by the myth of declining literacy but also by the modernist belief that language can be fully standardised and by the conflation of linguistic ‘correctness’ with nationhood. Under certain conditions, these sensitive ideological points can be instrumentalised in the pursuit of political power. Drawing on data from the Lithuanian language community, the talk shows how language ideologies and policies are reshaped under totalitarian regimes, with educators made agents of their implementation.

Alongside the analysis of educational discourses and teachers’ attitudes, the study draws on a **database** of authentic school essays spanning almost seven decades since WWII. The collection includes more than 7,500 files annotated by year of writing, grade level, evaluation, and other criteria, representing the writing of nearly 950 Lithuanian pupils – from primary school to upper secondary level. This corpus offers an ideal basis for comparing the normalisation of literacy under differing political conditions.

Qualitative and quantitative data on the correction of various types of language ‘errors’ suggest that Soviet totalitarianism enacted prescriptivism as an instrument of discipline and power. While in the West normative grammar teaching was gradually replaced by utilitarian, communication-oriented didactics, on the other side of the Berlin Wall prescriptivism was embedded in the pseudo-scientific discipline of *Sprachkultur*, and the teaching of linguistic expression became highly error-focused. Yet the more surprising finding is that post-totalitarian democracy did not bring democracy into education: it failed to adopt the linguistically-informed and emancipatory approaches to language teaching introduced elsewhere after 1990. The totalitarian ideology was absorbed into the new political order by further formalising the idea of linguistic correctness and adapting it to the new technocratic demands of national testing. This likely explains the marked rise in the number of corrections observed during this period. Thus, although over time the colour of pencils gradually shifted to green, language teachers’ professionalism remains dominated by the mechanistic application of prescriptive rules, mixed with romantic nostalgia and the post-1990 linking of normativity with patriotism.

The talk concludes with a discussion of the limits of prescriptivism-based pedagogy and the consequences of ‘error hunting’ for young people’s self-perception as literate individuals.

PAPER PRESENTATIONS

Estonian L1 teachers' prescriptive practices and attitudes in Estonian lessons

Kristel Algvère (University of Tartu)

The various factors that influence language users' attitudes and choices include Standard Language Ideology and Purism (Milroy 2001; Estonian overview Lindström, Risberg & Plado 2023:15). Attitudes toward language use affect not only language issues, but more directly, the people affected by these ideologies (Truan & Jahns 2024:10). Negative assessment of language-related assumptions creates inequality (Woolard 2020:3).

Education based upon a doctrine of correctness and purity in language that differs from the facts of actual language use is considered a force that produces linguistic insecurity in students (Baron 1976). In the absence of relevant, in-depth knowledge about language, many teachers practice language policies based on ideologies they are unaware of (Young 2013:157). Estonian educational system ought to discard the misguided notion that teaching the Estonian language solely entails mastering the rules of written language has been pointed out (Hennoste 1999:93), but prescriptive practices are still present.

Between October 2023 and May 2024, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 Estonian L1 teachers from basic and secondary schools in Estonia. This paper is based on qualitative content analysis of responses to the questions concerning correction practices and strategies teachers use. An overview of results from the same survey on attitudes of Estonian teachers to the Dictionary of Standard Estonian and to their students' L1 language usage and vocabulary is also connected with these results.

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Elite Prescriptivism versus Language Practice: The Case of Czech Script Reform in the Early Nineteenth Century

Alena Andrllová Fidlerová (Charles University)

This paper examines attempts to reform Czech script in the first half of the nineteenth century, illustrating the limited possibilities of prescriptive intervention in a context where a small educated elite did not control schools, censorship, or state administration, and often held linguistic views that diverged from those of the broader language community. Several scholars, including František Jan Tomsa (1753–1814), Antonín Jaroslav Puchmajer (1769–1820), and Václav Hanka (1791–1861), criticised the existing writing system for its divergence from other Slavic scripts and proposed various reforms: incorporating selected Cyrillic or newly invented graphemes to represent Czech phonemes not present in Latin, and replacing blackletter with roman type, already used in Polish. Some proposals went further, suggesting that Czech could be written in Cyrillic enriched with roman letters, or that Polish, Croatian, and Russian could adopt a reformed Czech orthography.

None of these reforms achieved immediate uptake. They faced political resistance, as Pan-Slavic ideas risked being perceived by Habsburg authorities as subversive, and technical and financial obstacles for printers, as well as the practical impossibility of implementing Cyrillic-based reforms in schools. Nevertheless, the transition from blackletter to roman type promoted by Tomsa around 1800 did take place gradually over the first half of the nineteenth century, becoming fully established only around 1850. Despite this partial convergence with Polish, however, the orthographic systems – and thus the graphic appearance of the two languages – remained distinct.

The paper combines qualitative and quantitative approaches. First, I outline key reform proposals, highlighting their features, arguments, and aims, and discuss what they reveal about each author's conception of the Czech language and national identity, particularly the belief in a single Pan-Slavic language of which all Slavic languages were considered dialects, and the potential role of script in fostering their mutual intelligibility. Drawing on an analysis of a sample of Czech books published between 1800 and 1850, I then trace the shift from blackletter to roman type, showing where the transition proceeded more rapidly or more slowly, and what this indicates about reader preferences and Habsburg censorship. Finally, I consider why unlike the other proposals, the change to roman type ultimately succeeded, which agents were involved in it, why it was so gradual, and whether such a protracted process can be understood as an effect of prescriptive intervention or rather as a spontaneous development.

Beyond the Usage Guide: Usage Advice in Online Style Guides

Holly Baker (Brigham Young University)

In an era when writers seek quick, authoritative answers to questions of grammar, diction, and correctness, style guides have become a central source of usage advice. This paper argues that modern usage seekers rely not simply on standalone usage guides but on the digital ecosystems surrounding major style manuals, where editors publicly adjudicate questions of usage.

Although manuals of style historically focused on citation systems and stylistic conventions, the past quarter century has witnessed a significant expansion of their scope and now include formally designated grammar and usage sections. In doing so, they position themselves as comprehensive reference works that can answer the full range of language questions encountered by students, researchers, and professional writers. These additions reframe usage itself as part of a guide's editorial purview and present style manuals as vehicles for adjudicating correctness alongside style.

I explore why style guides have taken on this expanded role and how they construct, justify, and disseminate usage advice within online environments. Several factors help explain this shift: the need for unified in-house editorial standards, the rise of digital publishing platforms that encourage centralized and searchable guidance, and the demand for authoritative commentary on public debates about clarity, bias, and inclusive language. As style guides grow into all-purpose resources, their publishers and editors must also defend their prescriptive legitimacy in a domain historically dominated by lexicographic authorities. I therefore analyze how these manuals cite linguistic research, invoke editorial best practices, and frame their recommendations as grounded in professional experience rather than personal preference.

I also examine how usage advice circulates in online venues attached to these manuals, especially the Chicago Manual of Style's Q&A archive, where editors respond directly to reader queries. These exchanges reveal how style-guide editors perform prescriptive authority: they articulate reasoning, negotiate competing norms, acknowledge variation, and establish the boundaries of what their guide can and cannot pronounce on. They also show which questions writers bring to these platforms, shedding light on the kinds of usage uncertainties that drive users toward style-guide expertise in the first place.

Ultimately, I argue that style guides represent a new model of prescriptive authority, one that blends institutional credibility with interactive editorial expertise. By providing accessible, responsive, and comprehensive usage advice, they have become the primary destination for contemporary writers seeking guidance. In this way, style redefine where authoritative usage advice resides and who is empowered to give it.

“Neither Our Language, Nor Our Culture”: Intersectional prescriptivism in the 2024 Paris Controversy

Valentin Balczesak (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

The selection of French-Malian singer Aya Nakamura for the 2024 Paris Olympics opening ceremony ignited a serious and vehement wave of linguistic prescriptivism in France. Far-right politician Marion Maréchal declared Nakamura’s sociolect and lyrics “neither our language, nor our culture”, while commentator Eric Naulleau degraded her sociolect as “shitty pseudo-French” and “vulgarity incarnate”. This study analyses these controversies to argue that contemporary prescriptivism in France operated beyond simple norms of usage. Rather, it functions as a mechanism of intersectional prescriptivism designed to police the boundaries of national belonging.

Using a Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2013) of media discourses alongside semi-structured interviews with five multilingual women residing in France, this study investigates how prescriptive ideologies are constructed by political elites and received by multilingual subjects. Theoretically, this work integrates Blanchet’s (2016) concept of glottophobia with Hill Collins and Bilge’s (2016) framework of intersectionality. The analysis demonstrates that criticisms of Nakamura’s grammar and vocabulary serve as proxies for “mysoginoir”, where the rejection of non-standard linguistic forms justifies the exclusion of racialised, female bodies from the sphere of legitimate “Frenchness”.

Crucially, this paper foregrounds the agency of speakers by shifting focus to the recipients of these prescriptive norms. Contrary to the model of passive reception, the interview data reveals that multilingual participants actively deconstruct these injunctions. They identify the defence of the French language as a thinly veiled defence of a white, monocultural hegemony, rooted in French Republican Universalism. By embracing hybrid linguistic identities, these subjects resist the banal nationalism (Billig, 1995) embedded in purist discourse, redefining the French language as a dynamic space of negotiation rather than a fixed heritage.

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On standardisation and its relation to formal registers in Canarian Spanish: The case of the existential "haber" construction

Miriam Bouzouita (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin) & Johnatan Bonilla (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

This presentation aims to examine how standardisation processes are taking place in Canarian Spanish and are affecting morphosyntactic phenomena. Canarian Spanish presents an interesting case study as it has been said to exhibit diagglossia (Auer, 2005, 2011), i.e. a dialect-to-standard continuum whereby (at least) two intermediate forms exist in between the local dialect(s) and the national standard variety (associated with Madrid), such as a regional standard variety (e.g., Morgenthaler García 2008). Additionally, Canarian Spanish is a transition variety which aligns for some phenomena with the Iberian Peninsular varieties and for others with the Latin American ones (e.g., Almeida 2012).

For this presentation, we will focus on the so-called pluralization of the Spanish existential construction with "haber" with plural noun phrases, as illustrated in "habían problemas" 'there were problems'. This linguistic feature is considered to be characteristic of the diatopic varieties of the Canary Islands (e.g., Bouzouita & Pato 2009), but its use has been rejected by the Spanish Academies (RAE & ASALE 2009): they favour the singular variant, as in "había problemas", even though certain Spanish-speaking areas appear to have fully grammaticalised the plural forms (e.g., Kany 1945).

In order to examine the degree of standardisation, the existential construction with "haber" will be studied, and analysed, both qualitatively and quantitatively, in three different registers, to wit, the political, the media and the academic registers as these have been claimed to be most representative of on-going standardisation processes due to their more formal situational settings (Morgenthaler García 2008). To this end, various corpora have been compiled using Natural Language Processing techniques and will be presented: CoParCan and CoPaCaYo serve for the study of political speech, while CoMeCaYo and CoACan for the mediatic one and academic ones. It will be shown that quantitative and qualitative differences can indeed be observed for the use of the existential constructions in these various registers, indicating that there exists a complex interplay between norm and usage in different formal situational settings.

On the prescriptive nature of conduct books: Forms of address in the Catalan sub-corpus

Jenny Brumme (Universitat Pompeu Fabra)

This paper aims to identify and examine collocations that reflect the prescriptive nature of conduct books in the corpus CoBooCat. The study is based on a corpus of 94 conduct books ('manuales de urbanidad') published in Spanish and Catalan in Catalonia between 1800 and 1936, two caesuras which mark Spain's social history: the collapse of the Antiguo Régimen and the outbreak of the Civil War. The quantitative analysis is supplemented by qualitative investigations based on three sub-corpora in order to observe changes in normative discourse: The first sub-corpus is related to the first boom of this genre (1835-1855). The second to the authorship of women (1875-1895) in a genre that had been previously cultivated mainly by men. The gender perspective concerns not only the authors but also the addressees, which include girls and women. In the third sub-corpus (1915-1935), conduct books written in Catalan in particular will be considered. Works in this language were produced under the influence of emancipation movements at the beginning of the 20th century and the favourable conditions of the Second Republic. The main focus is on the staging of normative discourse using collocations such as *leyes de urbanidad* ('laws of civility'), *reglas de urbanidad* ('rules of civility'), or *manda la urbanidad* ('civility commands'), *prescribe la urbanidad* ('civility prescribes'). The evaluation of a text genre, which has not yet been systematically recorded neither in Spanish nor in Catalan, focuses on the following research questions: a) Do certain collocations correlate with one of the three sub-corpora? In other words, is there a change in normative discourse over the period under investigation? b) Are certain collocations related to a stricter or more lax conception of politeness (*urbanidad*)? c) Are there differences in collocations between genders, i.e. textbooks for boys and textbooks for girls, or male and female authors? d) Are there differences between the collocations used in Spanish and Catalan normative discourse? This question is particularly interesting, as almost no normative works were published in Catalan until the 20th century. In summary, this study aims to contribute to a better understanding of a less researched text genre. At the same time, it aims to provide an in-depth analysis of normative discourse in Spain, frequently limited to the works published by the Spanish Royal Academy.

From Schoolmasters to Linguists: Language Experts in 20th-Century Usage Guides

Don Chapman (Brigham Young University)

The centenary of H. W. Fowler's *Dictionary of Modern English Usage*, published in 1926, invites a consideration of English usage advice in the 20th century. A key ideological development of 20th-century prescriptivism was the descriptivist challenge coalescing mainly in the emerging discipline of linguistics. This paper will examine the degree that Fowler and other twentieth-century usage guide writers engaged with linguists and other language experts to establish their own authority. This paper will argue that Fowler based his own claim to language expertise on little more than his experience as a schoolmaster, which in 1926 was likely claim enough. As language study became more professionalized in the 20th century, usage guides increasingly engaged with language experts, so that by the end of the 20th century, some familiarity with linguistics and related fields had become an expectation of the genre.

The term language expert in this paper comprehends a wide range of people writing about language, including lexicographers, grammarians, writing instructors, linguists, and usage authorities. Even with such a broad conception, Fowler's usage guide shows only a little reliance on other language authorities. His 33 grammatical terms among his "Technical Terms" (i.e. terms like absolute, complement, inflexion, copulative) would be the terminology one would need for teaching Greek and Latin and mostly point to Fowler's position as a schoolmaster. By contrast, the next major usage-guide writer, Eric Partridge (1947), refers to 116 language experts by name, including the outstanding grammarians of his day: Jespersen, Curme, and Onions. As the century progressed, most later usage-guide writers seem more like Partridge, citing many experts.

These citations show that the simple opposition of descriptive linguistics vs. prescriptive usage advice did not entirely obtain; to some degree prescribers in the 20th century recognized the value of professional study of language. My preliminary investigations suggest that usage guides gravitate to traditional grammar, but they also show awareness of later linguistic thought. This paper will examine how much and why 20th-century usage guide writers valued language scholarship outside their own genre.

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The Use of 'will' and 'shall' in Scottish and English Newspapers

Noam Davidov (Leiden University) & Mo Gordon (Leiden University)

Scottish Standard English (SSE) is a variety that emerged in Scotland in the 18th and 19th centuries, due to the influence of Southern British Standard English (SBSE) on the local Scots-speaking population (Aitken 1979; Millar 2020: 107–109). This period of time was rife with metalinguistic commentary discouraging the use of ‘Scotticisms’ – Scottish deviations from the prescriptively correct English, based on SBSE (Dossena 2005; Millar 2020: 107). Yet, despite these proscriptions, SSE developed subtle variations from the southern prestige variety that served as its model (c.f. Jones 1993). For instance, Gordon & Groot (in press) focusing on the use of the modals will and shall in Late Modern Scotland, which was subject to strong prescription at the time, find that higher class personal writing closely followed the Southern prestige model, while lower classes patterned similarly to present-day SSE. This raises the question how and when lower-class usage became part of SSE, which is now associated with higher-class educated users. Furthermore, while previous studies have traced the influence of Scotticism proscriptions in ego-documents (e.g., Dossena 2012), their impact on more carefully edited genres has less extensively been examined. This study therefore investigates the long-term impact of prescriptivism by analysing will and shall in Scottish and English newspapers, a genre particularly susceptible to editorial norms. Tracking their use from the 18th century to the present day reveals how far prescriptive rules shaped usage and whether these norms were adopted differently in the two varieties.

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Negotiating ‘Prescriptivism’ in Oracy: standard English, Dialect, and Teacher Agency in Liverpool Secondary Classrooms

Victorina Gonzalez-Diaz (University of Liverpool) & Sofia Lampropoulou (University of Liverpool)

‘Prescriptive’ traditions in the UK education landscape have long favoured an idealised ‘standard English’ variety that functions both as a linguistic and socio-educational benchmark (Snell 2013; Lampropoulou & Cooper 2021). In classroom practice, this has meant that the use of regional accents and dialects is frequently framed as inappropriate or academically risky. The recent turn towards oracy education in England, however, has prompted a reconsideration of these linguistic hierarchies, with the Oracy Commission report (2024) noting that spoken language education should recognise dialects as essential components of pupils’ linguistic repertoires (Cameron 1995; Milroy & Milroy 1999). How such reconsideration is negotiated at the classroom level remains underexplored.

This paper addresses this question through a small-scale study of oracy teaching practices in schools in Liverpool (UK). Working with six local secondary schools/teachers, we (a) co-created a suite of oracy activities designed to support metalinguistic awareness of the Liverpool English dialect; (b) asked teachers to deliver these activities; and (c) conducted focus groups and post-activity interviews to explore their experiences. The analysis revealed persistent socio-educational contradictions: while teachers valued the gains in pupils’ confidence and regional identity awareness, they continued to position themselves as gatekeepers of standard English. They acknowledged the importance of oracy as ‘good enough’ for supporting students, yet were hesitant to fully embrace regional dialects pedagogically.

This reticence was attributed to macro-level pressures, such as curriculum constraints and assessment regimes. Our analysis suggests, however, that a lack of curricular guidance, alongside longstanding internalised standard language ideologies, led teachers to accept Liverpool English only at the margins of formal schooling, even when they had enthusiastically engaged in developing new oracy practices.

These findings highlight the interplay of ideology, curricular trends, and teacher agency in reproducing ‘prescriptive’ norms, and suggest that the current ‘turn to oracy’ risks being constrained by entrenched standard language ideologies unless accompanied by wider structural and pedagogical shifts.

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“I’m happy to be corrected”: power relationships between copy-editors, authors, and norm-setters

Eglė Jankauskaitė (Vilnius University)

Lithuanian linguistic field is dominated by norm-setters and standard language ideology (Vaicekauskienė 2016; Vukotić 2019). One of the ways in which this ideology is reproduced is a type of copy-editing called language editing – editing the written text so that it adheres to the prescriptive norm set by The State Commission of the Lithuanian Language. Moreover, until 2019, publishing houses could be issued monetary fines for “incorrect” language in their publications, unless the “mistakes” were deemed to be “stylistically motivated”.

However, authors of both literary and non-literary texts do not always fit within this prescribed norm. They may also disagree with the copy-editor in their interpretation of the prescriptive norm, or their “mistakes” may not be viewed as “motivated” enough by the copy-editor. This leads to struggles between authors, copy-editors, and norm-setters, which on the surface are similar to the struggles between “grammarians” and writers described by Bourdieu (1991).

Based on data from interviews with 40 authors and (or) copy-editors, and a critical discourse analysis of texts on copy-editing, this research focuses on the power struggles between authors, copy-editors, and norm-setters in the Lithuanian linguistic field. I investigate, how these power relationships are, or in some cases – are not, misrecognized by these agents of the linguistic field.

The analysis shows that the power struggles are rarely overt, as most of my author informants and all of my copy-editor informants had internalized the standard language ideology. Even if some of them may question it, the orthodoxic notion of “stylistically motivated mistake” helps to obfuscate the subordination authors and copy-editors experience. In the rare cases where authors are able to reject copy-editors’ corrections, it is due to their exceptionally high symbolic capital in the cultural field.

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Historical changes in language teachers' perception with teaching language norms

Susanna Karlsson (Göteborg universitet) & Lena Lind Palicki (Institute for language and folklore)

This study investigates how Swedish language teachers' perceptions of challenges related to linguistic norms have evolved over a 50-year period. In 1975, language planners conducted a nationwide survey to determine which norm-related issues teachers addressed in their instruction and which they found most difficult. The survey was repeated in 2015, providing the basis for a longitudinal comparison. While teachers in both surveys focused strongly on the relationship between spoken and written language, the nature of the concerns shifted considerably. Teachers in the 1970s were primarily troubled by colloquial written contractions reflecting spoken pronunciation (e.g., någon → nån, skall → ska). In contrast, teachers in the 2010s reported that students struggled with mastering the inflection of the personal pronoun de ('they'), illustrating changes in usage patterns and dominant norm conflicts.

In 2025, we repeat the survey once again to explore how teachers' perceptions have continued to develop during a decade marked by rapid changes in communication practices. The 2025 study retains the core items used in both earlier surveys to ensure full comparability across all three time points, and new items relating to linguistic innovations related to current digital communications practices. The study focuses on whether teachers' concerns within the established categories have shifted in response to broader societal and linguistic developments, including the increasing role of digital written communication in everyday life.

The analysis adopts a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative results from all three survey waves are compared to identify long-term continuities and emerging changes, while qualitative responses provide insight into the nuances of teachers' reasoning and the contextual factors that shape their perceptions.

By integrating data from 1975, 2015, and 2025, the study offers a unique longitudinal perspective on how challenges related to linguistic norms arise, transform, and sometimes disappear over time. The findings contribute to research on language planning, norm development, and language pedagogy, shedding light on how teachers understand and negotiate linguistic correctness in an evolving communicative landscape.

Of Myths and Men: Prescriptivist Conceptions of Feminist Linguistic Activism in Estonia

Elisabeth Kaukonen (University of Tartu)

Initiatives promoting gender-neutral and inclusive language have expanded in recent years as awareness grows of the exclusionary effects of gender-specific expressions (Stout & Dasgupta 2011; Sczesny et al. 2016; Kim et al. 2023). Yet resistance to such change often stems from prescriptivist commitments to established norms of language (Blaubergs 1980; Bradley 2023).

This presentation examines prescriptive orientations toward feminist linguistic activism in Estonia. I first introduce corpus-linguistic research on Estonian language planners' prescriptive stances toward gendered compound nouns and changes in their usage (Kaukonen 2025). I then present ongoing work on attitudes toward gender-neutral language in Estonian media and among language users, drawing on data from the Estonian National Corpus 2023 and open-ended survey responses investigating gender bias in occupational titles (Kaukonen et al. 2025). The results reveal subtle signs of feminization and some awareness of linguistic sexism, yet male-centered language remains the default norm.

These findings demonstrate that Estonian, a grammatically genderless language, presents a notably distinctive case in which anxieties about linguistic change, the loss of national identity, and Western influence are coupled with the widespread misconception that Estonian is already gender-neutral. I argue that this misconception obscures ongoing linguistic gender inequality and contributes to the underrepresentation of feminist language-planning initiatives, despite its potential to improve linguistic inclusivity and benefit users.

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How prescriptive are Large Language Models?

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Large Language Models (LLMs) are revolutionizing how people communicate (Pearl 2025). LLMs exhibit human-like capabilities in natural language processing and language generation and are widely used commercially. While LLMs are capable of producing grammatical English, they are also shown to be linguistically biased toward dominant language varieties (Schneider 2024; Grieve et al. 2025). Further, LLMs have been shown to be ideologically influenced by the standard language ideology (Smith et al. 2024), as well as to prefer the prescribed variants of some morphosyntactic variables (Duncan 2024).

This raises critical questions about prescriptivism across two dimensions. First, LLMs may be new, increasingly influential agents of language standardization that propagate prescriptive language ideologies. Second, LLMs act as knowledgeable agents that people turn to for language advice and/or language work, such as editing and proofreading. Given this, we must urgently ask: What prescriptive norms and standards do LLM's follow? This paper answers this question empirically by probing LLMs (GPT, Gemini, Claude) to determine the rules they abide by and enforce.

We focus on a group of prolific but tricky-to-prescribe alternations in English (split infinitives, literally, which vs that, -one/-body, not vs no negation, plural existentials). We do this by i) prompting each LLM with questions for direct elicitation of attitudes to specific usage features; and ii) prompting LLM to complete a set of fill-in-the-blanks and editing tasks to assess preferences indirectly. Finally, we compare the LLMs' advice with authoritative usage guides. Preliminary results show that direct prompts elicit permissive, balanced advice, while indirect prompts strongly elicit prescribed choices. Together, these findings suggest that LLMs may sound descriptively tolerant in explicit advice while still operationally enforcing prescriptive norms in the language they generate and endorse.

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Re-creation of norms: the “Dictionary of Standard Estonian 2025” and its reception

Margit Langemets (Estonian Language Institute) & Lydia Risberg (Estonian Language Institute, University of Tartu)

Since January 2026, the legal basis of the literary norm of Estonian will be the normative “Dictionary of Standard Estonian 2025” (DSE), published in December 2025, both on paper and online. Historically, the normative DSE (since 1918) has primarily helped to keep track of spelling and morphology. In the 1990s, the content of the DSE changed quite extensively: in addition to word-level information, it began to provide guidance on how words should be used in sentences. For 30 years now, the latest DSE has been the legal source according to the Language Act (RT I, 14.06.2011, 3), which requires the use of standard language in official and public communication, as well as its teaching and use in schools. However, Estonian society has developed an understanding that all information contained in the DSE is normative in nature, although linguists have argued otherwise.

The compilation of the DSE 2025 has involved several significant changes in language planning practices, including a much greater consideration of actual language use than before (see Paet 2023; Risberg 2024). This gave rise to heated public discussion: over the past five years, the Estonian media has engaged in debates about the scope of standardization efforts (see Vainik & Paulsen, forthcoming). These discussions are deeply rooted in standard language ideology, which has shaped Estonians’ understanding of language (Lindström, Risberg & Plado 2023).

We will explore the reception of the DSE 2025 by analyzing the topics under discussion and the sources of discontent. Will the publication of the dictionary trigger a new wave of public discussions? Using critical discourse analysis, we will situate this reception within the broader context of language debates over the past five years.

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From Solecism to Standard: Singular They Across Two Centuries of Usage Advice

Morana Lukač (University of Groningen)

The history of singular they in English usage advice offers a clear view of how the notion of correct usage changes over time. Using material from the Hyper Usage Guide of English (HUGE) database (Straaijer, 2014) as well as twenty-first-century style manuals, this study reviews how authors of these works have responded to the linguistic feature from the late eighteenth century onward.

Early guides, from the late eighteenth century through the middle of the twentieth century, commonly dismissed singular they as nonstandard, even when acknowledging that it appeared frequently in speech and literature. Their arguments rested on agreement rules drawn on Latin-based grammar and promoted the generic masculine pronoun as the appropriate choice for gender-indefinite reference.

By the late twentieth century, usage writers began to acknowledge growing discomfort with gender-exclusive language. Many still recommended avoiding singular they in formal prose, but they also noted its long presence in English and its practical value in everyday writing. Curzan's (2014) account of nonsexist language reform—which exemplifies the politically responsive strand of prescriptivism—helps explain this shift in tone.

In the early twenty-first century, a number of major academic, journalistic, and governmental manuals present singular they as the preferred option for inclusive language (Robertson & Thompson, 2024). Rather than treating it as a marginal or informal choice, these guides now regard it as the form that best meets current expectations around clarity and representation.

The overall pattern shows that prescriptive judgements do not evolve through grammatical reasoning alone. Changes in advice on singular they reflect broader debates about identity, authority, and the social responsibilities of usage guidance, illustrating how standards of “proper” English are continually renegotiated in light of cultural and ideological change.

Taken together, these developments reverse the usual narrative of prescriptivism. Instead of following usage at a distance, prescriptive advice here plays a role in consolidating singular they as the default form. In other words, it does not merely register linguistic change, but actively shapes it.

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Prescriptivism and the language teaching of Norwegian Nynorsk

Kirsti Lunde (Western Norway University of Applied Sciences)

In this paper presentation, I will show prescriptivism plays out in the language teaching of the Norwegian written standard Nynorsk. I will mainly focus on the relationship between prescriptivism in language teaching and young writers' conceptualizations of codified variation in Nynorsk.

Nynorsk is one of two written standards of Norwegian. The other is Bokmål, and both were codified in the 19th century. Bokmål is a Norwegianization of Danish based on the elite spoken variety, and Nynorsk is a synthesis of different rural spoken varieties. Language planning processes throughout the 20th century focused on amalgamating the standards through spelling reforms, without success. The result was instead that each standard allows for much variation (Røyneland & Lanza, 2023, p. 340).

There are no official guidelines for how to combine the forms that comprise the codified variation, but Helset (2017) shows that users of Nynorsk experience certain forms as "conservative", "moderate" or "radical" forms of Nynorsk. He also finds that the actual usage of these forms constitutes norm clusters, and that the operative norm in Nynorsk is narrower and more moderate than the codified norm.

The material examined in this paper presentation consists of school texts in Nynorsk written by 21 pupils, eight focus group interviews with the pupils, and three focus group interviews with the pupils' teachers. During the presentation, analyses of this material will be presented and discussed with a focus on the relationship between the prescriptivism put forth by the teachers, and the pupils' conceptualizations of the codified variation in Nynorsk. I will be emphasizing the pupil's impression of how their teachers prefer "deep" and "old fashion" Nynorsk variants, and that the teachers employ a type of didactic social purism (cf. Vikør, 2007, s. 172) by using and recommending the more conservative Nynorsk forms, although both teachers and pupils claim that the codified variation is not emphasized in the language teaching of Nynorsk.

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“Let’s abolish the orders and found the Republic of Letters!” The French Revolution and Prescriptivism in the *Journal de la langue française* (1784-1795)

Mairi McLaughlin (University of California, Berkeley)

This paper explores the relationship between the French Revolution and prescriptivism in the first periodical devoted to the French language, the *Journal de la langue française*, soit exacte soit ornée. The periodical was founded by François-Urbain Domergue in 1784 and was published, with some gaps, until 1795. Its publication coincides with the French Revolution which begins with the storming of the Bastille on 14th July 1789 and ends in 1799. Historians of the language have already established that the founder, Domergue, and the periodical itself were implicated in the Revolution: Domergue played an active role shaping Revolutionary language ideology and policy, and he used the periodical to diffuse his metalinguistic thought (Busse and Dougnac 1992, Guilhaumou 1998).

The first part of the paper presents a general comparison of the editions published before and after 1789. This high-level comparison is quantitative, using the concordance SketchEngine to analyze a full transcription of the part of the periodical devoted to language. The comparison will reveal similarities and differences at a range of levels. For example, it will show that pragmatics only becomes a major concern after the Revolution. The second section blends quantitative and qualitative analysis to zoom in on aspects of prescriptive discourse which have been examined in research on other metalinguistic texts (e.g. metalanguage, intertextual references, imagery; see for example Ayres-Bennett and Seijido 2011, Marimón Llorca, Remysen, and Rossi 2021, and Humphries 2025). This section will reveal a tightening of prescriptive attitudes after the Revolution which is paradoxically accompanied by a more egalitarian language ideology. Together, the results of both sections will further our understanding of the relationship between metalinguistic discourse and the socio-political upheavals of revolution.

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Variable prescriptivism: The case of Gregorios Palaiologos' Letter-Writing Manual (1843)

Spiros Moschonas (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens) & Iouliani Theodosi

Charles Ferguson (1959) describes the high varieties of diglossia as “highly codified” and exhibiting “little variation”. This study shows that variability can function as a stylistic resource, even within highly regulated varieties.

We analyze the variability of *katharevousa*, the archaizing high variety of Modern Greek, in the *Epistoláron* of Gregorios Palaiologos, a letter-writing manual first published in 1843, and revised and reissued posthumously at least twenty-one times, culminating in its 1887 edition entitled *Méga Epistoláron* (Great Manual).

Gregorios Palaiologos (1794–1844) was born in Constantinople. He was trained and employed as an agriculturalist, and in this capacity he served in the first administration of the independent Hellenic State under Governor Ioannis Kapodistrias. A reformer, he published several manuals aimed at improving agricultural practice in Greece. He was also the author of two novels, *O Polypathís* (The Much-Suffering, 1839) and *O Zográphos* (The Painter, 1842), also written in *katharevousa*. They are notably “polyphonic,” in that their characters are portrayed through distinct speech styles.

All model letters in the *Epistoláron* are written in a “light”, flexible variety of *katharevousa*, that serves the manual’s purpose: to extend *katharevousa* across the widest possible domains of use in written communication, encompassing situations considered common or imagined as possible within urban everyday life (from arranging a financial transaction to scolding a prodigal son). Palaiologos’ *katharevousa* is shown to employ vernacular syntax and to make frequent use of Constantinopolitan features (e.g., *se díðō* instead of *sou díðō*, “I give to you”). A preliminary search shows considerable variability in the forms of address and the closings, in the pronominal system (high vs. low variants of personal, relative, and interrogative pronouns), in verbal endings (-un vs. *ōsi-n* or *-usi-n*), in the marking of the future (*thélō* vs. *tha*), and in the forms of the auxiliaries *eimi/eímai* and *éçhō*. Variation appears to correlate with the category of the letter (Familial, Friendly, Commercial, etc.), the relational status of sender and addressee (familiar vs. non-familiar), and the subject matter or the speech act (supplicatory, etc.) performed through each letter.

The analysis reveals an *Epistoláron* that is at once formulaic and variable, conventional and imaginative: both a prescriptive guide and an artistic creation.

Lend me an error. On the borrowing of errors from different complaint traditions

Ari Páll Kristinsson (The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies)

The presentation addresses the processes of manufacturing and perpetuating perceived linguistic errors within a speech community; more precisely one certain type, namely the peculiar phenomenon of borrowing certain elements from complaint traditions of a different language.

Data from Icelandic metalinguistic discourses will be presented which suggest that a particular element from the English complaints tradition (i.e., the error "do-not-end-a-sentence-with-a-preposition") has recently been "borrowed", and that it has since occasionally occurred in Icelandic prescriptivist practices. In the presentation, this borrowing of a "linguistic error" is interpreted as one manifestation of language contact.

It is argued that agents in media and popular culture acted, partly at least, as the channels responsible for importing and adding the element in question to the abundance that already existed in the native Icelandic complaints tradition.

Secondly, some examples of speakers' dealings with this "borrowed error" will be presented, i.e., the different ways in which it has been addressed metalinguistically. Discourses reveal the same sociolinguistic functions and characteristics as in common processes of the existing native complaints tradition. In some contexts, the borrowed error is treated along the lines of Curzan's (2014) "standardizing" prescriptivism, while in others, speakers' comments suggest that it is rather evaluated as belonging to the "stylistic" strand in Curzan's prescriptivism typology. Finally, it is evident that the "borrowed error", like many "native" ones, can be used in the context of degrading remarks and asserting perceived superiority.

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Normativity and the diversity trade-off in minority languages: the case of Scots

Hamish Pottinger (University of Oxford)

The typical configuration of what a language ‘is’ and ought to ‘do’ presents a challenge for many minority languages. Received ideals of homogeneity – such as standardisation, universality, or anonymity – are both a means of validating social groups and of limiting diversity within those groups (Lane et al. 2017). Since diversity is often the very purpose of minority language movements, this constitutes an inherent conflict in the development of those minority varieties, particularly when they are on a continuum with the superordinate variety.

This paper considers how this trade-off manifests in the conflicted normative practices within Scots literacy. In confronting ideological conflicts of legitimacy and authenticity (cf. Woolard 2016), discourses and language choices are often managed strategically so as to help Scots achieve the status of ‘a language like any other’. While efforts are made to conceptualise Scots as pluricentric, it is predominantly a homogenising standard language ideology which offers a digestible and recognisable framework for understanding ‘stigma’ and ‘language’. Accordingly, via a cautious preference for orthographic and lexical features from a long literary history that has influenced language planning efforts (e.g., Purves 1997), Scots is said to qualify as a discrete language, rather than a mere dialect. To illustrate this, I draw from semi-structured interviews conducted with literary writers – most of them activists – and other supplementary discursive and linguistic datasets.

This raises questions about the focus of language development. There is some evidence that abstraction from recognised forms of spoken Scots in writing can negate the ultimate aim of Scots activism – the validation of speaker identity – since it connotes a decontextualisation of and a distancing from the ‘natural’ vernacular. Hence, Costa (2024) has argued that Occitan language planning has suffered from assumed distinctions between ‘language’ and ‘patois’, cautioning against a pursuit of the former which does not consider speakers’ perspectives.

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What language norms are teachers held to in Flemish schools? A language attitudinal perspective on standard - colloquial variation

Laura Rosseel (Vrije Universiteit Brussel) & Chloé Lybaert (Universiteit Gent)

Dutch-speaking Belgium has long been associated with a strict standard language ideology (Van Hoof & Jaspers 2012). This ideology has also permeated successive governments' educational policies on language prescribing the use of Dutch and particularly the standard variety in class contexts (Ghyselen & Delarue, in press). However, recent language attitudinal work challenges the idea that Flemings still maintain this strict ideology: Standard Belgian Dutch (SBD) is not univocally appreciated or regarded as the most appropriate variety anymore, even in highly normative contexts such as higher education and speech therapy (Lybaert et al. 2022; 2024; Zenner et al. 2021). With this study, we further these investigations focussing on language norms in secondary education where teachers are traditionally seen as the “guardians of the standard language” (Van de Velde & Houtermans 1999).

In a speaker evaluation experiment with a 2 (variety: standard vs. colloquial; between-subject) x 2 (speech situation: relational vs. transactional; within-subject) x 3 (participant profile: pupil vs. language teacher vs. non-language teacher) design, we measure (1) how pupils and (language) teachers evaluate teachers who (do not) use SBD and (2) whether these evaluations vary across situational contexts: are the same norms upheld for relational activities like class management and transactional tasks like knowledge transfer? A sample of over 250 participants evaluated short audio recordings of a teacher addressing their class. Data is being analysed using mixed effects regression modelling.

If a strong standard language ideology were still dominant, we would expect consistent preference for SBD across contexts and listener groups. Instead, we anticipate more differentiated patterns shaped by speech situation and participant profile. SBD is expected to score higher in transactional contexts, whereas Colloquial Belgian Dutch may be valued more in relational interactions where interactional rapport is emphasized (cf. Zenner et al. 2021). We further predict that pupils show greater sensitivity to this contextual variation, while teachers (especially language teachers) may adhere more closely to traditional norms. Finally, we anticipate that expectations regarding language use will vary by subject area, with stricter norms applying to the subject Dutch than to other disciplines.

With this study we aim to better understand the evolution and malleability of language norms in Flanders. Beyond this scientific contribution, our findings have practical relevance for teacher education and language policy in educational settings (Delarue & Decaluwe 2014).

Prescriptive success depends on ideology: the fate of French elements in Dutch (1500-1900)

Gijsbert Rutten (Leiden University)

The Dutch-French contact situation, which goes back to medieval times, intensified significantly from the late Middle Ages onwards through trade, migration as well as cultural and political influence. One linguistic result of the contact setting was the increase of French elements in Dutch, for example loanwords and loan suffixes. The intensifying contact situation and the contact-induced changes were paralleled by a strong anti-French discourse from the sixteenth century onwards, which included multiple domain-specific purist dictionaries. Despite this anti-French discourse, the adoption and diffusion of French elements increased steadily across the centuries. The presence of French loanwords and loan suffixes peaked in the eighteenth century and showed a sharp and remarkable decline in the nineteenth century, at a time when prescriptivist discourse focussed strongly on spelling and grammar, while lexical purism had become less prominent, or had shifted attention to borrowings from German. In other words, after centuries of hardly successful prescriptions against French elements, prescription had shifted away from French, but prescriptivist practices now targeted French elements, and with success. In this paper, I will argue that by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, prescriptivism and in particular the concrete and domain-specific practice of lexical purism had become incorporated into the broader cultural and political ideology of the Dutch standard language. Closely connected to cultural and political nationalism, this ideology resulted in prescriptivist practices such as the eradication of supposedly French elements without any explicit prescription against French elements. The paper thus shows that prescriptive success is strongest when it is backed up by widely shared ideologies, and does not necessarily depend on prescription.

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Elaboration beyond innovation: new qualitative and quantitative perspectives on Dutch purist word lists (1550–1850)

Nelle Simonet (Vrije Universiteit Brussel/Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek - Vlaanderen)

Standardisation studies have traditionally focused primarily on grammars and orthographic works, leaving lexicographical standardisation efforts comparatively underexplored. Dutch, however, has a long tradition of puristic word lists dating back to the sixteenth century. These lists propose Dutch-origin alternatives for lexical loanwords labelled as “barbarisms”, such as *kundtschap* (‘skill, knowledge’) as a substitute for *intelligentie* (‘intelligence’). Because these lists were intended to ensure that Dutch could function across all functional and prestige domains without depending on Latin or other prestige languages, they provide a particularly suitable metalinguistic corpus for studying the elaboration stage in Haugen’s 1966 standardization model. Yet both elaboration and these puristic word lists have so far received relatively limited and highly fragmented attention in the literature, leaving little insight into the broader dynamics of this historical process and of the metalinguistic genre itself. In addition, their large-scale treatment remains rare in historical sociolinguistics and historical lexicography, which has tended to rely on small-scale, case-based analyses.

This study therefore examines twenty Dutch puristic word lists published between 1550 and 1850. The analysis combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches. On the one hand, patterns of innovation, reuse, and circulation within the tradition are investigated through large-scale corpus analysis, made possible through the digitisation of the lists as part of the project. On the other hand, the prefaces of the works are analysed in order to uncover changing ideas about loanwords, linguistic purity, and the position of Dutch. The quantitative results clearly show that, contrary to what the fragmented literature on elaboration has so far suggested, repetition and continuity constitute a substantial part of this tradition, with works clearly building on one another over time. The qualitative analysis of the prefaces further demonstrates that although the word lists themselves remain remarkably stable in form across three centuries, the motivations and ideological positions of their authors shift considerably throughout the standardisation process.

Our Daily Croatian: Prescriptivism and Language Ideologies Live on Croatian Radio

Andel Starčević (University of Zagreb)

Linguistic prescriptivism in the mass media is still an under-researched topic in Croatian linguistics. This is why in this paper I analyze how usage ‘advice’ on ‘proper Croatian’ is promoted on Croatian Radiotelevision’s Croatian Radio (HRT – Hrvatski radio). More specifically, I focus on a critical discourse analysis (Verschueren 2012, Machin & Mayr 2023) of the language ideologies propagated in the weekly call-in radio program *Hrvatski naš svagdašnji* (Our Daily Croatian), broadcast on Radio Sljeme, which is Croatian Radio’s Zagreb-based regional station. The 30-minute program is presented by a radio host who converses with a well-known Croatian prescriptivist about various examples of variation in usage, with a view to promoting standard-dialect variants as ‘correct’ Croatian. Listeners can also make a live call to the program or send an email with their questions. The research questions of this study are: (1) What language ideologies are promoted in the program? and (2) what discourse strategies are used in the promotion of these ideologies? The analysis and the results will hopefully encourage a more scholarly and inclusive approach to language variation and to language policy and planning debates in Croatia.

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Negotiating Norms: Feminine Personal Nouns in Ukrainian Across Prescriptivism and Displacement

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This paper examines how prescriptive regimes, language ideologies, and community-based usage shaped the trajectories of Ukrainian feminine personal nouns across the twentieth century and into the early twenty-first. Rather than treating non-standard or competing forms as deviations from codified norms, the study argues that they reveal the dynamic interplay between prescriptivism, language contact, and displacement. The analysis focuses on how feminine variants emerge, persist, or disappear under shifting political regimes, and how speakers evaluate these forms in relation to identity, authority, and legitimacy.

The study draws on two major sets of sources: (1) diachronic lexicographic materials, including pre-Soviet and Soviet dictionaries, which reflect institutional prescriptivism and changing codification practices; and (2) fieldwork data collected in L'viv (Ukraine) and Munich (Germany), consisting of language-biographical interviews with speakers born before 1950, a survey with visual stimuli, and written questionnaires. The lexicographic analysis traces how feminine titles for professions, kinship roles, and social positions were documented, modified, or erased across successive standardization cycles, revealing tensions between Western Ukrainian usage and Soviet norms.

Interview and survey data provide metalinguistic commentary illustrating how speakers navigate competing forms in everyday practice. Some feminine variants were maintained within Western Ukraine's multilingual environment—shaped by Polish and German contact—while others were reinterpreted or suppressed under Soviet language policy. In Munich, displaced Ukrainians transmitted the pre-Soviet repertoire across generations, preserving norms later marginalized by state-centred planning.

Methodologically, the study combines variationist analysis with thematic coding of metalinguistic discourse to examine ideological framings of feminization, normativity, and correctness. Particular attention is paid to contradictions between institutional prescriptivism and community-driven practice, demonstrating how speakers exercise agency in accepting, resisting, or reinterpreting norms.

The findings show that contemporary variation in feminine personal nouns is not recent innovation alone but a layered outcome of prescriptive interventions, migration histories, and multilingual contact. Importantly, following Taranenko (2013), the study highlights that feminization patterns preserved in diaspora networks began influencing the mainland Ukrainian standard in the 2000s, contributing to renewed debates about legitimacy and correctness. Situating post-2014 feminization within these longer trajectories, the paper illustrates how gendered morphology becomes a site where norms and usage are continually renegotiated. More broadly, it contributes to research on prescriptivism in minority and displaced communities, showing how linguistic authority is contested beyond nation-state frameworks.

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Dash Panic: Punctuation, Authenticity, and New Prescriptive Ideologies

Naomi Truan (Leiden University)

Generative tools have introduced new visual cues into everyday writing (Alafnan & MohdZuki 2023; Dynel 2023), and one of the most recognizable is the proliferation of dashes. Their sudden visibility has sparked commentary in online forums, journalism (Csutoras 2025; Fraser 2025), and peer-to-peer advice spaces, where users increasingly treat the dash as an index of “ChatGPT style”.

This paper argues that the dash is becoming a site where anxieties about authorship, authenticity, and linguistic authority converge, as can be seen in this screenshot from a private interaction on the social media platform threads:

[Fig. 1: ‘Are you using AI to reply?’]

Treating punctuation as an ideological object rather than a neutral device (Raclaw 2006; Weth & Juffermans 2018), the study examines how users frame dashes as evidence of machine-produced text and how this framing revives older prescriptive debates about clarity, correctness, and moralized writing practices (Thurlow 2006).

The analysis draws on a public metadiscourse from social media. It shows how readers mobilize prescriptive reasoning to police boundaries between human and machine writing, attributing excessive dash use to laziness, lack of discipline, or the flattening effects of automation. In doing so, they re-entrench hierarchies of acceptable usage while simultaneously negotiating new forms of linguistic agency: Writers strategically reduce or increase dashes to signal expertise, authenticity, or resistance.

By situating punctuation within emerging human–machine ecologies, the paper expands current understandings of prescriptivism beyond top-down norm enforcement. It highlights how norms and usage circulate through collective evaluation, technological mediation, and identity work. This perspective aligns with the conference theme by demonstrating that prescriptivism is not simply imposed but co-constructed in response to shifting communicative environments.

Do ‘norms from above’ match mainstream perceptions? Insights from an online survey in Aruba, Belgium, the Netherlands and Suriname

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In recent decades, the traditional monocentric view of standard languages has in Europe increasingly given way to a pluricentric perspective that acknowledges the coexistence of multiple national standard varieties. These natiolects now often serve as reference points for codification efforts and language policies, as seen in languages such as, among others, Dutch (Adviescommissie Taalvariatie, 2019), even if their analytical relevance remains contested (Scherr & Ziegler, 2023; Van Oostendorp, 2023). As such, natiolects are increasingly well-established categories in the minds of linguists and policy makers, but much less is known about how non-specialist language users conceptualise these categories.

The present study examines the extent to which Dutch language users accept the idea of multiple co-existing national standards. A total of 773 respondents from Aruba, Belgium, the Netherlands and Suriname completed a survey, containing (i) direct ratings of correctness and prestige of national varieties and (ii) open-ended questions prompting them to describe inter-varietal differences. Although not the main goal of the questions, the open-ended responses often indirectly reflect attitudes about national varieties, enabling us to contrast them with the direct attitudes from the rating scales. As such, the study can reveal whether (pluricentric) norms prescribed by policymakers match the ones held by respondents. A central dimension of this comparison concerns cross-community differences among respondents from Aruba, Belgium, the Netherlands and Suriname. We assessed, for the rating-scale items, the influence of respondents’ nationality through regression analysis; for the open-ended data, we linked recurrent thematic patterns to participants’ national backgrounds. These communities differ markedly in their historical relationships to the prescribed Dutch norm, which shapes how institutional norms relate to mainstream perceptions today still.

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This really gets on my nerves! Prescriptive attitudes among professional linguists in the Low Countries

Rik Vosters (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), Eline Lismont (Vrije Universiteit Brussel) & Arman Pakhchanyan (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

Survey studies on attitudes towards prescriptivism have primarily focused on the general public (e.g. Bennis & Hinskens, 2014, Ebner, 2017; Kostadinova, 2018) or on specific groups of language users, such as students and teachers (e.g. Severin, 2017; Wanner & Zang, 2024). Professional linguists, by contrast, have received little attention in survey research on prescriptive attitudes (however, see Lukač, 2018). While professional linguists are often portrayed as fundamentally descriptive (e.g. Straaijer, 2015), this assumption has thus rarely been tested empirically.

This paper presents the results of a recent survey of prescriptive attitudes among academic linguists in the Netherlands and Flanders. Using an online questionnaire, we examine how linguists position themselves with respect to Curzan's (2014) four strands of prescriptivism: standardizing, stylistic, restorative, and politically responsive prescriptivism. General attitudes are measured through agreement ratings on a series of statements targeting these strands, and are complemented with evaluative judgements on six contested features in contemporary Dutch. To probe attitudes towards specific usage items, we partially reuse the questionnaire developed by Bennis and Hinskens (2014).

The results are correlated with demographic variables, such as age and gender, as well as with linguistic subfield. This allows us to assess whether prescriptive ideologies cluster in particular disciplines or demographic groups. As such, this study offers an empirically grounded account of how prescriptivism operates among professional linguists in the Low Countries.

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From Purism to Functionalism: Transformations of Czech Prescriptivism

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The Prague Linguistic Circle's programme of language cultivation, formulated in the 1930s, emerged as a response to the puristic paradigm that had shaped Czech linguistics since the late nineteenth century. Although often characterised as descriptive (Vachek 1966), it is more accurately understood as a reconfigured form of prescriptivism (Starý 1999), one that preserved expert intervention in the standard language while departing from purism in its rationale, epistemic principles, and modes of articulating linguistic authority.

The paper examines how this shift reshaped notions of linguistic correctness and the role of linguists by analysing key theoretical texts by purists (Haller 2007 [1930]) and Prague Circle members (Havránek & Weingart 1932), as well as influential usage guides representing puristic and Prague Circle-oriented approaches (Brus jazyka českého; Jazykový koutek Československého rozhlasu). It focuses on the targets, justifications, and discursive legitimisation of prescriptive interventions.

Whereas purism was rooted in identity-based defensive concerns (Jelínek 2007), the Prague Linguistic Circle reconceptualised the standard language as a functional system governed by communicative needs (Havránek 1964 [1932]). This functional prescriptivism replaced prohibitions with analytically grounded, advisory interventions and reoriented Czech standardology toward a usage-based, functionally informed model of linguistic normativity, rendering Czech prescriptivism more explicitly analytical and, in Pullum's terms (Pullum 2024), more scientific.

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Language attitudes in the French supplementary school classroom in the UK and the US

Olivia Walsh (University of Nottingham)

French is generally viewed as a modern foreign language and French speakers in the UK as a socially prestigious group located mainly in London. However, the French-speaking population in the UK is socially, geographically, and linguistically more diverse and complex than this narrow perception suggests (see Huc-Hepher 2017: 147). In fact, for many Francophone immigrants in the UK who do not all use the 'standard' variety, French functions like a heritage language (HL, a non-dominant language spoken by immigrant communities). This dual status of French in the UK has been overlooked in research to date. A similar situation can be seen in the United States, where French is taught as a prestigious modern foreign language in schools/universities but is also spoken by many as a minority or immigrant language (see, e.g., Stein-Smith and Jaumont 2022). Many speakers of French in the UK/US send their children to supplementary schools, which are set up and run by immigrant communities and offer teaching of the HL and other cultural subjects in that language. This study compares attitudes towards 'standard' and 'non-standard' French held by teachers of French as a HL in the UK and US. It draws on data collected from online questionnaires administered to supplementary school teachers of French in both contexts to discover the social and demographic makeup of this community of HL speakers and examine the extent to which the language ideologies in countries where French is dominant affect this particular diasporic community. In particular, it examines whether the standard language ideology (SLI) is present (see, e.g., Lippi-Green 2012), and whether French speakers in this community have a monocentric or pluricentric conception of the French language, that is, whether or not they accept more than one variety of French as standard (see Oakes 2021).

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Seeking linguistic advice in the digital age: the shift from authority to interactivity

Anja Wanner (University of Wisconsin-Madison)

This paper will look at the democratization of giving linguistic advice in the digital age. It will make the argument that the Fowlerian model of providing enduring expert knowledge to a large audience is being replaced by more dialogical, more dispersed practices, a development that can also be observed outside the realm of linguistics. While usage guides written by language experts still exist, with the genre becoming overall more approachable or "kinder" (Curzan 2024), much of the discursive practice of advice giving has moved to peer-to-peer interactions. The argument is based on (i) in-depth interviews with twenty language professionals, such as editors and writers, with careers in the US and the UK and (ii) a selection of 100 posts tagged as "quick grammar check" from the social media platform Reddit. When asked to whom they would turn when they have questions about language use, none of the interviewed language professionals said they would ever reach for a usage guide. Most said they trusted their intuitions or would ask a colleague for advice. This interactive, situation-specific aspect of advice giving also animates social media platforms like Reddit, which has many communities ("subreddits") for the discussion of language use (the "grammar" subreddit has over 175,000 members). Anyone can ask questions, anyone can give advice, and anyone can "upvote" material that they like or find helpful. Such votes result in a public score known as a member's "karma." Authority does not come from someone's inherent expert status, rather, it is earned through fruitful peer-to-peer interactions within a community. Insights from this data will be discussed in the context of other forms of digital prescriptivism (Lukač and Heyd 2023) and the larger context of a loss in confidence in science and institutions, which has been found to hinder effective communication between experts and lay people (Rios et al., 2025).

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Belief as a factor in norm-usage interaction: trust in prescriptive authority and prescriptive felicity

Matjaž Zgonc (University of Ljubljana)

One of the various approaches to the relationship between norms and usage has been to treat norms as prescriptive utterance of the type “say p, not q”, and to seek evidence whether or not such normative utterances actually result in a difference in a given speech/usage. It was discovered (e.g. Moschonas 2022) that the rate at which such utterances provoke a change in usage (“prescriptive felicity”) is subject to variation just as any other type of language usage. Social factors such as gender, class and social mobility have long been demonstrated to affect usage, both under the influence of normative utterances and not. However, more individual factors such as temporary mental states that interact with social factors, have rarely been researched. This runs counter to a different type of normative utterance, namely L2 instruction, where there is a large body of research on the influence of motivation and other psychosocial factors on language learners. Evidence of individual-level differences in grammar also abounds (see Dąbrowska 1997 etc.) The present paper aims to fill the gap by testing the assumption from foreign language instruction in an L1 prescriptive setting. Using belief as the psychosocial variable, I aim to test its viability as an influence on prescriptive felicity by creating two separate instruction simulations differing only in the credibility of the instructor: credible (group A) and untrustworthy (group B). The instructor will serve as the deontic source of the normative utterance, and the respondents will then complete the task contingent on the normative utterance. The normative utterance in question pertains the (in)definite forms of the adjective in Standard Slovene, a well-researched usage problem with relatively low levels of salience in the lay population. The initial hypothesis, namely that the prescriptive felicity will be the same in groups A and B, rests on the assumption that normativity is an inherent property of (standard) language. If, as mentioned above, normativity is distributed unequally among the population and belief is one of the factors in motivation behind prescriptive felicity, significant differences between the groups should be observed. Should this be the case, the received understanding of the (Slovenian) academic standard being the necessary and sufficient criterion of normativity needs to be revised. For further insights, the significance of belief will be tested alongside the standard battery of social variables.

POSTER PRESENTATIONS

Comma placement before German infinitives between norm and usage

Ilaria De Cesare (Universität Potsdam)

German orthography is regulated by official rules that are binding for school and public administration. To date, these official rules are entailed in the Amtliches Regelwerk der deutschen Rechtschreibung ('Official rules of German orthography'), whose most recent version was published in 2024.

A domain that has received considerable prescriptive attention both in metalinguistic discourse and in the official discussions is comma placement before an infinitive. A look at the recent development of prescriptive norms in this domain reveals a history of continuous revisions. Over the years, different criteria have been drawn upon in the codification of comma before infinitives, including syntactic as well as non-syntactic ones (see Stark and Romstadt, to appear).

This study focuses on infinitives governed by a verb, as exemplified in (1) and investigates the role of the syntactic status of the infinitive in comma usage by means of a corpus study.

(1) weil sie versucht (,) den früheren Zug zu nehmen
because she tries (,) the earlier train to catch

We compare newspaper texts, which are assumed to be more subject to normative pressure, and posts on the social media platform X (known as Twitter at the time of data collection), a type of context that is considered less sensitive to normative pressure. An additional corpus study of Early New High German (1350-1650) texts provides further usage data that are not yet subject to the influence of prescriptive rules (von Polenz 2013: 271). The results show that newspapers tend to consistently place a comma before an infinitive, regardless of its syntactic status, while non-normed contexts show a major sensitivity to the syntactic status of the infinitive. The Early New-High German data align with the Twitter data in this regard.

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Read Frisian: Prescriptivism in a Minority Language

Nanna Hilton (Fryske Akademy), Wilbert Heeringa (Fryske Akademy), Amber Nota & Matt Coler (University of Groningen)

This study considers prescriptivism in the Frisian language community through an investigation of read speech. The study focuses on the linguistic properties of a spoken version of the written variety of the minority language (Read Frisian) and asks whether a shared norm exists for reading.

Frisian is a minority language spoken in the Netherlands by some 500,000 people. While officially recognised, the language is said to hold a lower social status than the national majority language Dutch. Speakers of Frisian do not necessarily have formal literacy training in their own language, but self-reported literacy proficiency has increased in the last decades (Klinkenberg et al., 2018). All Frisian speakers are also speakers of Dutch, the language traditionally used in the educational setting. In the 1990s, arguments were put forward that Standard Frisian has little acceptance (cf. Haugen, 1966) in the Frisian community, and that the variety therefore has little bearing upon language change. It was suggested that spoken Frisian is converging towards Standard Dutch (de Haan, 1997). Since then, Frisian has become a medium of instruction in many schools, as well as a compulsory school subject. With this change, a change in acceptance of Standard Frisian may have come about. But what does a spoken variety of Standard Frisian actually sound like?

Our study is the first to consider acoustic patterns of read speech by (40) native Frisian speakers. Apparent time and region are external factors considered with speakers belonging to a young or middle-aged age group, from two regions in Fryslân. The study looks at the prosodic traits melody (intonation phrase contour), tempo, voice quality, as well as vowel space, in the reading of a short text.

The linguistic analyses are also conducted on a dataset of read Dutch, by the same participants. This is to consider how Read Frisian is positioned, on a phonetic level, in relation to Standard Dutch.

The results from the study give us unique insights into standard language development in minority language communities. In turn, the findings can inform us about how political changes in the educational domain can affect language variation and change.

Feminine, Effeminate, Feminists: Judgment Claims on Feminine Speech in Usage Guides

Meili Hollingshaus (Brigham Young University)

The intersection between non-sexist language and prescriptivism has long been studied. Curzan (2014) describes “politically responsive prescriptivism” as using non-sexist language to be more inclusive. This kind of prescriptivism has also been studied in usage guides to discover the changing perspectives of English speakers in response to this effort. Amare (2007) and Schaefer (2013) have explored, respectively, sexist language within online grammar guides and the treatment of the epicene pronoun in the Chicago Manual of Style. Russo (2020) also studied the ideologies of H.W. Fowler in his 1926 usage guide and its impact on prescriptivism. However, an important area of study has remained virtually unexplored within this intersection: the presence of gender-based judgment claims in usage guides. Consider the following entry from Fowler (1926):

aggravate, aggravation. 1. The use of these in the sense annoy, vex, annoyance, vexation, ... is for the most part a feminine or childish colloquialism (p. 13).

This instance of sexist prescription is not unique to Fowler. In my study, I have searched for gender-based judgement claims in thirty-eight usage guides from 1770 to 2022. Through cursory study, I have found three groups that capture these ideologies:

- 1) Feminine: Using this form is wrong. Its use among women is evidence.
- 2) Effeminate: Men using this form will cause others to view them as unmasculine.
- 3) Feminists: Using this form will garner judgement from ‘feminists.’

I have found a preference for “feminine” and “effeminate” claims in earlier usage guides, while later guides relied more on “feminist” claims. My study shows the ideology and tradition of ‘masculine’ language as a basis for proscribing language—that they have not necessarily gone away but instead have taken on modern forms that still permeate our language use and prescription today.

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Prescriptivism in an organically developing writing system: the case of Roman Hindi-Urdu

Saiya Karamali (University of Washington)

Recently, the Roman script has arisen as a method for writing Hindi and Urdu in informal settings. Roman Hindi-Urdu is not only ubiquitous online, but is widely visible in India and Pakistan on billboards, storefronts, houses, and vehicles. This explosion in usage has occurred during a time of language-related tensions in South Asia: strong differences remain between Hindi and Urdu speakers' political and cultural identities; groups of speakers have long fought against English becoming the lingua franca in both India and Pakistan; and southern Indian states continue to resist the imposition of Hindi as a national language. It is no surprise, then, that Roman Hindi-Urdu has inspired heated discourse: Indian politicians, for instance, have been widely criticized both for using the Roman script and for favoring the Hindi script in official settings.

In addition to the normalization of the script itself, Roman Hindi-Urdu orthographic conventions have become highly consistent, despite many users not being aware of them ([redacted], in press). I am conducting a questionnaire, thus far with 63 participants, to determine why and when Roman Hindi-Urdu is used, and how Hindi and Urdu speakers feel about it. The questionnaire also includes an experimental task to determine users' judgements about which writing conventions they believe are "correct".

Preliminary results indicate that users have clear and consistent intuitions about the right and wrong ways to write Roman Hindi-Urdu. For each word I included in the experimental task, large majorities of participants agree on one or two viable spellings, and most judge the remainder of the spelling choices to be incorrect. Yet, when asked, participants typically have no clear sense of why they use these spelling conventions or why the Roman script is so common, and many have negative feelings toward the Roman script. Both the Roman script and its orthographic conventions appear to have become ubiquitous without any deliberate effort to create or impose them, and without being particularly well-liked.

Although prescriptivism in spelling is well known among linguists, my research shows that norms also develop organically, without necessarily being consciously imposed or popular. And in an era where nonstandard scripts are being used for many languages - in loanwords, for effect, and in diasporic communities, at a minimum - my research lays the groundwork for studying the organic development of prescriptivism in those writing systems, as well.

Effects of Prescriptivism on the Acceptance of Gender-Neutral Pronouns in Dutch

Maharatrie Teges Ken (Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

As gender inclusivity becomes an increasingly visible social concern, debates on how language should reflect it intensifies. Gender-neutral pronouns become focal points of representation within language. The gender-neutral pronoun forms of *hen/hun* and *die/diens* emerged within the Dutch-speaking communities not only as a linguistic innovation but also as objects of prescriptive commentary and public norm-setting. Despite their growing visibility, little empirical work examines how prescriptive ideologies shape their acceptance. This study addresses that gap by investigating the extent to which prescriptivist beliefs influence attitudes toward gender-neutral pronouns in Dutch.

This study employs a survey combining sentence-evaluation tasks with attitudinal measures. Dutch-speaking participants in Belgium evaluated sentences contrasting cueing with non-cueing conditions across three referential strategies. Participants completed a sentence-evaluation task consisting of eight items reflecting these conditions. The survey also measured attitudes toward language standardization, prescriptivism, and gender inclusivity. Pearson correlations were used to assess relationships between pronoun acceptance and these attitudinal factors.

The findings reveal a positive acceptance rate of gender-neutral pronouns among Dutch speakers in Belgium, with *die/diens* rated more acceptable than *hen/hun*. *Hen/hun* carries higher social visibility and stronger associations with gender-inclusive activism, making it more salient. *Die/diens*, by contrast, is perceived as less marked and disruptive. Notably, the study found no strong correlation between attitudes toward prescriptivism and the acceptance of either pronoun set. Instead, ideological beliefs about gender exerted a stronger influence, reflecting the notion of politically responsive prescriptivism.

This study highlights the complex ways in which speakers negotiate emerging forms within a shifting prescriptive landscape.

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Correcting Speech, Constructing Norms: Ideologies in Logopedics Textbooks

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While there has been extensive research on the role of prescriptivism in L1 and L2 language education, a comparable language process has received less scholarly attention: language therapy. Yet, the clinical context mirrors (foreign/second) language education in its use of standardized tests (Beushausen 2008) and an overall linguistically educative goal, colloquially put, an improvement of language skills across different linguistic areas. While a clear definition of pathological and non-pathological phenomena is necessary in order to identify language disorders (Cummings 2007), this goal is thus also inherently linked with notions about linguistic correctness and desirability. Consequently, language therapists, based on the therapist-patient dynamic, occupy a position of authority in deciding which language norms are upheld (Krämer, Vogl & Kolehmainen 2022).

Impositions of a standard language culture can lead to stigmatization as well as clinically unjustified pathologization of non-standard varieties (such as AAVE, see Archer et al. 2024) within the therapy context. Similar issues might arise with multilingual speakers who are assessed against allegedly neutral normative data of monolingual speakers. A lack of familiarity with multilingual patients in therapy settings has been shown to contribute to both over- and underdiagnosis of speech and language issues (Altman et al. 2022). Many clinical language professionals report feeling insecure and insufficiently prepared by their training to adequately treat patients with complex linguistic repertoires (Bloder et al. 2021; Centeno 2009; Centeno 2015; Newbury, Bartoszewicz Poole & Theys 2020; Norvik, Lind & Jensen 2022; Scharff Rethfeldt 2019; Stanford et al. 2024).

As a first step towards addressing this gap, this project focuses on language ideologies and the source of the norms employed during the education of future language therapists, especially, but not exclusively, regarding multilingual patients, by analyzing German textbooks for logopedics students. Given that these books are intended to lead the students towards a standardized national exam, they provide valuable insights into state-sanctioned understandings of linguistic norms and correctness.

The qualitative analysis explores questions regarding the understanding of language underlying these materials, the conceptualization of speakers, the role and treatment of different languages in clinical contexts, and how boundaries between clinically relevant and irrelevant speech phenomena are drawn, particularly with regard to multilingual and non-standard-variety speakers.