The Rise of Prescriptivism in English

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Abstract

The social milieu of eighteenth-century England gave rise to the middle classes. As their numbers, wealth, and influence grew, they felt the need for an authority on language to settle disputes of usage and variation. An English Language Academy was proposed but came to naught. Instead, dictionaries, such as Samuel Johnson′s, and grammars, such as Robert Lowth′s, took the place of a language academy. Together, dictionaries and grammars were felt to have accomplished the three goals that were deemed necessary: to ascertain, refine, and fix the English language once and for all.

نشأة المعيارية في اللغة الإنجليزية

الملخص

أدت البيئة الاجتماعية للقرن الثامن عشر الميلادي إلى نشوء الطبقة الوسطى ونموها من حيث العدد والثروة والنفوذ . وقد دفع ذلك بأفرادها إلى الشعور بالحاجة إلى مرجع يستندون إليه في حسم الخلافات اللغوية فيما يخص استخدام اللغة وظاهرة التنوع اللغوي . وقد أقترح إنشاء مجمع للغة الإنجليــزية لتحقيق ذلك غير أن هذا الاقتراح أخفق تماماً ، وبدلاً من ذلك نشرت معاجم كمعجم صامويل جونسون وكتب للنحو ككتاب روبرت لوث . وقد اعتبرت المعاجم وكتب النحو حين ذلك كافية لتحقيق ثلاثة أهداف ضرورية وهي : تحقيق اللغة وتنقيحها ومن ثم تثبيتها بشكل نهائي.

1.0 Introduction

Speakers and writers of English face a daunting task. Not only does English have a much more expansive vocabulary than other languages, due to the various accidents of history that shaped its modern form, but it also requires the extensive study of grammatical rules in order to master it. Other languages have relatively un-complicated grammar books by comparison. Many are, in fact, little more than a record of the language as it is spoken. If there are quirks and exceptions to their usual rules, they are relatively small in number. Most grammar books are thus descriptive in nature.

English, on the other hand, has many rules of grammar, many exceptions to these rules, and a plethora of prescriptive grammar books to detail them all. A great many of these points of grammar do not reflect the English language as it is spoken by the majority of native speakers, but nevertheless every student at all levels must study them and educated people ignore them at their peril.

Where do these rules and exceptions to the rule come from? This paper traces the beginnings of the phenomenon of prescriptive grammars in English. Part Two describes the milieu which led to the writing of prescriptive grammars. Part Three details the attitudes toward language itself that prevailed at this time. Part Four discusses the call for an English Language Academy and why it failed. Part Five shows that an English dictionary and an English grammar were found to be adequate substitutes for an English Academy. In Part Six prescriptive grammars are discussed in detail, and Part Seven shows what the results of this prescriptivist movement are today.

2.0. THE TEMPER OF THE TIMES

There are many factors that contributed to bringing about the present attitude of belief in and dependence on grammars and dictionaries. While some of them trace their roots back to antiquity, most of them arose in the years between 1650 and 1800. Prescriptivism did not develop in a vacuum but was part of, and the result of, the whole intellectual way of thinking during this period.

2.1. Politics

England between the years 1650 and1750 saw many changes. The execution of Charles I and the establishment of the Protectorate and Commonwealth, the Restoration of the monarchy with Charles II, and the deposition of James II, followed by the Glorious Revolution which settled William III and Mary, and later Anne, on the throne, all contributed to the change from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. This itself was a result of, and an indication of, the growing power of the middle class, the repercussions of which would be felt even in linguistics. The population itself nearly doubled in the years between 1700 and 1801 (Garside 1990: 476).

Both the growing political power of the middle class, as seen in the success of the Puritan revolution and the establishment of the Commonwealth, and the expansion of the colonies, which brought in great wealth, contributed to the opportunities for social mobility that had not been present before. "Naturally the beneficiaries of these changes who aspired to social betterment were forced to look outside their own traditions for guidance in modes of behaviour which characterized the gentleman" (Gordon 1972: 253). This betterment included language.

In spite of the tendency for monarchs to fall from grace during this period, there was still a strong nationalistic feeling in the people. Strong centralized national governments all over Europe fostered the development and use of their own vernaculars. There were many books, pamphlets, and essays written during this time defending English against those who compared it unfavorably with Latin or with other modern vernacular languages. It was

considered patriotic to defend one's own language and to recognize its fitness for use as a literary medium. The rugged individualist and the spirit of adventure were giving way to an increased valuation of order and systematicity, which "involved conformity to a standard that the consensus recognizes as good. It sets up correctness as an ideal and attempts to formulate rules or principles by which correctness may be defined and achieved" (Baugh and Cable 1979: 253).

2.2. Religion

Closely intertwined with the political status of England was its religious status. The repudiation of the Catholic Church by Henry VIII had aided in opening the doors to the Reformation, which contributed to making education available to every person. The popular spread of knowledge was especially influenced by the Reformation, whose proponents held the position that people themselves should have access to the Bible without needing a priest to read and interpret it. This idea had been debated for centuries, but the Protestant attitude prevailed and led directly to the translation of the Bible into the vernacular languages. This in turn reinforced secular and humanist needs as the status of the vernacular languages rose. Tindale's and Coverdale's translations of the Bible are examples. They and others, along with the populist style of preaching in the vernacular, fostered the increased appreciation of the common language.

2.3. Printing

Closely allied to the translating of the Bible into the vernacular, was the impetus for owning one's own copy of the Bible. The invention of the movable-type printing press helped make this possible, as it also helped to diffuse knowledge much more rapidly in all levels of society. The circulation of books grew rapidly; libraries were becoming more and more common and were making books more widely available. It was during the early part of the seventeenth century that Sir Thomas Bodley was given a grant from the Stationers' Company so that the Bodleian Library at Oxford was able to receive a copy of every book published in England. All kinds of printed material became more and more common--newspapers, journals, pamphlets, books--until by 1711 the total circulation of British daily or weekly newspapers was 44,000 (Durant 1963: 484). Literacy rose sharply as middle-class families strove to see that their children were able to read competently in English.

2.4. Education

The separation of the Church of England from the Church of Rome changed the characteristics of the English universities, which before this split had been the professional schools of the clergy. Learning now expanded into the sciences and into what has been called the humanities. After the advent of printing, the demand for education grew rapidly and the ease of exchange of knowledge became possible. "The rise of a commercial middle class spread literate education through wider circles of society and encouraged the study of modern foreign languages" (Robins 1979: 99). Thomas Sheridan in his essay on English education demonstrates the need for English to be taught, as well as Latin and Greek, in the education of "gentlemen" (Gordon 1972: 259). Views such as his were not uncommon at this time and eventually English was taught either alongside Latin and Greek or in place of them. The school teachers themselves, of course, had been educated only in the classics and were all too often reluctant to teach English. Before this time, the upper classes were mainly interested in having their children be fluent in Latin and Greek, as well as having a correct French accent; now the tide was turning. English was being valued for itself and education was aimed at producing speakers of "correct" English.

In addition, speaking and writing properly were also a way of differentiating the growing middle class into a more genteel merchant class and a less genteel trading class (Fitzmaurice 2000: 197). The middle

classes saw that the teaching of the English language was definitely necessary for their acceptance into genteel society (Crowley 1996: 84). Politeness and good taste were also seen as reasons for needing prescriptive authorities that could be consulted for advice on such social concepts (Raven 1992: 140).

2.5. Philosophy

The spirit of rationalism, which was fully manifested in the Age of Reason, showed itself in the tendency to attempt to settle disputes through appeal to logic. "Everything should, could, and would be improved by the application of reason. It was a time of an optimism that was supported by recent discoveries in astronomy, physics, and mathematics, the contributions of men like Galileo, Copernicus, Kepler, and Newton. Through reason the world, its institutions, and its people would be brought to perfection by discerning error and imperfection and then correcting all such" (Bambas 1980: 164). The easy acceptance of grammatical tradition in language usage was accordingly replaced by regulations based on logic and reason (Gough 1754: 252).

2.6. Linguistics

By the end of the Renaissance, the English language and problems connected with it were in the forefront of people's consciousness. The variations that had arisen through the years were no longer being looked on with as great a tolerance as before. "On one occasion, for example, More found fault with Tindale because he disregarded the customary distinction in the use of *yea* and *yes*. But such knowledge was assumed to be the inheritance of gentlemen and was fixed only by custom among them" (Gordon 1972: 252). The domination of Latin and Greek in the schools had had such a long history that it was a given that gentlemen were not educated without at least a superficial knowledge of the classics. Before this era, Latin and Greek were necessary tools for acquiring an education. Now, they became a showpiece for an educated gentleman. When the teaching of English became more common, it was not surprising that the conventions and examples of Latin were carried over into English in order to make it more appealing. That Latin grammar was an appropriate pattern upon which to model an English grammar was one of the basic assumptions of the day.

Early works on English had been primarily for the purpose of instructing foreigners or for providing a basis for the study of Latin. Now that textbooks were being written specifically for the instruction of English as a vernacular language, they were still influenced by Latin. The writers of such textbooks were for the most part unconscious of the fact that they were trying to force English into a linguistic mold that no longer had the pressures of a living language on it.

However, the attraction of an appeal to classical authority was irresistible for those writing at this time. They desired to have the same resources of logic, clarity, and force in English as they were conscious of using in Latin. "British writers justly feared that, as the fluid and multidialectal English replaced Latin, chaos and instability could destroy the relative ease of clear and exact communication afforded by the stable classical language in universal scholarly use throughout Europe" (Finegan 1980: 19). The same impulse that resulted in an appeal to classical authority also manifested itself in a belief in the authority of individuals to regulate linguistic matters in English and also explains the repeated appeals for the establishment of an English Academy. John Dryden was one of the early proponents of the call for an authoritarian regularization of English that would eventually lead to the common acceptance of a prescriptivist outlook on language and the formation of explicit rules of "correctness."

Even though the writers of the day generally adopted a rationalist philosophy with reason held in high regard, probably the most adequate explanation of the

popularity of the authoritarian movement was the popular demand of the middle classes for guidance. As the middle class increased in numbers and in wealth, they desired also to have the manners and education of those above them in social status, or at least the appearance of them. Preying upon their social insecurity, printers were ever ready to supply this need in the form of grammar books, etiquette books, and other handbooks.

Another basic assumption of the middle class was that variation was undesirable. Differences in social status that at one time were apparent by the trappings of wealth and status, such as houses, carriages, and certain types of clothes, were no longer necessarily the prerogatives of the upper class alone. When appearances failed to signal the distinction between classes, manner of speaking including pronunciation and grammar were found to be useful in making the distinction. The middle class was quick to realize this and to wish to acquire the surface results of a classical education. This desire for a veneer of educated speech, coupled with a lack of confidence in their own variety of language, set the stage for the development of authoritative or "prescriptive" grammars.

2.7. Enrichments in English

The freedom and individuality that flourished in English writing during the Renaissance diminished as the influence of Latin gradually became more and more pervasive. At last the criteria for style and elegance in English reflected those of Classical Latin. English was strictly compared to Latin and where differences were found, English was judged faulty. The result was a borrowing into English of elements of style and rhetoric that were purely Latin. Writers in general felt more confident about Latin because there were definite rules that could be appealed to and relied on since English was thought to have no grammar. Writers were often puzzled about how to express themselves elegantly and eloquently in their native tongue since they had learned

the standards and modes of rhetoric only for Latin, and sometimes for Greek. John Dryden, one of the most celebrated writers of the age, said that he was obliged at times when he was writing in English, to stop and put an idea into Latin first in order to know how best to express it in English (Bambas 1980: 162). This remark suggests how greatly many of the writers of the day longed for an authority in the English language.

In addition to stylistics and rhetoric being borrowed from Latin, vocabulary in English was also greatly expanded by the inclusion of Latin words. Borrowing words was, of course, no new thing, but during one phase the enlargement of the English lexicon by borrowing words from Latin seems quite deliberate with perhaps as many as ten thousand words being added to the vocabulary by 1650 (Bambas 1980: 134). All of these ways in which English was regarded as an object worthy of pride and cultivation point toward a new attitude toward English, an attitude which evolved into the conscious enrichment of English. It is true that as use of Latin diminished as the ubiquitous language of scholarly and "gentlemanly" endeavor, English came to function in places where Latin had flourished alone before, thus bringing with it an increased vocabulary for these new functions (Finegan 1980: 19). Some writers did seem to overdo it. The embellishment of writing with Latinate words, the display of wit and learning, the affectation of style, all were indications of those who took part in the enrichment movement.

Dictionaries of the times were hardly adequate to the task, being as they were mostly dictionaries of English for foreigners. The fact that these newly included words were termed "inkhorn" words by a number of scholars and writers shows their opposition to these pretentious words, but these objections did not seem to stem the tide of the use of unintelligible terms. So it was that the first English-only dictionaries were dictionaries of "hard words", and which only gradually became more inclusive

and more informative about words that were in frequent and common use in English.

New terms also arose in English with the increased travel and broader commercial ventures of England. Exploration, wider communication, and the increase of foreign translations all contributed to enriching the English vocabulary (Wells 1973: 16). By about 1700, however, the spate of new words into English had become a trickle, though not completely stopped, giving us essentially the vocabulary that is current today. However, the trend continues somewhat in formal or scientific writing, in which polysyllabic Latin and Greek words still predominate.

Along with the desire to enrich the vocabulary of English went the desire to improve its spelling. The spread of printing also gave impetus to spelling reform. By 1650 the number of variant spellings gradually had been greatly reduced, probably under the influence of the printers in London which was the center of printing. Moreover, the changes in pronunciation that were effected during the middle English period, notably the Great Vowel Shift, had resulted in a more or less standardized dialect that is recognizably "modern". As a result of the slowing of changes in pronunciation and other linguistic changes, the influence of the printing press, and spelling reformers, written English now had a form that varies only a little from what is current today.

3.0. ATTITUDES TOWARD LANGUAGE

The waning of the international and scholarly use of Latin, the concomitant increase in the use of European vernacular languages instead, the discovery of new languages, and the use of the vernacular languages for religious purposes led to a feeling that it was within the people's power to control the formation of the languages they were using. Before 1650 tolerance with variation in language abounded, but after this time it was felt that English usage needed to be regularized, standardized, codified, and unified. There was fear among the learned people that the expanded use of new linguistic embellishments in the language could lead to "ineloquent, imprecise, and ambiguous communication" (Finegan 1980: 19). At the same time, those writers who were embellishing their writings with "aureate terms" were in their own way trying to improve the language.

The discussion of proper grammar and usage became a popular theme for comment at this time. In 1664 the Royal Society went so far as to suggest and make provision for a committee to meet and discuss matters relating to English. For the most part, however, the Royal Society was more interested in mathematics and science and the project of improving the English language was not attempted. In a similar vein, in 1698 Daniel Defoe published *An Essay on Projects*, which was a collection of projects for improving the world. Among the schemes was a proposal for a linguistic academy, consisting of writers of such authority that no one would resist the edicts the academy handed down. Interestingly, one of the responsibilities of this body was the control of new words. Coining new words without permission was to be equivalent to counterfeiting money (Bambas 1980, 168).

Free-wheeling variation, even among educated people, was definitely contrary to an era that longed for order in the universe. What the spirit of the age called for was a language that was logical, permanent, and polished. One of the basic assumptions of this age was that language could be made subject to the laws of logic and reason. Attempts to modify the English of the time fall into three categories. They would attempt to develop rules for English and to set up criteria by which all language usage could be measured. They would attempt to purify it by removing any imperfections that were discovered and also by adding any improvements that were discovered necessary. They would also attempt, once the first two changes had been effected, to

render these changes and English itself permanent (Baugh and Cable 1978: 253). A perfect language would thus be achieved.

3.1. Ascertainment of the Language

The spirit of scientific rationalism that was predominant during this period also carried over into other domains, such as language. Things that could be explained by means of reason and logic were felt to be more satisfactory than otherwise. Whenever possible reason was supported by appeal to classical authority, and Latin was looked on as a model. It was now discovered that English had no grammar, at least it had no codified rules of grammar as Latin did. With the classical languages one could easily tell whether something was right or wrong, but the state that English was in left people vaguely uneasy as to the status of what they were speaking and writing. Their assumption was that because English had no codified grammar, it had no grammar at all. In the face of this, the learned people of the period were very eager to ascertain the English language. What was meant by this term was making certain that English was defined by a set of rules by which sentence structure and word choice would be agreed upon by all. The people of this period wanted to settle the usage of English beyond a shadow of a doubt and to set up a standard that could be appealed to at any time when one was in doubt or there was a difference of opinion. As it was, writers used their own individual judgments as to what was right and wrong and did not have the confidence of having an authority to back them up. Usage varied greatly, such as *have wrote* or *have written*, *housen* or *houses*, *shoon* or *shoes*. Pronunciation as well differed greatly from one person to another. One might hear *service* or *sarvice*, *certain* or *cartain*, *concern* or *concarn*. Even Gray's famous poem (1751) was originally published with the title *An Elegy Wrote in a Country Churchyard* (Baugh and Cable 1978: 250). Prominent writers of the day were eager for questions of usage such as these to be settled. Dr. Samuel Johnson appealed for the ascertainment of the English language in his *Proposal .for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue*. Addison, in the *Spectator*, noted that some kind of authority, such as an academy of language, was needed to ascertain the language and to settle questions of usage (Wells 1973: 34).

3.2. Refining the Language

A commonly held belief about English was that there had been a prior age when the language was pure, and that it was desirable to restore English to its former state. A second commonly held belief was that the former pristine purity of the language could be restored, that the imperfections and elements of what was thought of as "decay" could be identified and then corrected. The fact that English had no codified grammar was seen as evidence that the language had changed so much as to allow no standard. Individual opinion varied as to exactly which period in the past English had been in this pure state. "Thus Dryden (like Spenser) admired Chaucer's English, Swift admired Shakespeare's English, but Samuel Johnson and Thomas Sheridan admired Swift's" (Gordon 1972: 254). Whatever standard was to be chosen, it was felt that only by the exercise of some duly constituted authority could the continual degradation of English be stopped, or indeed, as some hoped, reversed. The second goal, in addition to ascertainment of the language, thus became to bring the language to a refined state with all offensive terms eliminated and any element that was felt to be "barbarous" banished from proper usage.

One of the earliest statements that is representative of this purist attitude toward English is that of Sir John Cheke, who wrote the following: "to his loving frind Mayster Thomas Hoby: I am of this opinion that our own tung shold be written cleane and pure, unmixt and unmangeled with borowing of other tunges, wherin if we take not heed by tiim, ever borowing and never payeng, she shall be fain to keep her house as bankrupt. For then doth our tung naturallie and praisablie utter her meaning, when she bouroweth no counterfeitness of other

tunges to attire her self withall, but useth plainlie her own,...and if she want at ani tiim (as being unperfight she must) yet let her borow with suche bashfulness, that it mai appear, that if either the mould of our own tung could serve us to fascion a woord of our own, or if the old denisoned wordes could content and ease this neede, we wold not boldly venture of unknowen wordes" (Hebel, Hudson, John-son, and Green 1952: 146). As can be seen in this 1557 quotation, the desire to purify English, spurred by the linguistic changes that had occurred during the Renaissance, was now seen as an imperative. By 1671 the anonymous editor of Stephan Skinner's *Etymologicon Linguae Anglicanae* was wishing that English had as few "solecisms and barbarisms" as did classical Latin (Wells 1973: 31).

By the eighteenth century, the demand for regulation of English was very strong, especially regarding foreign borrowings. This apparently was somewhat of a backlash against the "inkhorn terms" or "aureate terms" that had been purposefully introduced into English in the preceding century. There was a feeling at this time that English was in danger of being ruined by the introduction of foreign, especially French, words. French was the language of almost every court in Europe; knowledge of French and use of French by the upper classes in England was almost universal; travel in France was a necessary part of the education of the young; cultural exchange between the two countries was reciprocal, with perhaps France doing more exporting than importing. In reality, the number of French words borrowed into English from 1650 to 1800 was not as great as people thought (Baugh and Cable 1978: 287).

Swift realized that Latin had changed or "decayed", as he put it, and he saw that French too was changing through the increased use of affected words by some authors. He was afraid that English was similarly being affected by the introduction of "barbarisms", which had been greatly multiplied since the Civil War. "The Period wherein the *English* Tongue received most

Improvement, I take to commence with the beginning of Queen Elizabeth's Reign, and to conclude with the Great Rebellion in Forty Two....During the Usurpation, such an Infusion of Enthusiastick Jargon prevailed in every Writing, as was not shook off in many Years after....To this succeeded that Licentiousness which entered with the Restoration, and from infecting our Religion and Morals, fell to corrupt our Language" (Swift 1712: 17-18). Swift's barbarisms, however, appear to the modern reader as the singular crotchets of a conservative, opinionated old man. During every age there are always people who react adversely to various words and expressions, especially if they are new. But due to the regard with which Swift was held by his peers and by people in general, his opinions were given great weight and the usage he condemned was likewise condemned by the public in general.

One category of words that Swift considered in need of refining was the contractions that were formed by the habit some people had of shortening words. He felt that English was already too full of monosyllables and that words should retain their full polysyllabic sonority. He objected to such words as *rep*, *mob*, and *penult*, for example. Related to this, was the shortening of verbs. Again Swift cites monosyllables as the "disgrace of our language" and asks the Earl of Oxford, to whom his book is addressed, whether he does not find it disgraceful to permit verbs like *drudg'd, disturb'd, rebuk'd,* and *fledg'd*. The third category of "corruptions" that Swift objected to were simply new words that he did not like. They were primarily words that were in vogue with the fashionable people of the time and included some words that we would find hard to do without today: *sham, banter, bully, bubble, cutting, shuffling,* and *palming* (Baugh and Cable, 1978: 258). Swift is only one example of this phemomenon. Every self-appointed purifier of English had an idiosyncratic list of objectionable words and expressions.

3.3. Fixing the Language

Based on the assumption that language can and should be stopped from changing, the third goal was to render English unchangeable and to prevent its changing further. Fear of change, of course, is not uncommon. Baugh and Cable point out that the generation most interested in achieving permanence in language was also the generation that remembered the "disorders and changes of the Revolution and Restoration". Permanence and stability would indeed be valued by them (Baugh and Cable 1978: 254). Aside from permanence for permanence's sake, writers of the day feared change because of the possibility that it would lead naturally to unintelligibility of what had come before. Those who were familiar with Shakespeare and Jonson and Chaucer realized the truth of this. What they apparently did not comprehend was that change was inevitable. In spite of the fact that the historical record clearly showed linguistic change in every language that the intelligentsia of the day were familiar with, they still believed that English could be prevented from changing. Their fear was that their own writings would be lost to future generations. Many writers, Swift included, warned that two hundred years hence historians would have difficulty in understanding the writing of Swift's own time. This sentiment was expressed by the poet Waller in *Of English Verse*: Poets that Lasting Marble seek,/Must carve in Latin or in Greek;/We write in Sand… (Wells 1973: 36).

The three steps to improving English then were first to ascertain what English should be, purify it of all corruptions, and then, perhaps most ambitious of all, to fix it once and for all, and to protect it from changing ever more. The eighteenth century writers, of course, had no doubt about their calling to this task. Like many other historical periods, the people of this era considered themselves superior and held the belief that their judgments should stand for all posterity.

4.0. AN ENGLISH ACADEMY

Similar problems had been faced in other European countries, and if they did not try to ascertain, refine, and fix their languages, they at least founded academies to control somewhat the growth and rate of change of the vernacular languages. So, for example, while England was lacking a dictionary and bemoaning the fact, Italy and France had solved the problem by empowering an academy to produce one. It was only natural that England would compare its status with the other European countries. The earliest language academy was the Accademia della Crusca in Italy, founded in 1582 with the avowed purpose of purifying the Italian language and producing a dictionary, which it did in 1612.

Even more effective perhaps was the success of l'Academie francaise, founded by Cardinal Richelieu in 1635. A royal charter was offered to a small group of six men who had already been holding discussions on literature; their maximum number was set at forty. Their charter was very similar to the concerns of the English. "To cleanse the language of impurities, whether in the mouths of the people or among men of affairs, whether introduced by ignorant courtiers or preachers or writers….it should undertake to compile a dictionary, a grammar, a rhetoric, and a treatise on the art of poetry" (Baugh and Cable 1978: 261). It cannot be doubted that England looked to France and Italy as examples and inspirations in undertaking what for them had turned out to be of practical use. Comparisons with the French Academy were stated outright. In 1665 John Evelyn proposed an English grammar that would accomplish what the French Academy did. But unlike the language academies of European languages, an English academy was never established.

4.1. Interest in an English Academy

The idea of an academy for English can be traced back as early as the last part of the sixteenth century to a suggestion by John Baret in the preface to the letter *A* in his *An*

Alvearie, or Triple Dictionarie, in Englishe, Latin, and French (1573). His proposal was mainly concerned with the orthography of English and recommended that a group of scholars look into reforming spelling (Wells 1973: 32). There were various similar appeals to authority in the early seventeenth century. Edmund Bolton proposed a society authorized to settle language matters to be composed of politicians, lawyers, scientists, historians, literary men and other men of letters. Samuel Daniel suggested that there be an authority to rule on allowing new words into English. Dryden regretted not having an academy, and in 1664 the Royal Society of which he was a member resolved that as "there were persons of the Society whose genius was very proper and inclined to improve the English tongue, Particularly for philosophic purposes, it was voted that there should be a committee for improving the English language" (Baugh and Cable 1978: 263). However, it came to naught. The committee held four meetings; interest waned.

In 1697 Daniel Defoe wrote in his *Essay on Projects* that the king ought to establish an academy (Wells 1973: 33). In the early eighteenth century Addison, at the heart of a group of intellectuals and men of letters (Fitzmaurice 2000), urged that variation of usage would never be settled until an academy or something like an academy, consisting of the "best authorities", should be established, to settle the controversy between "grammar and idiom". Presumably Addison meant the controversy between English as it ought to be used and as it was used (Bambas 1980: 168). But the greatest proponent of an English Academy was Jonathan Swift.

4.2. Swift's Proposal

The assumption that language usage could and should be governed by an arbitrary authoritarian body was given its greatest expression in the proposal of Swift in 1712. No doubt inspired by the patronage and support of such a group in France by Cardinal Richelieu, the most powerful minister in France, Swift addressed his proposal to the Earl of Oxford, the Lord Treasurer of England, who held a similar position in the English government. Although Swift does not call his governing body an academy, the title of his proposal clearly enumerates the duties that academies were thought to render: *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue.* Swift was, of course, influenced by his classical education and felt that the polysyllabic words of Latin and Greek were somehow more desirable than the monosyllabic words of English, of which he felt English already had enough. Swift also appeals to the Earl of Oxford for corroboration of his dislike of dropping the vowel in the past tense endings of verbs. "What does Your LORDSHIP think of the Words, *Drudg'd*, *Disturb'd*, *Rebuk't*, *Fledg'd*, and a thousand others, every where to be met in Prose as well as Verse? Where by leaving out a Vowel to save a Syllable, we form so jarring a Sound, and so difficult to utter, that I have often wondred how it could ever obtain" (Swift 1712: 22).

The crux of the proposal is rather nebulous as Swift makes only a general suggestion as to what the authoritative body would do and who would comprise it. He recommends that it be made up of qualified persons without regard to their rank or politics, a quite unheard of suggestion for the time. He does not suggest a fixed number of people but merely suggests that they should meet together at some designated time and place and proceed as they see fit. He declines to put forward any methods for them to use, only mentioning that these persons would have the French Academy for an example of both what to do and what not to do. He states for the benefit of those who would make up this committee that "Beside the Grammar-part, wherein we are allowed to be very defective, they will observe many gross Improprieties, which however authorised by Practice, and grown familiar, ought to be discarded" (Swift 1712: 30). Unfortunately Swift did not give any examples of what he meant by "the

Grammar-part" and constrained his criticisms primarily to the words of English. In fact, he gives three categories of words that he feels need to be considered: words that need to be completely discarded, words that merely need correction, and a few antiquated words that need to be revived (Swift 1712: 31).

Swift summarizes his proposal and his fears in the following words: "But what I have most at Heart is, that some Method should be thought on for ascertaining and fixing our Language for ever, after such Alternations are made in it as shall be thought requisite. For I am of Opinion, that it is better a Language should not be wholly perfect, than that it should be perpetually changing; and we must give over at one Time, or at length infallibly change for the worse: As the *Romans* did, when they began to quit their *Simplicity* of Style for affected Refinements; such as we meet in *Tacitus* and other Authors, which ended by degrees in many Barbarities, even before the *Goths* had invaded *Italy*" (Swift 1712: 31-32).

The views of Swift and Addison and others were linguistically reactionary; they were loathe to accept new words or expressions, and more likely to long for a way to restore words that had once been accepted in English but that had been lost. It is important to note that these views were not eccentricities, but are those that were generally held by the educated classes of the time. Even though no academy was formed after the publication of Swift's proposal, the idea was popularly applauded. Swift's proposal, however, became a political controversy amid the fierce politics of the day. Swift, a Tory, had addressed his proposal to Robert Harley, who although he held the position of Lord of the Treasury, performed the functions of Prime Minister. The Whigs attacked Swift's proposal as a political issue. On the point of establishing an academy, Harley and his government fell from power. Queen Anne died. The idea of an academy and Swift's proposal were lost, and the idea of an academy died also.

4.3. Objections to an Academy

Swift's proposal marks the culmination of the movement for an English Academy. Contemporary opinion credits its failure with politics in high places and the Queen's death. In reality, opposition to the idea of an academy had been slowly building; the politicking and the death of the Queen allowed the opposition just enough time to muster their arguments and influence. What appeared to be a lone voice against an academy, Oldmixon's (1712) *Reflections on Dr. Swift' s Letter to the Earl of Oxford, about the English Tongue,* was apparently but the first indication of a groundswell of feeling against an academy. He makes a strong point for usage as the final arbiter. He reflects that an academy would be the "Arbitrary Fancy of a Few, who would impose their own Private Opinions and Practices upon the rest of their Countrymen" and he cites Horace in *de arte Poetica* that "Present Use is the final Judge of Language" (Oldmixon 1712: 18). Another objection that Oldmixon has is apparently against the old-fashioned rhetoric of writers like Swift. "For what is grown Pedantick and unbecoming when 'tis spoke, will not have a jot the better grace for being writ down" (Oldmixon 1712: 18-19). He also objects on the grounds that an academy might as well not be attempted because its goals would be impossible to fulfill anyway. Referring to Swift, he says, "The Doctor may as well set up a Society to find out the *Grand Elixir*, the *Perpetual Motion*, the *Longitude*, and other such Discoveries, as to fix our Language beyond their own Times….This wou'd be doing what was never done before, what neither *Roman* nor *Greek*, which lasted the longest of any in its Purity, could pretend to" (Oldmixon 1712: 25). Oldmixon also hints at the relationship between language and mind and the then-unknown processes that connect the two. "It will be vain to pretend to ascertain Language, unless they had the Secret of setting Rule for Thinking, and could bring Thought to a Standard too" (Oldmixon 1712: 26-27).

Another objection Oldmixon brought forward pertained to the individuality of people and the impossibility of legislating such people. He states that there will always be people who are individualists. Novel forms and idiosyncratic words will always form part of their writing. He extends this idea to include the people as a whole in one era and so alludes to the relationship between culture and language. "For every Age, as well as every Nation, has its different manner of Thinking, of which the Expression and Words will always have a Relish, and be Barbarous or Polite, according as the Times take their Turn" (Oldmixon 1712: 27). Many of Oldmixon's objections, rudely expressed as they were, had merit, although the full linguistic development of them was yet to come.

Some apparently felt that if Swift had had no success in bringing about the formation of an academy, it would be useless for anyone else to try. Furthermore, in the eighteenth century there was emerging an attitude of disbelief in the efficacy of an academy and a resistance to its formation. People were beginning to acknowledge that language might not be able to be fixed in an unchanging form by an academy. The earlier enthusiasm for the example of the French Academy seems to have waned and in its place were doubts as to the value of the results of the work of the French Academy. It was seen that the French Academy has definitely not stopped French from changing, and some even doubted that the French Academy had done French any good. In addition to pointing out the ineffectualness of the French and Italian academies, others pondered the fact that the English were noted for their independence and would probably not accept the dictates of an English Academy anyway. The limited scope of the influence of an Academy was also noted. A language academy might affect the language of the few educated men in the upper classes, but the majority of English-speaking people would never hear of the rules that the academy would make and would thus never abide by them.

By the latter part of the eighteenth century, opposition was pretty well consolidated against the formation of an academy. Samuel Johnson, among others, was against it. Johnson was very much interested in retarding change, but he, being one of those liberty-loving Englishmen, found the idea of an academy oppressive, and he further realized that Swift's premises were open to question (Wells 1973: 37). Johnson also appeals to the idea of usage as an arbiter of correctness in language. He recognizes the illusiveness of dealing with linguistic change. "Swift, in his petty treatise on the English language, allows that new words must sometimes be introduced, but proposes that none should be suffered to become obsolete. But what makes a word obsolete, more than general agreement to forbear it? and how shall it be continued, when it conveys an offensive idea, or recalled again into the mouths of mankind, when it has once by disuse become unfamiliar, and by unfamiliarity unpleasing?" (Johnson 1785, [3]).

5.0. SUBSTITUTES FOR AN ACADEMY

Although an academy of English was never instituted, the desire for the language to be ascertained, refined, and fixed still remained a popular sentiment, despite the disclaimers of some like Oldmixon. The outcry for an academy gradually died down, mostly because other means were supplying the demand. Instead of academy-produced resources, private dictionaries and grammars were beginning to be available and to supply the needs of the English people. Those interested in ascertainment of English came to realize that their goals could not be reached by edict from on high, but must be accomplished by directly working on the public. Sheridan states this belief in the powers of general consent for standardizing language in these words: "The result of the researches of rational enquirers, must be rules founded upon rational principles; and a general agreement

amongst the most judicious, must occasion those rules to be as generally known, and established, and give them the force of laws. Nor would these laws be met with opposition, or be obeyed with reluctance, inasmuch as they would not be established by the hand of power, but by common suffrage, in which everyone has a right to give his vote; nor would they fail, in time, of obtaining general authority, and permanence, from the sanction of custom, founded on good sense" (Baugh and Cable 1978: 269).

The recognized need in its simplest terms was for a dictionary, not merely of hard words, but one which would include all the words in English and a grammar that would detail their proper usage. Together these two would form an authority for settling disputes in usage. People recognized that without a dictionary and a grammar there would be no way of ascertaining what was correct in diction or what constructions were standard. In lieu of an English Academy, the two most important substitutions for it were Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) and Robert Lowth's *Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762).

5.1. Johnson's *Dictionary*

The goals of a dictionary as Johnson originally planned it sounded much like those of an academy: to ascertain, refine, and fix the language. Johnson thought to maintain the purity of English, at what stage of its development he did not make clear, and to ascertain primarily the meaning of English words (Johnson 1747: 4). He was also interested in making the pronunciation of English permanent and thus, he hoped, to promote the longevity of the language. At the same time he realized that it might be as impossible to change the language of a nation as it is to change the morals of a people through books, yet he hoped to accomplish this at least in part so that "it may contribute to the preservation of antient, and the improvement of modern writers" (Johnson 1747: 33). This was his

purpose at the outset as given in his book *The Plan of a Dictionary*. By the time the dictionary was published eight years later, his purpose had become somewhat more modest. In the Preface to his *Dictionary*, it can be seen that the number of goals Johnson set himself have been reduced to two, both essentially concerned with words only: to collect the words of the language and to correct words that are correctable and proscribe those that are not. Johnson realized that not all words are correctable, since language is a reflection of its imperfect human origin. By registering these "anomalies", Johnson hoped that they could be curtailed and prevented from increasing. He felt that it was the duty of the lexicographer to assume the role of arbiter of what was correct and what was incorrect in English (Johnson 1755: [1]). Johnson was quite ready to assume this role.

The public was hungry for an authoritative source. Johnson gave it to them, to such an extent that even today when a lexicographer tries to abdicate this position of authority to become only a recorder of language, public outcry is tremendous. People of Johnson's era looked to the lexicographer as a kind of superior being who had the right to rule on what words were acceptable and what pronunciation words were to be given. Baugh and Cable state that "this attitude was well-nigh universal in Johnson's day and was not repugnant to the lexicographer himself" (1978: 271). One way in which this authoritarian role of the lexicographer reveals itself in the dictionary is in the labels which Johnson provides for the propriety of the words. He uses such labels as "proper", "improper", "corrupt", "cant", "barbarous", and "vulgar", all clearly judgmental descriptions.

In describing the method by which he compiled the dictionary, Johnson drew upon dictionaries for foreigners, dictionaries of "hard words", noting that they were woefully deficient. When these obvious sources had been exhausted, Johnson proceeded to glean more words of English

from books of the best writers of the day, using, as he puts it, "fortuitous and unguided excursions into books" (Johnson 1755: [3]). What is important to note in this process is the fact that Johnson firmly established the principle of induction for ascertaining the meaning of words by recording the usage of words encountered in his reading. In fact, in the Preface to the *Dictionary*, he notes that the "sense may easily be collected entire from the examples" (Johnson 1755: [6]). An interesting report of the method Johnson used is as follows: "Johnson...had, for the purpose of carrying on this arduous work...taken a handsome house in Gough Square, and fitted up a room in it with desks and other accommodations for amanuenses, who, to the number of five or six, he kept constantly under his eye. An interleaved copy of Bailey's dictionary in folio he made the repository of the several articles, and these he collected by incessant reading of the best authors in our language, in the practice whereof, his method was to score with a black-lead pencil the word by him selected, and give them over to his assistants to insert in their places. The books he used for this purpose were what he had in his own collection, a copious but miserably ragged one, and all such as he could borrow; which latter, if ever they came back to those that lent them, were so defaced as to be scarce worth owning, and yet, some of his friends were glad to receive and entertain them as curiosities" (Hawkins 1961:77). As a common practice, Johnson tried to collect words that were in general use or in the works of "polite" writers. He did not include the specific words of particular professions (Johnson 1747, 4).

Another way in which Johnson curtailed his goals since the publication of *Plan* may be seen in the amount of discussion given to structure of English in the Preface of the *Dictionary*. Although the Preface includes fifteen pages of what would be called grammar, only twelve lines are given to syntax. This was apparently quite a disappointment for those who had hoped a

more comprehensive treatment of the structure of English would be included. Johnson found dealing with the words of English to be a sufficiently arduous task. Another way in which the finished dictionary was less that what had been planned relates to the matter of pronunciation. Johnson had originally thought that a dictionary could help arbitrate between variation in pronunciation. He had intended to use the pronunciation of the best speakers whose pronunciation showed the least variation from the written form of the word. However, when the *Dictionary* was published without a guide to pronunciation and the question of variation remained unresolved, Johnson pointed out that "the best speaker of the House of Lords (Chesterfield) and the best speaker of the House of Commons differed in the pronunciation of the word *great*. Johnson felt he could not arbitrate between equally reputable speakers of the mother tongue" (Bambas 1980: 192). Other lexicographers in years since have, however, taken this task upon their shoulders.

Johnson's *Dictionary* was immensely successful in the matter of spelling standardization. He did not go so far as to try to reform spelling, although people would have been willing for him to use his authority to introduce a better system. But his dictionary did promote an attitude in favor of traditional spelling. He says as much. "The present usage of spelling, where the present usage can be distinguished, will therefore in this work be generally followed, yet there will be often occasion to observe, that it is in itself inaccurate, and tolerated rather than chosen; particularly, when by a change of one letter, or more, the meaning of a word is obscured, as in *farrier*, for *ferrier*, as it was formerly written, from *ferrum* or *fer*" (Johnson 1747: 11).

Johnson also reconsidered his goal of fixing the English language once and for all. It had been stated in the *Plan* that one of the purposes for writing a dictionary was to fix the language; however, when the *Dictionary* was published, the Preface stated that it was

impossible for a lexicographer to "embalm" the language and keep it from "corruption" and "decay". Johnson states his opinion that academies which were founded with this goal have done their work in vain. "Sounds are too volatile and subtle for legal restraints; to enchain syllables, and to lash the wind, are equally the undertakings of pride, unwilling to measure its desire by its strength" (Johnson 1755: [10]). He remarks that he had flattered himself at first into thinking that he could indeed do this, but that he came to realize that it was an expectation "which neither reason nor experience can justify" (Johnson 1755: [10]).

In Johnson's dictionary, for the first time in English, the meanings of words were given along with examples of their usage from well-selected authorities. This had been done before in dictionaries of other languages, notably the dictionary of the Academia della Crusca, which probably Johnson knew, but this was the first time that this method had been used in English. Another valuable innovation in Johnson's dictionary was the enumeration of various meanings for each word. And it was the first time that a dictionary could by any means be called a standard, rather than a mere list of hit-and-miss words. It truly exhibited the vocabulary of the English language for the first time ever, it was replete with examples from notable writers, it offered a spelling which, if not always correct, at least was fixed and could be used as a reference. There were some defects. The chance for a reformed spelling was missed, as was mentioned above. The words themselves weren't always clearly English words. Some examples of words that Johnson put forward as English words are these: denominable, opiniatry, ariolation, assation, ataraxy, clancular, comminuible, conclusible, incompossible, indigitate. The right of these words to be included in an English dictionary was questionable at best. Prejudice and caprice mar some of the definitions. Others can only be called Johnsonian, for example: "Network: Any thing reticulated or decussated, at equal distance, with interstices

between the intersections". Its etymologies are often inventive rather than accurate (Baugh and Cable 1978: 270).

It was, however, an extraordinary accomplishment, the more so when one considers that other dictionaries of similar size and content were being produced by academies. It is only natural that Johnson's dictionary was compared with the ones being produced by the Italian and French academies. His friend Garrick wrote an epigram, commenting on the fact that Johnson had accomplished what took the whole French Academy to do:

And Johnson, well arm'd like a hero of yore, /Has beat forty French, and will beat forty more.

Boswell remarks that Johnson was "complacent" over a report that the Italian academy found it hard to believe that he alone had produced the dictionary (Bambas 1980: 189). A notice in Europe notes that Johnson could boast of being an academy all by himself. And it is true that he did conceive of his dictionary as performing at least part of the work of an academy, since which time the suggestion of an English academy has never seriously been put forward again. It was indeed a great achievement, especially when one considers that it was the work of one man, laboring almost alone for seven short years.

5.2. Rhetoricians and Grammarians

What Dr. Johnson's dictionary did for the lexicon was attempted for the syntax by the grammarians and rhetoricians of the eighteenth century. The grammarians succeeded in producing grammars as uncompromising as Johnson's dictionary with much the same goals of determining what was correct in grammatical usage and to fix it permanently. The rhetoricians, while not producing grammars as such, produced rhetorics of English that discussed many of the same questions of usage. One of these rhetoricians, Thomas Sheridan became interested in language through his interest in elocution. His opinions express an

interesting view of the role of language: "A revival of the art of speaking, and the study of our language, might contribute in a large measure, ...to the cure of the evils of immorality, ignorance and false taste" (Baugh and Cable 1978: 27).

These handbooks were the work of individuals who believed that reforms were necessary, that standards needed to be set up, and that they were the ones to do it. Most of these authors had no particular training or qualification for the task other than a belief that they had a right to declare what was right and wrong about the English language. Others were members of the clergy who had knowledge of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, which at least gave them the advantage of having an idea of comparative grammar. What usually happened however when these classically trained grammarians wrote their grammars was that English was forced into a classical mold. Others had no qualifications to recommend them whatsoever and were proud of it. One of these was Robert Baker who published *Reflections on the English Language* in 1770. As part of his qualifications he states that he knows no Greek, very little Latin, and adds: "It will undoubtedly be thought strange, when I declare that I have never yet seen the folio edition of Mr. Johnson's dictionary: but, knowing nobody that has it, I have never been able to borrow it; and I have myself no books; at least, not many more than what a church-going old woman may be supposed to have of devotional ones upon her mantle-piece: for, having always had a narrow income, it has not been in my power to make a collection without straightening myself" (Baugh and Cable 1978: 275). By such as these was the English language to be ascertained, refined, and fixed forever.

There were the occasional rare writers who realized that Latin was not the proper model for English. One of the earliest of these was John Wallis who wrote *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae* in 1653. But it was not until the eighteenth century that English grammar was considered a subject worthy of study in itself (Baugh and Cable 1978: 272).

In 1724 an anonymous work appeared entitled *The Many Advantages of a Good Language to Any Nation: with an Examination of the Present One*. It repeated many of the same old complaints about English that Dean Swift had presented: English had too many monosyllables, too many contractions, no grammar or dictionary. What was unique about this pamphlet was that it was the first appeal to try to arouse popular interest in correct grammar and proposed a series of weekly or monthly pamphlets to discuss points of grammar. In 1729 Thomas Cooke "brought out his "Proposals for Perfecting the English Language", which was also an appeal to popular opinion. His view of English was radical and idealistic. He proposed that all strong verbs should follow the weak verb conjugation, that all plurals should be formed by adding *-s* or *-es*, that the comparative forms of adjectives should be formed only by using *more* and *most*, and other regularizing changes. In 1761 Joseph Priestley's *The Rudiments of English Grammar* was published. This grammar was notable in that it recognized usage of reputable writers as the standard for linguistic propriety. Priestley's grammar accepts forms like *it is me* and *lesser* and the like because he saw them being used by good writers like Addison. Addison, rather than Steele, although both were associated with the influential *Spectator*, was one of the most cited writers in regard to both good and poor usage (Wright, 1994). Usage had been recognized as important before, but Priestley was the only one of his generation who insisted on this principle.

In 1762 immediately after Priestley's volume appeared, Robert Lowth published *Short Introduction to English Grammar*, which was to reign for many years among grammars, as Johnson's dictionary did among dictionaries. His grammar was much more in accordance with the feelings of the times than Priestley's was and had a commensurate success, especially since his

writing was in a style that was simple and easily understandable, which was not always the case in the grammars that were being written at this time. His style and the fact that he was decidedly authoritarian about variations in usage account for the popularity of his grammar. Twenty-two editions of Lowth's grammar were published before the turn of the century. Lowth was much more conservative in his view of English, preferring traditional solutions. His grammar was typical of the normative, prescriptive grammars that were being demanded. Lowth's grammar had many imitators who spread the influence of this school of prescriptive grammars, among which perhaps the most successful was Lindley Murray's *English Grammar*. Murray's grammar remained in use for decades and itself provided the model for future writers of school grammars for even more decades to come (Bambas 1980: 171).

6.0. PRESCRIPTIVE GRAMMARS

Grammar writing had been a prescriptive art since the Alexandrian grammarians who sought "a means of analyzing classical writers and guiding contemporaries to approximate this model" (Hughes 1962: 41). The eighteenth century grammarians developed this tradition to its fullest. There is no doubt that they saw themselves as authorities with the power to prescribe and proscribe English usage. Their first aim had been to codify the grammar of English in a set of rules. Like those who advocated the formation of an academy, they wanted to prove that English was capable of being described systematically. Secondly, the grammarians saw themselves as lawgivers, settling disputed matters based on their own judgment. Variation in usage was not to be permitted. If there were two alternate forms, the grammarian thought that one must be wrong. They were decisively against any uncertainty in usage. Once a pronouncement had been made on a case of divided usage, ever after the alternate form was completely condemned. Thirdly, the grammarians took it upon themselves to point out supposed errors and to hold them

up for display as examples of what needed to be corrected and improved upon in language. They seemed to delight in examining the writing of the best writers of the day looking for usage that could be condemned. Priestley (1761) stands out as an exception to this attitude.

Lowth's remarks in his grammar are a good example of these aims in that he is openly a corrector of improper usage (Baron 1982: 140). Lowth believed that English was regular and could be systematized in a grammar of rules. He said that it was not English itself, but usage that was at fault. Secondly, Lowth is quite certain about the rules that he lays down. Occasionally, very occasionally, he uses a modest "I think" about some pronouncement, but these times are very rare indeed. He was not hesitant about setting himself up as the ultimate authority. Thirdly, he believed in using examples both good and bad as a pedagogical tool. He states that "the principal design of a Grammar of any Language is to teach us to express ourselves with propriety in that Language, and to be able to judge of every phrase and form of construction, whether it be right or not. The plain way of doing this, is to lay down rules, and to illustrate them by examples. But besides shewing what is right, the matter may be further explained by pointing out what is wrong" (Lowth 1762, x). Priestley's grammar on the other hand had quite different aims. He described his *Rudiments of English Grammar* as simply "a collection of observations on the structure of it, and system of rules for the proper use of it" (Priestley 1761: 9). Priestley, well known for his discovery of oxygen, being influenced by this scientific orientation, was more likely to treat language as yet another phenomenon to be observed objectively. Unlike most English grammars of the times, which were simply Latin grammars with English words substituted for the Latin words, Priestley's grammar contained strikingly independent and fresh insights.

6.1. Methods.

Eighteenth-century grammarians for the most part appealed to the Latin system of eight Pricianic classes. They either followed this pattern or felt compelled to justify their divergence from it. If English was found to differ from the preferred Latin grammatical model, it was considered to be faulty. Priestley was opposed to basing English grammars on Latin models, of course. Many grammarians, among whom Lowth is an example, based their pronouncements wholly upon personal preferences, based on some form of logic or analogy, or even some feature of their own dialect, which they would consider to be the correct one. Whenever Latin was deemed not efficacious for settling disputed points, the grammarians turned to the authority of usage. Priestley was especially careful to base his analyses upon usage; whereas Lowth primarily cited passages of good writers as specimens of error in writing.

6.2. Usage

Usage had been recognized as an issue as far back as Quintilian in the first century. They were troubled by divided usage even then. While most grammarians of the eighteenth century agreed that usage must be the factor governing correctness, what they could not agree on was whose usage should set the standard. For most grammarians it was their own usage that formed the criterion by which the rest of language must be gauged. Some critics freely expressed their own personal dislikes, like Swift's dislike of monosyllables like *drudg'd*, contracted forms like *mob*, and new expressions like *banter*. Samuel Johnson railed against the form *noways*, calling those who used this word "barbarians". George Campbell was quick to point out that these barbarians were only Pope, Swift, Addison, Locke and other celebrated writers of the day (Bambas 1980: 181). Lowth, too, was not loath to use reputable writers as examples of improprieties. For example, he condemns Shakespeare's and Milton's use of the unstressed *ye* in oblique cases. Correct usage for Lowth apparently meant his own usage. Priestley's appreciation of the role of usage in defining correct grammar was quite different. Priestley was likely to invoke the example of reputable writers for the purpose of settling some disputed point. For example in the matter of what case pronouns should be when used after the copula verb, Priestley cites these observations: "Are these the houses you were speaking of? Yes, they are *them*. Who is there? It is *me*. It is *him*, etc. It is not *me* you are in love with (Addison). It cannot be *me* (Swift)" (Gordon 1972: 260). Such tolerance and detachment, however, were not to the public taste, which craved a more uncompromising and decisive approach.

George Campbell, a Scottish divine, also showed great respect for the evidence of usage and is responsible for a definition of good usage that has not been improved on and is still in use today. In his *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, published in 1776, Campbell defines good English as English which is "reputable, national, and present". He defines national as being neither rural nor foreign, especially rejecting arguments drawn from analogies to Latin and French. His present usage for Campbell was not the usage of the moment. He saw that what we accept in the present as good may in time prove to have been merely the whim of the moment. His present usage refers to the usage of the recent past, which has stood the test of time. Reputable use Campbell recognizes as difficult to define. "Whatever modes of speech are authorized as good by the writings of a great number, if not the majority, of celebrated authors." This concept today is usually stated as "the best use of the best speakers and writers" (Bambas 1980: 183).

6.3. Weakness of the Grammarians

Most of the mistakes the eighteenth-century grammarians made can be traced to their ignorance of the processes of linguistic change. Although the historical study of English was just beginning, materials were not readily available and their importance

was not recognized. Specifically, the great weakness was their failure to recognize the importance of usage as the final arbiter in linguistic matters. There were one or two grammarians or rhetoricians who did recognize the importance of usage, but most of the grammarians mention usage, then proceed to combine description and prescription together. They do not put into practice what they say in theory. It was a weakness too that the grammarians disagreed among themselves so frequently as to what the correct form was. It became a game with them to find examples of bad writing in the best writers. It was also a weakness of the grammarians that they did not acknowledge the validity and legitimacy of divided usage. Even those grammarians who followed the criterion of usage were inclined to settle on one form or the other based on the majority of writers and speakers. Even Campbell judged one form right and the other barbarous, rather than accepting what usage plainly shows: that two forms may be equally correct. Another weakness of the grammarians was that they did not realize or acknowledge the changes that take place in language, and that the forces that control these changes are too complex to be fully understood and predicted. In tune with the rationalistic temper of the times, they believed that everything could be understood by logic and by analogy and that solutions could be arrived at by decree. The grammarians did not realize that every time they ignored usage, they further widened the gap between the written form and the spoken form of language. While this has not proven to be an insurmountable problem in the two centuries since the grammarians worked, the authoritarian legacy left by the prescriptivist grammarians, which today does not allow the written form to keep pace fully with the spoken forms of English, may one day result in a gap between writing and speech that is as broad as the gap between written forms of modern English and Chaucerian English. Finally, a weakness of the grammarians was that they put forth objections to individual expressions. This characteristic is not confined to the eighteenth century by any means, but it was a large part of the prevailing attitude toward language. That most of the words criticized by the grammarians are still with us is proof of the futility of trying to meddle with the natural course of linguistic history.

6.4. Examples of Eighteenth-century Prescriptivism at Work

Many of the preferences now accepted in our handbooks as correct were first judged so in the eighteenth century. Lowth stated some problems with adjectives and adverbs, noting that writers like Dryden and Swift used adjectives as adverbs, like "extreme elaborate" and "extreme unwilling". Some grammarians advocated adding *-ly* to all adverbs, giving such forms like *soonly*, *lowlily*, *friendlily* (Bambas 1980: 175). Lowth also commented on the illogic of double comparatives like *lesser* and *worser*. He says that *lesser* is less objectionable because he heard it more often, thus implying that the criterion of usage should be used as the shaper of the standard. *Worser* has dropped out of common usage, of course, while *lesser* remains only in certain environments, like "lesser evil". Another innovation of this time was the differentiation of the comparative and superlative degrees of adjectives (Baugh and Cable 1978: 278).

Sentence-final prepositions are also condemned as improper for the first time during this period. Dryden notes that it is a common fault of Ben Jonson's to use a sentence-final preposition.

The waves and dens of beasts could not receive/The bodies that those souls were frighted from.

Dryden observes that he too is guilty of this fault, and indeed in the second edition of *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, he carefully edits all sentences that had previously contained sentence-final prepositions. The fact that if he and Jonson used this construction it must be natural, good English, did not occur to Dryden or to anyone else either for a long, long time (Bambas 1980: 163). Other prepositional

usage that was legislated by the eighteenth century grammarians is the difference between *between* and *among*.

The correct case of pronouns has become a touchstone for modern purists of English usage. Lowth was adamant in stating that nominative case must be used after the copula. "The Verb *to Be* has always a Nominative Case after it; as, 'it was *I* and not *He*, that did it:' unless it be in the Infinitive Mode; 'though you took it *to be Him*'" (Lowth 1762: 105,106). Even today, people who usually do not pay too much attention to grammar exhibit great insecurity in their choice of pronouns.

Verbs also caused the grammarians some trouble. Expressions like *had rather* and *had better* were condemned alike by Johnson, Lowth, and Campbell (Baugh and Cable 1978: 277). The distinction between *lie* and *lay* was apparently first specified in the last half of the eighteenth century. Lowth supplied the theory of an understood verb after *than* or *as* for determining correct pronoun usage. One of his examples is "You are not so tall as I [am]." Lowth almost gleefully cites examples of incorrect usage by Swift: "than me," and Hobbes: "as them." Lowth's theory won general acceptance as the ideal way to resolve the problem of case form after *than* and *as*. The grammarians also suggested that the pattern for strong verbs should be kept. Lowth wanted to keep the paradigm *sit*, *sat*, *sitten*, and *spit*, *spat*, and *spitten*, observing that analogy to other strong verbs plainly requires *sitten*. He was also critical of the merging of past and past participle forms of verbs, citing examples of misuse in these revered authors, such as: Milton: "have spoke, had rode, was took"; Dryden: "have began"; Pope: "The bard begun"; Addison: "Mr. Milton was wrote. The men begun"; and Swift: "had not arose, have stole, have mistook" (Finegan 1980: 25). Through the agency of grammarians like Lowth, the apparent merger of these two forms never gained credence as correct English. Another problem with verbs was the question of concord. *You was* was especially a problem. Defended as correct in the singular, Lowth and Priestley and others were against it, and it subsequently gave way to *you were*. The pronoun *ye* was also a source of perturbation. Lowth goes on at some length about this pronoun and cites Prior and Milton as using this pronoun quite incorrectly, seemingly quite oblivious to the fact that by his generation *ye* was not in common usage at all. Another concord problem had to do with demonstrative adjective and noun concord. Lowth thinks that the pattern *this means*, *that means* is quite illogical and that it ought to be *these means* and *that mean*. However, to this day, *means* is considered a singular noun, and Lowth's and other grammarians' goal of logical consistency has not been met (Bambas 1980: 175).

No doubt the grammarians of the Age of Reason found it intolerable that *shall* and *will* should be interchangeable. John Wallis in his *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae* first states that simple future is expressed by *shall* in the first person and *will* in the second and third persons. It was during the eighteenth century that such a scheme was completely accepted. Of course the system became more complicated when mood and other factors were taken into consideration. By the early twentieth century, H .W. and F. G. Fowler spent more than twenty pages in *The King's English* in an excruciating explanation of the use of *shall* and *will*. They remark that the correct usage of *shall* and *will* comes naturally to "southern Englishmen (who will find most of this section superfluous), " but "so complicated that those who are not to the manner born can hardly acquire it." Bambas notes that those who got it wrong were only Wilde, Yeats, Stevenson, the London *Times*, Gladstone, and the "highly reputable grammarian Henry Sweet" (Bambas 1980: 179). It is notable that this is a case of prescriptivism actually working, if only for one dialect. For the most part, the flow of living language ignored the prescriptions.

The yearning for absolutes gave rise also to the question of what pronoun to use for impersonal reference at the beginning of

a subordinate clause. The propriety of using *whose* as the possessive of *which* was proscribed by the purists. Lowth quotes Dryden: "The question, whose solution I require," and Addison: "Is there any other doctrine, whose followers are punished?" Based on an incomplete paradigm for *which*, common usage made use of the word *whose* to fill in the paradigm.

Nom. who   which

Gen.   whose *whiches (or *which's)

Dat.   whom   *whichem

As a result, purists like Lowth required that for the possessive function of *which*, the proper construction would be *of which*, thus making the correct form of Dryden's statement: "The question, the solution of which I require..." Generally speaking, most people have ignored this stricture. A similar problem was the use of *that* for *which* and *who*. Grammarians have preferred *which* for inanimate things and *who* for persons, though not entirely proscribing *that*. Again, common preference has generally tended to ignore this stricture by using *that* for anything.

Other usages that were settled at this time include *different from*, rather than *different than* or *to*, *between you and me*, not *between you and I*, the condemnation of *this here* and *that there*. Slightly later on, but in the same vein, it was discovered that to split English infinitives was an impropriety, despite the evidence of such sentences as "He was so reluctant to go that he managed *to just miss* the train", in which the split position is the best possible one for the meaning intended.

The eighteenth century is responsible for the final stamp of disapproval on multiple or double negatives. Lowth explicitly stated the rule that two negatives are equivalent to an affirmative. This mathematical rule was no doubt applied to language by reason of analogy to algebra. Priestley and a few other grammarians accepted the double negative, giving as reasons its common use in older forms of English, its widespread use in common speech, and its use in writers of standard English like Addison (Baron 1982: 138). Multiple negation was common in Early English. Chaucer said of the Knight, "He nevere yet no vileynye ne sayde /In al his lyf unto no maner wight." Which in modern English is roughly equivalent to saying, "He didn't never say nothing bad to nobody nohow." Because of reasons which we do not know, multiple negation was rare by the sixteenth century, although there are still a few instances of it in Shakespeare. By the eighteenth century it was disappearing from standard speech, but still flourishing in nonstandard speech, as it still does today. People who say "I didn't do nothing" are never mistaken for making an affirmative statement.

7.0. RESULTS OF THE PRESCRIPTIVISTS

The long-term effects of the prescriptive movement to make English better by applying logic and analogy is in many ways hard to determine. Some results may be noted, however.

As a consequence of the prescriptivist movement, people no longer felt, and it could no longer be said, that English had no rules. Today many feel that it may have too many. Some of the rules that the early grammarians and lexicographers formulated have now been discarded. Some of them that have been retained are of doubtful validity, yet they still have a place in modern grammars and impose their judgments on people who acknowledge the value of authority on correctness. Certainly many matters which were in disputed usage during the time of Dryden and Swift were settled.

The distinction between standard and non-standard usage has been maintained by the prominence of prescriptive grammars in the English language school systems. By maintaining this distinction, standard usage has continued to be a marker of superior social

status. Now, as during the time of the first prescriptive grammarians, acquiring the standard form of language is part of any social advancement. Prescriptivism may be defended in various ways, but it has also been called the cause of stilted, lifeless, but correct prose. It has been noted that it is a constraining effect on the free flow of some writers' expression (Bambas 1980: 184).

Whatever the grounds on which the decisions were reached about the correct standards, however arbitrary the choice, however faulty the reasoning behind the choice, the work of prescriptivist grammarians has indeed led to the fixing of an amazing number of points of disputed usage.

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