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Bakalářská práce

**Postoje k jazyku v preskriptivních gramatikách v době racionalismu.
Attitudes to language in the prescriptive grammars in the Age of Reason.**

Vypracoval

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Vedoucí práce

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracoval samostatně a výhradně s použitím citovaných pramenů, literatury a dalších odborných zdrojů.

Souhlasím se zapůjčením práce pro studijní účely.

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Poděkování

Rád bych touto cestou poděkoval Mgr. Ondřeji Tichému za jeho cenné rady a přínosné připomínky k tvorbě a organizaci mé bakalářské práce, jakož i za jeho ochotné a pohotové reakce na množství dotazů, jimiž jsem ho zahrnoval.

Abstrakt:

Tato práce se zabývá formováním názorů na jazyk v rámci standardizace angličtiny v osmnáctém století. Cílem práce je ukázat, že nástup preskriptivních gramatik byl podmíněn určitými ideologickými předpoklady o povaze jazyka a jistými procesy ve společnosti a že porozumění tomuto ideovému a historickému pozadí je klíčové pro interpretaci těchto gramatik.

První kapitola se zabývá zkoumáním tzv. návrhů na projekt anglické akademie. Ukazuje se, že tyto návrhy prezentovaly a šířily myšlenky, které tvoří základ preskriptivního náhledu na jazyk a že tedy byly nezbytnou předehrou pro rozmach preskriptivistické ideologie v pozdějších dekádách osmnáctého století. Druhá kapitola pojednává o důsledcích snahy nově vznikajících silných středních vrstev o sociální sebe-identifikaci. Ukazuje se, jak důležitou roli hrál v tomto procesu jazyk a jak touha vyrovnat se vyšším vrstvám vyústila v nebyvalou poptávku po jazykové kodifikaci a ovlivnila její podobu. V poslední kapitole se za využití poznatků z druhé kapitoly zkoumá povaha normy preskriptivních gramatik a ukazuje se, že byla založena na úzu vyšších společenských vrstev. Dále se dokazuje na příkladech Lowtha a Priestleyho, že gramatiky tohoto období nelze v posledku označit jako preskriptivní či jako deskriptivní, protože obsahují jak deskriptivní tak preskriptivní prvky. Navrhuje se pro ně tedy označení *normativní* gramatiky.

The Abstract:

This thesis concerns itself with the formation of the attitudes to language in the course of the standardization of the English language in the eighteenth century. It is the aim of this thesis to show that the rise of the prescriptive grammars was caused by certain ideological presumptions about the nature of language and by certain social processes and that the understanding of the ideological and historical background is crucial for the interpretation of these grammars.

The first chapter discusses the proposals for the English academy. It is shown that these proposals presented and propagated the ideas that formed the basis of the prescriptive attitude to language and that they, therefore, represent the essential prelude for the flowering of the prescriptive ideology in the later decades of the eighteenth century. The second chapter deals with the consequences of the effort of the strong rising middle classes for the social self-identification. It is shown that language played an important role in this process and that the desire of reaching the standard of the upper classes caused an unprecedented demand after the language codification and influenced its shape. In the last chapter, the nature of the norm of the prescriptive grammars is examined and it is argued that it was based on the usage of the upper classes. Furthermore, it is demonstrated on the works of Lowth and Priestley that the grammar books of this period cannot be labelled either as prescriptive or descriptive, because they contain both prescriptive and descriptive elements. It is, therefore, proposed to call them *normative* grammars.

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The Introduction

The United Kingdom is one of the countries that, unlike other European states as France, Spain, Italy or the Czech Republic, does not have any official institution that would be responsible for codification and standardization of the vernacular. Its functions are executed by various grammars, dictionaries and language handbooks usually published by respected educational institutions (Oxford, Cambridge) and independent publishers. It is, therefore, apparent that the standardization took different course in Britain than in the above-mentioned countries. The beginnings of the modern standardization and codification process are connected with an unprecedented interest in language in the whole English society, a subsequent quick increase in production of the English dictionaries and, mainly, the prescriptive grammars during the second half of the eighteenth century. However, it commences even sooner, paradoxically with the story of the English academy.

There is a long history of the pleas and proposals for the English academy, which culminated at the turn of the eighteenth century. These texts were the first attempts to standardize the English language by founding an official organization. The effort of their authors went in vain as the academy was never established and it is sometimes supposed that the proposals had no effect on the later process of standardization, but I shall show that the ideology they promoted and popularized took roots in the minds of the codifiers of the English language and influenced the stances towards language adopted by the grammar writers long after the last important proposal was published.

The history of ideas is sometimes difficult to trace. For this reason, I will adopt Richard Watts' theory of the language myths for the first part of the paper and demonstrate that the myths that were prominently exposed in the most important proposals were vital even fifty years after the last generally known proposal appeared and that the myths can be found even in the work of Joseph Priestley, a person who is generally believed to be one the most modern and progressive grammarians of the eighteenth century.

The second purpose of this paper is to look at the issue of standardization in the eighteenth

century from another point of view and discuss the socio-historical processes behind it, mainly the endeavour of the newly emerging socially mobile middle classes to adapt themselves to the manners and the language of their social betters. I shall show that this “pursuit of politeness,” (Fitzmaurice 1998) affected greatly the form and the contents of the grammars of the second half of the century and, thus, the codification of the English language. I shall refer to the socio-historical context to explore some aspects of the supposed prescriptivity of the grammars and, finally, to compare the approaches of, perhaps, the two most well-known grammarians of the era: Robert Lowth and Joseph Priestley. I shall show that , in contrast to what is often said about them, their attitudes share many common elements and that the strict division between prescriptive and descriptive approaches cannot be applied on the grammars of that era.

The Definitions of Important Terms and Notions

For the study of the processes which the views on language went through in the era under discussion, it is appropriate – if not imperative – first to define the basic notions of standardization, codification and prescription and make a clear distinction between them.

Standard is, probably, the most complicated concept to define, because the question of “standard language” is still one of the controversial topics of today’s linguistics and there is much debate as to its meaning.¹ Locher and Strässler agree with the definition in OED, which reads:

“B. 3.e. Applied to that variety of a spoken or written language of a country or other linguistic area which is generally considered the most correct and acceptable form, as Standard English, American, etc.” (Oxford English Dictionary 1989, online. Quoted in L&S, 2008)

The problem is, of course, in the words “generally considered,” because it is unclear, to whom it points. In an alternative definition, it is linked with certain “authority”:

¹ For details, see Locher and Strässler, 2008.

A. 10. a. An authoritative or recognized exemplar of correctness, perfection, or some definite degree of any quality.

b. A rule, principle, or means of judgement or estimation; a criterion, measure.

(Oxford English Dictionary 1989, online. Quoted in L&S, 2008)

L&S stress this ambiguity in the meaning of “standard.” From the meaning of the word itself, it does not follow, by whom it is or should be established. There is also a notion of *norm*, which is sometimes treated as synonymous with the standard and sometimes it is not.² For the purposes of this paper, I shall use the word *norm* for a somewhere codified standard, e.g. in a grammar book.

For *codification*, I will use the definition offered by Tieken-Boon van Ostade: “[C]odification may be defined as the laying down of the “laws” of the language, i.e. the rules of usage and the definitions and pronunciation of the items in the lexicon, in grammars and dictionaries for the benefit of the common user” (Tieken 2008a: 1)

Finally, *prescription* is, according to OED, “[t]he action or an act of prescribing or setting down something beforehand, esp. as a rule, law, etc.; a thing which is prescribed or set down; written or explicit direction or injunction.” (OED, 2010, online) However, Milroy and Milroy define it, somewhat shortly and more appropriately for our purposes, as the “imposition of norms of usage by authority.” (M&M; 2)³

By a mere comparison of these definitions, we shall see that *standard* (and *standardization*) is the most general of the three terms – it is the picking of a certain variety of language that is considered “the most acceptable,” but it does not tell us who carries out the selection and how it is made. *Codification* is, then, more specific, because it covers the notion of “lying down” – the selection is written somewhere, presumably in a book of authority. *Prescription* is the most

² See again L&S

³ For a competing definition of prescription as a *social and cultural consequence* of a standardisation and not, in itself, a linguistic process, as well as for a polemic discussion concerning the concept of standardisation presented here, see Jonathan Hope, “Biology, linguistics and the nature of Standard English” in Laura Wright ed., *The Development of Standard English 1300–1800: Theories, Descriptions, Conflicts*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

practical term of all (as opposed to “theoretical”.) Not only is there an authority that lays down the norm, but there is also an act of “imposition” on the subjected part and this part is expected to obey.

The other notions and terms will be defined in the course of the paper, whenever it will appear appropriate.

1. The English Academy

1.1 The Introduction

Richard Watts (2000) maintains that no language ideology, such as the “ideology of prescriptivism,” can emerge from the void, but has to be based on beliefs that have long history and are firmly rooted in the minds of the people of the era. He calls such beliefs “the language myths.” Myths are, as their name suggest, basically fictitious, “but they contain elements of reality in them, derived as they are from the mutually shared past experiences of members of the community.” (Watts 2000: 33) In connection with the prescriptivism, Watts enumerates these kinds of language myths:

- a) *language and ethnicity myth* – the idea of a strong link between the ethnic identity and a unified language.
- b) *language and nationality myth* – the idea that a unified nation needs one unified language.
- c) *language variety myth* – the idea that language is better when it is “richer,” i.e. when it has a great variety in forms and dialects.
- d) *myth of superiority* – the idea that one European language has certain qualities that make it better than the others.
- e) *myth of the perfect language* – the idea that language can reach (or has already reached) a state of perfection.
- f) *golden age myth* – if the language once reached perfection, there is an era that is desired to be repeated.
- g) *myth of the undesirability of change* – the idea that the perfect language should not experience any change, for it would inevitably degrade it.

According to Watts, this is not “an exhaustive list of myths. There are undoubtedly several other mythical strands that remain to be discovered.” (Watts 2000: 31) Watts argues that, in

Britain, during the end of the seventeenth and the beginnings of the eighteenth century, i.e. roughly during the reign of Queen Anne, there was a considerable fall of the *language and ethnicity* and *language variety* myth and an unprecedented rise of all the others myths. “[T]he stronger the language and nationality, language superiority and language perfection myths became, the weaker became the language and ethnicity and language variety myths” (Watts 2000: 40) This was the ideological basis just convenient for the prescriptivism to take place. The tradition of the proposals for the English academy represents a direct historical predecessor of the prescriptive processes of the eighteenth century and it reached its peak precisely during the era Watts mentions as crucial. I shall, therefore, interpret the most prominent texts concerning this topic through the optics of Watts' myths and explain how much they preceded the processes *ideologically*.

1.2 The History of the English Academy Proposals

Firstly, I shall briefly sketch the history of the proposals. Milroy and Milroy incorporate the history of the pleas for the academy in a broader picture, “the linguistic complaint tradition” (i.e. complaints about the unsatisfactory state of the language) and they quote several attempts of making standardization an important issue. The first complaints appears in the 14th century and there is, of course, no mention about academy (or any institution whose main goal would be the care for the language) yet. For the sake of our discussion, the most important of the earliest complaints is the one by William Caxton, a London printer. In 1490, Caxton “complained that the language was too variable, and that people from different places could hardly understand one another. He was quite clearly implying that standardisation in the strict sense (lack of variation in form) was needed.” (Milroy 1985:27) This suggests two things. Firstly, the awareness of the variation in language and the dissatisfaction with it begins long before the eighteenth century, when it reached its first peak, and, secondly, that, even then, the solution was already seen in standardization. (However unelaborated the idea was.)⁴

⁴ It is also a signal of the Chancery standard (emerging in the 1st half of the 15th century) not being accepted

The proposals for something like an academy (i.e. an authoritative body with a power to decide the matters of proper usage of a language) began to appear about a century later. Monroe (1910) enumerates some six or seven mentions of it in the private correspondence of the educated individuals of the period ranging from 1580 to 1679, including, for example, two documents by Dryden. One can see that the first of the pleas had appeared before the French Academy was founded in 1635 or even the Italian Academy in 1582. After that date, nevertheless, the “attempts [...] toward an English academy were more or less imitative. Practically every subsequent proposal specifically refers to the model in France.” (Monroe 1910: 109) Besides, there were two attempts to create an institution similar to the academy. The first of them took place during the reign of King James I., the second about the year 1664 within the projects of the Royal Society. However, both the attempts came to naught. (Even though Monroe gives proofs that it was a topic widely discussed amongst the members of the Royal Society. (Monroe 1910: 112))

The elaborate proposals that acquired wider public attention began with Daniel Defoe's *Essay on Projects* (published in 1697), a book (or a long pamphlet) containing several suggestions for social as well as economic improvements. One chapter of the book, called “On Academies,” is dedicated to the detailed description of the form, functions and goals of such an institution.

The golden age of the English academy came several years after Defoe's *Essay* during the reign of Queen Anne, for the political situation seemed favourable and the paragon for the English linguists, L'Académie française, was praised as never before. The idea was being promoted and widely popularized in the influential journals of the time: Addison's *The Spectator* (mainly Nos. 135 and 165) and *The Tatler*. In the latter, Jonathan Swift published an article on the language abuse (in No. 230, September 28, 1710) that he would later develop into the most notable and generally known of all the proposals, *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue* (1712). Swift himself probably ascribed great importance to the paper, because he addressed it to the Earl of Oxford, Lord

universally, although it was to this standard to which Caxton himself in the end subscribed.

High Treasurer, one of the most important politicians of the state.⁵ It is generally agreed that this was the time, when the project came closest to its realization.⁶

It is sometimes believed (see, for example, Tieken 2008a) that after Swift or, perhaps, after the scornful review of the purpose of the academy by Samuel Johnson in his “Preface to the *Dictionary*” (1755), the proposals ceased to emerge, as the process of standardization took different course and the project lost many of its supporters. Allen Walker Read (1938), however, quotes numerous suggestions for as well as approving comments on establishing of the academy in the latter half of the 18th century. The historical truth is that no such institution ever appeared in England and one can easily agree with Read that during the above-mentioned period, the “[p]olitical and social factors made any such establishment out of the question[.]” (1938: 156)⁷

1.3 Before Defoe

At the beginnings of the tradition, the pleas or proposals are short, fragmentary and there is seldom any discussion about the ideological background to the standardization or its proposed methodology. Caxton and many others longed for the standardization for purely practical reasons. The first evidence of something which can be, perhaps, interpreted as the *myth of the perfect language* in its embryonic stage, takes place in 1580 in a letter by Gabriel Harvey to Edmund Spenser. Harvey remarks that it would be suitable “to bring our Language into Arte.” (quoted in Monroe 1910: 1) Apart from this isolated remark, there is nearly a

⁵ The personal importance can also be deduced from the fact that this was the only one of Swift's documents that was signed by his own name. (Monroe 1910: 117) A pseudonym was attached to all his other works or they were published anonymously.

⁶ See, for example, Raby: “Swift’s *Proposal* very nearly succeeded; in fact, according to the head note of the 1735 edition, the preparations for an English academy would have been completed if not for the unfortunate death of the queen.” or Monroe (1910: 122): “[I]t is perhaps fortunate that the first Hanoverian kings and their ministers gave little heed to literature. [...] It is doubtless true, however, that of all the proposals those of Anne's time were assured of the most sympathetic hearing; that an English academy came nearest to founding when Swift penned his letter to Oxford.” Although both scholars differ in the opinion on appropriateness of the academy, they agree on the role of Swift's proposal in the process.

⁷ An institution called British Academy was indeed established in 1902 and is still working, but its mission is somewhat different.

century of silence. The proposals do appear in this period, but they limit themselves to delineation of the tasks of the academy or to lamenting the absence of an academy such as the French one. The next occurrence of the myth, and it is again the *myth of the perfect language*, can be found in Thomas Sprat's *History of the Royal Society* (1667)

“[I]f we observe well the English Language; we shall find, that it seems at this time more than others, to require some such aid, to bring it to its last perfection. The Truth is, it has been hitherto a little too carelessly handled; and I think, has had less labor spent about its polishing, then it deserves.” (quoted in Monroe 1910: 5-6.)

The quotation continues with his proposal of academy. The most ardent promoter of the idea before Defoe was Dryden. Monroe mentions two instances of the clear pleas for the academy – first in his “Epistle Dedicatory to the Rival Ladies” and second in the dedication of *Troilus and Cressida*. Dryden talks there about the improvements of the language, however, none of the Watts' myths can be deduced from the texts.

1.4 Defoe's “On Academies”

Defoe begins his essay with a praise of the French academy and its impact on the French language and culture. He assumes the simplistic view typical of many of the promoters of the English academy that it is solely the impact of the very academy what “refined and corrected” French to that degree “that we see it now spoken in all the courts of Christendom, as the language allowed to be most universal.”⁸ (Defoe 2010⁹) He believed that language can be very powerful tool of the cultural domination¹⁰ and, therefore, eagerly recommended what he saw as a way to the improvement of English as an international language to the king. By a foundation of the academy, the king “shall have opportunity to darken the glory of the French

⁸ For the discussion on the deeper, socio-political reasons of the diffusion of French, see e.g. Yadav 2004: 55-111.

⁹ When the source is an online document with no pagination, the number of the page is not given in the references.

¹⁰ A discussion of the validity of this argument would be interesting, but it is not the aim of this paper.

king in peace, as he has by his daring attempts in the war.” (Defoe 2010)

Defoe founds his conviction that English can succeed in the engagement with French, or even supersede it, on the basis that the English language is more comprehensive and can be refined more than French. He underpins his argumentation by the acknowledgements by French authors (In order to reinforce the argument as much as possible. For what is better than an approval by the enemy?) and an English poet lord Roscommon. “The English tongue is a subject not at all less worthy the labour of such a society than the French, and capable of a much greater perfection. The learned among the French will own that the comprehensiveness of expression is a glory in which the English tongue not only equals but excels its neighbours[.]” (Defoe 2010) Here Defoe's essay shows the features both of the *myth of superiority* and the *myth of the perfect language*.

As Defoe is strongly opposed to “all the irregular additions that ignorance and affectation have introduced; and all those innovations in speech, if I may call them such, which some dogmatic writers have the confidence to foster upon their native language” (Defoe 2010) and grants the Academy full control over the custom¹¹ after the language will have reached its perfection, we can find in his words echoes of a *myth of the undesirability of change*.

Nonetheless, Defoe's main interest lies in purging the language of “a mere frenzy of the tongue, a vomit of the brain, which works by putting a contrary upon the course of nature.” (Defoe 2010) These are the metaphors that he uses for the vulgarisms or “cursory oaths, curses, execrations, imprecations, asseverations” (Defoe 2010) To them, he dedicates more than one third of the whole proposal.¹² Peculiar as it may seem nowadays, it was a matter of immense importance to Defoe, because he perceived these words, in a very modern way, as expletives, i.e. words “[s]erving to fill out; introduced merely to occupy space,” (OED) those that do not add anything to the discourse. The majority of the authors of the other proposals condemn the swearing and the cant language on the aesthetic and/or the moral grounds (those

¹¹ “Custom, which is now our best authority for words, would always have its original here, and not be allowed without it. There should be no more occasion to search for derivations and constructions, and 'twould be as criminal then to coin words as money.” (Defoe 2010)

¹² Just as a matter of interest, I quote here a short passage of Defoe's example of a nonsensical dialogue:
"Jack, God damn me, Jack, how dost do? How hast thou done this long time, by God?" And then they kiss; and the other, as lewd as himself, goes on:-
"Dear Tom, I am glad to see thee with all my heart, let me die. Come, let us go take a bottle, we must not part so; pr'ythee let's go and be drunk by God."

words being blamed for their “impoliteness”, “inappropriateness” or “godlessness”), whereas Defoe, while keeping both these reasons, offers a lengthy discussion about the *practical* consequences of those bad manners.

His purpose is to make the written and (in the case of the expletives) also spoken language clear and intelligible. Defoe was one of the many thinkers in the Age of Reason who believed that the words express certain eternal ideas and that one of the tasks of a man is to learn how to express those ideas – in Descartes' words – “clearly and distinctly.” Moreover, to add also the moral motivation, he “saw the exchange of ideas, signified by words, as part of God’s providential plan for man’s improvement”(Clark, quoted in Raby 2010) Therefore, it follows that the main obstacles and dangers for the discourse are the words that have obscure meaning or no meaning at all. As language is considered to be a tool given to us by God, its misuse nearly equals heresy.

The task of purging the vernacular of those improper expressions, an issue of eminent importance to Defoe, seems to be quite different from the task of making it perfect. There is no doubt about the purging being a necessary preparatory phase for the process of perfection of the language. However, such a process concern itself usually with a selection of the privileged varieties of the language and although it is often accompanied with moral or aesthetic judgements, it is almost never connected with God and theological issues. On that account, I propose to add one more myth to Watt's list – *the myth of the purged language*.

I shall conclude that in Defoe's pleas, an evidence was found of these four myths: *the myth of superiority, the myth of the perfect language, the myth of the undesirability of change and the myth of the purged language*.

1.5 Swift's Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue

The most evident of the language myths contained in Swift's proposal is the *myth of the perfect language*. By a peculiar digression to the field of the historical linguistics, Swift sketches “the same Fortune” (Swift 2010) of Latin, French and English languages. He argues

that Latin and French have already reached (and passed) the state of perfection and links the era of the perfect language with the era of the greatest political power of the nations. “But the *English Tongue*,” he adds “is not arrived to such a Degree of Perfection, as to make us apprehend any Thoughts of its Decay[.]” (Swift 2010) However, it has already experienced the *golden era*, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. (Here one can see the instance of the *golden age myth*.) Swift asserts that English shares *the same Fortune* with the two languages, which already passed their perfection. He is implying that, if the effort to revive the quality of the language succeeded, the vernacular – and along with it the British Kingdom – would go through a period of great stability and power.

Swift presents also an odd version of the *myth of superiority*. He does not argue, as, for instance, Defoe does, that English is capable of supremacy over the other languages, because it is *intrinsically better*. Just on the contrary, he considers English to be inferior to Spanish, Italian and French, due to the comparatively small influence of Latin and the misfortune of English to develop from the harsh Saxon roots.¹³ The vernacular is, nevertheless, capable at least to equal the others in perfection, as can be deduced from the previous paragraph. Still, in viewing some languages *naturally* better than others, Swift demonstrates the myth in his proposal.

Apart from being the best known and most promising plea for the academy, Swift's proposal contains the most outrageous demand. He longs for a language that would be immutable. “I see no absolute Necessity why any Language would be perpetually changing; for we find many Examples to the contrary.” (Swift 2010)¹⁴ The changelessness is even more important than the further refining of the language. “[S]ome Method should be thought on for *ascertaining* and *fixing* our Language for ever, after such Alterations are made in it as shall be thought requisite. For I am of Opinion, that it is better a Language should not be wholly

¹³ To this reason he also ascribes the lack of “natural” politeness in the English nation. “For I am afraid, My Lord, that with all the real good Qualities of our Country, we are naturally not very Polite.” (Swift 2010)

¹⁴ This, for some unbelievable, aspect of Swift's proposal led some scholars (e.g. Watts 2002) to the conclusion that Swift's proposal is just a satiric piece of writing that uses Swift's usual techniques of promoting just the contrary of what he is saying. For that reason, they argue that Swift was, in fact, *against* the establishment of the academy. However, Francus, in her book *The Converting Imagination : Linguistic Theory and Swift's Satiric Prose*, gives an excellent in-depth analysis of the *Proposal* and concludes that even though the paper could have been initially meant as a satire, Swift was so much concerned with the topic (i.e. the institutionalized standardization of language) that he did not succeed in keeping his distance and his efforts resulted in an odd mixture of a satiric paper and a hearty plea.

perfect, that it should be perpetually changing[.]” Whence comes Swift's apparent repugnance towards the changes in language?

The notion of the English language being in a turbulent perpetual change that makes writings older than two or three centuries practically unreadable was, as well as the previous topic, a commonplace amongst the men of letter of the era. For example, Edmund Waller, a seventeenth-century poet and politician wrote in his poem “Of English Verse”:

But who can hope his lines should long
Last in a daily changing tongue?
.....
Poets that lasting marble seek
Must carve in Latin or in Greek:
We write in sand, our language grows
And like the tide our work o'erflows.¹⁵

Even Alexander Pope in his *Essay on Criticism* sadly remarks that “Our Sons their Fathers’ *failing Language see, / And such as Chaucer is, shall Dryden be,*” (Pope 2010) Moreover, it is, perhaps, not a surprise that Addison, too, was of the same opinion: “it would be impossible for one of our Great Grandfathers to know what his Posterity have been doing, were he to read their Exploits in a Modern News Paper.” (Addison 2010) All of these gentlemen provide us with instances of the *myth of the undesirability of change* and Swift seems to be a textbook example of the myth.

One should notice, nevertheless, that “the unreadable English author of the past” given as an illustrative case of the rapid change is nearly always Chaucer and that the examples of the unchanging languages are Greek and Latin, to which Swift, nevertheless, adds even Chinese and, importantly, some modern European languages like German or Spanish.¹⁶ This shows us

¹⁵ Quoted in Yadav 2004: 33.

¹⁶ “The Chinese have Books in their Language above two Thousand Years old, neither have the frequent Conquests of the Tartars been able to alter it. The German, Spanish, and Italian, have admitted few or no Changes for some Ages past.” (Swift 2010)

the relativity of the notion of *unchanging language*, as one can hardly admit that Spanish of that time was not changing or that Greek remained completely constant “between the Time of *Homer*, and that of *Plutarch*.” (Swift 2010) (Even though it may be admitted that because of the total codification and rigidity of the teaching of the dead languages, Greek and Latin could *seem* to remain quite constant.) But even the modern languages were much stabler when compared to the substantial changes the English language went through since the time of Chaucer.¹⁷ We should not be blinded by Swift's rhetoric, for if we put it into the context of his realistic examples (and those of some of his contemporaries) the expressions “for ever” and “immutability” lose their fatal tone. It is even clearer, if we realize that Swift's measure of the fixity of a language is the intelligibility of the texts written several centuries ago. (He introduces it as a touchstone of the immutability of the language several times in his proposal.)

I may conclude that Swift was not as ignorant to the nature of language change as Dr Johnson would have him several decades later in his *Preface to the Dictionary* and that his desire for an unchangeable language was, in fact, a plea for a reasonable standard that would allow to slow the rapid structural changes in language and, perhaps, give the authors a chance to be read several centuries after they died. However, as Watts concepts are presented as myths and for myths, the rhetoric effect is more important than the textual analysis, Swift remains one of the eminent representative of the *myth of the undesirability of change*. In Swift's proposal, one can therefore find, in various forms, these four myths: *the myth of the perfect language*, *the myth of superiority*, *the golden age myth* and *the myth of the undesirability of change*.

1.6 After Swift

After the death of Queen Anne in 1714 and the coronation of King George from the Hanoverian dynasty, it was improbable that the project of the English academy could ever succeed. The men of letters aimed their attention elsewhere and the process of standardization

¹⁷ Three hundred years separate Swift from Chaucer. It is roughly the same amount of time that separates us from Swift. I am sure that, to a reader with no linguistic training the changes in the latter era would seem quite petty when compared to the turbulent changes of the previous period.

took completely different course.¹⁸ Tiekens (2008a: 4) even argues that “Pleas for an English academy fell silent” and that Robert Baker must have been an exception when he wrote in the dedication to the King of his *Reflections on the English Language* that the contemporary writers “abound with Incorrectnesses and Barbarisms” and that an academy similar to the Parisian one (and the Italian one) is extremely desired. (Tiekens 2008a: 5) However, this is only partly true. While Baker may have been an exception in his feeling that the contemporary writers' language is unacceptable, (but even this seems improbable,) he was surely not the only defender of the foundation of the academy. As I have already noted, Read (1938) proved in her article that the idea survived well to the twilight of the eighteenth century. Moreover, the notable diversity of the authors of the particular suggestions which were chosen for the article (i.e. not only men of letters but also a student, a critic, a clergyman, an elocutionist and even an agriculturalist) implies that the project of the academy haunted the minds of the educated people long after it had passed its great moment, even though it never regained the same popularity it enjoyed during Swift's time.

Although some of the proposals are quite short, others (like Baker's) are considerably long and exhaustive regarding the tasks of the suggested institution. None of them, however, exhibits any trace of a language myth. It seems that the time of myths is over – this is valid at least for the proposals. On the other hand, the *language and nationality* myth, which is absent in Defoe and Swift, can be often found in the texts of those who stood in opposition to the idea of the academy. Two of the most pronounced objectors to the idea were Dr Johnson and Joseph Priestley. Interestingly, they both agree in the argument against the institution. Priestley, in the preface to his grammar, writes:

As to a publick Academy, invested with authority to ascertain the use of words, which is a project that some persons are very sanguine in their expectations from, I think it not only unsuitable to the genius of a free nation, but in itself ill calculated to reform and fix a language. We need make no doubt but that the best forms of speech will, in time, establish themselves by

¹⁸ See the second chapter of this paper.

their own superior excellence. (1772: xix)

Johnson, after several paragraphs of criticizing the French academy and Swift's proposal, concludes:

If an academy should be established for the cultivation of our stile, which I, who can never wish to see dependance multiplied, hope the spirit of *English* liberty will hinder or destroy, let them, instead of compiling grammars and dictionaries, endeavour, with all their influence, to stop the licence of translatours, whose idleness and ignorance, if it be suffered to proceed, will reduce us to babble a dialect of *France*. (1835: xxvi)

When condemning the authority of the academy, both the authors connects the liberty of the nation with the liberty of the language. In addition, their refusals support the fact that the idea of academy was still debated at their time. Johnson, writing forty years after Swift, and Priestley, even ten years after that, would hardly dedicate space to a long dead thought. Moreover, the quotation from Priestley implies that there were some, who were “very sanguine in their expectations” from the project.

A conclusion can be, perhaps, made that because of the stereotypical presentations of the English nation as a society of free men (as opposed to the French nation that was stereotypically described as being eager to surrender to the authorities,) the myth in question was intrinsically opposite to the spirit of the academy and, therefore, it was impossible to link them together.

1.7 The Conclusion

There is no direct link between the pleas for the academy and the standardization in the eighteenth century, for the project failed and the process of codification adopted completely different form. It was taken over by many personalities interested in language who worked

usually alone and never created an organized body,¹⁹ much less an institutionalized one. However, we have seen that, in the two most prominent and well-known proposals for the English academy by Swift and Defoe, one can find traces of all but one of the language myths designated by Watts as those that form the basis of the ideology of prescriptivism. (In the course of the discussion, even a new myth was discovered as an extension of Watts' list.) As those proposals very clearly expressed and successfully spread the set of beliefs that made it possible for the prescriptivism to flourish, I shall conclude that the tradition of the pleas for the English academy constitutes an important part of the process of standardization in Britain.

¹⁹ Though they constituted, perhaps, what Watts (2008) calls a 'discourse community.'

2 The Politeness, the Social Climbers and the Commodification of the Standard

2.1 The Introduction

In this chapter I shall sketch the socio-historical background of the processes of the language standardization and its codification in the grammar books of the second half of the eighteenth century. A special attention will be paid to the evolution of the notion of politeness and its impact on the aspirations of the middle classes as well as to the commodification of the standard language. In the end, I shall discuss the influence of the market and the readers on the shape of the grammars.

2.2 The Changes in the Society

The beginnings of the eighteenth century in England are marked with an unstable political situation. The Act of Union from 1707 created a new political body, the kingdom of Great Britain, by uniting England and Scotland under one ruler. Together with the War of the Spanish Succession and the tumult around the succession to the British throne, those events spread the atmosphere of qualm and uncertainty. On the national and international level, it was necessary to create a new national identity, the British identity. The era also saw the rise of the middle classes or the bourgeoisie. As newcomers in the social spheres, its members struggled to find their place within the monarchy.

In the search of the identity, national or social, people found language to be one of its crucial modifiers. The language became something to think and talk about. The unified language should have become the attribute of the unified realm on its glorious path towards the empire. It is, therefore, not a surprise that the connection of language and nation grew strong (Crowley 1996: 68) and that Watt's *language and nationality* myth was more and more pronounced. “The new nation, Britain, was an uneasy amalgam of four distinct nations, and thus needed to be consolidated at the level of language.” (Crowley 1996:68)

In the towns and cities of Britain, all sorts of people from middle classes began to be concerned with the state of their language and it was perhaps for the first time in the history that these issues penetrated the awareness of a merchant or a servant with such intensity and consciousness. The middle classes felt their social mobility and were attempting to climb the social ladder and reach the desired position of the upper classes. One way to do that was by mimicking the evident markers of the genteel society as the manners, the customs and, above all, the language.²⁰ Moreover, we must not forget that the members of the middle classes were encouraged in their effort of self-improvement because, due to the seemingly incessant wars, “there was a national and even a nascently imperial backdrop for individual narratives of self-improvement.” (Percy 2008: 126)

2.3 The Position of English

It can be deduced, then, that in Britain, the social value of the mother tongue was gradually moving up throughout the century. The rising prestige of English in all fields (mainly in science and politics) was often perceived and confirmed by the contemporary press. For instance, one of the anonymous critics of *The Monthly Review* states that “the English Tongue is not only become the vehicle of science, but is also the Language of the Orator.”²¹ (Anon. 1762, quoted in Percy 2008: 130) This was also often connected to the increasing popularity of the studies of the language.

Some even argue that English language became a sole overlord of the language domain. Thus Crowley:

“Consequent upon the consolidation of the bourgeois public sphere the argument over the status of the classical and vernacular languages had moved on. Rather than Latin

²⁰ A good summary of the situation can be found in Langford:

Nothing unified the middling orders so much as their passion for aping the manners and morals of the gentry more strictly defined, as soon as they possessed the material means to do so. This was a revolution by conjunction rather than confrontation, but it was a revolution none the less, transforming the pattern of social relations, and subtly reshaping the role of that governing class which was the object of imitation. The aspirants sought incorporation in the class above them, not collaboration with those below them. (Langford 1989: 63. Quoted in Watts 2002: 159)

²¹ By “the Orator” is meant Thomas Sheridan (father of the playwright Richard Sheridan), an actor and educator, whose public lectures on elocution were very popular in his times.

exerting dominance in a context of polyglossia, it was English that was beginning to become the hegemonic tongue.” (Crowley 1996: 77)

This, however, proves to be rather overestimating the position of English. The analysis of the newspaper advertisements²² of those times shows a rise of the interest in both teaching and learning English (and grammatical English especially) between the years 1750 and 1775 and its gradually acquired predominance over French and Latin amongst the middle classes, while, on the other hand, it proves that Latin retained its importance as the language of the educated, and French, despite the Seven Years' War and despite the still falling reputation of the French state in England, confirmed its role of “a medium of communication in a world where English was not yet the *lingua franca*.” (Percy 2004: 174) The vernacular penetrated all fields of scientific and social discourse, but the time was yet to come when it totally superseded the “international” French and the “educated” Latin.

2.4 The Construction of Politeness and Correctness

As suggested above, the middle classes were endeavouring to penetrate the company of their social betters and believed that they can achieve their goal by adopting a system of manners and proper language. Fitzmaurice (1998: 309) describes the situation even as a social anxiety:

“[S]ince Defoe [...] there had been considerable anxiety about the state of the English language in the hands of the vast majority of its speakers. One very material aspect of this anxiety was on the part of people who believed that they might rise in the world if only they were able to acquire and control polite and properly expressed discourse.”

There is one very important word in the excerpt from Fitzmaurice and that is “polite.” Its meaning radically differed from the present-day primary understanding of the notion, which Watts characterizes as follows: “The modern, twentieth century understanding of politeness is

²² Which “vividly reflect and construct contemporary desires and practices in a nascent consumer society.” (Percy 2004: 154)

that it consists of mutually shared forms of consideration for others." (Watts 2002: 161) In the first half of the eighteenth century, the polite manners and "politeness" were words that signified the way of life of the upper classes. (At least in the middle-class's interpretation.) The politeness was the opposite of what was perceived as crude, savage and uncivilized. The notion was developed even to the level of philosophy, which found its voice in writings of the 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury.²³ Such ideology is difficult to sum up in a few words, but, for instance, Watts attempts to define it as composed of "decorum, grace, beauty, symmetry and order." (2002: 162) Susan Fitzmaurice offers another definition, a pragmatic one, as described in and popularized by *The Spectator*:

Fundamentally, politeness concerned the sensitive practice of social considerateness through manners, dress and, most importantly of all, conversation, that were appropriate to an urban context, with urbane company. (1998:312)

Whatever could be the exact definition of the term, the notion became a symbol of the high society and, as such, was being spread by one of the most influential medium of the time,²⁴ the above-mentioned *Spectator* founded by John Addison and Richard Steele. *The Spectator* and also some other publications of that time (like *The Examiner*) treated every reader as a polite gentleman, who should be alarmed by all the improprieties and instances of badness in the society. By assuming that everyone should be concerned with the good manners, good taste and good polite language and by recognizing and criticizing of what they perceived as the shortcomings against these principles, they successfully created a model of a "perfectly polite reader." They produced the ambition amongst their readers (a majority of which were *not* members of the "polite" upper classes, though aspiring to belong to them) to reach the level of such a reader, i.e. to acquire the proper manners. That was, actually, the common goal of Addison and Steel:

"Addison and Steele were concerned to 'popularise' the ideology of politeness by

²³ See the monograph by Lawrence E. Klein *Shaftesbury and the culture of politeness*.

²⁴ See Watts 2002: 162.

raising issues that touched upon the social symbols listed above [i.e. decorum, grace, beauty, symmetry and order] in as many numbers as possible. They were also concerned to make the periodicals available to as wide a reading public as possible. [...] Their purpose was not to question the social order itself nor to put it to the test in any way, but to create a common feeling for it. In a very real sense, they might therefore be called the ‘propagandists’ of the ideology of politeness.” (Watts 2002: 162)

The impact of *The Spectator's* was enormous. Even though its history was very short (it was published from 1710 to 1712 and shortly in 1714), it was later collected into several (seven) volumes and reissued many times during the eighteenth century. As hinted in the above quotation from Watts, its readership was very broad. According to Donald Bond, it consisted of “ladies of fashion, business men, clergymen, players, perplexed parents, footmen and ladies' maids, lovers, and schoolboys - persons with a multiplicity of interests and backgrounds.” (Donald Bond, Introduction to *The Spectator* (Oxford, 1965), Vol 1, p. lxxxvii, quoted in Fitzmaurice 1998, 311) As we can see, *The Spectator* was read virtually by everybody who had the money and time to do so.

It was especially influential in the field of the language. As we have noted in the previous chapter, a persona of Mr Spectator (which was a disguise for Addison) was in favour of the standardization of the language under the surveillance of the Academy. Apart from that, he criticized the “defects” in language in several issues (*No. 135* or *No. 165*, for instance.) Besides, Isaac Bickerstaff, a persona similar to Mr Spectator, used first by Jonathan Swift and then by Richard Steele, expressed its cordial support of Gildon and Brightland, the prominent grammarians of the first decades of the eighteenth century, in the preface of the influential *Grammar of the English Tongue*.

It is, therefore, not a surprise that *The Spectator* became an epitome for politeness, not only for the issues it treated, but also for the elaborated and elegant language in which the issues were discussed. In the grammars of the eighteenth century, it is one of the most cited sources, superseded only by Swift, the New Testament, David Hume, Addison himself and Alexander

Pope. (Sundby et al. 1991: 35; quoted in Fitzmaurice 2000: 201)²⁵

The concept of politeness installed itself in the minds of the members of the middle classes and, largely due to the influence of *The Spectator*, it was nearly always connected with the language.²⁶ The polite manners begun to be viewed as a ticket to the upper class society, which was, seemingly, no longer unattainable. As Watts remarks:

The ideology of politeness in eighteenth century Britain created a social revolution. For the members of the middle classes, who were rapidly becoming more affluent, more mobile and more self-confident, being ‘incorporated’ into polite society was the goal of their social aspirations. (2002: 167)

Politeness was also connected with the notion of the “learned” people (for “[t]hose who should be imitated – the gentry – are not only polite; they are also ‘learned’[,]” Watts (2002: 165)²⁷) and, as a means of reaching the higher society, viewed as something, which can be adopted by diligent learning.

However, there was one cardinal problem. The would-be aspirants to the high circles were not sure how to acquire the desired qualities and, therefore, a great demand emerged for the definition of politeness and a description of the technique to acquire it. Since the “correct” language was perceived as one of the crucial parts of the idea of politeness, the socially mobile (Tieken 2008a: 14) people eagerly sought a body of instructions of how to express themselves in a proper way. The grammars (and other such kinds of texts like readers in the selected “elegant and polite” literature) were presented as the answers to such demand for they served as manuals of the correct and polite speech. (The selected readers also informed about the proper manners apart from the language.)

²⁵ See also Fitzmaurice (2000: 211): “[T]he language of *The Spectator* (and thus its writers) provides the grammarians with a ready corpus of language which they might use as the basis of a model for modern Standard English.”

²⁶ Crowley (1994: 74) treats it as a part of the process of self-identification of the middle-classes: “the process of bourgeois self-identification, at the social, political and cultural levels, by means of language; a process which depends quite as much on the construction of social ‘others’ as it does upon the identification of who, or what, the bourgeoisie was.”

²⁷ See also Auer (2009: 173) “Since education was essential to acquire polite speech, the lower and uneducated classes were excluded from becoming polite speakers”

It is, therefore, understandable, that during the century, the polite language (i.e. the desired one) gradually began to be considered the *standard*. Watts (2002) finds many occurrences of texts from the era that link “politeness” to “standard” and even adds that

the number of cases in which the two notions of ‘politeness’ and ‘learning’ are intimately connected with ‘standard English’ could be multiplied almost indefinitely in the eighteenth century. Sometimes the standard is set in accordance with the language of the gentry, sometimes with the language used at court (Watts 2002: 167)²⁸

What started as a process of social elevation of the mobile classes ended in the codification of the standard language. The codification longed for by Swift and Defoe arrived to Britain, though in a totally different form than they proposed.

Interestingly enough, even though many people bought their handbooks and studied them, they were very often not admitted to the “world above.” Instead, a new group of people emerged, I shall call it the polite middle class, which adopted the polite manners, even though it was still excluded from the upper classes. The process of codifying the polite/standard language, nevertheless, resulted, among others, in the lucid and very stigmatizing constitution of the impolite language and manners.²⁹

The codification of language in the grammars of the second half of the century results in a clear sense of what low-class or *impolite* language is. It is imprecise, old-fashioned, and casual. By contrast, standard modern English is up-to-date, formal and correct. (Fitzmaurice 1998: 323)

²⁸ Fitzmaurice arrives to a similar conclusion, but by ascribing the polite language to the middle classes, not to the gentry or the court, she implies that the identification of polite language with the standard did not occur until the second half of the century. “Polite English thus becomes synonymous with standard modern English - the uniform, codified, prescribed language of the insecure middle classes.” (Fitzmaurice 1998: 315)

²⁹ Another result was that the polite/standard language, which was, in fact, *learnt* by the middle classes began to be connected even more strongly with studying. For instance, Thomas Sheridan, the famous orator, makes it explicit in one of his lectures: “All barbarous nations agree in not studying or cultivating their languages, and this is one of the characteristical marks of barbarism. All civilized countries agree in studying and cultivating their languages, and this is amongst the first proofs given of their politeness.” (Sheridan 1762: 21; quoted in Watts 2002: 167)

The polite middle class found the attributes of politeness as a means of discriminating themselves from the rest of the middle classes, which led to the denser social stratification, i.e. to the direct opposite of the social considerateness promoted by Steel and Addison.

Therefore, the sense of politeness, the notion assigned to the middle classes in the last decades of the century, considerably changed. A neat summary of the situation is given by Fitzmaurice:

As the century wore on, the early eighteenth century notion of politeness embodied by and fixed in *The Spectator* grew increasingly distant and opaque. Instead of signifying a set of social practices regulated by mutual considerateness and cooperation, it begins to describe more narrowly a mode of behaviour and a variety of language prescribed as correct and appropriate for middle-class speakers. In the course of the latter half of the century, the notion of politeness is fossilised, and fixed to the social class that was most anxious to be thought polite. (1998: 313)

As we can see, the effort of the aspiring middle class was wasted as they, for the most part, did not succeed in penetrating the dreamed-up aims. Let us see now how the “pursuit of politeness” changed the face of the market.

2.5 The Market – the Commodification of Linguistic Skills

“[T]he new politeness - as embodied in a notion of correctness - was a commodity that could be bought. And one of its most transparent markers, language, was a product that could be marketed.” (Fitzmaurice 2000: 197) With people believing that acquiring a “higher” level of language may help them to climb up the social ladder, there appeared some that were able to exploit the situation for their personal profit by offering the polite language as a marketable commodity. With the growing demand, there grew a market for the language books. There is no doubt that the steep increase in the numbers of published grammars in the 1760s (Tieken

2008b: 106)³⁰ and the subsequent decades³¹ was created also by the publishers, who rightly judged the situation and answered the demand for the grammar books by publishing them in unprecedented amounts. It seems to have been quite a profitable trade as “there were consortia of publishers each of which marketed a single grammar” (Tieken 2008b: 123) The popularity of the products (the grammars) had reached so high a level that even the pirated³² editions of the most prominent ones, violating the Copyright Act of 1710, were no exceptions.³³ There were also many unauthorized reprints published in Scotland and Ireland as the Copyright Act did not apply to them. (Auer 2008: 66)

Nevertheless, the prominent publishers could have played more important role in the codification of the language than it is generally agreed. Tieken convincingly argues that the projects of Johnson's *Dictionary* and Lowth's grammar, two of the most influential publications of the era, were undertaken because they were commissioned by their close friend, London publisher Robert Dodsley, who saw the need for such works on the market and hence pushed his intellectual fellows to create them:

[R]ather than merely for linguistic reasons, the codification of the English language, that is, the publication of an authoritative grammar and dictionary, was taken up for economic reasons as well, and the main driving force in this process was Robert Dodsley, one of the major English booksellers of the eighteenth century. (Tieken 2002)

In a later article, Tieken even generalizes her statement: “[t]he grammars that developed into the most popular ones of the eighteenth century were first and foremost booksellers’ projects”

³⁰ Michael (1991) maintains that the process occurred ten years later, but Tieken presents more persuasive proofs for her assertion enumerating all the grammars published. See also Percy (2008: 128-9) for the discussion of the book reviewers' perception of the situation on the market, which is concluded by finding that “before about 1760, London reviewers generally felt that little of note had been written about English grammar since the 1710s.” (In 1710s, the influential Gildon-Brightland's and Greenwood's grammars appeared.)

³¹ The rise was indeed enormous - “83% of the grammars published during the eighteenth century came out after 1750” (Tieken 2008b: 104)

³² “i.e. a reprint which was published without the author’s or the original publishers’ permission” (Tieken 2008b: 107)

³³ For instance, Tieken (2008b: 122) mentions nineteenth pirated editions of Lowth's *Short Introduction*.

(Tieken 2008b: 124) The fate of the grammars that were commodified depended as much on the authors as on the publishers.

As a proof that the commodification of the “language skills” was perceived even by the contemporaries, and sometimes with disgust, let us quote one of the complaints of the contributor to the *Critical Review*:

It is with some concern that we have seen of late so many attempts by the various grammars, dictionaries, spelling-books, reading and pronouncing essays, and other daily treatises of the same kind, to reduce the business of education (the most important, if not the most noble, of any in civil society) to a mere mercenary job.(Anon. 1765, qtd in Percy 2008:131)

The grammarians were also well aware of the fact that their work is a marketable product. They often attempted to promote their own grammars by adding catchy words and phrases to the titles, title pages and introductions in order to raise the sales.³⁴ Anne Fisher, for instance, the author of *A Practical New Grammar*, added the word *practical* to the seventh edition of her book.³⁵ (Tieken 2008b: 109) The same tendency can be observed in the works of many of her contemporaries. In fact, the advertising practices were so ubiquitous that one of the contributors to the popular *Monthly Review*, lamented in 1764 (i.e. even before the biggest inrush of the grammar books took place) the advent of *A Complete English Grammar on a New Plan*, by Charles Wiseman with the following words: “How many *complete* English Grammars on *new plans*, have we not already had, or been threatened with?” (Kenrick 1765, in Percy 2008: 127)

The grammarians also encouraged their readers in their “pursuit of politeness,” among other

³⁴ Echoes of such practices can be, indeed, found in the jargon of the commercials for contemporary language handbooks and language courses.

³⁵ The great potential impact of the advertisement for the actual sale is hinted by the fact that the title is “improved” no earlier than in the seventh edition of Fisher's grammar, which was immensely popular even before that. (According to Rodríguez-Gil (2002) she was the fourth most popular grammarian of the era, after Murray, Ash and Lowth.) The “brand” must have been firmly established after several editions and so the supposed benefits of the advertisement were, probably, quite high, if they persuaded the author (or the publisher) to alter the title.

things, by including in their work quotations from the authors that were revered as the best stylists of their time.³⁶ Apart from being a useful pedagogical tool, it both strengthened the awareness of the importance of politeness by creating a corpus of the most polite quotations and implied that the attentive readers can equal (and even surpass) them – i.e. that politeness and the social status it was allegedly able to bring to them is attainable by adhering to the rules of the correct language.³⁷

2.6 The Readers

One of the reasons for the observed “prescriptive” nature of the grammars of the second half of the eighteenth century is that they were aimed at a certain readership and intended to meet a certain goal. And even though they did not always fulfill their initial intentions,³⁸ they made pronounced the fact that they were suitable for the part of the readership that was willing to learn the standard version of their language.

This new recognition of the distinct strata amongst the clientèle is explicitly stated for the first time in Gildon-Brightland's grammar (1710), which uses footnotes for the more interested in the subject and, thus, discriminates among two sorts of readers. The grammar is, nevertheless, intended for all potentially attracted persons. It was not before 1760s that the grammarians and the publishers became well aware of the stratification of the readership and their specialized demands and begun to offer specialized products. As Buschmann-Göebels sums it up “around the middle of the eighteenth century the idea of distinct types of readership was born. Different readers were given different books to read.” (Buschmann/Goebels 2008: 98)³⁹ During this decade and the subsequent years, the grammars that were later labelled as

³⁶ Lowth, for instance, collected great amounts of such quotes. For a detailed account see Navest 2006.

³⁷ “By suggesting that nobody was too good or too well-bred not to have to rely on a working knowledge of good grammar, the prescriptivists persuaded their insecure readers that the mastery of correct language must offer a way to join the ranks of those they admired most.” (Fitzmaurice 1998: 324)

³⁸ Lowth, for example, wrote his grammar originally for his son; when it was published, Lowth stated in the preface that “it was calculated fo the use of the learner, even of the lowest class[;]” (Lowth 1794: xiv) but, ultimately, it was felt that the work was suitable more for scholars than for general public. See Percy 2008: 126 and passim.

³⁹ See also Percy (2008: 126) “some [...] authors [inspired by the success of Lowth's grammar] and publishers targeted their own textbooks to more specific audiences, for instance to school pupils rather than to scholars.”

“prescriptive” appeared in large quantities. They were aimed to help their readers to master the “correct” or “polite” variant of English. This process was accompanied by the eventual separation of the “practical” and “rational” (or “universal”⁴⁰) grammar. As the latter was considered to be more demanding (for containing all sorts of philosophical speculations and being, in essence, more general and elusive, it was considered suitable for the advanced readers. The former type of grammar was designated for the less learned public and, therefore, for the majority of readers. In the first two decades, all the influential grammars, including Gildon-Brightland's, contained philosophical elements and there was “no strict division between practical and rational grammar during the period focused on here, as is often claimed.” (Buschman-Göebels 2008: 100) But as early as in 1762, when the preface to Lowth's *Short Introduction* was published, the author recommends to the readers who are versed in the art of grammar the universal grammar by James Harris:

Those, who would enter more deeply into the Subject, will find it fully and accurately handled, with the greatest acuteness of investigation, perspicuity of explications, and elegance of method, in a treatise intitled [sic] HERMES, by JAMES HARRIS, Esq; the most beautiful and perfect example of Analysis, that has been exhibited since the days of ARISTOTLE. (Lowth 1794: xv)

As we can see, the discrimination among several sorts of readers and the distinction between two kinds of grammar emerged at the same time and were closely connected.⁴¹

The supposed readers of the practical grammars of the second half of the eighteenth century fall into several groups. They can be clearly identified as it gradually became a commonplace to enumerate the intended types of readers in the frontispiece or in the preface. The most common are schoolboys (and children in general,) women and all the people willing to learn. (i.e. willing to climb the social ladder.)

However, the regard for the target readers was not marked on the first pages only. It affected the whole structure of the work. As the presumed education of the target readers lowered

⁴⁰ For the terms see Buschman-Göebels 2008: 87-90 and also Chapman 2008: 29-30.

⁴¹ On this issue, see also Chapman 2008: 28-30.

throughout the century, the clarifications of the grammatical phenomena must have become more simple. By analysing various approaches to the comparison of adjectives and adverbs, Randy Bax finds that

in the course of the eighteenth century the reader is no longer expected to be well-versed in Latin in order to recognise the Latin origin of words and to be able to produce grammatically acceptable English comparatives and superlatives as a consequence. This is a fundamental change in approach, which is a reflection of the type of readers that the authors had in mind, a readership that was rapidly changing. This development coincides with the greater attention paid to women as part of the intended audience of the grammars, as these usually lacked the kind of education which would have enabled them to distinguish between Latinate and non-Latinate words (Bax 2008: 286-287)

That was also one of the reasons, why several grammarians (for example Ash⁴²) published their work as an introduction to Lowth's grammar (considered by the contemporaries to be difficult, see above.)⁴³

2.7 The Conclusion

We have seen that, because of several socio-historical processes, the prestige of the English language was gradually rising in the society and that one variant, the polite language, was especially valued. The rapidly growing middle classes longed for the admittance into the higher society and, eagerly encouraged by the influential commentators of *The Spectator*, saw the polite language as one of the indispensable constituents of the upper-class level of

⁴² "GRAMMATICAL INSTITUTES or, an EASY INTRODUCTION to *Dr. Lowth's English Grammar*" (Ash 1810: the front page.)

⁴³ Their personal motivation was, probably, to earn some money as many of them were primarily schoolteachers, the profession that was paid badly in the eighteenth century. See Earl 1989: 68 and passim. The hope of meliorating the financial situation was also one of the reasons of the unprecedented upswing of the "new" grammars published in the second half of the century. Many of them were actually mere compilations or simplified versions of more popular works. According to Fitzmaurice (1998: 326) "The most prolific writers of grammars were schoolteachers, who published practical digests of more authoritatively argued and philosophically based works." See also Navest 2008.

behaviour. The polite language was much more than just an attribute of the socially privileged members of the society, it became the desired standard. The rise in the production of grammars and their inherent normativity were determined by the demand for the textbooks of the codified standard. The language skills, which should have served as a ticket to the higher circles, were reified in a book and, thus, marketable. The publishers realized that the grammars are requested products and actively supported the demand by advertising and commissioning the new works. Two of the most important publications, Lowth's *Short Introduction* and Johnson's *Dictionary* were the publisher's projects. The nature of the demand also caused the separation of the more scientific books of rational grammars from the practical grammars meant for immediate use. It is, therefore, necessary to see the grammars of that era as products written and published to answer the demand of the middle classes and to serve one specific aim – to teach the polite language.

3. Prescriptive or Descriptive? Lowth versus Priestley.

3.1 *The Introduction*

The picture of the grammars from the second half of the eighteenth century is sometimes simplified. In this picture, prescriptivism and descriptivism are presented as two irreconcilable approaches and the supremacy of the former in the period under discussion is always acknowledged. In this frame, Robert Lowth, as the most representative of the prescriptivists, and Joseph Priestley, as a sole delegate of the descriptive approach, are compared. (See, for instance, Baugh and Cable 258-269) There is often an open scorn towards prescriptivism and a favourable stance towards the descriptive approach.

The polarity is so strong that Lowth is sometimes portrayed as a diabolical figure: “However, there were other eighteenth-century purists whose influence may have equalled that of Johnson, but whose statements and strictures were related not to usage, but to their own

assumptions and prejudices. The most notable of these was Robert Lowth, Bishop of London[,]" (Aitchison 1991: 10) and Priestley as a hero of modern science: "Thus Priestley stands alone in his unwavering loyalty to usage." (Baugh and Cable 2002: 268)

Hodson suggests that the reason for the prescriptive/descriptive model lies in the historical stereotypes: "it provides an attractive version of history for modern linguistics, but also, as Sugg suggests, because it fits tidily with another remarkably resilient historical myth: that of the conservative 18th century, which was revolutionised only by arrival of the politically radical Romantic movement." (Hodson 2006: 62)

Whatever be the reason for that view, we can distinguish three conclusions it leads to⁴⁴:

- (1) There is a strict distinction between prescriptive and descriptive grammars.
- (2) The descriptive ones are more scientific, because the so-called prescriptive grammars imposed a norm that is not founded on the general usage, but on the usage of the individual grammarians or on their ready-made preconceptions of the usage of the upper classes. Generally, the prescriptive grammars does not show any evidence of research.
- (3) Lowth is the classical example of prescriptivism, Priestley of the descriptive approach.

In this chapter I shall use the socio-historical context explored in the previous chapter to prove that the strict distinction has no basis in the grammars themselves, because even those considered prescriptive were based on investigating the usage and not only that of the upper classes. Then I shall concentrate on Lowth and Priestley and find in their work both the prescriptive and descriptive approaches. Besides, I shall show that the Priestley was more similar to his contemporaries than it is usually suggested.

⁴⁴ There are undoubtedly more, but for the sake of the present paper, these three will suffice.

3.2 Fixing the Norm

It is an undeniable fact that the grammarians of the second half of the eighteenth century attempted to establish a language norm, so, in this respect, the conclusion no. 2 is valid. However, it would be a mistake to dismiss the whole prescriptive tradition on these grounds only. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the grammars concerned with the norm began to emerge during the era of the “pursuit of politeness,”⁴⁵ a historical process changing the whole shape of the society, and the normative nature of the works, which took their part in the process, was due to the extralinguistic influences. This norm was, therefore, by no means an unfounded concept. The grammars served as “passports to politeness” (Percy 2008:130) and their readers expected to find in them a successfully codified norm.

However, for such a text to fulfil its practical goal and, therefore, to be successful on the market, it was necessary to have the norm based on the supposed actual usage of the upper classes; otherwise it would be useless. Because of this practical aim of the grammars, we can, therefore, expect that the grammarians, at least the ones whose grammars were popular in their times, carefully observed the language and made their decisions about the value of the linguistic features on a basis of the gathered data. This is well summarized in Rodriguez-Gil:

Prescriptive grammar is strongly determined by the need to find external symbols that easily identify and differentiate social classes [...] But in order to determine what language usage is right or wrong, grammarians need to observe and describe the language use of the elite or educated people. [...] Therefore, in prescriptive grammars we find language observation and description, although this language description is undoubtedly socially marked. (2003: 190)⁴⁶

⁴⁵ The co-occurrence of the two processes can be perceived also by the observation of the changes of the treatment of individual linguistic problems in the course of time. Thus Bax (2008: 287):

The rules set by eighteenth-century grammarians for the comparison of adjectives and adverbs changed over time. While at first no formal rules and principles were distinguished that would guide the user into making a choice between either variant, with the increase of grammatical production in the course of the century [which was caused by the bigger demand for the norm of the polite language], greater attention was paid to formal characteristics of adjectival and adverbial comparison that would help to determine what forms to use.

⁴⁶ Even more radical comments on the nature of the grammars are not difficult to find among the scholars. For instance, Del Lungo Camiciotti argues that the grammar books were, in fact, descriptive: “[T]he underlying

Rodríguez-Gil's corpus-based analysis of the work of Ann Fisher, the first English female grammarian, whose *New Grammar* was among the three most popular grammars of the time, shows many instances of a descriptive background of the proposed rules. Auer and González-Díaz came to the same conclusion after a corpus research of the inflectional subjunctive. “In the eighteenth century, an immediate effect as revealed by the data would suggest that grammarians described language usage at the time.” (Auer and González-Díaz 2005: 323) I shall show below that we can find descriptive features even in the most popular grammar of those times, Lowth's *Short Introduction*.

3.3 Lowth

Lowth, being the icon of prescriptivism (Tieken 2006: 541) is often presented as an example of a grammarian whose norm was based only on his personal taste. Thus Aitchison :

there were other eighteenth-century purists whose influence may have equalled that of Johnson, but whose statements and strictures were related not to usage, but to their own assumptions and prejudices. The most notable of these was Robert Lowth, Bishop of London. (1991: 10)

See also Cole: “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.” (2003: 135) As an argument for Lowth total ignorance of the usage of others, sometimes even a quotation from the *preface* to his grammar is added, where Lowth reproves the best authors for their

scope of most grammarians of the second half of the [eighteenth] century is neither puristic nor prescriptive, but merely descriptive. [...] [The grammarians] were not concerned with a standard of correctness conceived as an authoritative pattern of good style drawn from the classics, but with a norm of linguistic behaviour based on the usage of actual speakers” (Del Lungo Camiciotti 1988: 101; quoted in Rodríguez-Gil 2003: 190)

grammatical solecisms.⁴⁷ However, Tieken (2006) finds, by examining Lowth's personal correspondence, that, in the more familiar style of the letters to his friends and family, Lowth uses many of the forms proscribed by him in his grammar,⁴⁸ i.e. that his own usage does not agree with his norm. It is important to realize that Lowth was not a member of the upper classes, he was also one of the social climbers from middle classes. (And a very successful one.) However, in the letters sent to the members of the higher classes, the style is perfectly correct and he carefully follows his own rules.⁴⁹ This indicates two things: firstly, Lowth was sensitive to different registers of the language and could distinguish them quite well, secondly, his norm as found in his grammar is based on what he perceived as an upper-class usage, i.e. the prestigious variant of the language and *not* on his own usage. Cohen, for instance, argues that “Lowth is prescriptive only with regard to his insistence on following what he determines to be established (and approved) usage, and he repeatedly acknowledges different customs among existing languages.”⁵⁰ (1999: 84-85; quoted in Rodriguez-Gil 2003: 191) It can be deduced that one of the reasons his grammar experienced such a success was that it precisely mapped the contemporary upper-class usage. On the one hand, it is, therefore, true that he based his norm on his personal *experience* only (and we have to distinguish between a person's experience and a person's usage,) on the other hand, it was the experience of a keen observer of the actual usage and he had, in fact, no other possibility than to rely on his own experience as no corpus of contemporary language existed. In this respect, Priestley can be blamed for the same fault for his comments on usage have their source solely in the personal experience, too.

However, as Tieken points out, Lowth indeed worked with a sort of corpus, though unorganized and “without any very curious or methodical examination,” (Lowth 1794: x) and

⁴⁷ “[o]ur best authors have committed gross mistakes, for want of a due knowledge of English Grammar, or as least a proper attention to the rules of it.” (1794, x)

⁴⁸ It is also indicated by his use of the spelling: “his use of nonstandard forms of spelling correlated with the nature of his relationship with the addressee: the closer the relationship, the more nonstandard spellings were found” (Tieken 2006: 551)

⁴⁹ Rodriguez-Gil, in a different context, seems to be proposing, given the fact that Lowth's grammar was a commissioned work (see the previous chapter), that Lowth could have well held quite different opinions on language and grammar than presented on the pages of his work for it “met its publisher's requirements rather than its author's.” (Rodriguez-Gil 2003: 191) However, I think that this is far-fetched, because, as one can see here, Lowth conscientiously followed the instructions contained in his grammar.

⁵⁰ For a proof of this part of the quotation, see below.

he even was not the first to do so. “He was, moreover, by no means the only or even the first eighteenth-century grammarian who worked with a corpus: there are at least four other grammarians after the year 1760 who did so, too” (Tieken 2006: 545)⁵¹ It was the corpus of – what he saw as – the grammatical mistakes by prominent writers and it can serve as another proof that Lowth paid attention to the actual usage, even though it was the “bad” usage he was concerned with in his corpus.

Moreover, Lowth was not interested in the best usage only, for many and various proofs of Lowth's observations on the general usage can be also extracted from his grammar. For example:

The Preposition is often separated from the Relative which it governs, and joined to the verb at the end of the Sentence [...]. as, ‘Horace is an author, whom I am much delighted with’ [...] This is an Idiom which our language is strongly inclined to; it prevails in common conversation, and suits very well with the familiar style of writing; but the placing of the Preposition before the Relative is more graceful, as well as more perspicuous; and agrees much better with the solemn and elevated style.
(Lowth 1794: 136-137)

This excerpt is often cited as a proof that Lowth's grammar went against the common usage. (Aitchison 2004: 11, Andersson and Trudgill 1990: 26) This is, nevertheless, not true, for what Lowth really does is making a difference between several registers and recommending one variant to be suitable for more “elevated style.” This passage can be viewed as a fair observation of the actual usage rather than a prescription.

The picture of Lowth as an elevated scholar imposing his own rules on the innocent readers is disturbed also by the fact that he surely cooperated with his readers, even on such important questions (or viewed as such now) as was the problem of double negation. The first edition of his grammar was published (by Dodsley, see the second chapter) as a trial version, to test the

⁵¹ For more information about Lowth's corpus see Tieken 1997 “Lowth's Corpus of Prescriptivism.”

readers' demand. Tieken writes that

[The first edition] had been intended as a kind of trial version, that was to be augmented by additions from the reading public, thus getting a more definitive shape (see also below). Lowth evidently received a large number of suggestions for improvement (see the manuscript additions in Alston's facsimile edition of the grammar), and these were all incorporated into the second edition[.] (2006: 540)

One of the improvements he incorporated into his second edition was the famous problem of double negation:

Two Negatives in English destroy one another, or are equivalent to an Affirmative (i) as,

“*Nor* did they *not* perceive the evil plight

In which they were, or the fierce pains *not* feel.”

Milton, P. L. i.335

(Lowth 1794: 132)

This famous paragraph does not appear at all in the first edition of Lowth's grammar.⁵² We see that Lowth based his norm on observations of the actual usage, though he promoted a usage of a certain social group. However, this was expected from him and his grammar, being the product on market, would have hardly been as successful as it was if he had not set the norm and had not based it on the selective usage.

3.5 Priestley

As I have noted above, Priestley is often considered to be the lone hero of the descriptive approach amidst the sea of prescriptive grammars. He is believed not to impose a norm, to make descriptive observations on the general usage and to have no preconceptions towards

⁵² Pullum also remarks that “[i]t should be noted that in the light of this example, his statement is descriptively accurate, for Milton undoubtedly meant that they perceived their plight and felt the pains.” (1974: 71)

the language.

3.5.1 Priestley's Preconceptions About Language

Let us quote here, once more, the second part of Priestley's repudiation of the Academy from the preface to his grammar: "We need make no doubt but that the best forms of speech will, in time, establish themselves by their own superior excellence." (1772: xix) This statement looks suspiciously when viewed from the point of a modern descriptive linguist, for it contains an evaluative statement about superiority of one variant of the language.

In his other book about language, *A Course of Lectures on the Theory of Language and Universal Grammar*, Priestley writes:

The time in which a language arrives at its perfection, it is natural to conjecture, will be when the people that speak it have occasion to make the greatest use of it; which will be when their power and influence abroad, and when arts, sciences and liberty at home are at the greatest height. (Priestley universal grammar: 195)

This passage reveals that Priestley held strong preconceptions about language.⁵³ In fact, his description of the language development is a variant of Watts' *myth of the perfect language*. It also contains in itself the *myth of the undesirability of change* for once we have the perfect state of the language, its change is, from definition, undesirable, and the *myth of the golden*

⁵³ How far was Priestley's theory of language from the theory of modern linguists is excellently shown in the following lengthy quotation from Mugglestone:

While Renaissance debates about the status of English as a language for intellectual expression exemplify, for instance, the increasing consolidation of one variety alone in the functional roles by which a standard may be determined, they also, and more pertinently, reveal advances in accompanying ideologies whereby this one variety of the language comes to be reified as the language in itself, and as exemplifying its 'best' qualities. Joseph Priestley, scientist, theologian, and grammarian, reveals the operation of exactly these ideas in his eighteenth-century conviction that the standard variety emerges not as a result of arbitrary and external circumstance (the prominence of London as capital, the role of the Chancery, William Caxton's decision to set up his printing press outside Westminster) but rather as the consequence of some superior merit and inherent value which is located within this one variety. As he stressed, 'the best forms of speech, the most commodious for use, and the most agreeable to the analogy of the language, will at length establish themselves and become universal, by their superior excellence' (1995: 12)

age, though the advent of such era is viewed in the future. In addition, it strongly reminds one of Swift's theory from his *Proposal*. It is, therefore, obvious, firstly, that Priestley believed in an existence of a superior standard in the language and, secondly, that the language myths supported by the promoters of the English academy lived long to the second half of the eighteenth century and even in the work of the objectors to the idea.

Priestley, therefore, really differs from his contemporaries in the question of the standard. However, this is not because of being unbiased towards language and persuaded that no variation of the language is superior to the others, but because he believed that the best variant would emerge by itself, without the help of the grammarians. As Hodson puts it: “for Priestley there is simply no contradiction between believing that some forms of language are better than others, and believing that such forms will establish themselves by common consent without the adjudications of grammarians.” (2006: 66-67)

3.5.2 Priestley and His Concept of Usage

Before we begin to discuss Priestley's concept of usage, we have to look at the general picture. The meaning of “custom” or “the common custom” in the grammars of the era has to be distinguished from the meaning the words “usage” or “the general usage” have now. For the modern linguist, the usage is a non-discriminative notion of all speakers' language practice. However, if a grammarian in the second half of the eighteenth century mentions the concept, he or she has in mind the usage of the upper-classes, i.e. the *polite language*. Barrell, for instance, argues that “‘common usage’ may appear to be an inherently democratic idea, in practice it gained a distinctly conservative force during the 18th century, becoming equated with the language of ‘the polite’.” (Barrell; quoted in Hodson 2006: 66) Azad, in his doctoral thesis on the notion of usage in the eighteenth century, agrees by identifying usage with “correctness”, another word for describing the polite language:

[G]rammarians never advocated a modern view of authoritative usage only to ignore it and ‘prescribe’ instead. To prescribe correctness was to describe usage [...] the two concepts were inextricably linked in a complex and subtle model of linguistic identity

and progress.” (Azad 1989: 3; quoted in Hodson 2006: 68)⁵⁴

As a demonstration of the view of the common use at that time, I shall present here the opinion of Campbell - and let it be noted here that he is, together with Priestley, considered to have been a descriptive grammarian⁵⁵ which is so illustrative that it deserves to be quoted in length:

In every province there are peculiarities of dialect, which affect not only the pronunciation and accent, but even the inflection and combination of words, whereby this idiom is distinguished from that of the nation, and from that of every other province.... This is one reason, I imagine, why the term *use* on this subject is commonly accompanied with the epithet *general*. In the generality of provincial idioms, there is, it must be acknowledged, a pretty considerable concurrence both of the lower and middle ranks. But still this use is bounded by the province and always ridiculous. But the language properly so called is found in the upper and middle ranks, over the whole British Empire. Thus though in every province they ridicule the idioms of every other province, they all vail to the English idiom and scruple not to acknowledge its superiority over them. (Campbell 1776: I, 353–4; quoted in Crowley 1996:80-81)

Campbell clearly declines to take into account the usage of all of the people and gives preference to the language of “the upper and middle ranks”, i.e. the polite classes. We have seen that the concept of the norm was based on the usage and by usage, it is meant the usage of the upper classes, i.e. the polite language.

Priestley is often praised for basing his grammar on the observations of the common usage

⁵⁴ Because this is an important issue, I will give one more quotation on the same subject, this time from Milroy & Milroy (1991:14-15): “It is likely that eighteenth-century preference for *different from* rested, not on any real superiority in terms of logic, effectiveness, elegance or anything else, but on the observed usage of the ‘best people’ at that time.”

⁵⁵ “Only two eighteenth-century scholars are said to have followed the descriptive model, namely Priestley and Campbell[.]” (R – Gil 2003: 184) Baugh and Cable also conflates Campbell and Priestley, but the latter is valued more: “The difference between Priestley and Campbell is that whereas Campbell expounded the doctrine of usage with admirable clarity and then violated it, Priestley was almost everywhere faithful to his principles. Campbell is frankly inconsistent. [...] Thus Priestley stands alone in his unwavering loyalty to usage.” (2002: 68) As we will see later, Priestley's “unwavering loyalty” is rather dubitable.

and, therefore, being the ancestor of descriptive linguists. However, his concept of “usage” was also quite selective, in which he was no exception from his fellow grammarians. “Priestley’s concept of usage is not that of modern descriptive linguistics but quite consistent with that of his contemporaries.” (Azad 1989: 3; quoted in Hodson 2006: 68) If, therefore, Priestley’s concept of usage was the same as of the other grammarians, he observed the usage of the members of the *polite* part of the society, i.e. he used exactly the same method as Lowth. The presentations of their findings differ, because Lowth adopts the rhetoric of a teacher, which was expected of him by his readers, and Priestley, under the influence of the *myth of the perfect language*, express himself by the words of a mere observer.⁵⁶

Lowth and Priestley are often presented as total opposites, but the previous paragraph advocates the hypothesis that their grammars are similar in some respects. Moreover, if their books were really quite different, one would expect that Priestley would scorn Lowth’s work and dismiss it as a fallacious achievement. However, Priestley’s reaction was surprisingly favourable. He even wrote to his friend about his own grammar that “[i]t has been out of print two or three years, and I shall not consent to its being reprinted. *Lowth’s* is much better[.]” (quoted in Hodson 2008: 177) Not only were in Priestley’s view their grammars comparable, but Lowth’s was actually superior to his own.

In the preface to the first edition of his grammar, Priestley enumerates many errors by the grammarians before him and promises that his grammar is free from them. One of those errors is “if the rules of some do not correspond with the present state of the language, as it is actually spoken and written;” (Priestley 1761: x; quoted in Hodson 2008: 181) With such views, he had to be convinced that Lowth’s grammar actually corresponds to the “language, as it is actually spoken” or he would not praise it.

3.5.3 Priestley’s Norm?

A quotation from the preface of Priestley’s grammar is often given as a proof that his one and

⁵⁶ Thus Millward: “However, the differences between their two works lie more in their attitudes than in the substance of what they say. Where Lowth is horrified by what he sees as error and says so emphatically, Priestley is gentler in his disapproval and tries to use reason rather than condemnation to persuade readers to change their ways.” (2004: 212)

only guide was the usage. “It must be allowed, that the custom of speaking, is the original, and only just standard of any language.” (Priestley 1772: ix) However, on the same page, he continues: “Must not this custom, therefore, be allowed to have some weight, in favour of those forms of speech, to which our best writers and speakers seem evidently prone; forms which are contrary to no *analogy of the language with itself*[.]” (ix, emphasis mine) Now, what is this “analogy of language with itself”? It seems to be an important notion to Priestley, because it reappears in the preface as a decisive tool even in the questions of usage: “But since good authors have adopted different forms of speech, and in a case which admits of no standard but that of *custom*, one authority may be of as much weight as another, the *analogy of language* is the only thing to which we can have recourse to adjust these differences.” (xviii-xix) In his grammar, he sometimes argues against the variant of usage in favour of the *analogy*: “Contrary, as it evidently is, to the analogy of the language, the nominative case is sometimes found after verbs and prepositions. It has even crept into writing. *The chaplain intreated my comrade and I to dress as well as possible. [...] He told my Lord and I.*” (103) In other cases, however, he gives preference to usage, though not without expressing some regret:

The word *means* belongs to the class of words which do not change their termination on account of number; for it is used alike in both numbers. *Lest* this means *should fail*. Hume’s History, vol. 8. p. 65 Some persons, however, use the singular of this word, and would say, *lest* this mean *should fail*, and Dr. Lowth pleads for it; but custom has so formed our ears, that they do not easily admit this form of the word, notwithstanding it is more agreeable to the general analogy of the language. (64)

Priestley’s approach to the usage is a problematic one, even if its selectivity is left out. He seems, after all, to have a rather befuddled notion of a norm of the vernacular (based, perhaps on an idea of some kind of the inner logic of the language), which he calls *the analogy of language* and he is less sympathetic to acknowledge the usage when it clashes with it. If we adopt this view, we should be able to explain the instances in his grammar, where he goes just

against a variant of usage and calls it “faulty.” For example: “Many persons are apt, in conversation, to put the oblique case of the personal pronouns, in the place of *these* and *those*; as *Give me them books*, instead of *those books*. We may, sometimes, find this fault even in writing. *Observe them three there*. Devil upon Crutches.”(91)

Apart from that, he here and there promotes the variants he considers to be more “elegant.” For example “There seems to be a peculiar elegance in a sentence beginning with the conjunctive form of a verb. [...] A double conjunctive, in two corresponding clauses of a sentence, is still more elegant.” In some cases, he even recommends the variant that is less frequent in the usage:

In some cases, however, there seems to be a peculiar elegance in adopting the universal sense of the word, by omitting the article when it might have been used with propriety enough. *If the young man who appeared in Flanders was really son to king Edward, he never would bear arms against him*. Hume's History, vol. 3. p. 383. Perhaps the following sentence is rather more elegant by the omission of the article. *I suspect, that from any height where life can be susported [sic], there may be danger of too quick descent*. Raffenlas, vol. 1. p. 39. *Too quick a descent* is more common. (154)

Such judgements, supposedly based on the aesthetic notion of the polite classes, would be expected more from the outspoken prescriptivists like Lowth, for the tone is quite normative, even though it appears to be said in a softer manner. (“A peculiar elegance”, however it may seem to express a merely subjective aesthetic judgement, would be directly connected to the image of the *polite* manners – all social climbers wished to be elegant.) It is worth noting that the last quotation is very similar to that from Lowth (136-137) above. Now we can clearly see that Priestley is much closer to the “prescriptive” tradition, than it is usually supposed.

3.6 The Conclusion

We have seen that the language myths promoted and spread by the proposers of the English

academy were still living in the work of one of the most exceptional grammarians of the time. We can, therefore, say that even though the project of the academy did not succeed, the myths it created and helped to maintain influenced even the grammar tradition fifty years later the last proposal was written. Even though they was, perhaps, not always exposed.

We have also seen that if we examine the grammars in their socio-historical context, i.e. the pursuit of politeness, we find, as a logical consequence of the preceding processes, that their norm had to be based on usage, but that this usage had to be selective. However, the observations on the general usage appears quite frequently in the prescriptive grammars. Finally, if we apply these findings on the work of Robert Lowth and Joseph Priestley, we discover in their work both prescriptive and descriptive elements and we find the latter to be much less exceptional amongst his contemporaries. Therefore, we may conclude, that the grammars of the time were neither strictly prescriptive, nor purely descriptive, but contained components of both approaches and that the today's distinction is somewhat misleadingly imposed to them.

I shall close this last chapter with a suggestion. Vorlat proposes this classification of the grammars to the three categories:

- (1) Descriptive registration of language without value judgements and including ideally – as a very strong claim – all language varieties.
- (2) Normative grammar, still based on language use, but favouring the language of one or more social or regional groups and more than once written with a pedagogical purpose.
- (3) Prescriptive grammar, not based on usage but on a set of logical (or other) criteria.

(Vorlat 1998: 485-6)

According to this classification and taken into account all that was shown, I suggest that the grammars of the second half of the eighteenth century should be called normative and containing less or more descriptive or prescriptive elements, instead of making a binary

opposition between the prescriptive and the descriptive grammars.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ In this context, I find interesting Chapman's view on the descriptivity/prescriptivity. He agrees with the fact that the prescriptivism, wreathed with the unfavourable properties often attributed to it, indeed emerged in the eighteenth century, but he conflates its emergence with a concept of "received wisdom" (i.e. uncritical acceptance of findings about language as made by prior grammarians) which he finds present in the work of Lindley Murray and, thus, he suggests that it was no before the last decade of the century that the actual prescriptivism took place:

If we need an eighteenth-century icon for prescriptivism, a better choice than Lowth would be Murray, who stands more clearly at the head of the pedagogical and prescriptivist tradition. After all, Lowth was still engaged in language questions of his day; he could be considered an eighteenth-century language expert. Murray, on the other hand, with his pedestrian interest in grammar, not language, makes a more fitting forerunner of today's usage expert. (Chapman 2008: 36)

The Conclusion

The process of the codification of the English language begun when the basis of the ideology of prescriptivism was articulated in the proposals for the English academy, an institution that should “correct, improve and ascertain” the vernacular. During the period when the academy was a distant dream that was rather idly wished for than seriously debated, the ideological basis of the project did not play any substantial role in the proposals. With the growing probability of the success of the effort, however, the project gained a clearer shape and the sophistication of the reasoning increased. Once the task was discussed at length, it became apparent that there was a certain complex of language-related beliefs behind the idea of the academy and that it consisted precisely of the myths which Watts enumerates as typical for the pre-prescriptive era and also of some others like the *myth of the purged language*. It was shown that the *myth of the perfect language* has the longest history, while the *myth of the undesirability of change* was most widely adhered to during the reign of the Queen Anne. Considering the nature of the later codification, it can be, perhaps, argued that these two myths were the most influential of all.

The only myth that could not be traced in the proposals, the *language and nationality myth*, was found to be incompatible with the idea of the academy and, therefore, would not appear in the papers promoting the project. Apart from this myth, however, the proposals were the amalgam of all the components of the language ideology described by Watts as typical for the beginnings of the era of prescriptivism.

Once the heyday of the project ceased, the myths lost their natural vent and cannot be traced in any of the later proposals. However, four of the myths (the *myth of the perfect language*, the *myth of the undesirability of change*, the *myth of the golden age* and even the *language and nationality myth*) can be found in the work of Joseph Priestley, one of the most prominent scholars of the era. It can be deduced that in this phase of the process of the codification, the myths were already so firmly rooted in the minds of the linguists that it was not necessary to emphasize the ideology which they represented. We have seen that the “ideology of prescriptivism”, embodied in the pleas and proposals for the English academy,

was being widely spread in the same time when the socio-historical processes that eventually formed the shape of the codification of the language commenced.

The creation of the new nation on the British isles and the rising prestige of English, which slowly began to replace French and Latin as the language of science and literature, supported the interest in the studies of the vernacular. However, it was the “pursuit of politeness” that influenced the way in which the grammar books were being written and distributed amongst the people. The manners and the way of life of the upper classes were presented to the middle classes by the influential medium of the time, *The Spectator*, as founded on the concept of politeness. Thus, the ambitious and socially mobile members of the middle classes recognized the politeness as a crucial condition of their reaching the higher level. Their goal no longer seemed unattainable after they adopted the conviction that the polite manners, and their inseparable part, the “correct” language, could be taught and learned. This conviction was eagerly supported by the publishers and reviewers of the influential magazines and, soon, the language skills became a product that could be easily marketable in a form of a grammar or a language handbook. As the demand gradually rose, more specialized products appeared – the practical grammars targeted on the education of young boys or women, the rational grammars that were more “scientifically” oriented than the practical ones or the “introductions” to those grammars that were popular enough, though considered too complicated for the beginners.

The notion of politeness changed its meaning during the latter half of the eighteenth century. The effort of the social climbers was wasted as they, for the most part, did not succeed in penetrating the higher society. The polite language began to be conflated with the snobbish manners of those members of the middle classes who were not elevated to the upper classes, but wanted to discriminate themselves from the people they perceived as their social inferiors. The concept of politeness, therefore, contributed to the denser stratification of the society, for it produced a clear notion of the *impolite* behaviour. However, the process of the codification of the language continued. The polite language, as codified in the grammar books, was understood as the standard and the nineteenth century is marked with even greater accumulation of the new grammars and language textbooks, for

the learning of the correct language became a part of the good general education.

We have seen that the grammar books were usually written in order to teach the middle classes the polite language, i.e. the language of the members of the high society. It was, therefore, necessary to present a norm that would have reflected the usage of the upper classes. The grammarians had to describe (and prescribe) what they perceived as the actual usage of the socially privileged so as to make their books successful on the market. However, they observed and described also the general usage, for they needed to distinguish it from the desired norm.

In the light of what we have seen, the approaches of Robert Lowth and Joseph Priestley seem similar – they both described the usage of the upper classes. The former presented it as a norm, the latter, in a somewhat softer manner, as a description of the state of the language, which need not be intentionally and systematically worked upon. We can find both prescriptive and descriptive passages in their works. Lowth appears to have his norm well based on the observations of the upper-class usage and he constantly comments on the general usage, too. Priestley seems to fit to the contemporary trends, because he believed in the superiority of a certain language variation and because the usage he described was selective. I shall conclude that it is, perhaps, more proper to label the grammars of the second half of the eighteenth century as *normative* rather than prescriptive or, in Priestley's case, descriptive, for we have seen that they contain a mixture of the prescriptive and descriptive elements.

I attempted to show that the rise of the prescriptivism in Britain was caused by certain ideological presumptions and certain socio-historical processes and that good knowledge of these causes is necessary for our better understanding of the motivations and the approach of the grammarians and for the more favourable interpretation of the grammar books themselves. If this was at least partly achieved, then this thesis fulfilled its purpose.

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Resumé

Tato práce se zabývá formováním názorů na jazyk v rámci procesu standardizace angličtiny v osmnáctém století. V jejím úvodu jsou stručně nastíněny cíle práce a vymezeny základní pojmy: standardizace, kodifikace, preskripce a norma. Cílem této práce je určit ideologické předpoklady kodifikace a ilustrovat je na návrzích projektu anglické akademie; dále pak popsat sociohistorické procesy, které daly kodifikaci finální podobu, a ukázat, že porozumění těmto procesům je klíčové pro interpretaci takzvaných preskriptivních gramatik.

První kapitola, nazvaná „Anglická akademie“ popisuje teorii jazykových mýtů, které tvoří ideologický předpoklad preskriptivistických postojů, a její aplikaci na jednotlivé návrhy projektu anglické akademie. Návrhy jsou řazeny chronologicky. Zjišťuje se, že během období, kdy byla akademie pouhým snem, který si mnozí toužebně přáli ale málokdo o něm uvažoval vážně, nehrál v návrzích ideologický podklad myšlenky zásadní roli. Společně s tím, jak pravděpodobnost založení akademie rostla, projekt začínal dostávat jasnější obrysy a argumentace byla stále důmyslnější a propracovanější. Jakmile byl onen nápad rozvíjen do šířky a jakmile jeho příznivci dostali příležitost k výřečnosti, začalo být zjevné, že za myšlenkou akademie stojí určitá jazyková ideologie a ta že sestává právě z těch mýtů, které se uvádí jako typické pro období těsně před nástupem preskriptivismu, a ještě z několika dalších. Jediný mýtus, který nebylo možno v návrzích vystopovat je *mýtus o jazyce a národnosti*. Tento byl však shledán nekompatibilním s myšlenkou akademie a tudíž se v žádostech ani objevit nemohl. Pomineme-li však tento mýtus, můžeme říct, že návrhy na akademii byly ztělesněním veškeré jazykové ideologie typické pro nástup éry preskriptivismu.

Dále se ukazuje, že poté, co odezněla doba, kdy měl projekt akademie největší ohlas (tedy po smrti královny Anny roku 1714), se mýty odmlčely a v pozdějších návrzích je již není možné nalézt. Nicméně čtyři mýty (*mýtus o dokonalém jazyce*, *mýtus o nežádoucnosti změny*, *mýtus o zlatém věku* a *mýtus o jazyce a národnosti*) se projevují o padesát let později v díle Josepha Priestleyho, jednoho z nejvýznamnějších lingvistů a té doby. Můžeme se domnívat, že v této fázi procesu kodifikace byly už mýty tak zakořeněné v myslích lingvistů, že v návrzích již

nebylo třeba ideologii, kterou reprezentovaly, zdůrazňovat. Dochází se tedy k závěru, že ačkoli k založení akademie nikdy nedošlo, návrhy tohoto projektu zásadně ovlivňovaly pohled na jazyk ještě dlouho poté, co poslední z nich vyšel tiskem.

Druhá kapitola, nazvaná „Slušnost, společenští horolezci a komodifikace standardu“, pojednává o sociohistorickém pozadí procesu kodifikace. Nejdříve se krátce nastiňuje politická situace a ukazuje se, že několik faktorů přispívalo ke zvyšování zájmu o studium mateřštiny. Těmito faktory byla například silná touha po nově definici národní identity, daná vznikem nového Britského národa spojením Anglie a Skotska v jedno království v roce 1707. Dále také vzrůstající prestiž angličtiny, která pomalu nahrazovala Francouzštinu a Latinu coby jazyky vědy a literatury. Avšak procesem, který kodifikaci jazyka ovlivnil nejvíce, bylo „usilování o slušnost.“

Další část druhé kapitoly objasňuje pojem slušnost (politeness) a způsob, jakým ovlivnil zájem o jazyk mezi střední třídou. „Slušnost“ měla v oné době zcela jiný význam než má dnes. V tehdejší Anglii bylo toto slovo spojováno se způsobem a také s jazykem vyšších společenských vrstev. Mnozí členové rychle rostoucích středních tříd měli neskromné společenské ambice a hledali tudíž metodu, jak proniknout do společnosti lépe situovaných. Nejjednodušším způsobem (a vlastně jediným možným) jak se privilegovaným vrstvám vyrovnat se jevílo osvojit si jejich mravy. V tomto úsilí byly střední třídy podporovány nejvlivnějším médiem tehdejší doby, časopisem *The Spectator* (tedy *Divák* či *Pozorovatel*), Josepha Addisona a Richarda Steela, který sice vycházel poměrně krátkou dobu (v rozmezí let 1711 a 1714), ale poté byl sebrán a v několika svazcích často publikován v průběhu celého osmnáctého století.

Ukazuje se, že ambiciózní členové středních tříd viděli v osvojení si slušnosti jednu ze základních podmínek svého společenského růstu. Poté co pojali přesvědčení, že je možné se slušným způsobem (a „korektnímu“ jazyku jako jejich neodlučitelné součástí) naučit, jejich cíl již nevypadal nedosažitelně. Na příkladech z tehdejšího tisku a sekundární literatury se dovozuje, že toto přesvědčení v lidech udržovali také recenzenti vlivných časopisů a nakladatelé. Jazykové dovednosti (to jest znalost té správné jazykové varianty a schopnost ji používat) se totiž zapsáním do gramatik a jazykových příruček staly komoditou, která byla

jednoduše obchodovatelná a velmi výdělečná.

Jak poptávka po gramatikách rostla, objevovaly se na trhu specializované produkty – praktické gramatiky zaměřené na jednu určitou skupinu zákazníků (například na mladé chlapce či ženy), „racionální“ gramatiky, které obsahovaly hlubší filosofická zamyšlení nad podstatou jazyka, či různé „úvody“ do těch gramatik, které získaly velkou popularitu, ale pro začátečníka byly příliš složité. (K nejznámější a nejúspěšnější gramatice té doby, kterou bylo *Krátké uvedení do anglické gramatiky s kritickými poznámkami*⁵⁸ Roberta Lowtha, byly napsány čtyři „úvody.“ Jeden z nich, *Grammatická ustanovení*⁵⁹ Johna Ashe, se sám stal jedním z nejpublikovanějších děl o jazyce v osmnáctém století.)

Dále se ukazuje, že pojem „slušnosti“ změnil během druhé půle století svůj význam a začal být spojován se snobskými způsoby těch členů středních tříd, kteří se chtěli vydělit ze společnosti lidí, jež považovali za společensky níže postavené. Proces kodifikace se nicméně nezastavil. „Slušný jazyk“ začal být naopak považován za standard a devatenácté století zažilo ještě větší rozmach nových gramatik a jazkových učebnic, jelikož učení se správnému jazyku začalo být součástí dobrého obecného vzdělání.

Nakonec se vyvozuje, že gramatiky druhé poloviny osmnáctého století byly z velké části psány proto, aby umožnili středním třídám naučit se „slušný jazyk“, tedy jazyk členů vyšší společnosti a že jejich podoba byla tedy v mnohém odvislá od požadavků jejich čtenářů a nakladatelů.

Třetí kapitola nese název „Preskriptivní či deskriptivní? Lowth versus Priestley.“ Pokouší se za využití poznatků z druhé kapitoly vyvrátit některé nepodloženosti, které se tu a tam objevují v sekundární literatuře a rozhodnout na příkladu prací Roberta Lowtha a Josepha Priestleyho, zda je platné nazývat gramatiky daného období preskriptivními.

Kapitola začíná rozbořem normy přítomné v těchto gramatikách. Motivace stanovení této normy je zřetelná z předchozí kapitoly. Je dovozováno, že norma, kterou gramatikové zprostředkovávali středním třídám, nebyla založená, jak se někdy uvádí, na domněnkách a předsudcích jednotlivých gramatiků, ale na tom, co považovali za skutečný úzus vyšších tříd.

⁵⁸ *A Short Introduction to English Grammar*

⁵⁹ *Grammatical Institutes*

Gramatikové popisovali (a předepisovali) úzus sociálně privilegovaných vrstev, aby zajistili svým knihám prodejnost. Bylo však také nutné pozorovat a popisovat obecný úzus, aby mohl být odlišen od vyžadované normy.

Následuje rozbor několika aspektů prací Lowtha a Priestleyho, jejichž přístup ke zkoumání jazyka je často dáván do kontrastu. Lowth bývá prezentován jako učebnicový příklad dnes již zastaralého preskriptivního přístupu, kdežto Priestley bývá oslavován jakožto předchůdce moderního deskriptivismu. Z rozboru však vyplývá, že jejich přístup je v mnohém podobný. Lowth i Priestley popisovali úzus „slušné“ vrstvy společnosti. To, co Lowth prezentoval jako normu, Priestley uváděl jako popis aktuálního stavu jazyka. V gramatikách obou autorů se dají nalézt preskriptivní i deskriptivní pasáže a je proto poněkud nevhodné nazývat je čistě preskriptivními anebo deskriptivními. V závěru třetí kapitoly je tudíž navrženo souhrnně označit gramatiky druhé poloviny osmnáctého století jako „normativní“ a obsahující více či méně deskriptivních či preskriptivních prvků.

Následuje Závěr práce ve kterém se shrnují poznatky, ke kterým se v průběhu práce došlo.