

Judging French.
Lay and expert language commentary in nineteenth- and twenty-first-
century France

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Abstract

This thesis presents a comparative study of French language commentary from two time periods, the late nineteenth and the early twenty-first centuries, and from two perspectives, expert and lay. It analyses four sources of language commentary to undertake two main comparisons. The first is a diachronic comparison of two language advice services: *Le Courrier de Vaugelas* (1868-1881) and the *Courrier des internautes* (2011-present, part of the *Dire, Ne pas dire* section of the *Académie française*'s website). Both sources publish readers' questions about language and a response from an expert, allowing for the analysis of commentary from an expert and lay perspective. Expert language commentary has been well studied, in the form of usage guides, *remarques*, *chroniques de langage* and dictionary prefaces, for instance, but these sources are primarily monologic. Analysis of the two dialogic Q+A sources provides insight into both lay and expert commentary and the interaction between them.

The second comparison, a synchronic comparison, analyses the blog posts and user comments from two websites on the topic of language and correctness: *Langue sauce piquante* (2004-present) and *Bescherelle ta mère* (2014-present). *Langue sauce piquante* contains both expert and lay commentary. *Bescherelle ta mère*, on the other hand, is an exclusively lay space and its audience comprises not language enthusiasts (as is the case with the other three sources) but 'ordinary' people, due to both the type of content featured and its accessibility via Facebook.

Language commentary from the nineteenth and the twenty-first century has received less scholarly attention than, for instance, the seventeenth century which marked the beginning of the *remarqueur* tradition, and the twentieth century, the period in which language columns were at their most popular. However, both the time periods analysed here are times of significant change for the language. In the late nineteenth century, the introduction of free compulsory education in the French language began to increase the number of people interested in questions of language. Turning to the twenty-first century, the lay-lay language commentary which we might assume was occurring most frequently in spoken language and was therefore inaccessible to researchers, has become accessible online. This thesis exploits the opportunities presented by the internet to examine lesser-studied lay-lay language commentary.

This thesis combines quantitative and qualitative analysis to examine the areas of the language which, to judge by the four sources studied here, cause French speakers difficulty or simply interest, how linguistic authority is created and negotiated, the recurring tropes in

discussions of correct language, the use of purist and prescriptivist imagery, and, finally, the implicit and explicit language ideologies expressed in lay and expert language commentary. It shows that standard language ideology and prescriptivism run through the nineteenth- and twenty-first-century sources, and argues that they have become a part of popular culture in lay online spaces. Whilst there are some striking similarities across the forms of language commentary from two time periods and two mediums (print to online), analysis also suggests that, in some cases, traditional commentary has taken a more extreme form online.

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Introduction

This thesis presents a comparative study of expert and lay language commentary from the late nineteenth century and the twenty-first century. An extensive body of literature concerning French language commentary already exists. Language commentary of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has been well studied, particularly the expert discourses of the *remarqueurs* (Ayres-Bennett has made significant contributions to this area of study, including Ayres-Bennett 1993; Ayres-Bennett and Sejjido 2011; Ayres-Bennett 2019 to name just three, and Caron's (2004) edited volume traces the genre from the sixteenth to the twentieth century). The language commentary of *chroniqueurs* ('language columnists'), most popular during the twentieth century, has also received scholarly attention (e.g. Bochnakowa 2005; Remysen 2012; Walsh 2016a; Walsh and Cotelli Kureth forthcoming), including the extent to which they are a continuation of the genre which began with the *remarques* (Ayres-Bennett 2015).

This study builds on the broad body of existing work but aims to shed new light on the study of French language commentary both by taking a comparative approach, and by considering two time periods which have so far been less widely studied, the late nineteenth and early twenty-first centuries. These two periods each saw important societal change which affected the linguistic landscape in France. In the late nineteenth century, education was becoming more accessible – indeed, in 1881 the introduction of free, compulsory education in France exposed more citizens than ever before to the standard French language. In the twenty-first century, the increasing role of the internet in everyday life has offered new possibilities for communication on a global scale and has also made interactions accessible for study which were previously inaccessible or hard to access. The present study exploits those new opportunities.

This thesis analyses four sources of language commentary, one from the nineteenth century and three from the twenty-first century. *Le Courier de Vaugelas*¹ (1868-1881) was a twice monthly publication in which readers' language questions were published with a response from the editor, Éman Martin. Directly comparable to it in format, the *Courrier des internautes*² (2011-present) is a section from the *Dire, Ne pas dire* website, itself a section of the *Académie française* website. Users' questions are answered by members of the *Service du*

¹ <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb327508332/date.item> (Accessed: 05/10/2020).

² <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/dire-ne-pas-dire/courrier-des-internautes> (Accessed: 05/10/2020).

Dictionnaire, a group of language professionals affiliated with the *Académie* (but distinct from the *académicien·ne·s*).³ Examining these two sources provides insight into both lay and expert language commentary some 130 years apart. Whilst expert language commentary has been widely studied, the focus has primarily been on monologic sources e.g. grammars, style guides and *remarques*. Dialogic forms of language commentary, including the two question and answer (Q+A) publications examined here, can, however, provide a unique insight into both expert and lay perspectives.

The two remaining sources for this study are posts and accompanying user comments from two twenty-first-century websites: *Langue sauce piquante*⁴ (LSP, 2004-present) and *Bescherelle ta mère*⁵ (BTM, 2014-present). The blog *Langue sauce piquante*, run by two proof-readers from *Le Monde* and hosted on the newspaper's website, primarily discusses language used in the media. *Bescherelle ta mère* is a website, Facebook and Twitter account which shares images of language errors, whether made by 'ordinary' people, by people in the public eye or by institutions and companies. Analysis of the LSP posts and comments gives access both to lay and expert discourses, and lay-lay interactions, a form of language commentary previously rarely analysed (Tarnarutckaia and Ensslin's 2020 study of metalinguistic discourses on Reddit is one recent example).⁶ BTM, on the other hand, is an exclusively 'lay' space with an audience of apparently 'ordinary' people (who may themselves make errors in their comments), rather than lay but still generally well-informed language enthusiasts, as is arguably the case for the three other sources.

The opportunity provided by the comments in these sources for the study of lay language commentary is unparalleled in offline sources. The comments sections represent a relatively untapped 'middle space' of language commentary. They are not the 'top down' views of institutions, experts or the elite, nor are they treated here as part of a language history 'from below' as it is usually understood, i.e. as a source for the language usage of 'ordinary' people through the study of ego documents. Rather, these sources give access to the language commentary of 'ordinary' speakers and to discourses which, we can assume, have taken place for a long time in spoken language (Osthus 2018: 25) but which have been correspondingly difficult to study.

³ *Académicien·ne·s* are the 40 elected members of the *Académie française*.

⁴ <https://www.lemonde.fr/blog/correcteurs/> (Accessed: 05/10/2020).

⁵ <https://bescherelletamere.fr/> (Accessed: 05/10/2020).

⁶ Reddit is a collection of online fora which are organised around specific topics. Users can join discussions and 'upvote' or 'downvote' other users' contributions (similar to 'liking' on Facebook).

This study examines these four sources with a view to both diachronic and synchronic comparison, with a focus on the following research questions:

1. What areas of the language are of particular interest for the French-speaking readers of the four sources? Which areas appear to cause the most difficulty or doubt, and does this change between the two time periods?
2. How is linguistic authority created and negotiated in each source? Who or what are held up by lay and expert commenters as models of good usage?
3. What are the recurring tropes in discussions of correct language? For example, what links are made between using, or failure to use, the standard language and other characteristics of the writer/speaker whose usage is criticised?
4. To what extent do the various forms of lay and expert language commentary use purist or prescriptivist imagery, and does this imagery change over time, or differ between the three twenty-first-century sources?
5. What explicit and implicit language ideologies are present in lay and expert language commentary? To what extent do they differ diachronically, and between the three twenty-first century sources?

Chapter 1 introduces the broad context in which this study tackles these questions, outlining the work upon which this thesis builds and presenting a brief history both of the standard language in France and of the codifying texts which have accompanied it. It also introduces the key concepts of language standardisation and language ideologies, in particular standard language ideology, prescriptivism and purism. The final sections of Chapter 1 consider some of the common tropes and images drawn upon in discussions of correct language in prescriptivist and purist texts, e.g. the ideal of a language ruled by analogy and logic, and the ways in which prescriptivism has been studied and conceptualised.

The comparative element of this study means that it draws on methods and insights both from historical sociolinguistics and computer-mediated communication. Chapter 2 introduces the opportunities and limitations associated with the use of these methodologies. The chapter also introduces the form and content of the four sources for analysis and their place within the broader context of language commentary. The methods of data collection, cleaning and sampling for the four corpora are then presented before the final section discusses the ethical issues involved with using publicly available online data for study.

Very limited external information is available about the readers of each of the four sources analysed, and in the case of the nineteenth-century *Le Courrier de Vaugelas*, this also applies

to information about the publication's editor, Éman Martin. Chapter 3 presents this limited external information and the information provided within each publication/platform by the readers/users and the experts of each source, in order to build a picture of the readerships and experts involved.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present a diachronic comparative analysis of *Le Courrier de Vaugelas* and *Courrier des internautes*, the two Q+A publications. Chapter 4 focuses on the topics of readers' questions to reveal the areas of the language which most interest readers from France and abroad and cause difficulty and doubt. Chapter 5 examines the ways in which the readers and experts of the two sources create and negotiate authority, through drawing on external authorities, e.g. literary figures and reference texts, and the language used to present their questions and responses. Chapter 6 examines the recurring tropes and imagery drawn on by readers and experts in their discussions of language. The final analysis chapter, 6.3, compares samples of blog posts and user comments collected from *Langue sauce piquante* and *Bescherelle ta mère*, websites which both share and discuss (to differing extents) the language errors made by others. Analysis then focuses primarily on users' comments considering, with some parallels to Chapter 6, the recurring tropes and use of figurative language.

We shall see that online forms of lay-expert and lay-lay language commentary show some striking similarities to traditional forms of printed language commentary. For example, similar tropes and imagery used in the nineteenth-century *Le Courrier de Vaugelas* can be traced back to the *remarqueur* tradition and to language commentary in earlier centuries, and are still found in the three online sources, the *Courrier des internautes*, *Langue sauce piquante* and *Bescherelle ta mère*. At the same time, examining twenty-first-century online lay commentary reveals that established tropes and imagery may take on new, often more extreme forms, especially in lay-lay commentary.

Chapter 1 Standardising and discussing the French language in France

As outlined in the Introduction, this thesis analyses lay and expert discussions of the French language in nineteenth- and twenty-first-century language commentary. This chapter puts that analysis in its research and historical context. Section 1.1 presents the model of standardisation which provides a framework for examining the historical context of French standardisation. Section 1.2 briefly outlines the well-studied history of standardisation in France (see Brunot (1966), Rickard (1989), Trudeau (1992), and Ayres-Bennett (1996) for comprehensive studies). Section 1.3 outlines the history of codifying texts and metalinguistic texts, from seventeenth-century *remarqueurs* to more recent examinations of ‘ordinary’ usage, reaching beyond the traditional tendency to focus on the social elite. Section 1.4 considers the role of the *Académie française* in France, whose presence is often taken to ‘prove’ high levels of prescriptivism in France (Estival and Pennycook 2011: 325), and argues that perhaps French prescriptivism is not a ‘special case’, as has been previously suggested.

One focus of this study is the implicit and explicit manifestations of three language ideologies in lay and expert language commentary: standard language ideology; prescriptivism; and purism. These concepts, which overlap, have at times been conflated in literature. In Section 1.5, I therefore define these concepts and attempt to delineate the three ideologies, showing where they overlap and diverge. Section 1.6 considers the features and tropes which have been shown to be typical of language commentary, the study of which is well established in historical linguistics and sociolinguistics. These features include, for instance, the use of metaphor and the trope of desirability of logic in language. Chapters 6 and 6 will show the extent to which these typical tropes and images were present in nineteenth-century expert and lay language commentary and can still be found in twenty-first century discourses on correctness. Finally, in Section 1.7, discussion turns to some of the ways in which prescriptivism, in France and more widely, has been studied. This includes conceptualisations of prescriptivist outputs ‘from above’ and ‘from below’ and an adaptation of McLelland’s (2021) model of prescriptivist texts for the purposes of studying online sources.

1.1 Standard languages and standardisation

Definitions of standard languages have been plentiful (see Davies and Langer 2006: 26-27), yet uncertainty about the exact properties of a standard language endure (Milroy 2012: 575). However, Milroy and Milroy’s (2012: 19) definition of a standard language as a high prestige variety of a language considered to have the characteristics of maximum efficiency and minimum misunderstanding in communication, has remained relatively uncontested

(Kristiansen and Coupland 2011: 18), and is adopted in this thesis. The definition incorporates both linguistic and social characteristics of the language: the linguistic characteristic of structural uniformity, for instance, allows for minimum misunderstanding; and the prestige attributed to the standard by society and/or social groups is a clear social characteristic (Milroy 2012: 575-76). Although the norms of the standard are expected in both written and spoken language, there is greater homogeneity in written language forms than in spoken language (Milroy 2007: 134; Milroy and Milroy 2012: 47), where variation is more widely expected, even if not accepted.

Haugen (1966: 933) first identified a framework to describe how a variety becomes a standard language, otherwise known as standardisation, formed of four processes: '(1) selection of norm, (2) codification of form, (3) elaboration of function, and (4) acceptance by the community'. A later version of the model (1983) reclassified the fourth stage as 'implementation', placing the focus more helpfully on the processes involved in disseminating the standard, rather than on its reception. These are not to be interpreted as four chronological stages, but processes which overlap and interact. Haugen's model has had significant influence in studies of standardisation of a variety of languages, but, as we shall discuss in Section 1.5, the model fails to distinguish between codification and prescription and makes no mention of purism (Ayres-Bennett 2019: 184-85).

Looking more closely at the individual processes, selection involves the selecting of a variety to become the standard. The selected variety is frequently the dialect associated with the social elite in the society (Haugen, 1966: 932), which tends to include influential institutions such as the government and religious powers – important powers in the later dissemination of the standard to the 'people'. An association with the powerful of a society elevates the variety's position (Joseph 1987: 43) and over time, the two become linked, the elite position of one reinforcing the other. The beginnings of a hierarchy are set in place: one variety and its speakers are elevated above all others.

Codification and elaboration are both ongoing linguistic processes. Codification allows the selected variety to achieve its hypothetical final goal of a standardised language variety with (ideally) 'one spelling and one pronunciation for every word, one word for every meaning, and one grammatical framework for all utterances' (Haugen, 1966: 931-33). Deciding upon and laying out the parameters of the language can result in prescriptions and proscriptions (to which I return in Section 1.5.4). The elaboration process ensures that the variety has the vocabulary and structures for use in the maximum number of functions. Finally, acceptance

or implementation is a social process which encompasses dissemination of the variety, including its teaching in universal education, insistence of its use in the media and use of the standard by influential institutions (Haugen 1983: 272). The ideological dimension of standardisation is now widely acknowledged and research into standardisation must consider how ideology is enacted (McLelland 2020: 9). Before we discuss this, I present a brief history of standardisation in France, using Haugen's (1983) model as a framework. Whilst I acknowledge and agree with criticism levied at the model by Ayres-Bennett (2019) (see also Deumert and Vandebussche 2003b), the focus of this study is not on the standardisation process itself and as such Haugen's model is an adequate guide for the narrative.

1.2 A brief history of standardisation in France

Despite some evidence of linguistic norms during the Middle Ages in France (Lodge 1993: 157), the beginning of the selection of the basis for a standard variety has been traced to the late twelfth century (Hornsby 2009: 160). In the thirteenth century, French gradually started to replace Latin in certain functions, such as in law and in government (Lodge 1993: 118-20), and the elaboration of a standard French language began. The growing prestige of the Ile-de-France variety saw the beginning of a challenge to Latin and, to an extent, regional dialects (Oakes 2001: 55). The Villers-Cotterêts edict, which in 1539 established French as the official administrative language for legal proceedings, is often cited as a significant moment in the changing relationship in France between French and Latin, and French and regional languages (see, for instance, Cohen 2003; Judge 2007: 16). Although French was successfully implemented in these limited spheres (Judge 2007: 16), Latin was still highly prestigious and present in French society (Rickard 1989: 85). Lacking the fixity of Latin, French, at this point, was neither rigidly codified nor widespread (Lodge 1991: 99-100).

Slow advances towards a fixed spelling system were made in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Lodge 1993: 164), but it was not until the sixteenth centuries that serious efforts were made to codify the French language (Lodge 1993: 159). Lodge (1993: 159) suggests that the motivations behind codification were three-fold: firstly, to improve the efficiency of communication across the country, although this was not a principal motivation. Secondly, and more pressingly, codification was a means by which French could gain the prestige of Latin. Latin was understood to obey grammatical rules; to gain the same prestige, French had to show it could do the same (Rickard 1989: 85). Thirdly, the production of codifying texts was a way for members of the elite group in society, who would have access to the codified language, to distinguish themselves from the *peuple*, who would not, thus creating a deliberate linguistic hierarchy. Language commentators, including Estienne (1579) and Du

Bellay (2001 [1549]), praised the language in comparisons with Italian and Latin and calls were made, by Du Bellay amongst others, to elaborate the vocabulary to enable the use of the language in more domains (summarised in Rickard 1989: 85-86).

The seventeenth century is considered the 'great period of language codification' in France (Lodge 1991: 101). The aims of increased codifying efforts were still not democratising (Lodge 2016: 203); that is, they did not envisage to create a standard language for all to use, but rather the opposite, solidifying a prestige variety for those in the upper classes (cf. Rutten 2009). By the second half of the seventeenth century, a belief that the French language had reached 'perfection' was prevalent amongst the dominant in French society, as was a desire to 'freeze' the language in that state (Lodge 1991: 104). The inherent clarity of the language, laid out later by Rivarol in his *Discours sur l'universalité de la langue française* (1784), was also widely acknowledged as truth (Lodge 1991: 105). Myths regarding the clarity and superiority of French (see also Section 1.6) have endured over time (Lodge 1991: 105), and, as this thesis will show, are present in nineteenth- and twenty-first-century lay and expert metalinguistic discussions.

The founding of the *Académie française* in 1635 established the importance of the language as a concern of the state (Ayres-Bennett and Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2016: 106) and a prescriptivist and purist approach to the language were made clear from its opening text.⁷ The *Académie* aimed to 'donner des règles certaines à notre langue et à la rendre pure, éloquente et capable de traiter les arts et les sciences' (*Académie française* n.d.).⁸ The preface to the *Académie's* first dictionary (1694) further consolidated a prescriptivist approach and adherence to a hierarchy of varieties by distinguishing between *le bon usage* and the language use of the *peuple*.

The French Revolution of 1789 was accompanied by major shifts in attitudes towards the notion of a standard language, its position in the education system, and the beginnings of wider acceptance of a standard (in the sense of Haugen) (Lodge 1991: 106). The French language was promoted by Revolutionaries as the 'element binding the French people together' (Lodge 2004: 207), and Revolutionary ideals moved towards a democratising standard (cf. Rutten 2009), viewing the language as belonging to the 'people' rather than the elite (Oakes 2001: 59). Use of regional varieties, in turn, came to represent 'hostility to the

⁷ Prescriptivism is discussed and defined in 1.5.4, purism in 1.5.5.

⁸ See Wolf (1983) for a summary of this text and an overview of the *Académie's* role during this period.

Republic, and disloyalty' (Hornsby 2009: 161). As the dissemination of Republican ideals relied on communication, the ideal of one nation speaking one language took hold (Judge 2007: 20).

Nineteenth-century France was a period of huge social change (Aminzade and Hodson 1982: 441). The *Lois Jules Ferry* made primary education system free and compulsory in 1881, meaning that larger numbers than ever before were exposed to the standard language through education. The re-introduction of conscription at the end of the nineteenth century, followed by World War I, brought together citizens from across France who turned to the common variety of standard French, and away from regional dialects, for communication (Judge 2007: 27). Similarly, greater urbanisation (Judge 2007: 27) and the spread of railways (Rickard 1989: 122) were increasingly bringing people from across the country together and solidifying the need for use of a common vernacular. A growing population of standard French speakers was accompanied by an increased awareness of standard and non-standard varieties; language use became an important identity marker and a trait by which to discriminate against others (Saint-Gérand 2009: 10-11).

In twenty-first-century France, almost all citizens receive or have received free, compulsory education in standard French. The standard language is used in all domains and, whilst regional languages are still spoken, there have been very few monolingual speakers of regional varieties since the 1940s (Judge 2007: 27). Centuries of standardisation – French is often considered to be a highly normative language (Lüdi 2012: 205) – have led to a situation in which feelings of linguistic insecurity are widespread (Section 1.5.4, see also Ager 2008) and the standard language continues to be an important identity marker (Paveau and Rosier 2008: 99).

1.3 A brief history of codifying and metalinguistic texts

The long history of standardisation in France has been accompanied by a wealth of metalinguistic and codifying texts. This section examines some of these texts, alongside some discussion of other Francophone and non-Francophone contexts. The history of codification in France, of codifying texts and usage guides, and, more recently, the history of ordinary usage beyond the elite, is well studied. However, much less work has been conducted on metalinguistic discussion online, and less still comparing online language commentary with historical commentary. As this thesis will show, comparison across time and mediums but within the same tradition of language commentary shows that the twenty-first century online forms of language commentary can confidently be considered an extension of the same genre of metalinguistic text which began with the seventeenth-century *remarqueurs*.

As we have seen, the sixteenth century marked a period of increasing codification and elaboration of the French language. Grammars of the language were produced, firstly, for foreign audiences learning French, and subsequently, for a French audience (Rickard 1989: 84), not necessarily for functional need, but to prove that it could be done – to show that French, like Latin, was fixed and rule-governed (Ayres-Bennett 1996: 141). These early French grammars, such as Palsgrave (1972 [1530]) and Dubois (1971 [1531]), sought to fit the French language into the sometimes unsuitable categories of classical grammars for Greek and Latin (Padley 1983: 71), causing aspects present in French but absent in Latin, e.g. articles, to be overlooked (Poplack *et al.* 2015: 16).⁹ The question of what would constitute the norm would follow in the seventeenth century (Ayres-Bennett 1993: 36).

The use of French in an increasing number of domains, including some scientific disciplines (Ayres-Bennett 1996: 140) created the need for lexical expansion (elaboration, in Haugen's terms). The earliest dictionaries in France were bilingual, usually intended for translation work (Kibbee 1996). Robert Estienne's *Dictionnaire françois* (1549) is perhaps the earliest dictionary in a recognisable form (Lodge 1993: 161). Intended for Latin scholars, it was a useful resource for French speakers in the absence of a monolingual French dictionary (Marello 2003: 331). The monolingual dictionary arrived in 1606 in the form of Nicot's *Trésor de la langue française* and was followed by an upturn in dictionary production (Lodge 1993: 161).

Increased efforts to codify the language in the seventeenth century were accompanied by an increase in the range and number of metalinguistic and normative publications. They include: remarks and observations on French (e.g. Vaugelas 1647; Bouhours 1674); grammars (e.g. Maupas 1618; Oudin 1640); monolingual dictionaries (e.g. Richelet 1680; *Académie française* 1694); and usage guides (e.g. Lartigaut 1669; Hindret 1687) (as summarised by Ayres-Bennett (2014: 176-82)). Relatively few grammars were published during the seventeenth century (Ayres-Bennett 2014: 180); significant, however, is the Port-Royal grammar by Arnauld and Lancelot (1968 [1660]) – a formal grammar based on reason and logic – which foreshadowed much of the grammatical theory which would follow in the eighteenth century (Rickard 1989: 103-04). The Port-Royalists viewed irregularities in the language as imperfections (Rickard 1981) and believed that language should be based in logic and reason (Tsiapera 2006: 760).¹⁰ As we will see in Section 1.6, the importance of logic in language has endured in language commentary.

⁹ See Padley (1983) for an overview of early French grammars.

¹⁰ See Padley (1985) for a detailed account of the Port-Royal grammarians and their legacy.

Vaugelas' (1647) *Remarques sur la langue françoise* marked the start of the *remarqueur* genre (Rickard 1992: 40), defined by Ayres-Bennett (2006: 263) as 'volumes of generally short observations or remarks on points of doubtful usage'. The genre represents a move from metalinguistic texts aimed primarily at foreign language learning to perfecting the French of first language French speakers. Ayres-Bennett's study of the *remarqueurs* has yielded useful approaches to texts to address questions including what is said and how in the *remarqueur* genre (Ayres-Bennett and Seijido 2011; Ayres-Bennett 2004, 2006); the use of metaphor (Ayres-Bennett 2009, 2011); and normativity in the genre (Ayres-Bennett 2014, 2016, 2019). A digitised corpus, the *Grand Corpus des grammaires et des remarques sur la langue française (XIVe-XVIIe s.)*, created under the direction of Ayres-Bennett *et al.* (2011) is a significant online resource for the future study of the genre. While revealing of what Vaugelas and his contemporaries believed laypeople were worried about in their language usage, the study of these works provides no direct evidence of lay attitudes towards the language. The two Q+A sources analysed in this thesis are a direct extension of this genre, in that they give language advice, but also allow for the study of lay language commentary and queries.

The audience for prescriptive texts has evolved greatly since the days of Vaugelas and his seventeenth- and eighteenth-century successors, who were writing for a specific and limited stratum of elite French society. In the late eighteenth century, a report by Abbé Grégoire (1794: 3-4) on the use of the French language in France found that six million of the country's 25 million inhabitants spoke no French at all, and a further six million struggled to hold a conversation in French. With fewer still able to read or write the language, the potential audience for Vaugelas' work was proportionally low, yet, within the circles who could access such texts, the genre gained much popularity (Osthus 2016: 334).

The introduction of free and compulsory education in the late nineteenth century increased the potential audience of codifying and metalinguistic texts. Teachers teaching standard French for the first-time sought help in language advice publications such as the *Journal de la langue française*¹¹ (specifically aimed at teachers) (Kibbee 2021) and *Le Courier de Vaugelas* (see 2.2.1), and guidebooks for concerned parents and pupils began to appear (Kibbee 2021). In the study of these texts, particularly through the Q+A format of language advice publications, we can see not only what the experts consider to be important aspects of language and correctness, but also the opinions and worries of the layperson. The Bescherelle brothers, whose works continue to be published today, also began publishing for the first time

¹¹ <https://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb34361126w> (Accessed: 05/10/2020).

during the mid-nineteenth century (for instance, a grammar in 1834; a dictionary in 1842; and a conjugation manual in 1843).¹²

The scope for studying language commentary on an individual, unpublished level has historically been limited. Lay discussions of language were, for a long time, restricted to conversation or to private written genres such as letters, limiting the quantity and diversity of data available for examination. The study of private, previously overlooked texts is becoming more common in historical sociolinguistics, with a growing interest in the research paradigm of language history ‘from below’ (see Elspaß 2007). An examination of a wide variety of different text types, and not just those standardised texts which represent a ‘history from above’, is necessary if we are to achieve a comprehensive history of a language (Elspaß 2012b: 156). As well as highlighting the importance of language histories ‘from below’ (Elspaß 2007; Vandebussche and Elspaß 2007), Elspaß has contributed to the field through studies of German-language private letters (Elspaß 2002, 2012a, 2015) and diaries (Elspaß 2012b). In the Anglophone context, sixteenth to nineteenth century linguistic norms and usage have been widely studied, although Auer (2014: 151-52) considered the nineteenth century to be rather neglected, despite its important role in bridging the usages and attitudes from the eighteenth century to modern-day English. Whilst the analysis of previously disregarded resources is gaining traction in historical sociolinguistic study, the use of such documents to study language attitudes has been less common in all European contexts. Yet the attitudes and usage of those outside of the traditionally studied sphere, i.e. not the educated elite, must be considered if we are to gain a complete picture of the time period in question.

Chroniques de langage first appeared in newspapers in France in the late-nineteenth century (Osthus 2015: 163) and enjoyed a ‘golden age’ of popularity in the mid-twentieth century (Ayres-Bennett 2015: 48). In many ways a continuation of the *remarqueurs* genre (Ayres-Bennett 2015), language columns are usually written by a single author, who discusses specific points of the French language, often in a context of correct/incorrect usages (Remysen 2005: 271). They differ from the *remarques*, collections published as entire books, because they were and are published in newspapers regularly (Remysen 2005: 271) and in many cases, the *chroniqueurs* base their discussions on queries from readers (Osthus 2015: 163). Appearing in both national and local newspapers (Ayres-Bennett 2015: 45), the potential reach of language columns is large, as is, therefore, their potential influence on lay attitudes

¹² The *Bescherelle* name has been adopted by the website *Bescherelle ta mère* (2014-present), analysed in this thesis (see Section 2.2.4).

to language (cf. Bouchard 2002). Their actual reach, however, is unclear; not everyone buying the newspaper will read the columns, but people who would not necessarily seek out language commentary may stumble upon them. From the 1960s onwards, language columns began to move into audio-visual as well as print media, before finding a space online too (Osthus 2015: 164), the same tradition continuing over time and across mediums.

Bochnakowa (2005, 2013) has analysed the types of linguistic features discussed in twentieth-century *chroniques de langage* in the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, giving an insight into the areas of language where the *chroniqueurs* feel it is important to adhere to the standard, as well as the areas they feel are the most ‘mistreated’. Remysen (2011, 2012, 2013) has analysed the normative discourses in Quebecois language columns, an important fixture in Quebecois press, whilst Walsh (2016a) has analysed the linguistic discussions of Quebecois columnists with a focus on their purist tendencies. Although primarily monologic – readers’ questions, even if the basis of the column, are often not published (Osthus 2016: 336) – through the study of these columns we can begin to gauge the areas of the language which trouble or worry French speakers. However, readers’ questions are usually paraphrased, rather than quoted directly or in full, meaning that lay discourses on language and correctness are inaccessible.

In the English-language context, letters to the editor function in similar ways to the Francophone world’s *chroniques de langage*, with readers often writing to the editor with complaints about language. Cameron (2012: vii-ix) suggests that this practice forms a part of a ‘popular culture of language’ in the UK and the US, alongside radio shows, language societies and online spaces, amongst others. As in France, ‘the expression of attitudes towards language correctness has been more thoroughly studied in the context of grammars and dictionaries’ with, up until now, ‘few studies on the expression of language attitudes in letters to the editor’ (Lukač 2016: 321). In Germany, journalists have produced popular books on language use (popular in both senses of the word); Bastian Sick’s four volumes, based on his newspaper columns, are one example (Elspaß and Maitz 2012: 195). Discussions of language use, especially by the German media, are also prominent online and on German TV and radio (see Moschonas and Spitzmüller 2009).

In recent years, the internet has proven itself to be a popular platform for airing comments about language (Paveau and Rosier 2008: 97), leading to a growing scholarly interest in online language commentary (Osthus 2018: 20). For lay language enthusiasts, online language commentary can take a variety of forms, including discussions or declarations on social media,

user comments on blogs and online articles and viral content such as memes¹³ (Queen and Boland 2015: 283; Švelch and Sherman 2018: 2394). Despite the wide variety of platforms for online discussion, a large proportion of lay language commentary happens, and has always happened, in ephemeral speech, meaning that for a long time it was technologically impossible to record this data and that, even now, the amount which can be recorded and studied is only ‘la partie émergée de l’iceberg’ (Osthus 2018: 25).

Expert language commentary is also found online. Websites and blogs which discuss language are numerous: these include websites which give language advice and online equivalents of traditional metalinguistic texts such as dictionaries, grammars and usage guides which were previously only offline. A wider range of resources are made possible by expansion online; the Larousse website,¹⁴ for example, offers monolingual and bilingual dictionaries (to and from French into six other languages), grammar lessons, an encyclopaedia and a discussion forum. Brands of dictionaries and textbooks are also found on Twitter, for example, including Larousse (22.6k followers),¹⁵ Le Robert (104.1k),¹⁶ and Bescherelle (38.3k; they describe themselves as the “‘bible’ de la langue française’),¹⁷ allowing for further dissemination of information and interactions with internet users.

As varied as the forms of metalinguistic text are, so now are the individuals and institutions who are producing them, usually perceived to be language authorities of some kind. Printed and published forms, such as dictionaries and grammars, have been, and still are, the work of language professionals – grammarians, lexicographers, members of the *Académie*. Before mass printing and publishing, producing a published text was costly; authors needed the economic means and/or institutional backing to publish. An author’s ability to publish increased their perceived authority. As Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2010: 17) highlights in her work on eighteenth-century to present-day English usage guides, authors producing such guides tended to share a specific set of qualifications and professional links, such as membership of a professional organisation. This was not a hard and fast rule, however. One member of the canon, Baker, author of *Reflections on the English language* (1770), was ‘barely educated’, although Baker is an exception to the rule (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2010: 17). Language columns have the institutional backing of newspapers which can increase a

¹³ An example meme is found in Figure 4.9.

¹⁴ <https://www.larousse.fr/> (Accessed 27/08/2020).

¹⁵ https://twitter.com/LAROUSSE_FR (Accessed 27/08/2020).

¹⁶ https://twitter.com/LeRobert_com (Accessed 27/08/2020).

¹⁷ <https://twitter.com/BescherelleFR> (Accessed 27/08/2020).

columnist's perceived authority, pertinent for those who publish anonymously or under pseudonyms.

Websites and blogs are sometimes run by language professionals, but also by language enthusiasts whose formal qualifications may be limited to a love for the language. As Osthus (2003) affirms: 'En fait il ne faut ni être linguiste ni académicien pour juger sur le bon usage et les normes. Il suffit de se brancher sur Internet'. This is valid not only on an individual level but can also be true for publications with large audiences, even resulting in increased authority in the offline world. *Bescherelle ta mère*, for instance, conceived of and created by Sylvain Szewczyk at 21 years old, shares language errors made by the general public and public figures. By his own admission, Szewczyk has no formal linguistic qualification,¹⁸ yet has modelled himself online as a 'justicier de l'orthographe'¹⁹ (see Section 3.4). With internet access and a little know-how, creating a platform for language commentary, or simply engaging with such a platform, has never been easier and the potential audience has never been greater.

The history of prescriptive texts in France is long and diverse, but, as we have seen, the resources studied have tended to be monologic texts, such as grammars or *remarqueur* texts. This is a missed opportunity to explore evidence of lay views which have been thus far under studied. The availability of resources has been a methodological obstacle; 'expert' commentary can be studied through the metalinguistic texts which we have just discussed (grammars, dictionary prefaces, usage guides etc.), but lay discourses have been harder to capture and study. The internet now provides fertile ground for the study of lay metalinguistic discussions which, it has been assumed, were taking place regularly in spoken language but which were little documented (Osthus 2018: 25). The four sources analysed in this study – three of which are twenty-first century online sources – all fall into the long tradition of metalinguistic texts in France, but are all more or less dialogic, containing the commentary of both the perceived authority and the more elusive lay audience. Furthermore, whilst research has considered the extent to which *chroniques de langage*, for instance, can be considered an extension of the *remarqueur* genre (Ayres-Bennett 2015; Osthus 2015), this comparison has not yet been extended to consider where online sources of language commentary are placed within the genre.

¹⁸ See the interview with Entrée Libre (December 2017) here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVyWwaBeRQU> (Accessed: 27/08/2020).

¹⁹ See the Twitter 'bio' here: <https://twitter.com/Bescherelle> (Accessed: 27/08/2020).

1.4 France as a special case?

French has been cited as the most highly codified or standardised language in Europe (Haugen 1966: 930), as highly purist (as discussed by Walsh 2014: 423), and subject to high levels of prescriptive force (Lodge 1993: 3; Osthus 2016: 334). Pressure to conform to the standard is high, evident in the education system (Paveau and Rosier 2008: 31) and in broader French culture, where orthographic deviation from the standard is somewhat of a breach of cultural etiquette (Paveau and Rosier 2008: 141). That is not to say that these pressures are exclusively French, but they are often considered as ‘typiquement française’ (Paveau and Rosier 2008: 141).

The view of France as a ‘special case’ of extreme prescriptivism has been pervasive both in mainstream and academic ideas about France and the French language (see Ayres-Bennett and Seijido 2013; Ayres-Bennett and Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2016). The prominence in public life of the *Académie française* is one factor which has fed this interpretation (see Estival and Pennycook 2011). The *Académie française* is, of course, not the only language academy in Europe; Spain’s *Real Academia Española* (‘Royal Spanish Academy’, established in 1713) can also be considered a prescriptive and purist institution (Paffey 2007),²⁰ as can Italy’s *Accademia della Crusca* (‘Academy of the Bran’) (Tosi 2011), which, established in 1583, predates its French counterpart by 52 years. As we have seen, the history of prescriptivism and codifying texts in France is certainly long but it is accompanied by equally long histories for other European languages. Germany, for instance, has a long prescriptive tradition, with its earliest prescriptive orthographies and grammars published in the 1570s (McLelland 2013: 209-10). The tradition of prescriptivism in France is arguably not so very different from that of its European neighbours.

The role of the *Académie française* at an individual and societal level in twenty-first century France has also come into question. For Adamson (2007: 51), the *Académie* ‘is a national icon, a proud symbol of a long tradition, of the love and respect the French have for their language’, but Robitaille (2002: 51) asserts that almost no one in France knows ‘ni ce qu’elle fait, ni à quoi elle sert’ (Estival and Pennycook 2011: 329 express a similar sentiment). Whilst internationally the *Académie française* may be viewed as ‘the prescriptive body par excellence’ (Linn 2013), its status and impact are not as great as many people believe (Ayres-Bennett and Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2016: 106). The *Académie* has not produced a new dictionary since 1935; its ninth edition is still in progress. An online dictionary is accessible to

²⁰ A more detailed discussion of the *Real Academia Española* is found in Paffey (2012: 53-59).

those looking for a more updated version, but the question posed by Ayres-Bennett and Seijido (2013: 13) remains: how many people are checking the *Académie's* resources, either paper or online, with any frequency? Until 1996, decisions made by the *Académie* had no enforceable power, and even now any official power is limited to contributions to the *Commission générale de terminologie et de néologie* (CGTN).²¹ The continued existence of the *Académie française* does, however, suggest a desire in France to maintain a standard French language and the value placed on its protection; the importance of even only symbolic authority cannot be dismissed (Edwards 2012: 15). As will be shown in Section 3.2.2, the *Académie's* online rubric, *Courrier des internautes*, receives questions from internet users across the globe looking for language advice, suggesting that the institution is still perceived as an authority for French-speakers worldwide.

1.5 Defining the terminology

As we have seen, the 'expert' perspective on language has been well documented and examined in France. Lay language attitudes, historically, have been harder to access, but have not only been neglected from study due to this methodological obstacle. It was previously considered that lay discourses were of little to no interest to the linguist given their non-scientific nature (see Niedzielski and Preston 2000: 3-10 for a summary of negative attitudes towards the study of lay language attitudes). The study of lay language attitudes is associated with the discipline of folk linguistics, defined as the analysis of 'beliefs about and attitudes towards language by collecting and examining overt comment about it by nonlinguists' (Niedzielski and Preston 2009: 356). Folk linguistic study, and the study of metalinguistic discussions more generally, can shed light on the role of language in society, how people view language and how these attitudes shape individual's language usage (Thurlow 2006: 670).

Work in folk linguistics (which Niedzielski and Preston (2000: 2) date back to the mid-1960s) has shown that the layperson and the linguist often have very different ideas about how a language works, and how it should work (Stollznow 2018: 16). 'Popular' linguistic works aimed at the layperson, written by linguists and non-linguists alike (Ayres-Bennett and Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2016: 112), have attempted to dispel some of the common misconceptions about languages and to de-mythicise widely-held ideologies about language; for instance, that a word must be in a dictionary to exist (Yaguello 1988: 85-90) or that language should not vary or change (Trudgill 1998: 1-8). However, lay misconceptions about languages and linguistics

²¹ The CGTN is a committee which recommends new lexical items, often to replace anglicisms. Since 1996, the *Académie* has had the final say in decisions made by the committee (Candel 2016: 280).

are still widespread (see Stollznow 2018). In shunning the study of phenomena such as prescriptivism, ‘linguists may have abdicated a useful role as arbiters’ (Edwards 2012: 17).

Research Question 5 concerns the ideologies which underpin expert and lay language commentary, specifically standard language ideology, prescriptivism and purism. The comparative elements of the study (two time periods, the same genre of language advice publication from print to online, and lay and expert perspectives) reveal the extent to which manifestations of these ideologies have changed and remained stable. The three language ideologies (standard language ideology, prescriptivism and purism) influence one another, and clear theoretical and practical distinctions are not always made between each of them. In order to understand these individual ideologies, it is important to firstly explore language ideologies more generally.

1.5.1 Language ideologies

In his overview of language ideology research, Kroskrity (2016: 98-102) refers to ‘three main planks’ in the study of language ideologies:

1. positionality – everyone approaches language from a specific social, economic, political position and this shapes their approach to language;
2. multiplicity – we all hold multiple positions in society based on numerous social factors (gender, education, age etc.) and consequently hold multiple positionalities;
3. awareness – ideologies present on a conscious or unconscious level.

The study of ideology was first developed outside of the linguistic sphere (Cameron 2006: 141). Silverstein (1979: 193) provided one of the first definitions of the concept applied to language: ‘sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalisation or justification of perceived language structure and use’. This definition marked an important turn in how ideologies were viewed in scholarly works, drawing attention to the fact that speakers can be aware of their ideologies – although not always, as we will see.

Irvine (1989: 255) defined language ideologies as ‘the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests’. This definition emphasises a social aspect, introducing the idea that ideologies can be shared across groups of speakers. It also highlights the positionality aspect – the power and politics which underpin ideologies. Woolard and Schieffelin’s (1994: 58) definition of ideologies as ‘interest-laden’ similarly connects beliefs to positionalities. The role of positionality in ideologies can be interpreted neutrally or pejoratively:

‘One can define an ideology in a neutral way by suggesting that it takes a partial or biased view of the social world, in order to make sense of it. In addition, a common, pejorative understanding of an ideology is of a world-view that helps to legitimize and maintain a set of power relations. Nor are these definitions mutually exclusive’ (Armstrong and MacKenzie 2015: 40).

Language ideologies are very rarely ‘about language alone’ (Woolard 1998: 20); they are inextricably connected ‘to group and personal identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology’ (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994: 56). Whether or not speakers are aware of how they draw on ideologies, the cultural and societal context in which ideologies are produced must be analysed to begin to understand them. Institutions such as the education system, administration and the media, for example, play important roles in the reproduction of ideologies (Blommaert 1999: 10), acting as ideological sites, spaces in which ideologies are articulated and shared (Kroskrity 2010: 198-99). Institutional support ‘normalizes’ ideologies, reinforcing their status as common-sense ideas about language (Blommaert 1999: 10-11).

Awareness of ideologies has formed an important point of discussion (Kroskrity 2004: 497), with suggestions that language ideologies work on both a conscious and an unconscious level (Paffey 2012: 16). As outlined above, Silverstein’s (1979) definition assumes ideologies are conscious, they can be articulated and, consequently, studied by analysis of metalinguistic discussions. However, definitions which emphasise a ‘common-sense’ element to ideologies, e.g. Rumsey’s (1990: 346) definition (‘shared bodies of commonsense notions about the nature of language in the world’) suggest that ideologies work on an unconscious level and, consequently, cannot always be reliably articulated by individuals. Armstrong and MacKenzie (2013: 25), following Eagleton’s (1991: 2) suggestion that ‘ideology, like halitosis, is [...] what the other person has’, state that whereas most speakers are not conscious of their own ideologies – speakers view their own outlook as neutral – they can identify the ideologies of others. Ideologies which function on an unconscious level can be difficult to study, or even identify. In practice, we are likely not dealing with a clear-cut distinction between conscious and unconscious ideologies, but rather speakers who show differing levels of awareness (Kroskrity 2016: 101).

This study, which explores the language ideologies expressed explicitly and implicitly in language commentary, makes the following assumptions about Kroskrity’s three main aspects of ideologies:

1. Language ideologies are influenced by the social, political and economic status of individuals or groups (positionality).
2. Language ideologies are multiple, with individuals holding numerous, potentially even contradictory ideologies (possible due to unconscious level of some ideologies) (multiplicity).
3. Language ideologies are beliefs about language and its use which are present on both a conscious and unconscious level (awareness).

1.5.2 Standard language ideology

It has been suggested that standard language ideology is the most pervasive language ideology in Europe (Gal 2009: 14), with many European countries living in what Milroy (2001: 530) has dubbed 'standard language cultures'. According to Vogl (2012: 13), standard language ideology is built around two core aspects: a belief in correctness, i.e. a strong feeling of what is correct/incorrect in a language, and a belief in 'the one best variety'. Lippi-Green (2012: 67), in the context of her work on the English language, defined the ideology as:

'a bias toward an abstracted, idealized, homogenous spoken language which is imposed and maintained by dominant bloc institutions and which names as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class'.

The limitation of standard language ideology to the spoken language is too narrow; an expectation to adhere to normative rules is imposed on both written and spoken language (Paveau and Rosier 2008: 294), arguably even more stringently on written language, which is more readily standardised (Milroy 2007: 134). The written language and the standard language are often conflated and the extent to which each is subjected, or not, to standard language ideology is not always problematised (McLelland 2020: 9). Lippi-Green's definition does not tease out these differences and consequently does not acknowledge the effects of standard language ideology on both spoken and written language. However, the role of institutions in promoting and disseminating the standard language and the sites of ideologies (cf. Kroskrity 2010) are clear.

Standard language ideology is generally viewed by linguists as an unconscious ideology (Milroy 2007: 133). In practice, this means that ideologically-loaded judgements made are not recognised as such by language users, but are believed to have a 'purely linguistic' basis (Milroy 2000: 536). At the same time, Kristiansen and Coupland (2011: 24) discuss 'the well-documented discrepancy' between the overt attitudes expressed in speech communities and

actual usage; members who give overt support to the standard may still use non-standard varieties. In this thesis, standard language ideology is defined as an ideology which conceives that a language exists in a standardised form and which hierarchises varieties, positioning the standard as the ‘best’ or ‘proper’ variety. Standard language ideology applies to both written and spoken language but has been more forcefully and successfully applied to written forms of language.

1.5.3 Codification

As we will see, codification, prescription and prescriptivism are related but different concepts. Codification, briefly introduced in Section 1.1’s discussion of Haugen’s (1966) standardisation model, is an ongoing process by which the rules of a language are laid out, after a selection process has chosen a variety to be standardised. Codification yields texts such as dictionaries and grammars – the ‘keepers’ of these codified rules – which may be more or less prescriptive or descriptive works (Ayres-Bennett 2019: 187). Prescriptions are an outcome of codification although the two terms have often been used interchangeably. As we will see, a prescription is a rule developed through codification, with the implication of carrying authority. It is possible to codify a language in a way that allows for considerable variation, i.e. not prescriptivist.

1.5.4 Prescriptivism and descriptivism

Prescriptivism, like standard language ideology, relies on a belief that there are correct and incorrect ways to use language. Most definitions of prescriptivism agree that it involves making a distinction between how a language ‘should’ or ‘shouldn’t’ be used as illustrated in Langer and Davies’ (2006: 46) definition: ‘Prescriptivists believe it is acceptable to prescribe certain usages and to stigmatise others as incorrect or bad, even when these are commonly used by all sectors of the population’. However, definitions start to deviate beyond this initial point, and prescriptivism and prescription are often being conflated, both with each other and with codification and purism (Ayres-Bennett 2019). Haugen’s (1966) model, for instance, conflates codification and prescription (Ayres-Bennett 2019: 187). Prescriptivism is part of the standardisation process in that it is one way in which the standard is maintained, alongside other mechanisms, such as the spread of literacy and the hierarchisation of varieties (Milroy and Milroy 2012: 22). In what follows, I attempt to delimit prescription and prescriptivism, presenting the latter as both an ideology and an activity.

Here, I restrict the term prescription to the rules of the language themselves; prescriptions are an outcome of codification (as per Haugen’s model). Ameka (2016: 71), however, arguably

conflates prescriptivism with prescription, defining *prescriptivism* as ‘the specification of dos and don’ts in language’. It is prescriptions, and not prescriptivism, which are the ‘dos and don’ts’. Prescription has an ideological basis, as the use of the dichotomy of ‘dos and don’ts’ in Ameka’s definition relies on a belief in a correct form of a language and, consequently, the hierarchisation of usages. Prescriptivism, however, is more than the mere specification of what is correct/incorrect.

Trask (1999: 246) defines prescriptivism as a set of behaviours: ‘The imposition of arbitrary norms upon a language, often in defiance of normal usage’. This definition focuses on the action of prescriptivism and does not allow for an ideological basis. It is also important to note that language users’ knowledge of their language’s codex can be incomplete, leading them to prescribe usages which are contrary to the codified norm. Straaijer (2016: 233) similarly frames prescriptivism as an activity: ‘whenever one person tells another how to do something with language in such-and-such a way, how to say or write something, that is prescriptivism.’ This implies, unintentionally, perhaps, that prescriptivism occurs on an individual level, with no room for institutional prescriptivism, something emphasised by Curzan’s (2014: 17) definition: ‘the conscious and explicit efforts to regulate the language of others that carry institutional authority’. Yet that emphasis too is, I would argue, too narrow; authority in language is not limited to an institutional level.

Trask, Straaijer and Curzan all present prescriptivism as an activity with the aim to enforce a certain usage or variety. Crystal’s (2010: 2) definition more explicitly highlights a hierarchisation of varieties: ‘[Prescriptivism is] the view that one variety of language has an inherently higher value than others, and that this ought to be imposed on the whole speech community’. Crystal presents prescriptivism as an ideology, rather than as a set of behaviours. Milroy and Milroy (2012: 1) agree with Crystal, but (unhelpfully) use the term ‘prescription’ for this ideology: ‘Prescription [in my terms: prescriptivism] depends on an ideology (or set of beliefs) concerning language which requires that in language use, as in other matters, things shall be done in the right way’.

Taking the discussed definitions into consideration, this study conceives of prescriptivism as both an ideology and a set of behaviours. Framing prescriptivism as an ideology is useful because it makes three features of prescriptivism explicit:

1. Prescriptivism may be about more than just language, ideas about correct/incorrect language are ideologically motivated and tied to other ideologies such as nationalism.
2. Prescriptivism, as an ideology, is shared amongst groups of speakers.

3. Prescriptivism can function on an unconscious level, with speakers enforcing an arbitrary norm.

As a behaviour, prescriptivism is the effort to impose 'correct' ways of using the language through the recommending and condemning of certain usages and/or varieties. This can be on an individual level, e.g. correcting a friend's language use, and on an institutional level, for instance through the education system. Prescription, on the other hand, is conceived of as an outcome of the codification process, a codified rule which presents usages as either 'right' or 'wrong'. It is the rule itself, rather than the action of enforcing the rule. This study is interested in manifestations of prescriptivism (both as an ideology and a set of behaviours) in lay and expert language commentary. It does not focus specifically on the prescriptions themselves although these will be relevant at times.

Prescriptivism stigmatises certain language usages (Pillière and Lewis 2018) and can lead to situations of linguistic insecurity, defined by Meyerhoff (2006: 192) as 'Speakers' feeling that the variety they use is somehow inferior, ugly or bad'. It results from the legitimisation of certain usages and the cultural capital (cf. Bourdieu 1982) associated with the standard variety. Prescriptivism creates a heightened sensitivity to one's own language use, particularly amongst speakers of 'low prestige' varieties and dialects (Osthus 2018: 26), and even a feeling that one's own language is not 'real' French (Ager 1999: 9). Over time, this can lead to language shifting, contextual based change from dialect to standard and vice versa, and in extreme cases, to the loss of the dialect or low prestige language (Ager, 1999: 9).²² There are also social consequences for those not using the prestigious standard, including reduced potential for social mobility (Paveau and Rosier 2008: 141) and social discrimination (Milroy and Milroy 2012: 2). Language also often 'stands as a proxy for discrimination' for characteristics which are protected (e.g. religion, race, gender) (Milroy and Milroy 2012: 2).²³

The extent to which prescriptivism is universal in linguistic communities is unclear. Thomas (1991: 13) suggests that prescriptivist behaviours can be found in all standard, or standardising, language societies. For Joseph (1987: 16), where there is variation, value judgements will follow. A 'speech of the people' ideology, particularly regarding spoken language, is dominant in the polynormative situation of Irish, variation is valorised and the

²² For more on the loss of dialects and dialect levelling in France, see Blanchet and Armstrong (2006) and Hornsby (2009).

²³ In November 2020, the *Assemblée nationale* approved a proposed law concerning accent discrimination (*glottophobie*). Information about the proposal available here: https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/dossiers/promotion_france_des_accents (Accessed: 09/03/2021). It remains to be seen if/how this will change language-based discrimination in France.

hierarchisation of varieties rejected (Ó Murchadha 2016: 201-02). However, the absence of a hierarchical or anti-variation ideology on an institutional level, does not preclude that judgements on language use are not made by individuals. The ideological beliefs about what is correct/incorrect, in both language use and as extends to behaviour more generally, are 'entrenched in the folk psyche' (Ó Murchadha 2016: 212).

A distinction has been made, in earlier sociolinguistic research, between prescriptivism, which *prescribes* usage, and descriptivism, which *describes* usage. It is now widely agreed that the distinction is not clear cut (Ayres-Bennett 2016: 104). Texts that are principally prescriptivist may contain descriptivist elements and vice versa (Hodson 2006; Ayres-Bennett and Seijido 2011). It may be, as Joseph (1987: 18) noted some forty years ago, that it is not possible to produce a descriptive text, as to state conditions of what speakers do and do not say is to enter into 'the prescriptive domain'. The process of selecting a set of speakers to describe involves a value judgement, at odds with the scientific process strived for by the descriptive approach. Crucially, an author's intention and a reader's reception of a text may not always align (Joseph 1987: 18). After all, those consulting metalinguistic and codifying texts are not usually doing so to find options of usage, but rather to find one *correct* answer (McLelland 2013: 220).

For Cameron (2012: 8-9), the term 'prescriptivism' has problematic negative connotations and is limited by the prescriptivist/descriptivist binary. Cameron (2012: 8-9) prefers the term 'verbal hygiene' to refer to 'whenever people reflect on language in a critical (in the sense of 'evaluative') way', covering a more comprehensive set of behaviours. However, the term 'hygiene' carries its own potentially negative connotations. Judgements based on 'dirtiness' and 'cleanliness' have moralistic overtones, as is clear in the well-known phrase 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness' (cf. Douglas 2002). More than just judging language as correct/incorrect, there is an added layer of judgement associated with 'cleanliness' and 'hygiene'. What is more, cleanliness/dirtiness are judged on a continuum: something can be spotlessly clean or a bit clean.

Milroy and Milroy's influential work 'Authority in Language' (first edition 1985, fourth edition 2012) introduces the 'complaint tradition' to refer to the promotion of standard language ideology outside of the classroom (2012: 30). Milroy and Milroy suggest that complaints about language use will generally fit into one of two categories. Type 1 complaints 'attack "mis-use" of specific parts of the phonology, grammar, vocabulary of English'. Type 2 complaints, on the other hand, are 'moralistic' and 'recommend clarity in writing and attack what appear to be

abuses of language that may mislead and confuse the public' (2012: 30-31). Both type 1 and 2 complaints can reasonably be subsumed into the framework of prescriptivism, when prescriptivism is conceptualised as both an ideology and an activity. Similarly to Cameron's (2012) 'verbal hygiene', the label of 'complaint tradition' carries negative connotations and in both cases an agenda or at least judgement is already implied. Equally, both Milroy and Milroy (2012) and Cameron (2012) foreground a moralistic dimension to judging language (explicit in Milroy and Milroy's type 2 complaints and more implicit in Cameron's use of 'hygiene'). Consequently, both approaches remind us that prescriptivism is an ideology and that it is not necessarily neutral.

1.5.5 Purism

Purism is an ideology and a set of related practices which seek to control the boundaries of what is or is not part of a language. Thomas's widely cited (1991: 12) definition describes purism broadly, as:

'the manifestation of a desire on the part of the speech community [...] to preserve a language from, or rid it of, putative foreign elements or elements held to be undesirable (including those originating in dialects, sociolects and styles of the same language)'.

This presents a broad scope of potential purist targets: both internal elements ('dialects, sociolects' etc.) and external ('foreign elements'). The scope of purism is wider still for Paveau and Rosier (2008: 23): '[Purisme] veut prémunir la langue originelle contre ses mauvais usages (et usagers)'. Trask (1999: 254) and Brincat (2003: 155) limit the scope of purism to the targeting only of unwanted foreign elements in a language.

Although there is little agreement on the exact scope of purism, all definitions tend to position languages as something that 'can be damaged' (Langer and Nesse 2012: 607). Thomas' definition of purism will be the point of reference for this study, but the targets of purism are extended to include protection of the language against both undesirable usages and users of such forms, as highlighted by Paveau and Rosier's (2008) definition. As will be shown in Chapter 6, lay commentators often criticise those making language errors, rather than the errors themselves.

Whilst both purism and standardisation resist change to the language, the two concepts differ in that a standard language is not a prerequisite for purism. Purism assumes that the 'language is currently pure and, therefore, change to it equals contamination, corruption or decline of some sort' and that the 'language must be protected from this contamination and preserved

in its current state (or, alternatively, if the language has already begun to be corrupted, the corrupted part must be removed)' (Walsh 2016b: 9). This conceptualisation relies on the existence, or possibility, of a 'pure' form of the language to be defended, which may or may not take the form of a standard language – it may simply be free from particular 'polluting' features. Brincat, Boeder, and Stolz (2003: viii), for instance, consider purism in situations with endangered and minor languages.²⁴ However, sustained purism usually relies on, at least, the beginnings of standardisation to have started (Walsh 2016b: 9). Purism also overlaps with prescriptivism, in that it assumes the need to control a language and how it is used but goes further than prescriptivism in its identification of polluting elements and assumption of the need to remove them (Walsh 2016b: 8-9).

²⁴ Brincat (2003) examines Maltese language purism, to give one specific example.

1.5.6 Summary of concepts

Standardisation	The process by which a language becomes standardised, is implemented and maintained as such. Standardisation elevates one variety to a position of prestige, introducing the hierarchisation of varieties. Standardisation has been more widely achieved in written language but is considered to apply to both written and spoken forms.
Standard language	A language variety which has undergone standardisation, which is considered to have minimal variation in form and is to be used in all functions. It is a prestige variety, found atop the linguistic hierarchy.
Codification	A process by which the rules of the language are decided upon and laid out in a fixed form, usually in writing. This is an ongoing process and allows for rules to change over time.
Prescription	An outcome (but not an inevitable outcome) of codification, a prescription is a codified rule of the language presented in terms of correct/incorrect. It differs from codification in that it implies the idea of a recommendation or authority.
Ideologies	
Standard Language Ideology	An ideology which conceives that a language exists in a standardised form and that this form is the 'best' or 'proper' variety. It applies to both written and spoken language but has been more forcefully and successfully applied to written forms of language.
Prescriptivism	An ideology which contains the following: 1. there are 'good' and 'bad' ways of using a language; and 2. prescriptions must be followed. Prescriptivism is also a behaviour involving the insistence on correct language use, the recommending and condemning of usages. Prescriptivism is an opposing ideology to descriptivism (which <i>describes</i> how the language is used by its speakers).
Purism	Purism overlaps with prescriptivism but is not simply a form of prescriptivism. Purism is a belief in the possibility of a 'perfect', 'pure' form of a language, which may have existed in the past, and which must be protected from decline or corruption. Impure forms must be removed from the language. This is not just limited to foreign borrowing into the language, but also to internal variation and change.

Table 1.1 Summary of key terms as used in this study

1.6 An overview of typical tropes in language commentary

Prescriptivist and purist criticism of the language is mostly aimed at words specifically ('language=words') and at the written, rather than spoken, mode ('language=writing') (Hohenhaus 2002: 167-68). Prescriptivists and purists target language usage and attempt to enforce normativity through a variety of techniques based on, for instance, people's understanding of how a language *should* work or by looking back at the origins of a language. This section will explore some of these 'common-sense' assumptions about language found in metalinguistic discussions and the recurring ways in which laypeople and experts use prescriptivism and purism to enforce or proscribe certain usages. The comparative element of this study, nineteenth- and twenty-first-century sources are examined, allows for an analysis of prescriptivist and purist justifications over time in the same geographical context and same genre. Given that online lay language commentary has seldom been studied in this way, this analysis of justifications and metaphor in lay-lay communications on correctness will provide an alternative approach to existing studies.

Purist discourse typically draws upon a number of images to express opinions on language use (Thomas 1991: 19), and scholarly research has investigated the imagery used and its development over time (see, for instance Jones 1999; Ayres-Bennett 2011). In the context of France and the French language, Paveau and Rosier (2008: 57) categorise metalinguistic imagery as follows: aesthetic arguments (*beau/laid*); political arguments (*langue de la liberté*); pseudo-linguistic arguments (*clarté de la langue*); and metaphorical arguments (*langue en bonne santé*). Thomas' (1991: 39) model for purism also includes aesthetics, but employs the term in a broader sense, encompassing values such as 'correctness', 'wholeness' and 'pristineness'. These categories will be loosely used to trace some of the common and long-standing tropes in French language commentary.

Beginning with pseudo-linguistic arguments, one long-standing topos, which dates back to Greek grammar (McLelland 2011: 92), concerns analogy and anomaly. Words formed via analogy are those which can be shown to follow the understood rules of the language, words which show a similar formation to others (following a pattern). Anomaly, on the other hand, as the label suggests, refers to words or structures that behave in a way which seems to differ from the 'expected' way or established patterns, potentially calling into question their legitimacy or 'standardness'. In Greek grammars, analogy was 'equated with linguistic naturalness', whilst anomaly was considered to be a form of irregularity, an 'aberration from the system' (McLelland 2011: 92). Over the (many) years since its first discussion, linguists have discussed the relevance and scope of both concepts (Lahiri 2003: 1). The

neogrammarians, for instance, believed that all apparent inconsistencies could be explained through analogy (Morpurgo Davies 1998: 254), and Ramus (1515-1572) that any inconsistency in a language could be explained away with an analogical approach (Padley 1985: 26).

Related to the concept of analogy, and a second example of a pseudo-linguistic argument, is the ideal of a logical language (Pullum 2004; Hohenhaus 2002); explanations based in logic are preferable. The myth of French as a logical, even the most logical language, has been pervasive in linguistic commentary (Lodge 1993: 4) and is often traced back to Rivarol's (1784) *Discours sur l'universalité de la langue française* (Hiddleston 2004; Tarnarutckaia and Ensslin 2020), which praised the clarity and rationality of the language. Manifestations of this myth are still found in folk language commentary, as demonstrated by, for instance, Tarnarutckaia and Ensslin's (2020) study of metalinguistic discourse on Reddit.

The genius of language ('la génie de la langue') has been a well-known trope in metalinguistic commentary since at least the seventeenth century, but took root in nineteenth-century linguistic discussions, with French perhaps the most frequently associated with this concept (Schlaps 2004: 367-81). The 'genius of language' topos, which can be considered both pseudo-linguistic and metaphorical, often draws on logic as a justificatory basis, encompassing a belief that a certain language variety has properties which are to be considered inherently logical. This could be to do with the formal properties of a language variety, or a 'type' of language (Schlaps, 2004: 372-381). In the twenty-first century, the genius of the language trope is rarely used, but rather draws criticism for its unscientific nature and the 'mysticisme nostalgique' it creates (Siouffi 2015: 70).

The 'Golden Age' topos centres around the belief that the language attained a state of perfection at a stage in the past (Watts 2000; Milroy and Milroy 2012: 40). Any subsequent change to the language is presented as negative, often framed in terms of decline and deterioration (Pullum 2004: 6-7). Related to this trope is a more general belief that 'older=better' in matters of language (Hohenhaus 2002: 155), although this idea can be pervasive more broadly. For instance, perceived declining standards of language are often attributed to modern technologies (Thurlow 2006). Expressions of the 'Golden Age' topos, which can draw on aesthetic, metaphorical and pseudo-linguistic arguments, are also found in the authors and texts used in language commentary as paragons of 'good' usage – 'la langue de Molière', for example, was mentioned in Twitter reactions to the 1990 French spelling reform (Humphries 2016: 14).

The use of metaphor in metalinguistic and grammatical texts has a long history across many language contexts (Ayres-Bennett 2011: 239) and is also found in folk linguistic discourses (Hohenhaus 2002: 172). The metaphors used in language commentary often (but not always) personify the language and rest on notions of a living and/or pure language, for instance through images of healthy/diseased languages (Langer and Nesse 2012: 617) or of the body of language as under attack (Hohenhaus 2002: 170-72). As well as drawing on knowledge and assumptions shared between the author and audience (Cowling 2007: 168-69), the use of such metaphors is highly emotive.

Aesthetic judgements are also frequent in language commentary (Rastall 2008: 103-04). As with discussions of logic, aesthetic judgements can be levelled at the micro-level of usages and at languages as a whole; the French language as a beautiful language is a pervasive myth in France (Catach 1991: 11). Analysis of the expert and lay language discourses in two time periods (nineteenth and twenty-first century) will show that these arguments were and are still being drawn on in language commentary and, consequently, that online forms of linguistic commentary can be viewed as an extension of more traditional forms such as *remarques* and language columns.

1.7 Approaches to the study of prescriptivism

Having examined some of the common tropes of prescriptivist and purist language commentary, this final section explores the ways in which prescriptivism and forms of prescriptivism have been theorised in literature. Whilst references are made throughout to prescriptive 'texts', it should be noted that expressions of prescriptivism manifest in both written and spoken forms. As explored in Section 1.5.4, the distinction between prescriptivist and descriptivist texts is often not clear cut (Ayres-Bennett 2016: 104), with texts containing elements of both ideologies and/or being interpreted as more/less prescriptivist by their audience (Joseph 1987: 18). Ayres-Bennett (2016: 105-06) proposes considerations for scholars when approaching prescriptivist/descriptivist texts, to enable more rigorous analysis.²⁵ These centre on determining, firstly, whether the texts are 'prescriptive in intention/purpose' and/or 'prescriptive in expression'. Secondly, if a text is prescriptive in expression, does this reflect a prescriptive attitude or 'a description of the dominant use'? Finally, is the text 'prescriptive in effect' and if so, if this is a result of the text itself or the way it is being used. This approach allows for greater nuance and places significance on both author intention and audience reception.

²⁵ This is further developed in Ayres-Bennett (2019: 190-99).

Ayres-Bennett and Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2016) differentiate between prescriptivist efforts ‘from above’ and ‘from below’ – as well as ‘top-down’ versus ‘popular’, and ‘official action’ versus ‘private initiatives’. In France, prescriptivism has principally come ‘from above’ but often with limited success, whereas British prescriptivism has tended to come ‘from below’ (Ayres-Bennett and Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2016: 116). Whilst the binary distinctions of ‘from above’ and ‘below’, or ‘private initiatives’ versus ‘official action’, can serve as useful starting points, they are not always easy to apply in practice. For instance, the boundaries of what constitutes ‘official action’ can be unclear. If ‘official action’ refers only to state-sponsored activities and publications, many wide circulation reference texts not published by the state would fall outside of this category and into ‘private initiatives’ alongside, for instance, a blog run by a lay language enthusiast. The reach and authority of these two types of texts can vary greatly. A binary distinction works to a point, but risks losing some nuance.

Straaijer (2016) focusses on the actors in prescriptivism to distinguish between low level prescriptivists, who are close to actual language users and who are highly influential – Straaijer specifies teachers and language bloggers – and those who are further from language users and involved in ‘top down’ language planning activities, such as governments and certain media outlets (Straaijer, 2016: 236). Again, the limits of a binary distinction cannot encompass the many different manifestations of prescriptivism. A teacher, for instance, is likely teaching a prescribed curriculum and likely has more potential prescriptivist influence than a language blogger, whose own influence can vary widely – e.g. some blogs are a layperson’s hobby, others are backed by newspapers. Furthermore, the boundary between a blog (low level prescriptivists for Straaijer) and a media outlet (high level) is not necessarily always clear.

McLelland (2021) moves away from binary conceptions of prescriptivism and conceives of prescriptivist forms in a pyramid model (Figure 1.1) which considers the authority, reach and influence of texts.²⁶ Grammars, at the narrow top of the pyramid have high authority, but low reach and (probably) relatively low influence. The frequency with which people consult a grammar (of their own language) is likely to be low (Davies and Langer 2006: 44). There is little empirical evidence to suggest that such texts have any direct influence on language use (McLelland 2021). Rather than determining usage, prescriptions laid out by grammarians tend

²⁶ This thesis does not tackle the question of influence of prescriptive texts, nor can its analysis shed any light on such questions. This question has, however, been tackled by numerous scholars with varying conclusions (Ayres-Bennett 1993; Auer 2009; McLelland 2011, 2014; Havinga 2018).

to be reflections of what is already, or what is becoming, the norm (Ayres-Bennett 2014; McLelland 2014: 270).

At the next level, dictionaries, advice manuals, language columns and some online fora, are also monologic but probably have greater reach and greater influence. McLelland (2021) suggests that dictionaries are turned to more often than grammars, although the likelihood that either are consulted frequently is small. Davies and Langer (2006: 44) posit that despite many households in Germany having a dictionary and/or usage guide, in their experience, these are not consulted with any great frequency. The influence of such texts primarily lies in their use in the media and in education (Langer 2002: 68). Dialogic genres such as online fora are in the next tier. Finally, at the bottom of the pyramid are the norms found in a community of practice/speech community, which have low authority but wide reach and the potential for high influence. The distinction made between the level of authority of a prescriptive text (including a speech act) and its potential reach eliminates some of the ambiguity highlighted in the 'from above'/'below' model, and seems easily applicable to traditional prescriptive texts such as grammars and passing spoken comments made amongst friends – each representing opposite ends of the triangle structure.

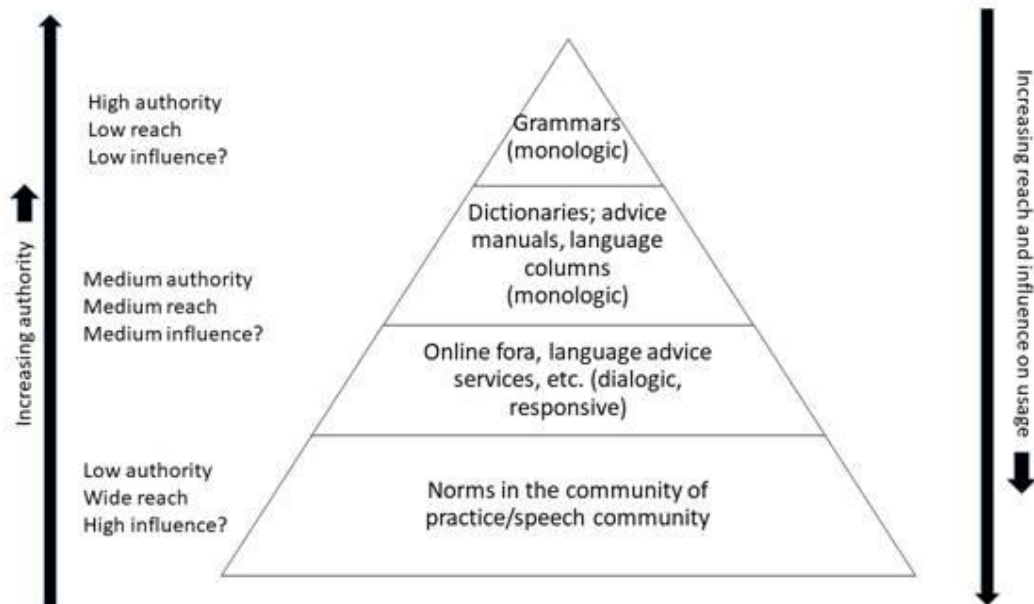


Figure 1.1 McLelland's (2021) model of prescriptive texts

Conversations which previously took place in private settings are now appearing in the public sphere of the internet, blurring the distinction between the public and private, both in terms of accessibility of texts and the topics addressed (Landert and Jucker 2011: 1422-24).²⁷ My analysis of user comments on a public Facebook page (6.3), for instance, found that comments which begin as on-topic can quickly lead to off-topic and personal discussions amongst friends.²⁸ Comments which may previously have been shared between only two individuals or a small group can now reach a public audience. It is easy to leave comments underneath online news articles and blog posts, making voicing a public opinion fast and, in many cases, less subject to editing than, for instance, letters to the editor (Landert and Jucker 2011: 1423). An increase in reach of a resource is likely to increase the potential number of engagements it receives.

Dürscheid and Frehner (2013: 35) noted that email communication, being an ‘unobtrusive’ medium, ‘encourages people who would not send letters otherwise to communicate in writing’ and that approaching others for advice and assistance has become much easier because of emails. This is even more true of social media and public comment sites which are easily accessible through any browser and not just one dedicated application. Not only then is the potential audience of online sources much greater than offline, but the number and type of people engaging with the sources may also be a wider cross-section of society.

In Figure 1.2, I adapt McLelland’s model and create a new online category which parallels printed and offline sources, to reflect the greater potential reach offered by online interactions and texts.²⁹ A new dimension, ‘increased accessibility’ has been added to account for the potentially greater influence on usage and reach online sources may benefit from in comparison to their offline equivalents. Dictionaries, for instance, reach their largest ever audiences online (Tarp 2014: 235) in part, because of the ‘speed and ease’ with which material can be accessed (Dziemianko 2010: 257). The label ‘authority’ has been replaced with ‘perceived authority’ to highlight the subjective assessment of authority. Dashed lines, instead of solid lines, highlight that the pyramid is also a continuum, where boundaries are often unclear and crossover between sections is possible and plausible. An additional factor not captured in the model, but which may be interesting for future study, is proximity of

²⁷ This ‘blurring’ did not start with the internet; ‘electronic media’, such as television and radio, also contributed (Landert and Jucker 2011: 1423).

²⁸ These comments and conversations were removed for ethical reasons explained in Section 2.6.

²⁹ The aspects of influence and reach are unchanged from McLelland’s model. Given the difficulties of accurately measuring the number of people accessing offline and online texts, ‘reach’ is taken in this study to reflect the likely size of the audience.

relationships, especially in online interactions, which is also likely to affect levels of authority, reach and influence.

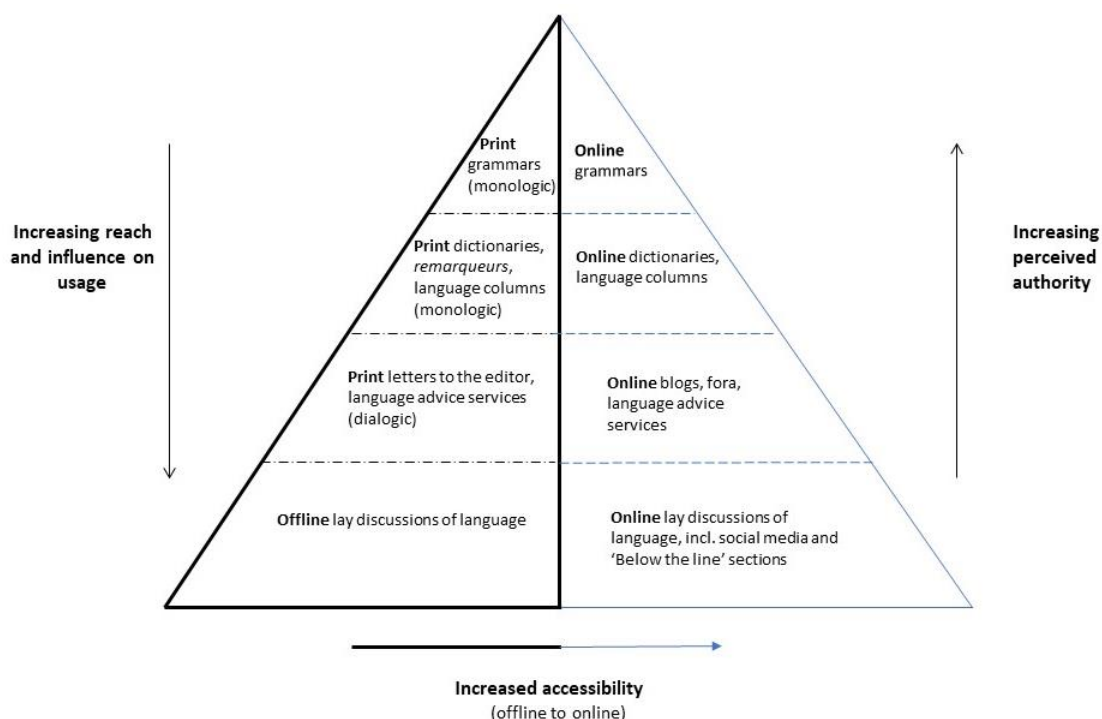


Figure 1.2 Potential model of prescriptive texts (adapted from McLelland (2020a))

The adapted model tackles some issues which arise when considering the diverse range of online prescriptive interactions and behaviours. Tweets, for instance, can vary hugely in their reach; in some cases, they may arguably reach the same size audience as a language column. This depends on who sends the tweet, i.e. someone with very few followers in comparison to a public figure with millions of followers (Emmanuel Macron, for instance, has 5.6 million followers),³⁰ and the popularity of a tweet (if one tweet is ‘retweeted’ extensively, it reaches a much larger audience). Similarly, tweets can be sent by individuals, lay or expert, and institutions, meaning the perceived authority of tweets also varies greatly. The reconceptualisation of McLelland’s pyramid as a continuum goes some way to incorporate the potential differences in reach and authority within the same medium.

1.8 Conclusion

The long history of standardisation and prescriptivism in France has been widely discussed in academic literature, as well as in the media, with French often considered a highly

³⁰ Correct as of 01/09/2020. <https://twitter.com/EmmanuelMacron> (Accessed: 01/09/2020).

standardised language and France as a society with high levels of prescriptivism. However, while we have seen that the periods of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries are well studied (in particular, the works of the *remarqueurs*), metalinguistic texts from the late nineteenth-century have been less widely examined, despite this being a period of great social change. The introduction of compulsory and free education gave access to the standard French language to greater numbers than ever. Even less widely studied are online forms of language commentary of the twenty-first century.

Deumert and Vandebussche (2003a: 461) suggest that the study of primary sources of language commentary could make significant contributions to the study of standardisation and its associated ideologies. Monologic metalinguistic texts written by language authorities, such as grammars, dictionaries and usage guides, have been extensively studied. The study of such texts can shed light on the areas of the language which experts *believe* that their lay audience find difficult or need guidance with, as well as the 'expert' approach to language and correctness. However, dialogic texts, such as question and answer publications, give direct insight into both the expert and lay perspective and how the two interact.

The internet has opened up the potential space for lay language commentary and the format which this can take. The lay discussions of language available on social media websites and in comments sections are a part of a somewhat untapped 'middle space' for study. They are not written by traditional authorities, such as grammarians or lexicographers and so do not form a part of language study 'from above'. Nor can they be considered part of the more recent tradition of language 'from below', which typically looks at the usage of 'ordinary' people through the analysis of ego-documents. Rather, analysis of online lay language commentary provides insight into how laypeople conceive of correct and incorrect language use, and how they react to perceived errors.

Chapter 2 Methodology

This study is a diachronic and synchronic comparative analysis of four sources of language commentary from two time periods: *Le Courrier de Vaugelas* (1868-1881); *Courrier des internautes* (2011-present); *Langue sauce piquante* (2004-present); and *Bescherelle ta mère* (2014-present) (see Table 2.1 for a brief summary of each). Consequently, it draws on methods and theory from both historical sociolinguistics and computer-mediated communication. Section 2.1 explores the opportunities for study and methodological issues involved in the two fields. There is, for instance, a discrepancy between the availability of data from historical periods and the data available online today which affected the choice and selection of sources for analysis. A large number of twenty-first century sources of lay and expert language commentary were available but relatively few comparable nineteenth-century sources. Other sources would have been available for study of the nineteenth century, for instance the prefaces and further contents of usage guides and grammars published at the time – this was, after all, a period which saw a growth in the market for such texts (Henry 2008: 72) – however, these are not readily comparable to online, dialogic sources of language commentary.

The format of *Le Courrier de Vaugelas* makes the source uniquely comparable to the *Courrier des internautes* section of the twenty-first-century *Dire, Ne pas dire* website. Both sources present language questions posed by the public and responses from an ‘expert’, allowing for the analysis of both lay and expert commentary on language and correctness. Throughout this thesis, a distinction is made between ‘lay’ and ‘expert’ discourses. The Oxford English Dictionary defines an ‘expert’ as ‘a person regarded or consulted as an authority on account of special skill, training, or knowledge; a specialist’.³¹ The adjective ‘lay’ is defined in direct opposition to ‘expert’ as ‘non-professional, not expert’.³² Researchers often distinguish between discourses of ‘linguists’ and ‘lay language users’ (e.g. Cameron 2012), differentiating between those who work professionally with the language and those who do not. Davies and Langer (2006: 21) have noted that this distinction is essentially the same as that made in studies of folk linguistics between ‘folk’ and ‘professional’ discourses, where ‘folk’ refers to ‘those who are not trained professionals in the area under investigation’ (Niedzielski and Preston 2003: xviii). I distinguish between ‘lay’ and ‘expert’ here, rather than ‘lay’ and ‘linguist’ as this more accurately reflects the positions held by the authorities of each source. As we shall see in Chapter 3, the audiences of the sources analysed here are varied: they are aimed

³¹ Definition 2a under the entry ‘expert’: <https://www.oed.com/> (Accessed: 09/03/2021).

³² Definition 3b under the entry ‘lay’: <https://www.oed.com/> (Accessed: 09/03/2021).

largely at lay language users but, in some cases, language professionals make up part of the audience. For instance, we shall see that regular readers of *Le Courier de Vaugelas* include Georges Garnier, an etymologist (Section 3.1.2.5). The terms ‘lay’ and ‘expert’ are used in this thesis primarily to distinguish between the two established positions in each source, i.e. those answering the questions in the authoritative position (‘expert’), and those seeking advice or writing in from the ‘lay’ position, even if some in the lay position may have some relevant expert knowledge.

Lay-lay commentary is examined through analysis of user comments on two online forms of language commentary: *Langue sauce piquante* and *Bescherelle ta mère*. As discussed in Section 1.3, expert language commentary has been widely studied, but the lay perspective examined in this thesis is less well studied. The format and content of the four sources analysed in this study are discussed in Section 2.2. Section 2.3 then situates each corpus within the model of prescriptive texts developed in Section 1.7 and, in turn, within the broader tradition and genre. This is followed in Sections 2.4 and 2.5 by a discussion of the collection and sampling processes employed in the study to create manageable offline corpora from the four sources. Finally, in Section 2.6, the methodological and ethical considerations of the study are discussed.

Title	Description
<p><i>Le Courrier de Vaugelas</i> (1868-1881) (<i>Courrier</i>)</p> <p>https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb327508332/date.item</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A twice-monthly publication edited by Éman Martin from 1868-1881, totalling 240 issues. - The bulk of the publication contains readers' philological and grammatical questions and the editor's responses to them. - These questions and answers are analysed in this study.
<p><i>Courrier des internautes</i> (2011-present) (<i>Internautes</i>)</p> <p>http://www.academie-francaise.fr/dire-ne-pas-dire/courrier-des-internautes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Part of the <i>Dire, Ne pas dire</i> section of the <i>Académie française</i> website. - The <i>Courrier des internautes</i> is a sub-section where readers' questions and responses to them are published by the <i>Service du Dictionnaire</i>. - On average, eight questions and answers are published every month. - This study analyses the questions and answers.
<p><i>Langue sauce piquante</i> (2004-present) (LSP)</p> <p>https://www.lemonde.fr/blog/correcteurs/</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A blog run by two proof-readers from <i>Le Monde</i>. - The posts discuss language and correctness, usually inspired by errors found in the press. - Posts are published every few days. - Includes a section for users to make comments and discuss posts. - User comments and posts are analysed.
<p><i>Bescherelle ta mère</i> (2014-present) (BTM)</p> <p>https://www.facebook.com/bescherelletamere/</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A website which publishes the language errors of internet users, public figures and companies. - All content is also published on accompanying Twitter and Facebook pages of the same name. - The Facebook page allows users to comment on and discuss posts. - Posts are published with varying frequency – at most, numerous posts a day, at least, once every few days. - User comments and posts from the BTM Facebook page are analysed.

Table 2.1 Brief summary of the four sources analysed in this study

2.1 Methodological considerations: Past and present

2.1.1 Methodological opportunities and limitations of historical sociolinguistics

In analysing the language attitudes presented in a nineteenth-century language advice publication, this study contributes to the field of historical sociolinguistics, a discipline at the intersection between linguistics, social sciences and history (Bergs 2005: 8-9). Language must be studied within its social context, and this is particularly true when considering historical contexts (McColl Millar 2012: 58), a viewpoint reiterated by Auer *et al.* (2015: 9): 'historical sociolinguistics *par excellence* aims to study language use, as produced by individual language users, embedded in the social context in which these language users operate'. Any analysis of historical sociolinguistics cannot divorce the language from the context in which it was produced.

Russi (2016: 5) argues that historical sociolinguistics 'requires the application of theoretical tenets and methodologies employed by contemporary sociolinguistics'. The Uniformitarian principle, which assumes that '[w]hatever happens today must also have been possible in the past' (Bergs 2012: 80), is often applied to the study of historical sociolinguistics. The principle, which encourages researchers to look for known explanations and causes before turning to the unknown, must be applied with care in the humanities, where, unlike in the natural sciences, such simple correlations are not always plausible (Bergs 2012: 80). In practical terms, this means ensuring that data is interpreted in line with its social and historical context, rather than relying on assumptions based on our understanding of modern society (Bergs 2012: 84).

Hernández Campoy and Schilling (2012: 66) list seven challenges for historical sociolinguistic research: representativeness; empirical validity; invariance; authenticity; authorship; social and historical validity; and standard ideology. Many of these are linked to what Labov (1994: 11) terms the 'bad data problem', which, for historical sociolinguistics, references the fact that documents available for study are available only by chance, not by design, and are limited in number (Cantos 2012: 102), with the amount of documentation available also varying greatly from country to country (Nevalainen 2015: 245). This fact may limit the representativeness of the data (the extent to which it can be generalised to a wider population), although the need for 'genuine statistical representativeness' to draw conclusions from data has been questioned and dismissed in sociolinguistics for some time (Hernández Campoy and Schilling 2012: 65). The key to historical sociolinguistics, according to Labov (1994: 11), is to make the most of these bad data. Janda and Joseph (2003: 220) prefer the term 'imperfect data', as 'bad' carries implications of 'mistaken, faulty, or false' data. While the data available have limitations, they are not unworthy of study.

The lack of contextual data for many historical documents regarding the writer's age, gender and location (Auer *et al.* 2015: 5), for instance, can also affect representativeness. Before compulsory education, literacy was not widespread (Nevalainen 2011: 281). Consequently, historical written documents originate largely from educated, upper class male authors, or their scribes, i.e. the strata of society who were literate at the time (Auer *et al.* 2015: 5). What is more, authorship can be difficult to decipher (Hernández Campoy and Schilling 2012: 68). The data available are also restricted to written sources until the past 100 years or so (Nevalainen 2015: 245). Whilst the limitations of authorship and lack of oral data cannot be avoided completely, the use of ego-documents, such as letters and diaries (see, for instance, Voeste 2018; Hernández Campoy and García-Vidal 2018; van der Wal 2007), as well as courtroom texts (But 2017; Vartiainen 2017) and street songs (Graser and Tlustý 2012), can begin to broaden the social class and background of authors studied. As described in Section 1.3, this creates a 'language history from below' (Auer *et al.* 2015: 7), helping to ensure that, firstly, less formal writing is available for analysis, and secondly, a broader cross-section of society is represented.

Problems of invariance and authenticity arise from the potential lack of variety in document type and style in historical corpora. The language used in written documents tends to be more normative and uniform than speech. Researchers must be careful to avoid overgeneralising any uniformity observed in such data to prevent invalid conclusions being drawn from the language use, both written and spoken, of the time (Hernández Campoy and Schilling 2012: 68). Equally, the authenticity of this normative variety of written language is questionable. Labov (1994: 11) suggests that the language used in historical written documents often does not accurately reflect the language used at the time but is rather a 'normative dialect', 'riddled with the effects of hyper correction, dialect mixture, and scribal error'.

Finally, it has been argued that historical sociolinguistics research can be skewed by the ideologies of the researcher (Hernández Campoy and Schilling 2012: 66); 'typically, popular accounts glorify the past, tying the history of a language to the "glorious" history of the nation and to literary achievements' (Milroy 2012: 571-72). This is true in wider sociolinguistic study, too; as Coupland and Kristiansen (2011: 17) highlight, researchers have often 'down-played' the 'ideological dimension of standard language' in linguistic research. This has led to a primary focus on standard language histories, whilst non-standard varieties have been comparatively under-studied (Hernández Campoy and Schilling 2012: 70). A consequence of this is the drawing of invalid conclusions about the development and use of non-standard

varieties due to overreliance on the histories of the standard language (Hernández Campoy and Schilling 2012: 72).

Working with historical data has clear limitations and presents a number of methodological complications, yet similar theoretical and methodological issues are present in non-historical sociolinguistics and so 'we cannot hold historical sociolinguistics to standards with which sociolinguistics itself cannot comply' (Hernández Campoy and Schilling 2012: 63-4). Furthermore, although representativeness and generalisability were considered fundamentals of sociolinguistic methodologies, researchers now accept that 'true' statistical representativeness and generalisability are difficult, if not impossible, to achieve in most sociolinguistic studies both of current and historical languages (Hernández Campoy and Schilling 2012: 65).

This study uses one historical source: *Le Courrier de Vaugelas* (1868-1881). The 'bad' data problem – the idea that data are available by chance and limited – was a factor for consideration when selecting the source. Firstly, the availability of data for the nineteenth century, in comparison to the twenty-first century, was more limited. This affected the selection process. For instance, all issues of the *Courrier* which were edited by Éman Martin were available in a digitised format; two later publication runs under Edmond Johanet, however, are not available online or publicly in print in the UK. Similarly, contextual data for the historical source has been difficult to come by; it has not been possible, for instance, to locate information about whether the editor published every letter he received or figures about readership, and very little about either editor. Instead, it has been necessary to surmise such information from the data available within the source itself. Whilst questions of authenticity of the language used and invariation should not be discounted entirely in this study, the primary focus of the analysis is not on the language used, but rather the attitudes expressed. For this reason, authenticity and invariation were considered when making assumptions about the readership in Section 3.1.2, but do not affect the validity of any conclusions.

2.1.2 Methodological opportunities and limitations of computer-mediated communication

Alongside the historical sociolinguistic methods needed for the study of a nineteenth-century source, analysis of three online sources necessitates methodologies from computer-mediated communication (CMC) research. The two methodologies present different challenges. Whereas historical data can be limited in number and form, vast amounts of data are available online. The difficulty is in the selection and delimitation of the data. As Herring (2007: 1)

states, 'It is now a truism that computer-mediated communication [...] provides an abundance of data on human behaviour and language use'. For this study, a range of online sources could have been used to investigate lay language commentary including social media websites (such as Facebook and Twitter), blogs and fora. Data collection methods vary widely from historical sociolinguistics, where a researcher must make do with the data which has been made available often by chance, to internet data, where selection, and possibly sampling, processes are necessary to create a manageable corpus of suitable data.³³

Studies can approach the internet for corpus creation in two broad ways: 'web for corpus' or 'web as corpus' (de Schryver 2002). This study uses the 'web for corpus' approach, taking samples of online data and saving it offline to create a corpus which does not update or change over time.³⁴ Whilst the dynamism offered by a 'web as corpus' approach could offer interesting insights into, for instance, how users' edit their comments, this question is not central to the study. The static corpus approach, which yields a corpus which does not constantly change, was considered preferable as it facilitates rigorous, manageable analysis.

The potential effects of the online medium on language use must be taken into consideration in this study, given that three of the four sources are hosted online. This could be particularly significant for analysis of data taken from the *Bescherelle ta mère* Facebook page, since social media are a uniquely 'online' phenomena, and its comparison with *Langue sauce piquante*, a blog dedicated to language and correctness. The two websites vary in their target audiences (as explained more fully in Sections 3.3 and 3.4) and the language use of each audience also varies (see 6.3). Whilst BTM comments frequently contain features associated with CMC language, e.g. the use of emojis and unconventional punctuation (e.g. !!!!!) (cf. Barton and Lee 2013: 5), LSP comments are usually closer to the written offline standard.

CMC is often described as a written form of language which carries some of the characteristics of spoken language (Crystal, 2011: 21), blurring the traditionally established boundaries of written and spoken language. Research conducted into early forms of CMC in the 1990s tended to place great focus on the differing characteristics of synchronous and non-synchronous modes of communication on the internet and has been criticised for

³³ Throughout this thesis, 'corpus' is used to refer to the initial dataset collected and collated into an offline form. 'Sample' is used to refer to any subsection of this data created for analysis.

³⁴ The 'web as corpus' approach, which 'retains the dynamic nature of the data' by analysing data directly from the internet (de Schryver 2002), allows researchers to track how data changes over time (if you can record the changes) but does not have the benefit of a static corpus, i.e. having a corpus which cannot be edited and deleted by external users once collected.

'perpetuating Internet language myths' about both forms (Androutsopoulos 2006: 420). Research has also considered the extent to which the language used online corresponds to standard or non-standard language, with a focus placed on the use of 'Text-speak' features such as emoticons and abbreviations, space-saving techniques which evolved from the restrictive character-limit of initial forms of text messaging (Anis 2007: 94-95). Studies have primarily focused on the English language (Herring 2010: 6) and found little consensus on how CMC differs from the standard, with evidence of contrasting language ideologies which advocate both for diverse and uniform language use (Phyak 2015: 379-80). The number of different voices and perspectives in online language commentary are large and varied (expert vs. lay, authoritative vs. democratic). This study, in its comparison of lay and expert commentary aims to compare two distinct perspectives.

Considerable media and lay commentary has criticised CMC both for its impoverished nature (usually attributed to its lack of physical cues) and for its popularly assumed nefarious influence on the language (Thurlow 2006: 668). Such claims are widely considered 'inherently problematic' in academic spheres, for their oversimplification of the complexities of the numerous technologies involved (Thurlow 2006: 668), yet have had a significant presence in media discourses on CMC. Whilst previous literature on online language use must be taken into account, e.g. typical and medium-specific features of CMC (cf. Anis 2007; Barton and Lee 2013) and code-switching tendencies (see contributions in Danet and Herring 2007) when analysing data from the three online sources, it is not the central interest of this study, which offers a new focus which is not on the language itself, but on what people say about language.

2.2 Content and form

All four sources analysed in this study are forms of language commentary. As we shall see, the nineteenth-century *Le Courier de Vaugelas* and twenty-first-century *Courrier des internautes* are directly comparable sources. Both sources contain questions about language from their lay readership and responses written from an expert perspective. Analysis of these two sources reveals the areas of the French language which cause lay readers doubt and difficulty (Research Question 1), how authority is created and negotiated (Research Question 2), the recurring tropes and imagery used in language commentary (Research Questions 3 and 4), and the extent to which discourses can be considered prescriptivist or purist (Research Question 5).

Although interactions between experts and lay commentators were possible before the internet, as evidenced by dialogic publications such as the *Le Courier de Vaugelas* and letters

to the editor (McManus 2008: 1), the frequency and speed at which these interactions can now take place online sets the online interactions apart. Before the internet, linguistic discussions between laypeople were, it is assumed, taking place primarily in spoken conversations (Osthus 2018: 25), although, given the difficulty of recording such data, scholarly knowledge of what was being said and at what frequency was no more than anecdotal. Online platforms for discussion now allow us to empirically examine the content of such discussions as well as gain insight into the frequency with which they are happening. Social media and comment sections give access to such discussions. *Bescherelle ta mère* and *Langue sauce piquante* are both dedicated to discussions of language and both facilitate lay language commentary in the form of comments. Whilst examples of the same broad genre (online language commentary), the two websites differ significantly in their approaches and intended audiences, thus providing a further point for comparison and contributing to Research Questions 2, 3, 4 and 5.

2.2.1 *Le Courier de Vaugelas*

Le Courier de Vaugelas (Courier) was a fortnightly publication, which ran from 1868-1881 (ten print runs of 24 issues), under the editorship of its founder Éman Martin.³⁵ From 1886-1887, the *Courier* had two additional print runs (20 issues), under the editorship of author Edmond Johanet. Johanet's phase of the *Courier* is not available online, nor in print in the UK. This study looks only at the first, larger run of the publication under the original editor, Martin, all issues of which are available online via the *Bibliothèque nationale de France's* online archive *Gallica*.³⁶ This is due to, firstly, the greater amount of data, and secondly, the availability of data.

The subscription-based *Courier* was distributed in France (for 10 francs per year) and abroad (14 francs per year). The publication's front-page states that it is 'consacré à la propagation universelle de la langue française' (see Figure 2.1), and that it will answer the grammatical and philological questions of its readers in France and abroad. At the end of the nineteenth century, 'interest was growing in [...] the propagation of French outside France' more generally (Adamson 2007: 11), as evidenced, for instance, by the establishment of the *Alliance française* in 1883, an organisation which aims to promote and propagate French globally (*Alliance française* n.d.). The *Courier's* aim thus reflects the broader top-down desires observed in late nineteenth-century France. The use of Vaugelas' name in the publications

³⁵ Martin was taken ill during the final run of the *Courier* and died a few months later in 1882.

³⁶ <https://gallica.bnf.fr> (Accessed: 17/08/2020).

title instantly links the *Courrier* to the *remarqueur* tradition which began with Vaugelas in the seventeenth century (Rickard 1992: 40).

In this study, I examine the question and answer section of the *Courrier*, the largest section of the publication. The interactions in this section give insight into the linguistic worries and queries of readers, as well as the attitudes towards language of both the readers and the editor. In total, over Martin's 240 issues, the *Courrier* printed 1,837 questions and responses, with the number of questions varying between issues from 4 to 16 questions (7.7 questions per issue on average). The total publication length was always eight pages, the only exception being the final issue of each print run which was longer as it contained summaries of all questions from the 24 issues in the run. In addition to the Q+A section, each issue contained a biography of a grammarian e.g. Henri Estienne (over six issues from 01/07/1870 – 15/09/1870; see Figure 2.2 for an extract), a list of new grammatical and literary publications, and a smaller section listing past publications. From the third print run onwards (01/10/1871), the *Courrier* included a 'Passe-temps grammatical' which consisted of phrases containing language errors found in the periodical press that the reader was challenged to find and correct (see Figure 2.3). Martin thus attempted to provide content which was educational and entertaining.

QUESTIONS
GRAMMATICALES

L E

QUESTIONS
PHILOGIQUES

COURRIER DE VAUGELAS

Journal Bi-Mensuel

CONSACRÉ À LA PROPAGATION UNIVERSELLE DE LA LANGUE FRANÇAISE

Paraissant le 4^{er} et le 15 de chaque mois.

PRIX :

Abonnement pour la France. 6 f.
Idem pour l'étranger. 10 f.
Avec, la ligne. 50 c.

Rédacteur : EMAN MARTIN
PROFESSEUR SPÉCIAL POUR LES ÉTRANGERS
26, boulevard des Italiens, Paris.

ON S'ABONNE
En envoyant un mandat sur la poste, soit
au Rédacteur, soit à l'Administrateur M. J.
CUNEAUX, 33, rue de Seine.

SOMMAIRE.

Origine du mot *Paradis* (d'un théâtre) ; — Emploi de *Et* dans les noms de nombre ; — Origine de *Manches amadis* ; — S'il faut *Ne* après l'expression *Avant que* ; — Origine de *Se faire blanc de son épée*. || Signification du verbe *Blaguer* ; — Un enfant élevé à la brochette ; — Quand, après un participe présent, il faut mettre un pronom devant le verbe principal ; — Signification de *Eclairé à giorno*. || Questions à résoudre. || Suite de la biographie de *Robert Estienne*. || Ouvrages de grammaire et de littérature. || Familles parisiennes prenant des pensionnaires étrangers pour les perfectionner dans la conversation.

FRANCE

— 0 —

Première Question.

Pourriez-vous me dire pourquoi on appelle PARADIS les places les plus élevées dans nos théâtres ? Est-ce une appellation ironique pour signifier le peu de confortable qu'y trouvent ceux qui les occupent ?

« Comment a-t-on osé nommer *paradis* ces loges étouffées, véritables nids juchés dans les combles de nos théâtres modernes ? Elles tirent sans doute leur nom de leur hauteur effrayante ; car c'est le véritable enfer du théâtre, où montent toutes les vapeurs, toutes les exhalaisons du parterre, des loges, des baignoires et du lustre... Il faut avouer que nous faisons, nous autres modernes, un singulier abus des mots. »

C'est en ces termes que le *Dictionnaire de la Conversation*, à l'article PARADIS, renseigne son lecteur sur la question que vous me proposez. Mais il se trompe gravement, ainsi qu'il me sera facile de vous le faire voir.

La raison de cette appellation ne se trouve point dans la « hauteur effrayante » de ces loges étouffées ; elle se trouve dans la disposition des théâtres primitifs, sur lesquels on représentait les mystères, théâtres dont voici la description générale prise dans le *Dictionnaire des mœurs et coutumes de la France*, par Chérnel (II, p. 209) :

Le théâtre offrait généralement trois régions principales :

le paradis, la terre et l'enfer, et sur la terre on voyageait sans difficulté d'une région à l'autre.

Le paradis était représenté par l'échafaud le plus élevé et avait la forme d'un trône. Dieu le père y régnait sur une chaise d'or, entouré de la Paix, de la Miséricorde, de la Justice, de la Vérité, et des neuf cœurs d'anges rangés en ordre par étages.

L'enfer occupait la partie inférieure du théâtre et avait la forme d'une gueule de dragon qui s'ouvrait quand les diables voulaient entrer ou sortir.

La terre, placée entre le ciel et l'enfer, se divisait en un grand nombre de compartiments dont des écriteaux indiquaient la destination.

Appeler *paradis*, dans un théâtre moderne, ce qui portait le même nom dans les théâtres du moyen âge, ce n'est donc point faire là « un singulier abus des mots » ; c'est, au contraire, pratiquer une règle généralement observée, celle qui conserve les noms nonobstant les transformations que peuvent subir les objets auxquels ils appartiennent.

L'auteur du même article ajoute : « C'est avec plus de justesse que le peuple donne à cette partie haute de nos théâtres le nom de *poulailler*. »

Telle n'est point encore mon opinion ; car, dans l'hypothèse où l'on ignore l'origine de *paradis*, il me semble plus logique de donner ce nom, qui rappelle le ciel, à la partie supérieure d'un théâtre (les Anglais ne disent-ils pas *the gods*, les dieux ?) que de lui appliquer une dénomination rappelant les prosaïques bipèdes qui peuplent les basses-cours.

X

Deuxième Question.

Auriez-vous la complaisance de me dire quand il faut mettre ou ne pas mettre la conjonction *et* dans les noms de nombre ; car l'emploi de cette conjonction me présente souvent des difficultés.

D'après Burnouf, les Latins avaient trois règles dans cette partie de leur syntaxe.

En comptant de 10 à 20, ils ne mettaient pas de conjonction, s'ils commençaient par les unités :

Figure 2.1 Example of a front page (Courrier; 01/03/1870. p.81)

BIOGRAPHIE DES GRAMMAIRIENS
SECONDE MOITIÉ DU XVI^e SIÈCLE

Henri ESTIENNE (1)

Né à Paris, en 1528, Henri Estienne annonça dès son enfance d'heureuses dispositions pour la littérature. Son père (Robert Estienne, qui a fait l'objet de plusieurs feuillets de ce journal) ne pouvant pas, comme il l'aurait désiré, prendre soin de son éducation, le confia à un professeur pour lui enseigner les éléments de la grammaire. Ce professeur expliquait alors à ses élèves la *Médée* d'Euripide. Henri, ayant entendu déclamer cette pièce par ses camarades, fut si frappé de la douceur et de l'harmonie de la langue grecque, qu'il résolut de l'apprendre.

Figure 2.2 An extract of 'Biographie des Grammairiens' section: first instalment on Henri Estienne (Courrier; 01/07/1870, p.149)

PASSE-TEMPS GRAMMATICAL.

Corrections du numéro précédent.

1° ... ni une somme moindre de *qui que ce soit* (le mot *qui-conque* doit toujours remplir une double fonction); — 2° ... dont les victimes préfèrent garder l'affront *plûtôt* que de (Voir *Courrier de Vaugelas*, 4^e année, p. 153); — 3° ... mais c'est ici précisément *qu'il* ne faut; — 4° ... l'homme descendrait ainsi jusqu'à ce que le pied lui *manquât*; — 5° Ce que nous voulons ne *s'acquiert* pas en un jour; — 6° ... la défense de ces docteurs en ignominie (voir *Courrier de Vaugelas*, 1^{re} année, p. 4, col. 1); — 7° ... et la lèvre *épaisse* du nègre (Le mot *lippu* signifiant qui a les lèvres grosses, l'expression « lèvres lippues » est un pléonastme); — 8° ... avec une voix *nasillarde* (l'adjectif *canarde* ne s'emploie pas dans ce sens).

Phrases à corriger

trouvées toutes dans la presse périodique.

1° Sauriez-vous me dire, interrogea le vieux Breton, pourquoi deux employés agitent de temps en temps de petits drapeaux sur notre route.

2° Le crayon de Daumier s'est moqué cent fois de ces petits propriétaires en rupture de comptoir qui s'essoufflent, sous le soleil chaud, à arroser un jardin pelé, grand comme un drap de lit.

3° L'an dernier, dans un coin perdu du Havre, à la Villa des Falaises, charmant endroit assez éloigné où les maisonnettes surplombent sur la mer, et que Mme Judic habita tout un été, mêlant ses refrains des Bouffes, etc.

4° Ces groupes, sur l'ordre de M. Garnier, viennent d'être retirés comme ne remplissant pas le but artistique désiré, et placés dans une autre partie moins en vue du monument.

5° Le père Brenner, las de le nourrir, et voulant s'en débarrasser, résolut de l'expédier, sans autre forme, chercher fortune ou mourir de faim.

6° Eh bien! en bonne conscience, pouvait-on considérer que la preuve fût faite et que l'Opéra populaire dut être à jamais enseveli dans l'oubli?

7° Beaucoup d'officiers, de magistrats, de savants, d'artistes et de gens de lettres, de boursiers, d'hommes politiques, voire même des ennemis de la République venus pour voir comment s'en tireraient ces gens-là.

Figure 2.3 Example 'Passe-temps grammatical' (Courrier; 15/08/1879, p.93)

Martin also used the *Courrier* to arrange the placement of foreigners with Parisian families for language practice purposes, as well as to help teachers to find work placements abroad (see Figure 2.4). Linguistic exchanges of this type were becoming increasingly popular across Europe during this period. For instance, the beginnings of an international pen pal scheme, developed to help French pupils practice their English, can be traced back to the south of France at the end of the nineteenth-century (Schleich 2018: 37). Martin also provided teachers looking for work in France and abroad with information about agencies and publications which could help them to find or advertise teaching positions (see Figure 2.5). These additional services can be interpreted as attempts towards achieving the journal's aim of spreading the French language, giving readers the opportunity to learn and teach French.

FAMILLES PARISIENNES

Recevant des Étrangers pour les perfectionner dans la Conversation.

<p>Près du Jardin d'acclimatation (Bois de Boulogne), deux dames françaises de distinction, habitant un joli hôtel, désirent recevoir quelques pensionnaires étrangers. — Grand confort. — Excellentes leçons de français. — Arts d'agrément. — Les plus sérieuses références obligées.</p>	<p>Le Rédacteur d'un journal d'enseignement, ancien directeur d'école normale et auteur d'une grammaire française, reçoit quelques pensionnaires étrangers à des prix modérés. — Rive gauche.</p>
<p>Un agrégé de l'Université offre de prendre en pension un jeune étranger qui désirerait une éducation française — Près du Jardin du Luxembourg.</p>	<p>Une maison d'éducation qui n'est point une pension prend des étrangers à demeure pour leur enseigner la langue et la littérature françaises. — Près du Collège de France et de la Sorbonne.</p>
<p>Dans la famille d'un pharmacien, on recevrait en qualité de pensionnaire un jeune étranger qui voudrait, outre le français, étudier encore la médecine. — A quelques minutes du boulevard des Italiens.</p>	<p>Un docteur en médecine, marié et père de famille, demande à prendre en pension <i>un</i> ou <i>deux</i> jeunes garçons d'origine anglaise et dont la santé pourrait exiger des soins particuliers. — Quartier du Jardin-des-Plantes.</p>

(Les adresses sont données à la Rédaction du Journal.)

Figure 2.4 Notices advertising home stays with Parisian families (*Courrier*; 01/02/1870, p.72)

RENSEIGNEMENTS

Pour les professeurs français qui désirent trouver des places à l'étranger.

AGENCES AUXQUELLES ON PEUT S'ADRESSER :

A PARIS : M. Pelletier, 116, rue de Rivoli ; — Mme veuve Simonnot, 33, rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin. — A LONDRES : Miss Gray, 35, Baker Street, Portman Square ; — A NEW-YORK : M. Schermerhorn, 430, Broom Street.

JOURNAUX POUR DES ANNONCES :

L'*American Register*, destiné aux Américains qui sont en Europe ; — le *Galignani's Messenger*, reçu par nombre d'Anglais qui habitent la France ; — le *Wekker*, connu par toute la Hollande ; — le *Journal de St-Petersbourg*, très-répandu en Russie ; — le *Times*, lu dans le monde entier.

(M. Hartwick, 390, rue Saint-Honoré, à Paris, se charge des insertions.)

On demande pour Québec (Canada)

Une institutrice française de 25 à 30 ans, diplômée, de bonne société, parlant anglais et pouvant enseigner la musique. — Beaux appointements. — Les plus sérieuses références seront exigées. — S'adresser au bureau du journal.

Figure 2.5 Job notices for French teachers (*Courrier*; 01/05/1873, p.40)

In the final issue of the sixth year of the *Courrier* (15/04/1876), Martin made available a reprint of the first five years of the publication (01/10/1868-15/03/1875) for purchase to his subscribers.³⁷ The offer suggests that the editor believed that the *Courrier* had a large enough, or interested enough, readership to warrant a rerun of its previous issues. Although it has not been possible to determine circulation figures for the *Courrier*, this may suggest that at some point around its sixth year the publication saw an increase in the number of subscriptions, which Martin saw as an opportunity to sell previous issues to his new readers.

In addition to the main Q+A section of the *Courrier*, the *Communications* section at the beginning of the publication also contains letters from readers. These *communications* usually provide additional or new information to support or challenge a previous answer from Martin. The letters in this section range from one paragraph to up to two pages in length, much longer than the brief questions published in the main Q+A section. This interaction is encouraged by Martin, who frequently includes calls for participation such as the following:

1. 'Je remercie l'auteur anonyme de la lettre précédente, et je m'empresse de saisir l'occasion qu'il me fournit pour prier les lecteurs du *Courrier de Vaugelas* de vouloir bien, à son exemple, m'adresser des critiques sur mes solutions quand celles-ci ne leur paraîtront pas acceptables, ou leur sembleront seulement défectueuses.' (15/02/1869, p.73)

³⁷ Martin describes the task of reprinting as *très laborieuse* (15/09/1877, p.41) and notes that the printing of the first run of issues will not be possible until the following January due to the numerous changes and corrections needed (01/09/1877, p.33).

Not every edition of the *Courrier* contains a *Communications* section; there are 137 such sections over 240 issues, which contain between one and five letters from readers, totalling 225 letters. Some readers sent multiple letters (182 letters from 128 distinct readers) and 44 letters were published anonymously. The readers are discussed in more detail in Section 3.1.2.

A *Réponses diverses* section, introduced in 1878, is found at the very end of 55 issues of the *Courrier*. Its arrival was announced as follows:

2. '*IMPORTANT*. Sous le titre de *Réponses diverses*, placé tout en bas de sa 8^e page, le Rédacteur de ce journal répondra dorénavant, comme il le fait dès aujourd'hui, aux questions en dehors de la langue qui lui sont adressées de temps à autre par ses correspondants' (15/2/1878, p.121).

Each section consists of a few short lines of text, which is not always easy to interpret, as the question being addressed is not published. It does, however, offer clues about the readership, such as their name and location (in 208 out of 209 instances). For instance, in Figure 2.6, the first reply is addressed to 'M. J. G., à Leicester (Angleterre).

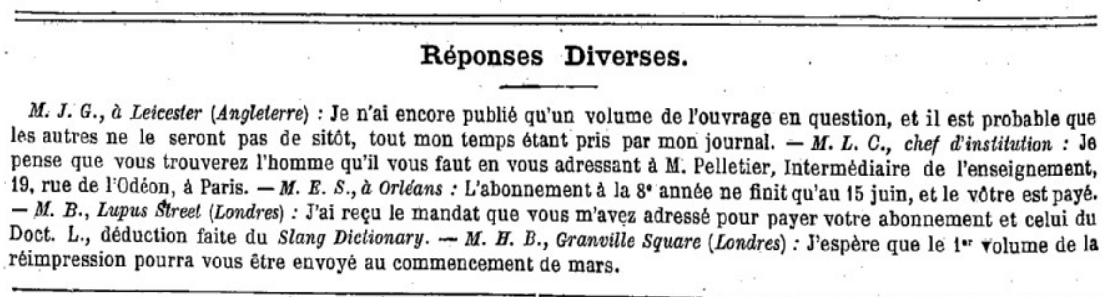


Figure 2.6 Example *Réponses Diverses* section (15/02/1878, p.128)

Finally, in 90 of the 240 issues, an *Avis* section is included on the *Courrier's* front page which contains short notices for subscribers. Most of the *Avis* are about pricing and subscriptions, alerting subscribers to changes in price and reminding subscribers to send payments (36 notices), or the general running of the *Courrier*, e.g. notifying readers of breaks in the publication, when the next print run will begin and organising the reprinting of previous issues for interested subscribers (34 notices). In 13 *Avis*, Martin announces prizes and honours which he and/or his publication have received (see Section 3.1.1). Finally, seven notices relate to questions, asking readers to send in questions or, in one instance, apologising for a delay in

publishing an issue caused by the closure of the library and, consequently, Martin being unable to check needed citations (01/04/1877, p.161). Although this section, containing practical information for readers, gives little insight into language ideologies, it provides (otherwise unavailable) information about Martin and the running of the *Courrier*.

2.2.2 *Courrier des internautes*

Dire, Ne pas dire ('Say, do not say') is a section of the *Académie française* website, introduced in 2011, which publishes short advice pieces on language use, under the headings 'Emplois fautifs', 'Extensions de sens abusives', 'Néologismes et Anglicismes'. It also features longer blog-style pieces: the 'Bloc-notes' section contains short opinion pieces written by an *académicien-ne*, whereas the 'Bonheurs et surprises' section broadly discusses language history, including etymology and language evolution. The website's stated aim is to help its visitors 'approfondir [leur] connaissance de la langue française', and users are invited to ask questions 'sur un point précis de français',³⁸ some of which are responded to publicly on the *Courrier des internautes* (*Internautes*) section of the site.³⁹ A short blog post on the *Dire, Ne pas dire* website, reflecting upon the first year of the new section of the *Académie's* website (by *académicien* Pouliquen 2013), discusses the motivations behind the move to a more interactive website: '[Permettre] une relation plus ouverte, plus spontanée avec ceux des internautes qui se disaient sensibles au bon usage de notre langue et qui semblaient douter de notre réactivité face aux agressions dont elle était victime'.

It is the *Internautes* section of the *Dire, Ne pas dire* website which is of interest to this study. In this section, questions from readers about the French language are published alongside responses from the *Service du Dictionnaire* (*Service*), although as Figure 2.7 shows, responses are published with the strapline 'L'Académie répond'. The first post went online in October 2011 and since then, questions and answers have been published sporadically, usually appearing a few at a time around once a month. The number of posts on the website is in no way representative of the number of questions received via this platform, which is approximately 5,000-7,000 per year (personal correspondence with the *Service* July 2019). This is double the number reported by the *Service* in an interview with *Le Figaro* (2009), when the platform received between 3,000 and 3,500 letters per year, suggesting that engagement with the platform has grown as it has become more well-known and/or established.

³⁸ <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/questions-de-langue> (Accessed: 17/08/2020).

³⁹ It is unclear whether those questions which are not published publicly still receive a response.

The screenshot shows the Académie française website. At the top, there is a search bar and navigation links. The main content area features a large banner for "DIRE, NE PAS DIRE" with the Académie française logo. Below this, a reader's question is displayed, dated December 2, 2012, from Elliott C. of Fontenay-sous-Bois. The question asks about the correct phrasing for a comparison: "L'assertion A est vraie si l'hypothèse H est vérifiée. Il en va de même de (ou pour ?) l'assertion B" or "... Il est de même de (ou pour ?) l'assertion B". The Academy's response, dated the same day, explains that both forms are correct, but "Il en est de même de/pour" is preferred as it is more precise and elegant. The response also mentions that the Academy receives many letters and that the question is part of a series of reader inquiries.

Elliott C., Fontenay-sous-Bois
 Le 2 décembre 2012 Courrier des internautes

Ma question concerne "il en va de même de", "il en est de même de". Laquelle est correcte ? Dit-on : "L'assertion A est vraie si l'hypothèse H est vérifiée. Il en va de même de (ou pour ?) l'assertion B" ou "... Il est de même de (ou pour ?) l'assertion B". Et, à ce propos, doit-on laisser une espace entre un mot et le point d'interrogation qui le suit ? Mille mercis.

Et enfin, pourquoi ne pas faire suivre les exemples de courriers de lecteurs par la réponse correspondante ? Merci pour ce service précieux, en espérant que la charge n'est pas trop lourde.

Elliott C., Fontenay-sous-Bois

L'Académie répond

Permettez-moi d'abord de vous remercier, au nom de toute l'équipe de *Dire, Ne pas dire*, pour vos compliments. Nous publions régulièrement des lettres de lecteurs, mais vous êtes trop nombreux à nous écrire pour que nous puissions toutes les faire figurer sur notre site.

J'en arrive maintenant à votre question. Toutes les formes que vous proposez sont correctes. *Il en est de même de/pour* se rencontre plus que *Il en va de même de/pour*, mais cette dernière forme est de meilleure langue. D'autre part, il faut une espace insécable avant et après le point d'interrogation.

At the bottom of the page, there are four navigation links: "Poser une question de langue sur un point précis de français", "Consulter le Dictionnaire sur le nouveau site publié par l'Académie Française", "Concourir pour un prix Règlement des prix littéraires", and "Découvrir « Dire, Ne pas dire » et le bloc-notes des académiciens".

Figure 2.7 Example content from the Internautes (<http://www.academie-francaise.fr/elliott-c-fontenay-sous-bois>; accessed: 17/08/2020)

In a BBC Radio 4 interview, first aired in December 2011,⁴⁰ a member of the *Service du Dictionnaire* reported that the number of letters received increases after public holidays such as Christmas and New Year, an increase which they suggested demonstrates the popularity of

⁴⁰ Snippets of this interview with journalist Agnès Poirier are found in a 30-minute radio programme which discusses the *Académie française* and its position in France more generally: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b018fmsz> (Accessed: 17/08/2020).

language-based discussion amongst families in French society. Evidence of debate and discussion between families, friends and colleagues is also present within the questions themselves, with frequent statements such as: 'À la suite d'un débat houleux...' (Internautes_Q36);⁴¹ and 'J'ai eu récemment un débat avec un collègue...' (Internautes_Q98). The discrepancy between the number of questions received and those eventually published mean a selection has been made by one or more members of the *Service du Dictionnaire* about which questions should and should not be published. It is unclear exactly how these choices are made; Pouliquen's (2013) post states that they publish the questions and responses that are 'les plus instructifs', but does not elaborate further. To send a question to the *Service*, internet users simply fill in an online form (see Figure 2.8). An address, a telephone number and a fax number are also provided, allowing for question submission in alternative formats.⁴²

Dire, Ne pas dire

Académie française

23, quai de Conti
75270 Paris cedex 06 - CS 90618

Tél. : + 33 (0)1 44 41 43 00
Fax : + 33 (0)1 43 29 47 45

Nom *	<input type="text"/>
Prénom	<input type="text"/>
Adresse électronique *	<input type="text"/>
Adresse	<input type="text"/>
Code Postal	<input type="text"/>
Ville	<input type="text"/>
Pays	<input type="text" value="France"/>
Message *	<input type="text"/>

Figure 2.8 Form for submitting a question to Internautes

⁴¹ All *Courrier* and *Internautes* questions were given an ID in the following form: *Courrier_Q1*; *Internautes_Q1*. The ID for responses is as follows: *Courrier_R1*; *Internautes_R1*. See Section 2.4.

⁴² The submission format used for each question published is not indicated on the website. Since the rubric has only existed in a post-internet world, it would be interesting to know how frequently alternative formats are used.

2.2.3 Langue sauce piquante

Langue sauce piquante (LSP) is a blog, hosted on *Le Monde*'s website. Since it began in November 2004, the blog's two contributors, Olivier Houdart and Martine Rousseau, have written and published almost 3,500 blog posts (correct as of August 2019). The frequency of posts varies, from multiple times a day to every few days. The posts themselves are usually short, from a few lines to a few paragraphs, and often include a photo or a video. The blog's title, *Langue sauce piquante*, indicates that the topic of the blog is language and suggests that it will provoke strong reactions. Topics vary greatly but are frequently inspired by language use observed in the media. For instance, the overuse of adjectives by film critics,⁴³ and the confusion in written language of the homophones 'repaire' and 'repère' in a *Le Monde* article,⁴⁴ are two examples from the sample of posts analysed in 6.3. Other posts are inspired by questions from readers. In this way, LSP can be considered an online *chronique de langage* (Ayres-Bennett 2015: 47). There is one such example in my sample and it concerns a journalist's translation of the English 'The evidence speaks for itself' to 'L'évidence parle d'elle-même'. *Evidence* is described by the reader as a false friend and 'faits' or 'indices' are suggested as alternative translations.⁴⁵

The blog's content is organised on its main page by date, showing the newest posts first. All posts are categorised from a set list of possible categories, and labelled with numerous tags (see Figure 2.9) which are not from a set list, but more closely reflect the content of the post.⁴⁶ The list of categories reflects the blog's interest in questions of correctness (e.g. 'Aux belle coquilles du "Monde"', 'La langue korrekte' [*sic*], 'La typo c'est pas sorcier'), its educational aims (e.g. 'Cours du soir', 'Le mot du lundi'), as well as more specific areas of the language on which the blog focuses ('Syntaxe, priez pour nous', 'La confusion des sens', 'Aux sigles méconnus'). The names of public figures appear frequently on the list of tags, particularly politicians (e.g. 'Emmanuel Macron', 'Fillon', 'François Hollande', 'Sarkozy'), as do linguistic elements (e.g. 'virgule', 'subjonctif', 'apostrophe', 'conjugaison'). The blog also provides a list of 'liens utiles', which includes links to online dictionaries (not just French dictionaries but

⁴³ <https://www.lemonde.fr/blog/correcteurs/2015/01/13/hilarant-jubilatoire-jouissif/> (Accessed: 17/08/2020).

⁴⁴ <https://www.lemonde.fr/blog/correcteurs/2014/05/18/dans-la-jungle-de-lorthographe-les-naxalites/> (Accessed: 17/08/2020).

⁴⁵ <https://www.lemonde.fr/blog/correcteurs/2013/09/11/levidence-est-elle-une-evidence/> (Accessed: 17/08/2020).

⁴⁶ These tags work similarly to hashtags on Twitter. Clicking on a tag will bring up all blog posts which have the same tag, e.g. clicking on the tag 'accent circonflexe' will allow a user to see all other blog posts on the website which have that same tag.

also, for example, the English-language Urban Dictionary);⁴⁷ language institutions, e.g. the *Académie française* and the DGLFLF; as well as resources about, for instance, *argot* and the feminisation of the language.

CATÉGORIES	ÉTIQUETTES
	"Charlie Hebdo" "Le Canard enchaîné"
Au fil des jours	"Le Monde"
Aux belles coquilles du "Monde"	"Retour sur l'accord du participe passé"
Aux sigles méconnus	Académie française accent circonflexe
Cours du soir	AFP apostrophe Atelier diktée
Des correcteurs racontent	Cambadélis CGT conjugaison
Devinette	coquille dans "Le Monde" correcteurs
La confusion des sens	décès Emmanuel Macron
La langue korrekte	Festival de l'imaginaire Fillon Flammarion
La marche du "Monde"	France Inter François Hollande
La typo c'est pas sorcier	gilets jaunes Grèce hollande
Langue de bois	inflation du pluriel Jean Pruvost Macron
Le mot d'ailleurs	novlangue Paris participe passé
Le mot du lundi	pléonasmе poliorcétique ponctuation
Les voisinages imprévus	Richard Herlin Sarkozy subjonctif
LSP a goûté pour vous	Syndicat des correcteurs syntaxe Syriza
Non classé	Trotsky UMP virgule zeugme
Syntaxe, priez pour nous	éantiosémie éponyme

Figure 2.9 List of blog post categories and tags from LSP

⁴⁷ Urban Dictionary is a, primarily English-language, dictionary of slang: <https://www.urbandictionary.com/> (Accessed: 17/08/2020).

Two methods of interaction are available to LSP users. Firstly, below each blog post is a comment section. Those wishing to comment must provide a name, an email address and their message; only the name and message are published, alongside the date and time that the message appears online. This comment section allows for interactions primarily between users, although Houdart and Rousseau occasionally interact with their audience in this way. It also provides a space for comment on the post's content. Secondly, users can send a question to the blog's email address, and the site invites 'les questions de langue française qui vous poseraient un problème'.⁴⁸ Interactions of this sort between the contributors and the website's users are not made explicit in the content of the blog posts, so it is not possible to see who is asking questions or what they may be asking, but the open invitation from the blog's creators suggests that the questions received may influence the content posted.

2.2.4 *Bescherelle ta mère*

First started as a Twitter account⁴⁹ in early 2014, *Bescherelle ta mère* (BTM) is also a website,⁵⁰ and Facebook page,⁵¹ which publishes the language errors made by the media, public figures, businesses and the general public. The name of the website, *Bescherelle ta mère*, alludes to the famed French language reference book franchise *Bescherelle*, and *ta mère* ('your mum'), an offensive interjection, used in informal language – also in the form of 'nique ta mère' ('motherfucker'; 'Go fuck yourself'). The use of the familiar expression stands in stark contrast to the language institution and the traditional authority and prestige with which *Bescherelle* is associated.

In this study, I analyse the posts and user comments from the BTM Facebook page only. In its early years, the BTM website allowed users to leave comments under posts but, after a change in interface in 2017, this functionality was removed.⁵² Now, comments are left either on the Facebook page – the primary method – or on Twitter. User engagement with the Twitter account is infrequent in comparison to the Facebook page; this, in part, influenced the decision to analyse the Facebook content and comments over the equivalent Twitter data.

BTM posts usually consist of a title, a photo displaying an error, a short comment and, frequently, an expression of thanks to whoever supplied the photo (see Figure 2.10 for an

⁴⁸ <https://www.lemonde.fr/blog/correcteurs/a-propos/> (Accessed: 17/08/2020).

⁴⁹ <https://twitter.com/bescherelle?lang=en> (Accessed: 17/08/2020).

⁵⁰ <http://bescherelletamere.fr/> (Accessed: 17/08/2020).

⁵¹ <https://www.facebook.com/bescherelletamere/> (Accessed: 17/08/2020).

⁵² Communication with *Bescherelle ta mère* via Facebook revealed that the comment ability was removed from the website to avoid having two separate sites of comments, those left on the website and those left on Facebook.

example from the website and Figure 2.11 from the Facebook page). This content is labelled as 'Fautes' on the website and is published on all three platforms.⁵³ User engagement differs across platforms and the website contains additional content (discussed below). According to an article published online by *Le Monde* in October 2014, just months after the launch of BTM, the website was receiving one million visits a month (Zerbib 2014). As of August 2019, when the website had published almost 2,400 posts, 735,997 Facebook users 'liked' the BTM page and 186,400 users 'followed' the BTM Twitter account.

Aïe. Tout s'explique.



Swagg Man ✓
@TheSwaggManTV



SI TOI AUSSI TU EN N'A MARRE
DE L'ÉCOLE FAIT COMME SWAGG
MAN, FUCK LE BEYSHREYLLÉ
BRO 😂😂

05/04/2015 17:30

Désolé Swagg Man, je ne suis pas consentant.

Merci à Aurélie B.

Figure 2.10 Example post from the BTM website (<https://bit.ly/35W8nUG>; accessed: 17/08/2020)

⁵³ The BTM Twitter account has been inactive since February 2019 (Accessed: 17/08/2020).



Figure 2.11 Example BTM Facebook post with anonymised comments (<https://bit.ly/2BstzTV>; accessed: 17/08/2020).

The errors published are sent to BTM by their users. To contribute a 'faute', which must be in image form, users need a free account with the website. The user uploads their image and can then add 'tags' – labels which the website can use to link similar content. This content is primarily intended for entertainment and there is little which could be described as pedagogical; the posts do not explain why the usage in question is incorrect, for instance. It is in this way that BTM differs most significantly from the three other sources which, although also intended to entertain, equally aim to instruct. Three additional sections of BTM – presented as more instructive – are available on the website only: *Cours* ('Lessons'), *Chatons*

(‘Kittens’) and *Le livre* (‘The book’).⁵⁴ As of 12th August 2019, the website had published 41 *cours*, some of which are longer blog-style posts about language-related news stories, such as the revelation that Belgium was considering the removal of past participle agreements,⁵⁵ while others are a continuation of the content available in the ‘Fautes’ section.⁵⁶ The *Chatons* section, described as shareable ‘pedagogical’ content,⁵⁷ contains a series of photos of kittens with what the website calls ‘violent’ messages about correct/incorrect language, often using colloquial and vulgar language (e.g. ‘putain’ in Figure 2.12).



Figure 2.12 Example of ‘Chatons’ content from BTM

2.3 Situating the corpora

The four sources used in this study are part of a wider tradition of prescriptivist texts in France. Figure 2.13 illustrates how each source fits into the model developed in Section 1.7 (adapted from McLelland (2021)). The *Courrier*, published in print, is situated on the left-hand side of the model. It is placed in the third level of the pyramid as it has medium to low reach. The potential audience of the *Courrier* was limited to those who could afford to subscribe, understood standard French and had an interest in questions of correct language. The perceived authority of the publication is greater than that of lay-lay discussions of language,

⁵⁴ The ‘Le livre’ section links users to an Amazon page where the BTM creator’s book can be purchased.

⁵⁵ <http://bescherelletamere.fr/la-belgique-souhaite-supprimer-laccord-du-participe-passe/> (Accessed: 17/08/2020).

⁵⁶ E.g. <http://bescherelletamere.fr/le-stagiaire-ditele-est-desormais-chez-cnews-la-preuve/> (Accessed: 17/08/2020).

⁵⁷ <http://bescherelletamere.fr/des-chatons-pour-vos-amis/> (Accessed: 17/08/2020).

as the premise of the publication was to allow readers to consult a perceived language expert. On the other hand, its authority is less than that of dictionaries and grammars, whose authority usually goes unquestioned in lay circles (Milroy and Milroy 2012: 4); analysis of interactions between the *Courrier's* editor and some of his readers show that the readers do occasionally push back against the editor's responses (Section 5.2). The *Internautes*, LSP and BTM are published online, and are placed in the right-hand side of the model. *Internautes* and LSP have a medium level of perceived authority, as both websites have affiliations to institutions which are often viewed as authoritative (LSP is an offshoot of *Le Monde* and *Internautes* is an *Académie française* initiative). They are therefore placed in the third level of the model. BTM is placed in the bottom level, as it has a low level of perceived authority. It has no institutional backing (despite drawing on the *Bescherelle* name) and those involved, i.e. the website's main creator and presumably a large proportion of its audience, are laypeople rather than perceived language experts.

BTM's primary aim is to entertain, rather than to advise or engage in detailed metalinguistic discussion. The potential audience of the site is not, for this reason, limited to language enthusiasts, as is the case for the other three sources. Additionally, the mechanics of Facebook further widen the potential audience; users are more likely to stumble upon the BTM page, unlike *Internautes* and LSP, which users would generally need to seek out. Even if users do not 'follow' the BTM Facebook page, they may be shown its content by the Facebook algorithm, e.g. if 'friends' engage with it. Furthermore, analysis of the language used in BTM comments suggests that users are not always aware of the linguistic norm as – unlike in LSP comments – BTM users often flout the norm themselves. In this way, analysis of BTM comments moves away from lay language enthusiasts and brings us closer to the elusive linguistic views of 'ordinary' people (see Osthus 2018).

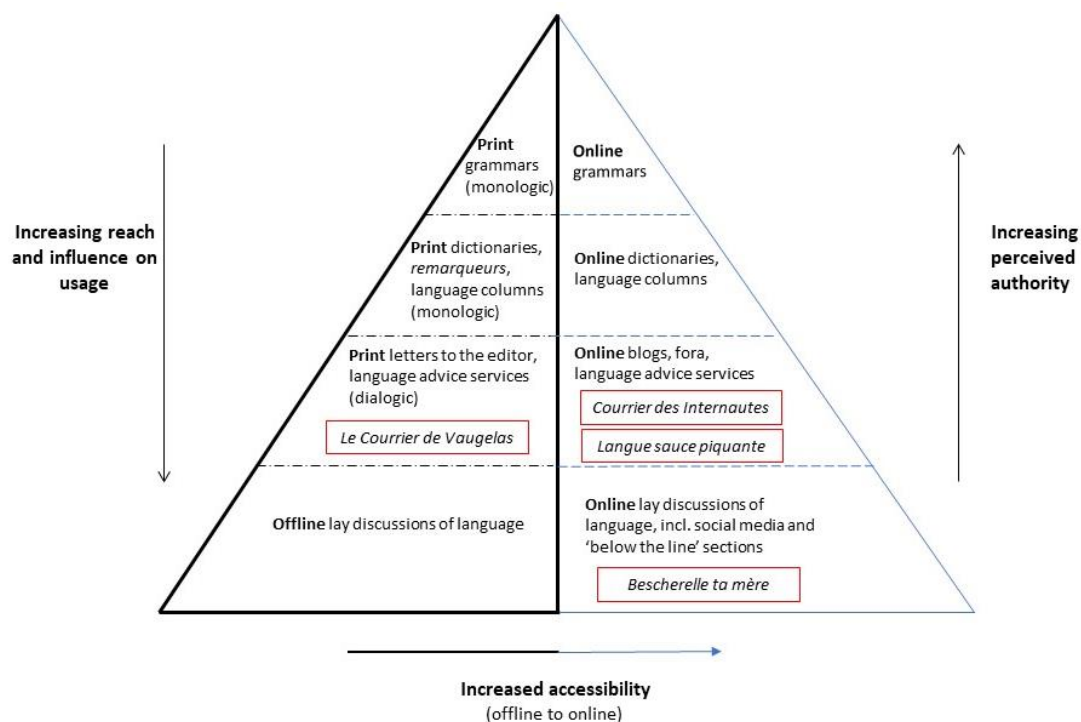


Figure 2.13 Model of prescriptivist texts including the corpora

2.4 Collecting the data

This thesis uses a 'web for corpus' approach (see de Schryver 2002); all data used is stored in offline, static corpora. For the *Courrier*, each issue was manually downloaded in the PDF format supplied by *Gallica* and stored digitally offline. Converting the files from PDF to a searchable text format proved unworkable because of the amount of inaccuracies created. Consequently, the corpus is not searchable. To facilitate analysis, the topic of each *Courrier* question from every issue was catalogued in a searchable Excel database, recording the issue from which it came, a summary of the question (as summarised by the editor on the front page; see Figure 2.14) and whether the letter came from the *France* or *Étranger* section of the publication (see Section 3.1). Each question was then given a unique ID in the following format: *Courrier_Q+number* for questions, and *Courrier_R+number* for responses (the number being attributed chronologically from oldest to most recent post), e.g. *Courrier_Q204*, *Courrier_R12*. The same initial collection process was followed for the *Internautes* sample. Webpages were downloaded manually and stored offline. Again, the data were then catalogued and given a unique ID, in the form *Internautes_Q+number* and *Internautes_R+number*. The questions and their responses are stored in a password protected Excel spreadsheet, creating a fully searchable corpus, facilitating quantitative and qualitative analysis. The corpora are available upon request.

SOMMAIRE.

Coup fourré remis sur le tapis ; — Origine de *Payer en monnaie de singe* ; — Si la construction *C'est de celle-ci dont...* est bonne ; — Pourquoi *Par ces présentes* pour désigner une seule lettre ; — Sur une lettre, faut-il mettre *Confidentiel* ou *Confidentielle* ? || Explication du futur *J'enverrai* ; — Signification et origine de *Burgrave* dans le langage des journaux ; — Pourquoi *Demi* venant après un substantif n'est pas précédé de *Une* ; — Justification de *Écorner une table, une pierre, etc.* || Questions à résoudre. || Biographie de *Henri Estienne*. || Ouvrages de grammaire et de littérature. || Familles parisiennes pour la conversation. || Avis aux professeurs français qui désirent aller à l'étranger pour y enseigner leur langue.

Figure 2.14 Screenshot of question summary from the *Courrier* (1/7/1870, p.145)

For the LSP and BTM corpora, both the posts and the accompanying comments were collected. The free web scraping tool HTTrack was used to download the data.⁵⁸ Once collected, the data were catalogued and given unique IDs by post (e.g. LSP.post_5; BTM.post_45) and by comment (e.g. LSP_1; BTM_2). LSP usernames were also collected for each comment. This made it possible to check patterns of individual users. Most obviously, the LSP bloggers (Rousseau and Houdart) often comment under the username 'correcteurs' (268 comments), or using the usernames 'Martine' (127) or 'olihoud' (83).⁵⁹ In a corpus of 18,416 comments from 300 posts, 478 comments are left by these users, accounting for 3% of all comments.⁶⁰ Collecting LSP usernames raises no ethical concerns, as LSP comments are not linked to an account, and so usernames do not give access to any further information about the commenter, user anonymity is preserved. As with any online data, it is difficult to be certain who is writing the comments; it is not possible to know whether users are commenting under multiple aliases or if they are using the username of someone else. This is

⁵⁸ Web scraping is a process by which data from a webpage or full website is extracted into an offline format. Tools such as HTTrack allow users to extract large amounts of data automatically, making the process faster and simpler than a manual extraction.

⁵⁹ The content of the comments makes it clear that it is the bloggers commenting, e.g. apologies for typographical errors in post content.

⁶⁰ There are other usernames which may belong to Rousseau, including 28 comments from accounts with the name Martine, e.g. 'Mais, Martine...' and 'Martine, marchande de marrons'.

not unique to this study but a pertinent question in many online studies. Usernames were not collected from the BTM Facebook comments for ethical reasons (see Section 2.6).

2.5 Sampling the data

When creating corpora, decisions must be made about the amount of data to be included. Having decided upon the four sources, it was necessary to consider whether the corpora used would be exhaustive (including all available data for that source) or whether to sample the data to yield smaller, more manageable corpora, which raises questions about representativeness and balance (McEnery, Xiao, and Tono 2006: 13-19). Exhaustive corpora were used for all analysis of the *Internautes* and quantitative analysis of the *Courrier* (see Table 2.2). All available *Courrier* data were collated into an offline corpus of PDF documents, amounting to 240 issues; 1,837 questions and answers; and approximately 830,400 words.⁶¹ It was considered preferable to include all data, as the *Courrier* is the only source from the nineteenth century in the study; a larger sample therefore seemed appropriate. Some sampling of the data was necessary in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 for closer qualitative analysis; these sampling methods are discussed in each chapter.

Turning to the twenty-first-century sources, at the time of collection (27/04/2017), the *Internautes* website had published 300 questions and 278 responses (40,909 words). Not all questions are published with a response; this was more prevalent amongst the earliest published questions. As this was a manageable corpus for analysis, all data were collected and stored offline. Initial analysis revealed eight questions and responses were duplicates (same question and response from the same reader). These repetitions were removed and replaced with the next eight questions and responses to be published: *Internautes_301-Internautes_308* (published 04/05/2017- 01/06/2017).

To allow for possible comparison of the LSP corpus to both the *Internautes* and *Courrier* data, the initial collection of LSP posts mirrored that of *Internautes* data. At the time of data collection, LSP had published 966 posts, compared to 300 for the *Internautes* webpage in the same time period (October 2011 – April 2017) so the data were sampled to create a comparable sample of 300 LSP posts. This was done by assigning all 966 posts a random number using an Excel formula; posts were then sorted numerically using this random number; finally, the first 300 posts from this randomised list formed the initial corpus. Alongside the 300 posts are 18,371 user comments, totalling 1,280,125 words. A different

⁶¹ One issue of the *Courrier* (published 01/12/1870) was not available via Gallica and has therefore not been included in this sample.

sampling technique was necessary for BTM, because there are more metadata on Facebook and a higher volume of BTM posts and comments available. An additional limitation was the inability to program data scrapes for a particular timeframe of post publication (i.e. collect only data from October 2011-April 2017); the software used can only collect from the date of collection backwards. Furthermore, because the BTM Facebook page was created in March 2014, the collection timeframe used for LSP (October 2011-April 2017) could not be replicated exactly. Instead, the 150 most recent BTM posts and their accompanying comments were collected (26/04/2019 back to 15/12/2018). These 150 posts yielded a total of 54,866 comments, and 535,164 words) for the BTM corpus. The four corpora and sampling methods used are summarised in Table 2.2.

Source	Sample size	Sampling method
<i>Le Courrier de Vaugelas</i>	1,837 questions and responses from 240 issues (approx. 830,400 words) ⁶²	All 240 issues used for quantitative analysis in Chapter 4. Data sampled for qualitative analysis in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 – sampling process described in these chapters.
<i>Courrier des internautes</i>	300 questions and 278 responses (40,909 words)	All 300 posts published at time of collection used (October 2011-April 2017).
<i>Langue sauce piquante</i>	300 blog posts and 18,371 user comments (1,280,125 words)	Random sampling of all posts published between October 2011-April 2017.
<i>Bescherelle ta mère</i>	150 posts and 54,866 user comments (535,164 words)	150 posts and comments collected from the date of collection back (26/04/2019 back to 15/12/2018).

Table 2.2 Sources and sampling methods

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 compare the *Courrier* and *Internautes* corpora. The *Internautes* corpus is much smaller than the *Courrier* – there are fewer questions and responses and a smaller total word count – but the shared Q+A format of both corpora facilitate a direct comparison of

⁶² As the *Courrier* corpus is not searchable, the total word count is based on an average word count, calculated using the data of 10 issues.

expert-lay interactions. This imbalance is acknowledged during analysis where raw figures are accompanied by percentages. 6.3 analyses the posts and comments from two websites: *Bescherelle ta mère* (BTM) and *Langue sauce piquante* (LSP). Although the LSP sample was initially considered for comparison with the two Q+A sources, it was ultimately decided to focus on the comparison between LSP and BTM, as both show us lay reactions to linguistic features, rather than advice-based discussions between an expert and a lay audience.

Initial quantitative analysis of the comment data from LSP and BTM shows that user engagement differs considerably between the two sources (summarised in Table 2.3). User interactions with LSP are far less frequent than on the BTM Facebook page; the mean number of comments per LSP post was 61.2, compared to 365.8 comments per BTM post. Whilst the frequency of engagement is much lower on the LSP website, the length of each comment is typically much longer: a mean of 69.7 words for LSP compared to 9.8 words for BTM, and a modal average of 10 words for LSP compared to 3 words for BTM. For BTM, user engagement is characterised by high volume and short comments, whereas for LSP, engagement is less frequent, but the average comment is over seven times longer than for LSP.

		LSP	BTM
Number of posts		300	150
Total number of comments		18,371	54,866
Time period of collection		14/11/2011 – 30/03/2017	15/12/2018 – 26/04/2019
Highest number of comments per post		696	2,500
Lowest number of comments per post		4	10
Average number of comments per post (mean)		61.2	365.8
Number of posts with over 100 comments		49 (16%)	111 (74%)
Average number of words per comment	Mean	69.7	9.8
	Mode	10	1
	Median	38	7

Table 2.3 Quantitative summary of LSP and BTM corpora

For both the LSP and BTM datasets, the average number of words per comment is not normally distributed. That is, when the word count data is plotted, it does not produce a bell curve (in which the mean value is in the middle of the curve and the data distribution is symmetrical across this point). Rather, both corpora shown in Table 2.3 have a positive skew (LSP = 3.7; BTM = 5.1; above 1 is highly skewed). This means that when the data are plotted, most data fall to the left of the mean: most comments have fewer words than the mean

number of words per comment. Consequently, statistical tests run on this data were for non-parametric data (i.e. data which are not normally distributed). From these two corpora, smaller samples were created to allow for detailed qualitative analysis.

2.5.1 Cleaning the LSP and BTM data

The process described above arrived at two initial corpora of the following sizes: 150 BTM posts with 54,866 accompanying user comments totalling 535,164 words from a four-month period (15/12/2018-26/04/2019) and 300 LSP posts with 18,371 user comments totalling 1,280,125 words, from a period of over five years (October 2011-March 2017). For comparative qualitative analysis of BTM and LSP undertaken in 6.3, it was necessarily to reduce the size of the samples further. Initial analysis of the data collected also showed that not all LSP posts were on the topic of language and correctness, nor were all user comments suitable for study, containing, for example, personal discussions or information. A process of cleaning and sampling the data was therefore undertaken.

Table 2.4 shows some initial quantitative analysis on the BTM corpus. The range of the number of comments received per post is considerable: from 10 comments to 2,500 on a single post (for scale, 2,500 comments is equal to 5% of all BTM comments). Users can also engage with Facebook posts through 'sharing'.⁶³ Engagement of this type shows a similarly wide range: from 0 shares to 4,300 of a single post. A shared post is likely to reach a much larger audience than one which is not shared (see Blommaert and Varis 2015 and; Varis and Blommaert 2015 for a more detailed analysis of such online engagements). This shows that not all BTM posts resonate with their audience; whilst some are widely shared and commented upon (not always due to the linguistic content, as shown in Section 7.3), others receive minimal engagement.

One-word comments are the modal average, totalling 5,278 comments. This is partly due to the way in which Facebook data is coded, as for the most part, 'one-word comments' come in one of two forms:

1. the tagging of another Facebook user by username in the comment⁶⁴ (the coding of this on the Facebook website means it is counted as just one word even if a user's full name is tagged)

⁶³ To 'share' a Facebook post means to republish a piece of content on one's own profile, signalling the content to all users with whom you are 'friends'.

⁶⁴ If a user is 'tagged' in a Facebook comment they receive a notification which will link them to the content in which they have been tagged. To tag another user, users type '@name of user'.

2. comments which are one single emoji (or multiple use of the same emoji – as before, counted as one word as a result of the online code).

The median and mean average comment lengths are higher at 7 and 9.8 words respectively. Whilst the volume of engagement with BTM posts can be high, comments tend to be either short reactions to the content or signposting of the content to other users.

Total number of articles		150
Total number of comments		54,866
Average number of comments per post (mean)		365.8
Highest number of comments on a single post		2,500
Lowest number of comments on a single post		10
Average number of shares per post		358.6
Highest number of shares		4,300
Average number of words per comment	Mean	9.8
	Mode	1
	Median	7

Table 2.4 Summary of BTM corpus

Table 2.5 lists the types of comments removed from the corpus during the cleaning process. This included comments which only contained a tag or an emoji. Whilst these comments do tell us something about user engagement and reactions to errors, the focus of analysis is on how errors are discussed, so it was decided to limit analysis to comments which also include words. Also removed were any comments which presented as blank when collected. This happened to comments whose only content was an image or a GIF, as confirmed by revisiting the Facebook page (2,966 comments).⁶⁵ Whilst this decision prevented the systematic analysis of these data, images and GIFs related to metalinguistic discussions could be an interesting topic for future study. Exploratory analysis also showed that within comment threads, user interactions often went quickly off-topic, switching to personal rather than metalinguistic discussions. Since it would not have been ethical to include such personal content without consent from users, all comments sent in direct reply to another comment were removed. In total, 20,663 such replies were removed, leaving a total of 26,389 comments and 255,149 words (see Table 2.6 for the breakdown of the data at this stage).

⁶⁵ A selection of these comments was used to confirm the type of content; I did not check all 2,966 comments.

	Comment type	No. of comments removed	No. of remaining comments
	Full corpus	n/a	54,866
Only content is:	Tag (e.g. 'Amy'; 'Amy Smith') ⁶⁶	3,423	51,443
	tag + punctuation (, e.g. 'Amy Smith !!!')	430	51,013
	corrupted emoji (e.g. 🤔) ⁶⁷	54	50,959
	tag + corrupted emoji (e.g. '🤔 Amy')	396	50,563
	blank	2,966	47,597
	emoji and emoji + tag (e.g. 🤔; 🤔 Amy')	545	47,052
	Replies	20,663	26,389

Table 2.5 Summary of types of comments removed from BTM corpus

Total number of posts	150	
Total number of comments	26,389	
Mean number of comments per post	175.9	
Total number of words	255,149	
Average number of words per comment	Mean	9.7
	Mode	3
	Median	8

Table 2.6 Cleaned data set (BTM)

Turning to LSP, analysis of the posts and tags applied to all posts by the bloggers (as described in 2.2.3) shows that posts with the tags 'La langue korrekte' and 'La confusion des sens' contain material which is most comparable to that of BTM, i.e. highlighting the errors of others. The posts with either or both of these two tags were therefore chosen for sampling for qualitative analysis (100 posts).⁶⁸ This decision resulted in excluding topics such as upcoming literary events or recent publications (some of which are on the topic of language, but a range of topics are covered).

Seven LSP posts which included one of the relevant tags but also included the tag 'Devinette' were removed, as this tag always indicates a quiz or *dictée*. Dictations remain an important pedagogical tool in the French education system (see Brissaud and Mortamet 2015) and have

⁶⁶ Fictional names used to protect anonymity.

⁶⁷ In most cases, emojis are displayed in the offline dataset as they appear on the Facebook page. However, certain emojis corrupt in the data scraping process.

⁶⁸ Some of these posts also had additional tags (e.g. *Au fil des jours* and *La confusion des sens*). The tags used on the website are discussed in Section 2.2.3.

wider cultural significance. For instance, a televised spelling championship hosted by Bernard Pivot was broadcast for 30 years until 2005 (Ayres-Bennett and Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2016: 114). However, this kind of content and the accompanying comments do not typically include metalinguistic discussion, so the content aligns neither with the content of BTM nor with the aims of the analysis. This left a sample of 93 posts and their associated comments (totalling 432,129 words) from the 300 posts initially collected (see Table 2.7).

Total number of posts with a relevant tag (and not marked 'Devinette')		93
Total number of comments		6,523
Average number of comments per post (mean)		70.1
Total number of words		432,129
Average number of words per comment	Mean	66.2
	Mode	7
	Median	37

Table 2.7 Breakdown of final LSP data set (93 posts and accompanying comments)

2.5.2 Creating qualitative samples

The resulting samples from LSP and BTM (6,523 comments and 432,129 words for LSP and 26,389 comments and 255,149 words for BTM) were still deemed too large for detailed qualitative analysis within the scope of this study. Given the differences between these two corpora in i. the number of posts, ii. the average number of comments per post, and iii. the total word counts, only one of these aspects could be kept comparable across the two samples in the process of further reducing their size. Two samples with the same number of comments would have different total word counts; two samples with the same number of words would have differing total numbers of comments. It was decided to match the total word counts for each sample as, hypothetically, this gave equal opportunity for themes and certain language usages to arise.

Firstly, it was decided to use data from 33% of posts from each source. This was considered preferable to using a small selection of comments from all posts. Limiting the number of comments per post to this extent would risk missing potential recurring themes within the content. As noted above, users interact with the two websites differently: LSP comments are less numerous and are longer; BTM comments are more frequent but usually shorter. In fact, analysis of the data has shown that it is uncommon for one comment to touch on multiple

themes – more comments might then have provided a higher number of themes, but this was not known at the time the decision was made.

A goal seeking function in Excel was used to calculate the necessary number of posts and comments to create two samples with an approximately equal number of words (emojis and tags also included in the word count). A goal is inputted – in this case approximately 29,000 words per sample⁶⁹ – and Excel calculates the necessary inputs to achieve this: 33% of posts; 20% of comments from each LSP post and 34% of comments from each BTM post (see Table 2.8). As decisions were based on average word counts and the average number of comments per post, these are expected values. When these proportions were then applied to the actual data (rather than the averages), the numbers differ slightly. The final sample is shown in Table 2.9.

	<i>Langue sauce piquante</i>	<i>Bescherelle ta mère</i>
No. of posts	33% of 93 posts	33% of 150 posts
Mean no. of comments per post	70.1	175.9
No. of comments	20% of comments from each post <i>No. of posts x (20% of mean no. of comments per post)</i> 31 x (20% of 70) = 435 comments	34% of comments from each post <i>No. of posts x (34% of mean no. of comments per post)</i> 50 x (34% of 176) = 2,991 comments
Mean no. of words per comment	66.2	9.7
No. of words	<i>No. of comments x mean no. of words per comment</i> 435 x 66.2 28,797	<i>No. of comments x mean no. of words per comment</i> 2,991 x 9.7 29,013

Table 2.8 Expected qualitative sample sizes based on sampling the same number of posts, but different numbers of comments for each post equal number of words

⁶⁹ I arrived at this number via trial and error with the goal seeking function. The aim was to create a manageable size corpus for detailed qualitative analysis, comprising of a large enough number of comments from each source to include the maximum number of attitudes and opinions.

		<i>Langue sauce piquante</i>	<i>Bescherelle ta mère</i>
No. of posts	33% of posts		
		31	50
No. of comments	20% of comments per post		34% of comments per post
		454	2,866
No. of words		30,724	29,214
Average word counts	Mean	67.7	10.2
	Mode	14	3
	Median	37	8

Table 2.9 Actual qualitative sample sizes (LSP and BTM)

When selecting posts for the sample, the following factors were considered:

1. *Variety of source type and topic of the post*: To avoid creating a sample of posts which all featured the same error type from the same type of source, posts were not sampled at random, but selected to show a wide variety of features. The extent of repetition within the datasets, however, means that there is still considerable overlap in terms of errors and sources in the resulting sample.
2. *Removal of posts about typographical errors (typos)*: Posts which only discussed typos, e.g. typing ‘excisions’ rather than the intended ‘excusons’ (BTM.post_5),⁷⁰ or errors which resulted in a funny or taboo change of meaning, e.g. writing ‘baise’ (from the verb ‘baiser’ – ‘to have sex’) rather than the intended ‘braise’ (‘ember’, BTM.post_45), were excluded from the sample, because reactions to these types of posts are often neutral (Queen and Boland 2015: 286) or the reactions are fuelled by the humour created by the error (see Sections 7.1 and 7.3).
3. *Year of LSP posts*: Selection of LSP posts also took the year of publishing into account to ensure a spread across all the data originally collected. This was not necessary for BTM, where all posts initially collected are from a short four-month period.

Once posts had been selected from each corpus, a random selection of the accompanying comments was collected. For each post, all comments were given a ‘random’ number using a random number generator tool on Excel, the comments were then ordered according to the random number assigned (from smallest to largest); from this randomised order, the first 20% of comments per post were then collected for LSP and the first 34% of comments per post for

⁷⁰ Posts were given the following IDs: BTM.post_5; LSP.post_6.

BTM (as needed to arrive at the desired word count), yielding the final sample of approximately 30,000 words for each source. As will have become clear, for LSP and BTM, the process from initial identification of sources and data collection to final selection of the samples was relatively complex. For the reader's convenience, the final data selected for qualitative analysis are presented in Table 2.10. Having outlined the processes involved with delineating the data for analysis, I now turn, in the final section of this chapter, to a discussion of the ethical implications of this study, specifically the considerations necessary for the analysis of data collected from public online sites without consent from users.

Title	Content description	Datasets
<p>Le Courier de Vaugelas (<i>Courrier</i>) https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb327508332/date.item</p>	<p>A twice monthly publication edited by Éman Martin from 1868-1881. The bulk of the publication contains readers' philological and grammatical questions and the editor's responses to them.</p>	<p><i>Exhaustive dataset:</i> 1,837 questions and answers from 240 issues (approx. 830,400 words)</p>
<p>Courrier des internautes (<i>Internautes</i>) http://www.academie-francaise.fr/dire-ne-pas-dire</p>	<p>A section on the <i>Académie française's</i> website in which the <i>académicien·ne-s</i> and the <i>Service du Dictionnaire</i> discuss language and correctness. <i>Internautes</i> is a sub-section which publishes readers' questions and responses to them, written by the <i>Service</i>.</p>	<p><i>Exhaustive dataset:</i> 300 questions and 278 answers (40,909 words)</p>
<p>Langue sauce piquante (LSP) https://www.lemonde.fr/blog/correcteurs/</p>	<p>A blog run by two <i>Le Monde</i> proof-readers which discusses language and correctness, often inspired by language used in the media. The blog contains a section for users to make comment and discuss posts.</p>	<p><i>Selected dataset:</i> 300 posts; 18,416 comments; 1,262,764 words</p> <p><i>Qualitative sample:</i> 31 posts, 454 comments, 30,724 words</p>
<p>Bescherelle ta mère (BTM) https://www.facebook.com/bescherelletamer/</p>	<p>A website which publishes the non-standard language usages of internet users, public figures and companies. All content is published on accompanying Twitter and Facebook pages of the same name. The Facebook page allows users to make comments about and discuss posts.</p>	<p><i>Selected dataset:</i> 150 posts; 54,866 comments; 535,164 words.</p> <p><i>Qualitative sample:</i> 50 posts, 2,866 comments, 29,214 words</p>

Table 2.10 Breakdowns of all four corpora, including summaries of content and dataset sizes

2.6 Ethical considerations

Any study which uses data from human subjects must consider the ethical implications of the work. Discussions of the ethical issues associated with online data have often, particularly in early research, centred on data accessibility and on the distinction between interactions in public and private online settings (Bolander and Locher 2014: 17). Communication via WhatsApp, for instance, would be considered 'private', and use of such data requires consent from participants, both ethically and practically (the participants would need to grant access). It is often assumed that data available publicly, on the other hand, can be used for research purposes without the need for consent. Ethically, this view is not uncontested. D'arcy and Young (2012: 537) liken this practice to the recording of conversations in a public space without consent. Whilst researchers still debate what exactly comprises a public and a private online space, the question of whether it is ethical to use even unambiguously public data has not yet been resolved (Tiidenberg 2018: 469). A distinction here can usefully be made between researchers attempting to elicit online data, and the observation of data which are already published online, the former requiring more stringent ethical considerations.

The boundaries between private and public spaces of interaction have become increasingly blurred in the online sphere with previously 'private' matters now being discussed in public spaces (Landert and Jucker 2011: 1422-23). Accordingly, when deciding whether data is 'public' or 'private', access alone cannot be the deciding factor. The content of interactions must also be considered. Researchers must avoid, if not seeking participant consent, using data which is publicly available but private in content. It must also be noted that some sections of websites may be more or less private or public than others (Bolander and Locher 2014: 17). All data used in this study were publicly available data, and the topic – language and correctness – was likewise not private or intimate. This is not to say that private content is never disclosed in such a context. In this study, any content considered private or intimate in any of the three online corpora has been removed and is not used in the analysis or any conclusions drawn from it. See also Section 2.5.1.

Each of the four corpora used in this study required different decisions to be made. *Le Courier de Vaugelas*, published during the late nineteenth century, discloses the full names of readers and their geographic location on occasion. Given the time that has passed since publication (minimum 139 years), the fact that this information was supplied by readers, published in print at the time, and is still readily available publicly online today, this information will be used where relevant. Users interacting with the *Internautes* and LSP webpages simply supply

a username to be published online.⁷¹ This username is not linked to an account (although people may use the same username for multiple websites). Given the limited amount of data supplied and the implausibility of being able to trace users outside of the webpages themselves, usernames were not removed from the data collection and were briefly analysed to give a picture of each sites' readership (Chapter 3).

The use of Facebook for the BTM corpus raises specific ethical concerns, as Facebook 'operates under a tenet of identity disclosure (real names are used), and it is the "network" rather than the individual user that determines visibility and discoverability' (D'arcy and Young 2012: 535). During the data collection process, the names of users were first encrypted and then removed. Users' names or profile information were never accessible to the researcher through the offline corpus. To check that the comments themselves are not traceable (or at least not easily traceable) (see Beaulieu and Estalella 2012 for a discussion on ethics and traceability), 20 randomly selected comments were inserted into the search engine Google and also directly into the search function of the BTM page. No results were found in either case, suggesting that directly quoting the comments within this study will not reveal the author's identity.

While it has been suggested that 'Facebook is, predominantly, a private space' (Ditchfield and Meredith 2018: 503), some pages are open to all internet users. This is the case for the *Bescherelle ta mère* Facebook page; it is open and public, meaning that to access the page and view its content, a user does not need to have an account with Facebook. All data were collected without the use of a Facebook account, meaning that only publicly accessible data are used. A tendency was observed for users to 'tag' other users in their comments, as a way of signalling the content to others (see Section 2.5). The process of 'tagging' on Facebook involves typing an '@' in the comment box, followed by the name which corresponds to the user's account. In these cases, the names of users were collected but, for privacy, are not reproduced within this thesis. Rather, tagging is signalled as follows: '@user'. Whilst the use of Facebook data in sociolinguistic research is contentious, every effort has been taken in this study to ensure that the data were collected and used ethically and that the 'humanness' of the data is not ignored. With the provisions discussed above, this study received ethical approval from the University of Nottingham Research Ethics Committee, whose guidelines have been carefully followed throughout.

⁷¹ In the case of *Internautes* this is always a first name. For LSP, the usernames are a mixture of both first names and usernames which do not seem to correspond to an offline first name.

This chapter has presented the methodology used in this comparative study. The use of four sources, which are a mixture of historical and CMC data, necessitated complex sampling, to create manageable and comparable datasets for quantitative and qualitative analysis. For *Le Courrier de Vaugelas*, sampling and analysis were further complicated by the technical limitation of the PDF documents not being searchable. Having now considered both the methodological challenges and opportunities presented by a study of this kind, and having described how they have been approached in this study, in Chapter 3 I examine the sources in more detail, analysing more closely their content, creators and potential readerships.

Chapter 3 The authorities and their readers

Having discussed the broad context of this study and the framework through which the sources will be analysed in Chapter 2, this chapter now introduces the people in charge of each source and their likely readerships, drawing principally on information available from within the sources themselves, given the very limited external information available. This means that any assumptions about the audiences are based on readers/users who interact with the sources. While readers of *Le Courrier de Vaugelas* often provided information about themselves in their letters, there is far less information about the users of the *Courrier des internautes*, and less still about *Langue sauce piquante* and *Bescherelle ta mère*, both for reasons of limited self-disclosure of information and ethical issues surrounding the use of any disclosed data (Section 2.6). Each source is examined in turn: *Le Courrier de Vaugelas* in Section 3.1; the *Courrier des internautes* in Section 3.2; *Langue sauce piquante* in Section 3.3; and finally *Bescherelle ta mère* in Section 3.4. Note that examples from all four sources are reproduced as collected, with bold added for emphasis.

3.1 *Le Courrier de Vaugelas*

3.1.1 Éman Martin, the editor of *Le Courrier de Vaugelas*

The *Courrier's* editor, Éman Martin, worked alone on the publication, making all editorial and linguistic decisions. Understanding his background and interests can help shed light on the positions taken in the journal. With limited information available outside of the journal, the analysis in this section is based mainly on Martin's own contributions, as well as contributions from readers published in the *Communications* and *Réponses diverses* sections and, finally, paratextual information. Only one account of Martin's life has been located, published online by the *Cercle de Recherches Généalogiques du Perche-Gouët* (2009, henceforth C.R.G.P.G.), a group of amateur genealogists.

Éman Martin lived from 16th May 1821 until 27th November 1882 (see Figure 3.1).⁷² According to the C.R.G.P.G. (2009), Martin grew up in Eure-et-Loir, around 100km south west of Paris (confirmed by Martin in a *réponse diverse*, 01/03/1878, p.136), and was educated in the local village school of Illiers and later at the *école normale primaire de Chartres*, a school which trained primary school teachers. Martin then taught in Dieppe, Normandy, before spending some time in London, learning English and teaching French. This time in the UK is confirmed by Martin: 'Depuis 1851, époque où, étant à Londres, j'ai conçu le plan de mes études grammaticales' (15/03/1875, p.186). Upon his return, Martin began teaching French to

⁷² This is confirmed by the BNF here: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5833201s/texteBrut> (Accessed: 17/08/2020).

foreigners in Paris, where he continued to be based during his *Courrier* years (1868-1881) – the publication lists his office location as Boulevard des Italiens. It is unclear how accurate the C.R.G.P.G.'s account of Martin's life is; there is no mention of the sources consulted, and the claim that publication of the *Courrier* ceased at his death is incorrect – two print runs followed under editor Johanet (1886-1887). As we will see, some information is corroborated by Martin in the publication, whilst other questions remain unanswered.



Figure 3.1 Plaque erected at the birthplace of Éman Martin

(Source: <https://www.perche-gouet.net/histoire/photos.php?immeuble=43>; accessed: 07/10/2020)

Martin, who on the *Courrier*'s title page describes himself as an 'ancien professeur spécial pour les étrangers', published at least four language reference books:

1. *La langue française enseignée aux étrangers* (four volumes published before the *Courrier* from 1859-1868, facsimile reprint in 2016)
2. *La grammaire française après l'orthographe* (1866, two years before the first issue of the *Courrier*)
3. *Origine et explications de 200 locutions et proverbes* (published posthumously by Delagrave, 1888, 1895)⁷³

⁷³ It is unclear, in the case of the two posthumous books, who organised the publications.

4. *Deux cents locutions et proverbes, origine et explications* (published posthumously by Delagrave, 1925)

As Chapter 4 will show, questions about the history of the language (including etymologies) are the most frequently published topic in the *Courrier*, the editor's two posthumous publications reflect a broader interest in this topic. In the *Courrier's Réponses diverses* section, Martin laments that he is 'tellement absorbé par mon journal' that work on other publications is not possible: 'Ma Grammaire française après l'orthographe n'a toujours qu'un volume' (01/04/1879, p.24; see also 01/08/1879, p.88).

The *Courrier's Avis* section includes 13 notices of awards with which Martin and the *Courrier* have been honoured (Table 3.1). Six awards in nine years (1/5/1870 to 1/3/1879) suggests Martin's work was respected by the authorities who awarded the prizes, including the *Académie française* and Education ministers in France and Québec, and that Martin had a certain level of recognition. The awards became more significant, too i.e. from *Officier d'Académie* (silver palm) to *Officier de l'Instruction publique* (gold palm). It is unclear whether the awards were for Martin specifically, or the *Courrier*, except for the *prix Lambert*, awarded explicitly to both by the *Académie française* and the *Académie des beaux-arts* (Figure 3.2).⁷⁴ In drawing attention to these prizes, Martin highlights his authority and legitimacy as a language expert (further discussed in Chapter 5).

⁷⁴ See: <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/rapport-sur-les-concours-de-lannee-1875> (Accessed: 15/10/2020).

Date (p.)	Summary of awards received by Martin and/or the <i>Courrier</i>
1/5/1870 (p.113)	A formal exchange arranged between the <i>Courrier</i> and an unnamed publication managed by P. J. O Chauveau, the Minister for Education in Québec.
1/9/1870 (p.177)	Martin awarded the title of <i>Officier d'Académie</i> by the Minister for Education in France, for services to French education and culture, under a knighthood-type award which began in 1808, the <i>Ordre des Palmes Académiques</i> . ⁷⁵
1/2/1875 (p.161)	Martin and the <i>Courrier</i> received the <i>prix Lambert</i> from the <i>Académie française</i> , awarded once a year to: 'des hommes de lettres, ou à leurs veuves, auxquels il serait juste de donner une marque d'intérêt public'. ⁷⁶
1/4/1876 (p.177)	Martin received a <i>médaille d'honneur</i> from the <i>Société libre pour le développement de l'Instruction et de l'Éducation populaires</i> . No further information provided.
1/2/1877 (p.129)	Martin received the title of <i>Officier de l'Instruction publique</i> from the Minister for Education and Beaux-Arts, M. Waddington. This title is also an <i>Ordre des Palmes Académiques</i> , but a higher class.
1/3/1879 (p.1)	Martin wins two prizes at the <i>Exposition universelle</i> , <i>une mention honorable</i> and <i>une médaille de bronze</i> . No further information provided.

Table 3.1 Summary of awards presented to Martin and/or the *Courrier*

⁷⁵

https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexteArticle.do;jsessionid=0D8919711076EA5B7E7FD39D1FB41C78.tplgfr23s_3?idArticle=LEGIARTI000006503330&cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006060720&dateTexte=20100713 (Accessed: 17/08/2020).

⁷⁶ <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/prix-lambert> (Accessed: 17/08/2020).

ACADÉMIE FRANÇAISE

Séance publique annuelle du jeudi 11 novembre 1875.

Rapport de M. PATIN, secrétaire-perpétuel de l'Académie,
sur les Concours de 1875.

(EXTRAIT.)

« Le prix Lambert est, selon l'intention du fondateur, une marque d'intérêt public qui s'adresse à la personne même d'un homme de lettres. Il peut être encore et il a été quelquefois une distinction indirectement adressée à son œuvre, faute d'une autre manière de la récompenser. En le décernant cette année à M. Eman Martin, l'Académie couronne, autant qu'il est en elle, son *Courrier de Vaugelas*, journal grammatical très-digne du nom dont il se pare, où, depuis assez longtemps déjà, les singularités, les difficultés de l'usage sont savamment, ingénieusement expliquées ou résolues. »

Figure 3.2 *Courrier* announcement regarding the prix Lambert (01/12/1875, p.113)

3.1.2 The audience: *Le Courrier de Vaugelas*

Le Courrier de Vaugelas was a subscription-based publication, available for readers in France and abroad, which, according to the C.R.G.P.G. (2009), grew out of Martin's ongoing correspondence with former pupils once they returned home from Paris. The following question from a reader abroad, published in 1868, supports this view:

1. 'Dans les quelques leçons que j'ai prises de vous, vous m'avez recommandé de ne point faire sonner l'r de *monsieur*. Est-ce qu'on peut donner une raison de cette exception ?' (Courrier_Q44)⁷⁷

Two other questions, also sent from abroad, suggest a personal relationship with Martin:

2. 'Dans son charmant roman de *Graziella*, dont vous m'avez recommandé la lecture' (Courrier_Q27, 1868).
3. 'Il y a au commencement d'un livre que vous m'avez recommandé (Un philosophe sous les toits)' (Courrier_Q360, 1870).

The readership evidently widened beyond pupils, as Martin claimed in November 1875, seven years after he founded the *Courrier*, that the number of 'lecteurs' had surpassed 5,000 (15/11/1875, p.105).

3.1.2.1 *Courrier* readers: Geographic locations

Although the *Courrier's* main Q+A section separates readers' questions simply as from France and *Étranger*, 71 of the 225 *Communications* contain some kind of geographical clues, as do

⁷⁷ The use of bold in this and all subsequent examples is my own emphasis.

all but one of the 209 *Réponses diverses*, where readers' names and locations identify the intended recipient of each response, e.g.:

4. 'M. L. P., *Boulevard Denain (Paris)* : J'ai pris bonne note de votre lettre' (01/04/1878, p.152)

In *communications*, any geographic location is usually mentioned in the main body of the letter and provided in varying levels of detail, from just the country to the full address. Table 3.2 summarises the indications of readers' location in France or abroad from these three sections. Both supplementary sections have a higher percentage of letters identifiably from French readers than from abroad. The *Communications* section, in which readers' contributions usually discuss and critique solutions given by Martin, has the largest proportion of French readers (93%): first language French speakers and/or those based in France may well have felt more able to critique Martin than L2 French speakers abroad.

	Location is specified in France		Location is specified abroad	
	No. of locations	%	No. of locations	%
<i>Communications</i> (n=71, 154 give no location)	66	93%	5	7%
<i>Réponses diverses</i> (n=208, 1 gives no location)	132	63%	76	37%
Main Q+A section (n=1,837)	1,091	59%	746	41%

Table 3.2 Specified reader locations by France and abroad (Courrier)

On the incomplete evidence we have, the readership was predominantly based in France; in no section of the publication does the number of questions from abroad exceed or even equal those from France. The highest proportion of readers identifiably from abroad (41%) is found in the main Q+A section. It is worth noting that Martin apparently published every question

he received, even if this resulted in repetition.⁷⁸ For instance, five questions query the use of the subjunctive in *Je ne sais pas que* at the beginning of a phrase.⁷⁹ In four *Réponses diverses*, Martin reassured individual readers that their questions would be dealt with in a later issue, e.g.:

5. '[...] si je ne puis vous en donner la solution dans la 9e année, je vous la donnerai dans la 10e.' (15/08/1879, p.96)

Although letters from readers within France are the majority, the *Courrier* still boasted a substantial readership abroad, particularly in *Réponses diverses* (37% of all queries, 76 questions) and the main Q+A section (41%, 746 questions), though it is not always clear whether those living abroad were in fact French. The geographical data available in the *Communications* and *Réponses diverses*, which is usually more precise than in the Q+A section (see Table 3.3), suggest that although most readers with identifiable locations are from France (63% for *Réponses diverses*, 93% for *Communications*), a significant number of readers communicating with the *Courrier* are based elsewhere in Europe and the world, across four continents, and in both Francophone and non-Francophone countries. For instance, 24 letters come from the United Kingdom, eleven from Germany and a further eight from the Netherlands. Francophone countries including Mauritius (10 letters), Algeria (5), Belgium (4) and Switzerland (1) are also represented, alongside letters from further afield such as one each from Canada and Japan.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ This draws criticism from one reader, Bernard Jullien, who in a letter of complaint to Martin writes: 'les questions sont toujours un peu les mêmes' (15/07/1877, p.9).

⁷⁹ *Courrier_557*; *Courrier_877*; *Courrier_1034*; *Courrier_1129*; *Courrier_1532*. These are discussed in Sections 4.3.3 and 5.3.1.

⁸⁰ The reader from Canada could be from Francophone Canada, but this is not clear from the letter.

<i>Réponses diverses</i>			<i>Communications</i>		
Location	No.	%	Location	No.	%
France	132	63%	France	65	92%
Elsewhere in Europe	63	30%	Switzerland	1	1%
United Kingdom	24	12%	Elsewhere in the world	5	7%
Germany	11	5%	Algeria	4	6%
The Netherlands	8	4%	Russia	1	1%
Italy	5	2%	Total	71	100%
Belgium	4	2%			
Spain	3	1%			
Austria	2	1%			
Jersey	2	1%			
Czech Republic	2	1%			
Finland	2	1%			
Elsewhere in the world	13	6%			
Mauritius	10	5%			
Algeria	1	0%			
Canada	1	0%			
Japan	1	0%			
Total	208	100%			

Table 3.3 Geographic location by country of readers (Courrier: *Réponses diverses* and *Communications*)

Most *communications* and *réponses diverses* from France come from urban areas. Readers from Paris are by far the single largest group (49 letters or 25% of the 198 readers who state that they are from France, and 11% of all contributors to the *Communications* and *Réponses diverses*; Figure 3.3). The next best represented city was Chaumont, but with just four letters (2% of readers listed as from France). Although the middle of the nineteenth century marked a change in rural schooling, children in urban areas still had greater access to education than those in rural locations (Heywood 2002: 61-65). The concentration of *Courrier* readers in urban areas accords with the areas of France in which access to the standard, and in turn interest in questions about the standard, was greater.⁸¹

⁸¹ Section 1.2 discusses the status of the standard language and education during this period.

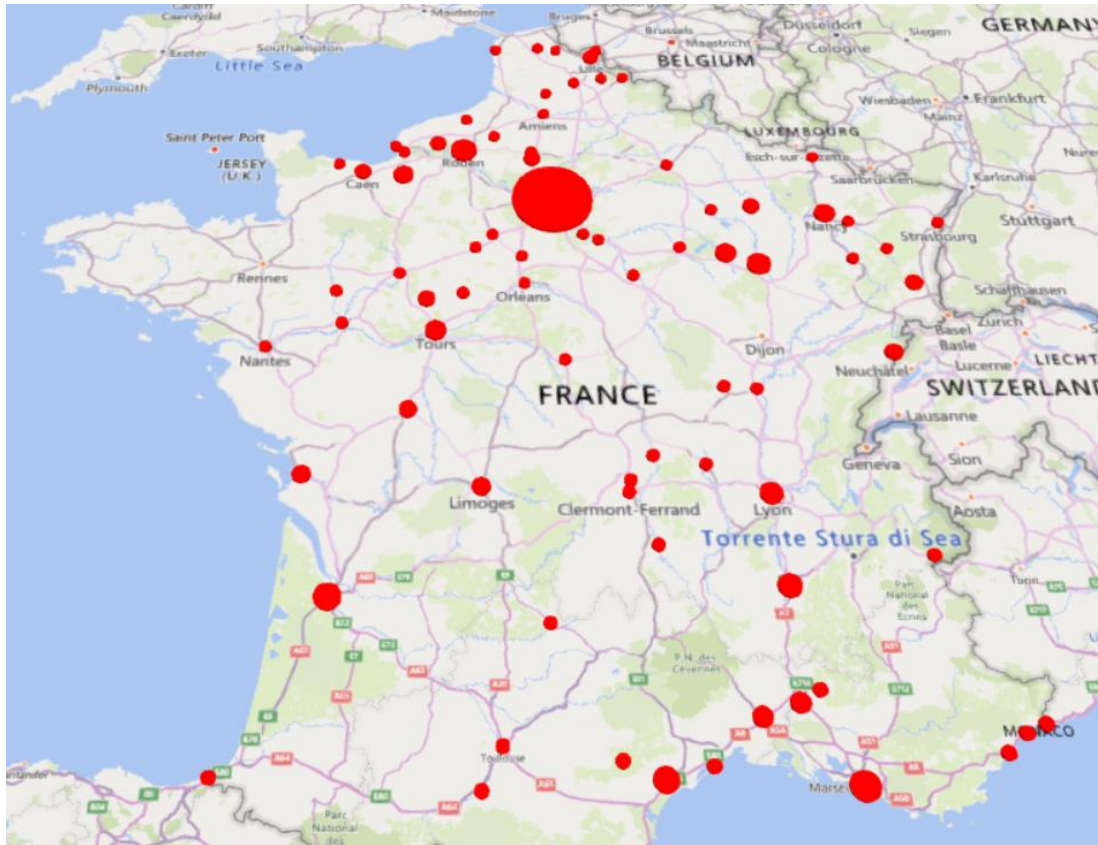


Figure 3.3 Identified Courier reader locations in France (Communications and Réponses diverses)

3.1.2.2 Courier readers: Occupations

Within the *Communications*, 44 readers' occupations are disclosed, either by the readers themselves or by Martin (see Table 3.4 for a loose categorisation of job fields). Mentions of professions may serve to bolster a reader's perceived authority on language matters, as well as hinting at their social standing and class. Jobs in education are the most frequently mentioned (12 mentions), ranging from primary school teachers to professors who are experts in 'rhétorique' and 'langue et de littérature française du moyen âge', and two *professeurs* from the *Collège de France* (a research institute and higher education establishment in Paris). Four further roles may be linked to academia: two *philologues*; 'un archiviste'; and 'un orientaliste'. The *Courrier* is likely to have appealed to those in education, for whom a strong grasp of the standard French language was a necessity.

Job area	No. from Communications
Education and Academia	12
<i>Docteur ès lettres ; deux instituteurs ; ancien professeur au collège arabe-français d'Alger ; professeur d'anglais ; Monsieur le directeur de l'École normale de Nîmes ; professeur agrégé de l'Université ; professeur au lycée de Pontivy ; professeur au lycée de Rodez ; professeur de rhétorique au lycée de Limoges ; savant professeur de langue et de littérature française du moyen âge au Collège de France ; célèbre professeur du Collège de France</i>	
Army	6
<i>Colonel de l'Espée ; commandant ; interprète militaire ; Lieutenant des Douanes ; Lieutenant de la garde mobile ; ancien caporal</i>	
Language	5
<i>Auteur du Dictionnaire étymologique des noms propres d'hommes ; Président du Cercle sténographique ; un littérateur-grammairien ; deux philologues</i>	
Civil Service	4
<i>Employé à la Trésorerie générale ; Inspecteur de l'Enregistrement ; Président de la Cour d'Appel ; juge de paix</i>	
Media	4
<i>Ancien directeur de la Revue de l'Instruction publique ; rédacteur en chef du Messenger ; secrétaire de la rédaction du journal La France ; Rédacteur en chef du Journal de Chartres</i>	
Medicine	3
<i>Docteurs</i>	
Engineering	2
<i>Ingénieur des mines ; ingénieur des Ponts et chaussées</i>	
Religious	2
<i>Pasteur ; grand rabbin⁸²</i>	
Management	2
<i>Deux chefs d'institution</i>	
Miscellaneous	3
<i>Un archiviste ; un orientaliste ; un artiste du théâtre du Palais-Royal</i>	
Total number of job titles mentioned in Communications	44

Table 3.4 Courier readers' occupations mentioned in Communications

⁸² This reader is also a *professeur au séminaire* so could also be considered part of the 'Education and Academia' section.

For those working in sectors not explicitly linked to language, such as medicine and the army, their profession often confers an alternative authority to set against Martin's linguistic authority. For instance, a reader, self-identified as Dr X..., explains that whilst Martin presented *avoir la fièvre* and *avoir les fièvres* as synonyms:

6. 'Il n'y a pas un médecin qui ne fasse une grande différence entre ces deux expressions' (15/08/1880, p.41).

Three similar examples are found in *communications*: two from army officers and one from a pastor.

Martin highlights the expertise and professions of his readers in 24 (of 225) *communications*, e.g.:

7. 'le savant auteur de l'*Histoire de la littérature contemporaine en Russie*' (15/07/1875, p.41).
8. 'un savant philologue, que j'ai l'honneur de compter parmi mes abonnés' (01/05/1875, p.1).
9. 'savant étymologiste qui veut bien, de temps en temps, se ravir à des occupations plus sérieuses, pour venir me témoigner l'intérêt qui lui inspire la lecture de la modeste feuille à laquelle je consacre mes soins' (01/05/1870, p.113).

Highlighting educated readers and readers with linguistic expertise not only shows respect for his readers (see use of *savant* in Examples 7, 8, 9) but also, indirectly, gives the publication legitimacy. It is not just the perceived experts who receive Martin's compliments, Martin frequently compliments readers who send *communications*:

10. 'mon savant contradicteur' (01/07/1870, p.146; 01/06/1873, p.50).
11. 'un de mes lecteurs les plus attentifs et les plus fervents' (01/11/1869, p.17).
12. 'un ami de la langue française' (01/06/1873, p.49).

As Martin often calls on readers to engage with the journal, such references help to foster a respectful relationship between himself and the readers, giving readers the confidence to risk having their own letters publicly critiqued.

That the range of professions mentioned in the *Courrier* suggests a well-educated bourgeoisie readership was noted by one reader, 'le petit-fils d'une fileuse' ('the grandson of a spinner'), who highlighted the humbleness of his own background:

13. 'Permettez à l'un de vos plus humbles lecteurs de vous présenter quelques observations...' (15/03/1876, p.169)

The letter mentions the reader's upbringing in a village in rural Basse-Normandie and signs off with apparent modesty:

14. 'Je soumets humblement cette hypothèse à votre docte sagacité'.

However, this admission could be interpreted as a manifestation of a modesty topos, as the use of standard language and apparent access to literature suggest that the reader is highly educated:

15. 'Il est déjà mention de ce jeu en la vie très-horifique du grand Gargantua par M. Alcofribas (1562), au chapitre XXII du livre'.

This reader's analysis of their 'humble' background may also be illustrative of greater linguistic insecurity amongst those who are 'first-in-the-family' in comparison to the confident bourgeoisie; since Labov (1966), it is known that linguistic insecurity can intersect with class (see also Preston 2013 for an overview of linguistic insecurity, including its intersections with class).

Two further readers also seem to express linguistic insecurity:

16. 'Je suis bien loin, Monsieur le Rédacteur, d'avoir la prétention de résoudre ici ex professo une question dans laquelle ont à entrer des éléments divers, **dont certains excéderaient ma compétence.**' (01/06/1873, p.49)
17. '**Je suis loin d'être un érudit**, et c'est exclusivement pour recevoir des leçons que j'ai pris un abonnement au *Courrier de Vaugelas.*' (01/08/1876, p.33)

However, these could again be evidence of a modesty topos, as there are no letters published in the *Courrier* which use anything but standard language – although the possibility that letters were amended by Martin cannot be ruled out.

3.1.2.3 *Courrier* readers: Education and access to texts

The *communications* published in the *Courrier* can also reveal the types of texts to which readers had access and their knowledge of other languages, e.g. Latin is often mentioned in discussions of etymologies. Whilst Martin occasionally references Latin and Greek texts, he does not assume that all his readers share this proficiency in classical languages, which would indicate a certain level and kind of education. In fact, in response to the postscript of a letter from M. Lemas, a professor from Limoges, who questions the usefulness of publishing the

etymology of *péremptoire*, an etymology which Lemas suggests is available in dictionaries (01/05/1879, p.34), Martin notes that not all of his readers are versed in Latin – not all readers have been so lucky as to have had a privileged education. Martin explains that he aims to spread the French language and to be accessible to people from varying educational backgrounds:

18. ‘Parmi mes abonnés, **il y en a qui n’ont pas l’avantage d’avoir appris le latin** (il n’est pas donné à tout le monde d’aller à Corinthe),⁸³ et qui, cependant, ont le droit de trouver dans ma publication, **consacrée à la propagation « universelle » de la langue française**, les renseignements dont ils peuvent, de temps en temps, avoir besoin sur certains termes.’ (01/05/1879, p.34)

Besides differences in educational background, Martin also allows for differences in his readers’ access to reference works. This seems to suggest an awareness that readers come from different social backgrounds, some with less access to reference works, and a desire for the *Courrier* to serve as a needed resource:

19. ‘Puis-je donc leur refuser les explications qu’ils me demandent, surtout quand je sais qu’ils **les chercheraient vainement dans les ouvrages** servant d’ordinaire à l’enseignement de cette langue ?’

Other readers do seem to have had access to a wide variety of texts, both literary and reference, as per the following example:

20. ‘Vous continuez à **condamner** comme vicieuse cette locution ne pas laisser que de, et cependant **ouvrez le dictionnaire de l’Académie et la plupart des ouvrages les plus estimés de la langue française**, et vous y trouverez...’ (15/04/1876, p.185)

References are made to both publicly available texts and readers’ personal copies, e.g.:

21. ‘Rapportez-vous, je vous prie, à **la Bibliothèque gauloise**, Livre des Proverbes par M. Leroux de Lincy’ (15/05/1875, p.9).
22. ‘De même, à quelques vers plus loin de **mon édition de Garin**’ (15/05/1872, p.121).

⁸³ This is an expression which came to French from Greek. It alludes to the alleged expensive tastes of Corinthians and means ‘not everyone has equal opportunities to certain things’.
<https://www.linguefrancaise.net/Bob/49176> (Accessed: 28/09/2020).

This gives us further hints about the socio-economic background of the *Courrier's* readership – many were able to afford their own copies of reference texts (the authorities cited by readers and experts are examined in Section 5.2).

3.1.2.4 *Courrier: Women as readers*

In the main Q+A section of the *Courrier*, the gender of readers is not evident. Some information can be gleaned, however, from the *Réponses diverses* and *Communications*. In the *Réponses diverses*, only seven of the 209 notices (3%) are clearly responses to missives from women. Of these seven notices, the topic of three is unclear, e.g. 'J'accepte l'échange que vous me proposez' (15/06/1880, p.16), two relate to the running of the journal (one subscription issue and one about the date of the final issue in the series), and one seems to promise a response to a language question: 'Je m'occuperai prochainement de la "fameuse" exception que vous me signalez' (1/5/1878, p.168). Finally, there is one response to Mlle L. M. B. from Bordeaux, apparently a primary school teacher looking for work, to whom Martin writes: 'Je ne m'occupe qu'accidentellement du placement des institutrices, et je n'ai aucune demande en ce moment' (15/07/1880, p.32).

In the *Communications* section, when a reader's identity is not explicitly stated, Martin usually refers to the letter-writer as 'un de mes abonnés' or 'un de mes lecteurs', where the masculine article may serve as a 'gender-neutral' marker, or, given the scarcity of women's names in letters, may accurately reflect the gender of the correspondent, e.g.:

23. 'Mes bien sincères remerciements à l'auteur de la communication qu'on vient de lire ; car, grâce à **lui**, il m'est permis d'indiquer [...]' (01/05/1873, p.33).

Only one published letter is unambiguously from a woman: 'Zilla Suvadoux', 'une de vos petites abonnées étrangères' (01/12/1879, p.146). As not all letters in the *Communications* section are published in full or with the names of their authors, it is unclear whether this is the only letter from a woman. If, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, we assume that the proportion of women contributing to the *Communications* section is similar to that in the *Réponses diverses*, i.e. around 3%, then we may conclude that women were not writing in to the *Courrier* with the same frequency as men, which, in turn, may suggest that women were also not accessing this publication at the same rate as men. Or, perhaps, women were less bold to write in. This would support research concerning contemporary online activity which suggests that women make fewer online contributions than men; for instance, Hill and Shaw (2013) found that contributions by men to Wikipedia pages outnumber contributions by women at approximately 3:1.

3.1.2.5 *Courrier* readers: Frequent contributors

Three readers have multiple *Communications* published. Georges Garnier, described by the editor as 'le savant philologue' from Bayeux, sends 14 letters; Charles Maisonrouge, 'un savant abonné' from Honfleur, also sends 14; and Fillemin, 'un véritable ami du *Courrier*' from Sens, had four letters published.⁸⁴ Analysis of the letters of frequent contributors gives a slightly fuller impression of reader profiles, even if it is unclear how representative these are of the wider readership.

Georges Garnier, an *étymologiste* by trade, discusses etymology in eleven of his 14 letters (sent between December 1869 and September 1880),⁸⁵ providing Martin with new information and clearing up inaccuracies in previously stated etymologies. For instance, when Martin cannot provide an etymology for the word *olim*, Garnier offers a solution (15/01/1870, p.57). Charles Maisonrouge sent 14 letters, also frequently on the topic of etymology, within just three years, 1876-1879. Martin comments on the frequency of Maisonrouge's letter in the following:

24. 'Parmi les observations que M. Maisonrouge veut bien prendre la peine de m'adresser sur chaque numéro de mon journal.' (15/11/1877, p.74)

25. 'Il m'a écrit les lignes suivantes dans la critique de quinzaine qu'il veut bien continuer à m'adresser.' (15/02/1878, p.121)

and later when he describes Maisonrouge as:

26. 'cet infatigable critique' (01/05/1879, p.33).

Martin's interactions with Maisonrouge suggest both bemusement at the frequency of his communications and slight frustration at the regular criticism. Yet, Martin continues to publish the letters.

Both Maisonrouge and Garnier are well-read and seem to enjoy researching the language. Maisonrouge remarks:

⁸⁴ We learn little about Fillemin from his letters which discuss the 'superfluous' use of *encore* in the phrase 'je n'estime encore heureux' (01/10/1873, p.113), the etymology of 'larmes de crocodile' (15/01/1874, p.169-170), the etymologies of demonyms (01/11/1874, p.113), and the presentation of addresses in English language letters (01/03/1875, p.178).

⁸⁵ Garnier is not listed in the *Dictionnaire de biographie française*, but is, alongside one of his proposed etymologies, mentioned in Amann's (2014: 38) book, *L'origine du mot « félibre »*, in which it is stated that he was born in 1815 and published Christian poetry.

27. 'Mon seul mérite étant de persévérer à suivre une piste lorsque je la juge bonne, vous ne devez point trop vous étonner que j'insiste sur nouveaux frais à propos du mot *péquin*.' (15/01/1877, p.121)

Whether this indicates pleasure in linguistic research, or simply pleasure in being correct is not entirely clear. Garnier's letters clearly demonstrate his access to many texts, that he is highly educated, quoting in Latin and Greek, and that he spends time researching the topics of his letters:

28. 'J'ai relu Hérodote [...] Je ne trouve rien non plus dans les poètes grecs ou latins des grands siècles.' (15/04/1874, p.9)

In Garnier, Mainsonrouge and Fillemin, Martin had at least three very loyal readers, who frequently engaged with the publication and can certainly be considered language enthusiasts. Garnier's letters suggest he was highly knowledgeable about etymology, and his opinions and intellect were respected by Martin. Maisonrouge and Martin rarely agreed on linguistic matters, yet Martin published a large number of his letters, suggesting that Martin enjoys and sees as important the inclusion of alternative opinions – after all, a contradictory opinion gives Martin the opportunity to present his own alternative view. Furthermore, the publishing of letters from experts and keen language enthusiasts bolsters the *Courrier's* authority, portraying an image of a respectable and interested readership.

3.1.2.6 Summary: *Le Courrier de Vaugelas* readership

The potential readership of the *Courrier de Vaugelas* (1868-1881), published when knowledge of standard French was not widespread, was a relatively narrow stratum of society. On the evidence we have, its readers had access to education, wrote standard French and had enough disposable income to subscribe to the publication, or knew someone that did.⁸⁶ From the information available, many of the *Courrier's* readers were professionals or retired professionals. In the main Q+A section, 59% of questions were sent by readers from France and 41% from abroad. Most readers within France were in urban areas and readers from abroad were mainly located in Europe but stretched across four continents; whether these readers were L1 or L2 French speakers is unknown. Women were rarely visible, with only a handful of letters published identifiably coming from women. The evidence available from an examination of three frequent letter-writers reinforces the impression that Martin's readers included other language professionals who were equally passionate about language, spending time reading the *Courrier*, researching alternative answers to questions and writing to the

⁸⁶ I have been unable to confirm if the publication was accessible in libraries.

editor. Martin was willing to publish critical reactions to his publication, both when the reader was correct and when he could disprove them. This picture of Martin's late nineteenth-century readership will now be compared with that of the twenty-first-century sources analysed in this study: the *Courrier des internautes*, *Langue sauce piquante* and *Bescherelle ta mère*.

3.2 *Courrier des internautes*

3.2.1 The *Académie française* and the *Service du Dictionnaire*

Responses published on the *Courrier des internautes* webpage are written by members of the *Service du Dictionnaire*, a group affiliated to the *Académie française* but separate from the *académicien-ne-s*, made up of approximately thirteen professors and language professionals. Very little is known about the members of the *Service*. One job advertisement published on the *Académie française* website in 2018 explained that the group comprised 13 members: '7 PRAG (professeurs agrégés de l'enseignement secondaire en poste dans l'enseignement supérieur), 3 professeurs agrégés en MAD,⁸⁷ 1 lecteur-correcteur et 2 secrétaires administratifs'.⁸⁸ When asked who responds to *Internautes* questions, a member of the *Service du Dictionnaire* (private correspondence, June 2019) stated that: 'Nous répondons en fonction de nos goûts, de nos compétences et de nos disponibilités,' placing significant importance on personal taste as a deciding factor.

The authority of the *Internautes* site comes from the *Académie française* brand, in whose name all replies are published ('L'Académie répond'). As we saw in Section 1.4, the *Académie* has little more than symbolic power, but their opinions are still significant to some in France, even if the pronouncements they make are not always taken on board (Ayles-Bennett and Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2016: 109). Whilst most users choosing to contact the *Académie* presumably recognise its authority, six users challenge or express their shock at a position from the *Académie* (see Chapter 5). However, positive assessments of the *Académie* and the *Internautes* platform outnumber the negative. These were especially common in the first months of the interactive platform (which began in October 2011) and were published without comment from the *Service du Dictionnaire*:

⁸⁷ MAD = *mise à disposition* ('secondment').

⁸⁸ http://www.academie-francaise.fr/sites/academie-francaise.fr/files/poste_de_secretaire_administratif_service_du_dictionnaire_a_pouvoir.pdf (Accessed: 17/08/2020).

An article from *Le Figaro* (Aïssaoui 2009) suggests that the *Service* is a mixed group of ten members, including philosophers, lexicographers and historians, but predominantly people 'détachés de l'Éducation nationale'.

29. 'Je vous écris simplement pour vous féliciter et vous remercier pour ce site. Je trouve fantastique que des académiciens utilisent les possibilités d'internet pour communiquer avec tout type de personnes et partagent leur savoir.'
(Internautes_Q297)

As we will see, more letters are received by the *Service* than are published online. It is possible that a higher frequency of negative portrayals of the *Académie* are received but are not published.

3.2.2 The audience: *Courrier des internautes*

The *Internautes* webpage provides little information about those sending in the questions, usually only their first name, the initial of their surname, and frequently the country in which they are based (Figure 3.4). Without access to the website's metrics, information about who is using and engaging with *Internautes* is limited to the information supplied in users' questions and information which can be gathered or surmised from the few interviews a member of the *Service du Dictionnaire*, Patrick Vannier, has given. In a 2018 interview, Vannier noted that *Internautes'* audience is a select group:

'« Nous écrire, c'est déjà s'intéresser à la langue, analyse Patrick Vannier. Cela écarte tous ceux qui ne font pas de fautes et tous ceux qui ne savent pas qu'ils font des fautes ou à qui cela ne pose aucun problème. »' (Vannier cited by Ratouis 2018 in newspaper *Le Point*)

It is, in his view, the linguistically insecure and those with a keen interest in language who make contact. If we view linguistic insecurity as a by-product of standard language ideology and prescriptivism, the *Académie's* platform, by advising on *correct* usages, enforces these ideologies, perhaps further cementing feelings of insecurity and, in turn, the need for the platform.

Marcia N. (Rio de Janeiro)

Le 22 février 2013 Courrier des internautes

Nous devons dire parleurs du portugais ou plutôt locuteurs du portugais?

Marcia N. (Rio de Janeiro)

L'Académie répond

On peut dire *Une personne qui parle le portugais*. On peut dire aussi un *locuteur portugais*, mais le plus simple est d'écrire *lusophone*.

Voyez la définition de ce mot, telle qu'elle figure dans notre *Dictionnaire* :

« **LUSOPHONE** adj. XX^e siècle. Composé de *luso-*, tiré du nom de la Lusitanie, et de *-phone*, du grec *phônê*, « voix », d'où « langage, langue ». Qui parle la langue portugaise ; où l'on parle le portugais. *Populations lusophones. La communauté lusophone. Pays, État lusophone*, où le portugais est langue officielle ou langue de communication. *Le Brésil est un État lusophone*. Subst. *Un, une lusophone*. »

Figure 3.4 Example Internautes Q+A (Internautes_253)

In 2013, *académicien* Yves Pouliquen (2013) published data about the number of visitors to the *Dire, Ne pas dire* section of the website (which includes the *Internautes*). It showed that, during the section's first ten months (01/11/2011-31/08/2012), it received 45,395 visitors, which equates to, on average, 4,500 unique individuals per month. Correspondence with the *Service du Dictionnaire* puts the number of questions received in 2019 at approximately 5,000-7,000 per year suggesting that website traffic has since increased. Visitors are from a varied geographic background:

'Une majorité d'entre eux est naturellement d'origine française (23 044) à laquelle s'ajoutent deux à trois mille francophones originaires en parts égales du Canada, de Suisse, de Belgique et d'Algérie. Il en vient aussi des États-Unis, d'Allemagne, d'Italie et d'Espagne, environ huit cents pour chacun de ces pays.'

(Pouliquen 2013)

Pouliquen (2013) also suggests that the interactions between users and the *Service du Dictionnaire* have changed. Whereas initially users contacted the *Service* to point out 'les fautes les plus grossières du langage parlé', users are now more frequently seeking advice: 'ils nous ont ensuite demandé si telle ou telle expression, lue ou entendue ici ou là, était correcte et d'en préciser, le cas échéant, les conditions d'emploi.' This shift towards advice-based

interactions further supports the idea that the website’s audience is the linguistically insecure, those seeking advice from an authority.

3.2.2.1 *Internautes* users: Geographic locations

Internautes questions are usually introduced with the user’s name and their geographic location (see Figure 3.4) with varying levels of detail provided, e.g. country or city, presumably based on the online question submission form, which asks users for a home address. Online data regarding user identities can be unreliable, as users may change or hide their identity. The following analyses are therefore tentative conclusions from the ‘best available’ data. Whilst this may not correspond identically to users’ ‘real’ offline identities, offline and online identities of individuals are increasingly convergent (Marwick 2013: 358). Furthermore, offline and online identities can be conceptualised as multiple legitimate identities, performed by one individual (Cover 2015).

Total sample (n=300)		
Location	No.	%
France	234	78%
Abroad	47	16%
Unspecified	19	6%
Total	300	100%

Table 3.5 Geographic location of *Internautes* users by France/Abroad (n=300)

In order to compare the geographic location of *Internautes* users with *Courrier* readers, user locations have been grouped as France/Abroad as per the distinction made in the *Courrier*. Users within France sent 78% of questions published on the *Internautes* website (234 of 300), over the period October 2011-June 2017. They outnumber users from abroad more than four to one (Table 3.5),⁸⁹ and represent a higher proportion of contacts from France than in the Q+A section of the *Courrier* (59%; Table 3.6).⁹⁰ High proportions of France-based readers in both corpora strongly suggest, perhaps unsurprisingly, that questions about the French language are more prevalent from within France than from outside France across both time periods.

⁸⁹ As with Martin’s *Courrier*, these figures represent the number of users asking questions, rather than those simply consulting the page.

⁹⁰ Higher proportions of French readers are found in other sections of the *Courrier: Communications* = 93% of known readers from France; *Réponses diverses* = 63%.

	France		Abroad	
	No.	%	No.	%
<i>Le Courrier de Vaugelas</i> (n=1,837)	1,091	59%	746	41%
<i>Courrier des internautes</i> (n=281)	234	83%	47	17%

Table 3.6 Comparison of reader location (Courrier and Internautes)

Of the 281 *Internautes* questions where a location is specified, 267 (91%) were from Francophone countries, of which 23 were based outside of France (Table 3.7). This does not necessarily indicate a first language French speaker – a Canadian user may speak L1 English – but does show that users are mostly from French-speaking countries. This suggests that the *Académie's* authority has reach beyond France and into the Francophone world. The high proportion of questions from within France in the *Internautes* corpus (83% from France, 17% from abroad) arguably reflects the relative position and authority of the *Académie française* within and outside of France. The *Internautes* service is not the only language advice website for the French language; those outside of France may instead seek language advice from other online or offline resources. For example, L2 speakers may access bilingual dictionaries or translation services, whilst users from other Francophone countries may seek advice from authorities based in their own countries. French speakers in Québec may consult the *Office québécois de la langue française* website,⁹¹ or call their language helpline,⁹² whilst Belgian Francophones may opt to contact the *Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles's Direction de la langue française* using their online messaging service,⁹³ which sends private responses to language questions.⁹⁴

⁹¹ <https://www.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/accueil.aspx> (Accessed: 24/08/2020).

⁹² Information about the language helpline is available here: <https://www.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/ressources/publications/services/servicetarife/servicetarife.html> (Accessed: 24/08/2020).

⁹³ <http://www.languefrancaise.cfwb.be/index.php?id=10826> (Accessed: 24/08/2020).

⁹⁴ I have contacted both services for information about user numbers but have received no reply to date.

Location	No.	%
France	234	83%
Rest of Francophone	23	8%
Not Francophone	24	9%
Total*	281	100%

*19 unknown

Table 3.7 Geographic location of Internautes users (Francophone/non-Francophone)

In the corpus of 300 questions (exhaustive at the time), 19 countries are represented from five continents (see Table 3.8), in comparison to 16 countries from four continents in the *Courrier* (data from *Communications* and *Réponses diverses*). The number of countries represented in the two corpora thus appears to be similar, despite the relative ease with which the *Internautes* website could be accessed globally. However, *Service du Dictionnaire* member Vannier claimed that the platform receives questions from over 110 different countries, suggesting a much greater global spread (private correspondence, June 2019). The number of questions from L2 French individuals is also reported to have grown since 2013 (Ratouis 2018),⁹⁵ further suggesting that the *Académie* is perceived as an authority within and outside of the Francophone world.

⁹⁵ Looking at the ten most recent questions published on the site (July-October 2020), seven were sent from readers in France and three from abroad (two from Brazil, one from New Zealand).

Country	No. of questions published	% of total (n=300)
France	234	78%
Germany	8	3%
Belgium	7	2%
United Kingdom	5	2%
Canada	4	1%
Switzerland	4	1%
USA	3	1%
Burundi	2	1%
Congo	2	1%
Réunion	2	1%
Mexico	2	1%
Brazil	1	0%
Ivory Coast	1	0%
Spain	1	0%
Hong Kong	1	0%
Luxembourg	1	0%
Morocco	1	0%
Puerto Rico	1	0%
Portugal	1	0%
Unspecified	19	6%
Total	300	100%

Table 3.8 User locations by country (Internautes)

In a BBC Radio 4 programme in 2011, 'Inside the Academie Francaise' [*sic*],⁹⁶ reporter Agnès Poirier recounts that many messages received through the *Internautes* platform are from readers in Canada, although when the interview was first released (23/12/2011) none of the 16 questions published on the website were from Canadians. In my corpus, only four of the 300 published questions (October 2011-April 2017) are from Canada. It is impossible to determine whether the countries represented in this sample are representative of the wider population of those posing questions, but it appears that the actual geographic spread of users is far greater than is reflected in the questions published. However, the sporadic appearance of users from abroad in this corpus makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the use of the platform outside of France.

3.2.2.2 *Internautes* users: Occupations

Users' professions and/or student status are mentioned in 40 of 300 *Internautes* questions (see Table 3.9). In 31 of the 40 questions which mention a profession, the reader's profession is presented as relevant to the question which they are asking, e.g.:

⁹⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b018fmsz> (Accessed: 24/08/2020).

30. **‘Je suis salarié d’une importante association ornithologique.** L’ensemble des ornithologues français utilisent les termes « nicher » ou « nicheur » pour indiquer qu’un oiseau couve ou se reproduit.’ (Internautes_Q154)
31. **‘Je réalise actuellement une version française d’un documentaire** dans lequel il est fait mention du « roi de Danemark » ou « roi du Danemark ». Pouvez-vous me dire laquelle des deux formulations est correcte ?’ (Internautes_Q21)

As in Martin’s *Courrier*, jobs from the education sector are the most frequent (18 of a total 40 mentions of identifiable *Internautes* professions, 45% of listed *Internautes* occupations; 27% of *Courrier* occupations).⁹⁷ Given the large number of cases where no occupation is listed, it is again difficult to know to what extent these proportions are representative of the readerships as a whole. However, it does suggest that in the twenty-first century as in the late nineteenth century, language advice resources are popular amongst those in education, they form the largest identifiable group of both audiences. In eight of the 18 questions sent by professionals from the education sector, the question has arisen from either the language use of the pupils or from a class discussion, e.g.:

32. ‘Professeur de français en collège, j’entends chaque jour des horreurs dont je souhaite vous faire part.’ (Internautes_Q296)
33. ‘J’enseigne le français en Angleterre et mes étudiants aimeraient savoir pourquoi en français vous dites [...]’ (Internautes_Q81).

These mentions of occupations differ from those in the *Courrier*, which were often used to establish authority.

⁹⁷ Data about the professions of commenters from the two further corpora (*Langue sauce piquante* and *Bescherelle ta mère*) are not available and so are not included in this comparison.

Job area	No.
Education and Academia (employed)	18
<i>professeur des écoles; professeur de français dans un lycée allemand; professeur de français langue étrangère; professeur de français; professeur principal; professeur de français en Angleterre; enseignante en école élémentaire; enseignante en mathématiques</i>	
Education and Academia (student)	8
<i>élève à l'École expérimentale de Bonneuil; étudiante en deuxième année d'anglais; deux étudiants au lycée; étudiantes à Amiens; participants à un atelier d'écriture</i>	
Media	3
<i>réalisateur; journaliste spécialisé dans la technologie; employé à Radio Canada</i>	
Language	3
<i>transcripteur des auditions; correcteur; testeur des traductions</i>	
Legal	2
<i>secrétaire à la direction juridique; juriste d'entreprise</i>	
Medicine	1
<i>médecin légiste</i>	
Miscellaneous	5
<i>un professionnel; membres de l'association Côté Bassin regroupant les passionnés de jardins aquatiques; salarié d'une importante association ornithologique; membre d'un groupe de rock</i>	

Table 3.9 Users' professions (Internautes)

Eight questions (one fifth of 40 instances of stated occupations) were sent by students. Vannier, in his *Le Point* interview, explains that before access to online information became much easier, students would contact the website for help with their homework. An influx of 15 etymological questions from secondary-school pupils from the same town is recounted by the reporter (Ratouis 2018). Two students and one teacher mention attendance at an 'atelier d'écriture' as the inspiration behind their question (Internautes_Q17; Internautes_Q39; Internautes_Q41). It seems plausible that teachers may still influence the decision to write to the *Académie* and promote its services, and certainly that questions of language and correctness are being discussed within school.

Professions dealing directly with language (e.g. a *littérateur-grammairien* (*Courrier* 15/12/1874, p.138) and a *transcripteur des auditions* (Internautes_Q243)) and professions in

the media (e.g. a *Rédacteur en chef du Journal de Chartres* (*Courrier* 15/10/1876, p.74) and a *journaliste spécialisé dans la technologie* (*Internautes_Q100*)) are found in both sources. These are professions in which the standard is expected; journalists, for instance, often viewed as gatekeepers of the standard language, are looked to as ‘model speakers’ (Davies and Langer 2006: 44) and may find themselves under greater scrutiny when their usage falls short of expectations (Strelēvica-Ošiņa 2016: 259; see also Chapman 2012 who considers the linguistic criticism levelled at politicians). As we see in Section 3.3, the *Langue sauce piquante* blog exploits this expectation and makes the non-standard language use of journalists its focus.

Perhaps the most marked difference in reader occupations between Martin’s *Courrier* and the *Internautes* corpus concerns questions identifiably from readers in the army: six in the *Courrier*, e.g. two Lieutenants and a major, compared to none in *Internautes*. This might suggest that those in the army ranks in the late nineteenth century had a greater interest in questions of language than they do now in the twenty-first century, possibly seeking to draw authority and legitimacy through their language use too, but the data are too scanty to draw a firm conclusion.

Comparison of the occupations listed in the two readerships suggests that, firstly, and perhaps unsurprisingly, both resources are popular amongst readers who work directly with the language, either teaching it or using it publicly. Beyond these fields, the audience is varied, but most jobs are ‘professional’ – white-collar workers primarily, rather than manual workers, for instance. This may simply show a bias in which readers are willing or keen to disclose their professions, or whose questions are chosen for publication, but if the listed professions do broadly represent the wider readership, we may conclude that the *Académie’s* language advice service is more popular amongst ‘professionals’, and those who are judged for their language use.

3.2.2.3 *Internautes*: Women as users

Internautes questions are published with the user’s first name (provided by the user via an online form). Table 3.10 shows the performed (and assumed) gender of users based on the name provided. In 31 out of 300 questions, it was not possible to assume a gender from the name and/or only an initial was provided, e.g. ‘H.’ (*Internautes_200*). There are more identifiable men (167 of 300 questions) than women (102), but the balance is much closer than that observed in the *Courrier*, where only seven of the 209 *Réponses diverses* were reliably identified as contributed by women. Whilst the identifiable participation of women is

much higher in the *Internautes* corpus than in Martin's *Courrier*, there is still an imbalance, suggesting once more that men are more likely to contribute to online metalinguistic discussions than women.

Assumed gender	No.	%
Women	102	38%
Men	167	62%
Total*	269	100%

*31 incomplete or ambiguous entries

Table 3.10 *Internautes* users by assumed gender

3.2.2.4 Summary: *Courrier des internautes* users

With between 5,000 and 7,000 questions received each year (in recent years at least), the *Internautes* platform receives far more questions than it publishes. The frequency with which questions are received suggests a continued interest amongst French speakers in questions about language and correctness, as well as a desire to seek out language advice. What is more, the *Académie's* position as an authority seems strong, the public still seek their opinions and rulings on language. Questions are received from over 100 countries but, in this sample at least, only 19 countries were represented and 78% of questions were sent from within France (233 of 300 questions). Available *Courrier* data suggested that readers were based in at least 16 countries, not a large difference between the two samples despite the ease with which the *Internautes*, as an online resource, can be accessed. However, if the number of countries reflected in the sample is symptomatic of a bias in question selection and Vannier's estimate of questions from over 100 countries is more accurate than the global reach of the *Internautes* is much greater than that of the nineteenth-century print publication. This suggests two things. Firstly, questions about the French language and its correct usage seem to have reach beyond France – 'seem to' because we cannot rule out the possibility of the questions from abroad being sent by French nationals who live abroad. Secondly, the perceived authority of the *Académie* extends beyond France.

In twenty-first-century France, access to education in French and to reference texts on French is higher than ever before, meaning that, firstly, the options available to French-speakers to research their questions or seek language advice are numerous; it is therefore a *choice* to contact the *Service du Dictionnaire*, rather than the sole option. Secondly, questions of language and correctness are potentially relevant to their largest audience now that most adults in France have received an education in standard French. However, the choice to use

the *Internautes* platform, on the small amount of available evidence, is predominantly made by professionals, particularly those working in education, and students.

Women contributed approximately 34% of *Internautes* questions (102 of 300). Whilst this makes them more prominent contributors than in the *Courrier* (only 3% of question-writers identifiable as women), there is still an imbalance, which provides further support for claims that men's online contributions outnumber women's (e.g. Hill and Shaw 2013). Overall, the *Internautes* audience is still a limited group of speakers who are interested in the language and its correct usage, and who view the *Académie française* as an authority on such matters; it is not, as Vannier explains (cited by Ratouis 2018 in *Le Point*), speakers who use the language without error or those who do not care about their errors.

3.3 *Langue sauce piquante*

Langue sauce piquante (2004-present, LSP) has two main contributors, Martine Rousseau and Olivier Houdart, both of whom, when starting the blog, worked as proof-readers (*correcteurs*) for *Le Monde's* online content. Their profession allows us to make certain assumptions about their own attitudes to language and about how they may be perceived by their audience. Firstly, to work as a proof-reader, a clear vision of what constitutes correct/incorrect language usage is necessary; the profession relies on replacing the incorrect for the correct. As proof-readers, Rousseau and Houdart engage in the ideology of prescriptivism, supporting, and indeed living, the belief that there are right/wrong ways of using the language; through their removal of incorrect usages, they are engaging in the activity of prescriptivism. Consequently, we may expect their blog to show prescriptivist tendencies. For their audience, the bloggers' positions as proof-readers lend the pair legitimacy in language questions; they work in the media and specifically with language, giving them the necessary expertise to discuss language and correctness. Outside of their work at *Le Monde*, both Rousseau and Houdart have published 'popular' books on the French language on topics including punctuation (Houdart and Prioul 2007), grammar (Houdart and Prioul 2009) and the difficulties of written French (Herlin, Houdart, and Rousseau 2016).

As of October 2019, LSP received around 2,000 visitors a day, fluctuating depending on the post topic (private correspondence with Rousseau, November 2019). This is a much higher frequency than the 4,500 monthly visitors to *Dire, Ne pas dire* (the section of the *Académie* website which contains the *Internautes*) in their first ten months (Pouliquen 2013). Further data about LSP's readership is limited to what is provided in the comments section of each post, and as with Martin's *Courrier* and the *Internautes*, any information is only about readers

who interact with the source, rather than those who simply access it. While we have no explicit information about the professions of those interacting with the site, we might infer that LSP users are similar to the audience of *Le Monde*, the ideologically centre-left leaning newspaper (Kuhn 2006: 66) whose readers have ‘a higher economic and a higher cultural capital than that of other daily newspapers and of the French population at large’ (Jeanpierre and Mosbah-Natanson 2009: 176). We are therefore likely dealing with an audience of ‘white-collar’ workers, similar to that which was observed in analysis of *Courrier* and *Internautes* audiences.

Names are left by users in the comment sections of LSP blog posts but these are often usernames (as an illustration, see Table 3.11 for the top ten most active usernames), and drawing any conclusions from these is not possible. Whilst some usernames resemble traditional offline names, such as *Jacques C* and *Gus*, others, such as *l’insecte* and *TRS* are likely online aliases only. In the corpus of 300 posts, 5,869 unique usernames were used to leave 18,123 comments. This number does not necessarily correspond to an equal number of offline individuals, particularly because some usernames are repeated with small differences. For instance, accounts which contain the word ‘Miniphasme’, including ‘Miniphasme’ (75 comments), MiniPhasme cyanogène (6), ‘MiniPhasme emmi les barbares’ (3), total 1,776 comments. If all instances are the same user adapting their username, then this represents the largest number of comments per user.

Position	Username	No. of comments	% of total
1	leveto	1,050	6%
2	Gus	842	5%
3	harald	732	4%
4	Jesús	506	3%
5	TRS	405	2%
6	zerbinette	356	2%
7	Jacques C	340	2%
8	Anoup	272	2%
9	correcteurs	266	1%
10	l’insecte	243	1%
Total number of comments			18,123

Table 3.11 Ten most frequent LSP users (300 post corpus)

Whilst little is known about *who* is commenting, the data do reveal *how* users engage with the blog (see Table 3.12 for an overview of user engagement). Most users (4,933 of 5,869) left only one comment in the corpus of 300 posts (published October 2011-April 2017). Yet these comments do not account for the majority of comments in the sample. One-off comments count for only 27% of the total comments (4,933 comments out of a total of 18,123). On the other side of the scale, almost the same percentage of comments (28%, 5,012 comments) were made by the ten most frequent contributors (see Table 3.11), and 30 users commented over 100 times. Engagement with the blog is varied: most users contribute one-off comments, but a small proportion of users engage frequently and prolifically with the content.

Total number of comments	18,416 ⁹⁸	
Mean number of comments on each post	61.4	
Number of posts with over 100 comments	49	16% of posts
Highest number of comments	696	4% of all comments
	Post title: <i>Contester, une maladie ?</i>	
Lowest number of comments	4	
	Three posts received four comments: « <i>De l'aborigène au zizi</i> », <i>c'est champion !</i> <i>Guy, typo' fleuri</i> <i>Castro (Roland) le matassin</i>	
Users who left only one comment	4,933 (81%)	

Table 3.12 Overview of reader engagement with LSP (corpus of 300 posts)

The two bloggers (using the shared username *correcteurs*) were the ninth most frequent commenters in this corpus, writing 266 comments across 142 posts. The bloggers additionally comment using individual usernames, including *olihoud* and *Martine*. Comments made by the bloggers tend to address individual users directly (as in the second comment in Figure 3.5), but on a handful of occasions the comment is simply an aside. For instance, on 31st July 2015, a blog post was published discussing a phrase used in the satirical weekly the *Canard enchaîné*. Later that day, the bloggers commented under this post about an unrelated cartoon published

⁹⁸ For seven posts, the number of comments left was available, but the comments themselves were not. The number of available comments totalled 18,123.

in that day's *Le Monde*.⁹⁹ Direct interaction between the bloggers and the blog's users is common, but not a given. Users also interact with each other. Such interactions are not necessarily easy to find, as users signal that their post is in response to another user's post in different ways.¹⁰⁰ The most frequently used signals are: '►username'; '@username'; and, the method used by the bloggers, 'à [username]:'. Terms of endearment, e.g. 'les lspistes' (e.g. LSP_4486) and 'amis blogueurs' (LSP_9699), are also used by LSP commenters; their presence suggests a feeling of community and of shared endeavour amongst frequent commenters.

Determining the performed gender of LSP users is difficult due to the high number of aliases used which do not correspond to 'traditional' offline names. In the qualitative sample (454 comments from 31 posts, see Table 2.10), there are 158 individual users, 107 of whom have usernames which denote no gender, nor contain any pronouns or agreements indicating the user's gender. Of the 51 users whose performed gender is clearer, 37 are men and 14 are women. Of the 10 most frequent commenters in the sample, five present as men and in five others the gender is unclear. As in both Martin's *Courrier* and the *Internautes*, the (limited) evidence suggests that women are underrepresented in the comments, accounting in LSP for approximately 27% of contributions. Although little is known about the readers and commenters of the blog, assumptions can be made about the potential readership based on assumptions about *Le Monde* (the host website) and, since the blog's content centres around discussions about language and correctness, we can be sure that those accessing the site are interested in questions of language.

⁹⁹ <https://www.lemonde.fr/blog/correcteurs/2015/07/31/qui-vivra-verrat/> (Accessed: 25/08/2020).

¹⁰⁰ LSP differs in this way to, for instance, the comment system on Facebook or Twitter, where users 'tag' other users to signal that their comment is a direct reaction.

harald

8 FÉVRIER 2017 À 19 H 04 MIN

La virgule, l'explicative et la déterminative, oui, j'en ai entendu parler, et de la virgule flottante aussi :

«La virgule flottante est une méthode d'écriture de nombres réels fréquemment utilisée dans les ordinateurs.

Elle consiste à représenter un nombre par un signe s (égal à -1 ou 1), une mantisse m (aussi appelée significande) et un exposant e (entier relatif, généralement borné).

Un tel triplet représente un réel $s.m.be$ où b est la base de représentation (généralement 2 sur ordinateur, mais aussi 8 ou 16 sur certaines anciennes machines, 10 sur de nombreuses calculatrices, ou éventuellement toute autre valeur). En faisant varier e , on fait « flotter » la virgule. La mantisse m est représentée par une suite de chiffres en base b , généralement de taille fixée, dans laquelle on choisit de placer une virgule à une position fixe : juste avant ou juste après le premier chiffre, ou juste après le dernier chiffre ; dans ce dernier cas, la mantisse est un entier naturel¹. Pour un nombre donné, la valeur de l'exposant dépend de ce choix. Les nombres en virgule flottante peuvent ainsi être vus comme l'équivalent informatique de la notation scientifique, qui correspond à la deuxième convention (virgule placée juste après le premier chiffre).»

Cette virgule flottante à beaucoup de charme, mais il faut bien le dire, j'hésite à l'utiliser, une sorte d'appréhension.



correcteurs

9 FÉVRIER 2017 À 7 H 59 MIN

harald : cette virgule flottante, comment l'intégrer à la syntaxe ? ne risque-t-elle pas de donner le mal de mer au lecteur ?



leveto

9 FÉVRIER 2017 À 8 H 18 MIN

► correcteurs

s'il faut choisir, ne vaut-il pas mieux la virgule flottante décrite par harald qui ne donne que le mal de mer plutôt que le **bacille virgule** qui donne le choléra ?

Figure 3.5 Example interaction between LSP bloggers and users. Comments are in response to a blog post about the use of commas in different types of clauses. (<https://bit.ly/2GqbEWt>)

3.4 *Bescherelle ta mère*

Bescherelle ta mère (2014-present, BTM) is an example of what Heyd (2014: 497) terms ‘grassroots prescriptivist photo blogs’; blogs which rely on photographic content, are run by laypeople, with a primary purpose of entertainment and whose commentary on language use can ‘range from benevolent and amused interest to harsh, normative critique’. It can also be considered a part of the so-called ‘grammar nazi’ phenomenon,¹⁰¹ the practice of critiquing the language use of others, common in internet cultures across a wide variety of language contexts (Švelch and Sherman 2018: 2392). BTM differs quite significantly from the other three sources analysed in this study. Whilst all sources have an aspect of entertainment, the content published by BTM is not intended to educate its audience, nor can it be interpreted as advice-giving. It aims to entertain and is consequently well-suited to comparison with LSP, giving insight into user reactions to similar content from two differing approaches.

BTM was created in 2014 by 21-year-old Sylvain Szewczyk and began as a Twitter account. Szewczyk saw a possibility ‘pour rigoler’ when he realised that the Twitter username ‘@Bescherelle’ had not yet been used and, as the French version of the Huffington Post summarises: ‘Il décide de le lancer pour épingler toutes les fautes d’orthographe qu’il voit passer, en particulier dans les médias’ (Lorenzo 2014). Within weeks, the Twitter page and accompanying Facebook page had gained considerable online popularity (Lorenzo 2014). Szewczyk is not a language professional and consequently both the website’s content and user engagement with the content can be conceived of as sources of lay language commentary.

During a TV interview (November 2017), Szewczyk recounts how over time he became increasingly aware of the link between language use and access to education and socio-economic factors and so tries in BTM content to promote laughter at the errors made, rather than the person making the error(s).¹⁰² This approach to language and correctness is articulated in the final pages of his 2017 book, ‘Je t’apprends le français, bordel !’ (Figure 3.6), which highlights the difficulty of the French language and advocates for educating others. Whilst Szewczyk himself might not aim to incite laughter at other people, BTM user comments frequently critique the error(s) and the individual(s) who made the error(s) (see 6.3). No attempts are made to counter this on any of the three BTM platforms, via the post content or ‘About’ sections, for instance.

¹⁰¹ See Horan (2019) for a discussion on the use of *nazi* as an insult in forms including *feminazi* and *grammar nazi*.

¹⁰² See the interview on current affairs show *C à vous* here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0iwPKAYfctk> (Accessed: 25/08/2020).



Figure 3.6 Extract from 'Je t'apprends le français, bordel !' by Szewczyk

BTM content is crowdsourced (i.e. content is obtained via a large group of people, usually, and in this case entirely, online). Users find or come across language errors and then share them with the website via an online form, demonstrating that they have a knowledge of correct and incorrect language. In this way, users are positioned as 'experts', separating *correct* usages from the *incorrect*. It can be assumed that not every error sent in by users is then published online. We know that an editing process occurs, as those publishing the content compile the error into an article form, comprising the photo, a title, and sometimes a caption. It therefore seems likely that a selection process also takes place, perhaps weeding out any supposed errors which are not in fact incorrect.

No analysis of the BTM users' characteristics is possible, as the data were anonymised at the point of collection for ethical reasons (see Section 2.6). We can assume that BTM users do not visit the website for language advice, but to look at the mistakes of others for entertainment. Analysis of the comments in 6.3 will show that this establishes a notional hierarchy: there are those who make language mistakes, and those above them who do not make such mistakes but spot them in others. Unique here, however, is that the website has already highlighted the errors, meaning that mastery of the French language is not a prerequisite for engaging with the content. As we will see, this means that user comments also often contain errors,

some of which are intentional errors for the purpose of humour, whilst others appear to be genuine mistakes. The enjoyment which users can take from the website stems from the way in which its content makes users feel like a language expert or, at the very least, superior, as well as the potential for unintended double entendre which can result from certain errors (see Section 7.3).

3.5 Conclusion

Le Courier de Vaugelas, *Courrier des internautes*, *Langue sauce piquante* and *Bescherelle ta mère* are, broadly, manifestations of the same genre – that of language commentary – over time, from offline and printed to an online format. The *Courrier* and *Internautes* are, more specifically, examples of language advice resources in which language experts answer the language questions of their lay readers. The *Courrier's* editor, Martin, is positioned as a linguistic authority, and his credentials as an expert are bolstered not only by his role as editor, but also by his previous work as a teacher and by his other publications. The *Internautes* platform, on the other hand, enjoys institutional linguistic authority, thanks to its explicit association with the *Académie française*. Martin often turns to the *Académie française* in his responses, but for the *Internautes* platform, the *Académie* is the main legitimising authority (discussed further in Chapter 5).

LSP and BTM are both blogs concerning language and correctness, but their approaches differ. LSP is comparable to a language column: two language professionals discuss language and correctness across a range of topics which are sometimes inspired by readers' questions. BTM, by contrast, is a prescriptivist blog with predominantly photographic content (cf. Heyd 2014: 497). LSP benefits from a similar institutional authority to the *Internautes*, drawing its legitimacy from its association with *Le Monde* and the professional authority of its two bloggers, who work as proof-readers. *Bescherelle ta mère*, on the other hand, has no institutional or professional backing, although arguably it lays claim to some kind of authority through the (unlicensed) use of the *Bescherelle* brand in its name. In the absence of institutional backing, the nature of BTM's content (people's language errors shared for entertainment), and the crowd-sourcing aspect of the website, places authority in the hands of those accessing the content, separating *good* from *bad* usages.

The *Courrier* and *Internautes* are readily comparable, not just for their similar formats, but for their seemingly similar audiences. The audiences of both sources comprise those who have queries about the language and/or an interest in language and correctness. Although, as noted earlier, assumptions about the readership are based on readers who write to the

sources; little is known about the 'silent readership' of any of the four sources. While questions are sent to both corpora from across the globe – at least 16 countries from four continents for the *Courrier* and 19 countries across five continents in the *Internautes* sample (although the *Service du Dictionnaire* claims to have received queries from over 100 countries) – the majority of questions published are from readers based in France. Readers' occupations are not systematically provided in the *Courrier* or *Internautes*, but the available data suggest that those working in education and academia are frequent contributors to both sources, which reflects the role of education professionals in diffusing the standard language and their consciousness of that fact. Almost all professions cited by readers are 'professional' occupations, i.e. white-collar workers, rather than manual workers, suggesting that pressure to conform to the standard is felt more strongly in professional working environments.

The performed gender of *Courrier* readers and *Internautes* and LSP users suggests that women contribute less frequently than men in all three samples. No comparable data are available for BTM. Contributions by women are very low in the nineteenth-century *Courrier* (3% of *communications*). This increases to 27% in LSP and 34% in the *Internautes* corpus. Despite the incomplete data and the absence of information about BTM, the imbalance in the three sources strongly suggests that women are still contributing less to language commentary publications than men, despite a significant increase compared to the nineteenth century.

Much less information about the LSP and BTM audiences is publicly available; for ethical reasons, most personal data is either censored or deliberately not collected for study (e.g. Facebook usernames). While reasonable assumptions can be made about LSP readers based on its association with *Le Monde*, the audience for BTM is potentially vast. Whereas for the *Courrier*, *Internautes* and LSP, the audiences are limited to people who willingly access the sources, the functionalities of Facebook mean that even users who are unaware of BTM may be shown its content. The potential audience thus extends beyond those language enthusiasts who seek out language and correctness content.

Users of BTM and LSP can not only interact with the website and the content (most similar to interactions with the experts for other sources), but they can and do also interact with other users. This gives access to lay-lay language commentary, a form of language commentary which has been thus far little studied. With this knowledge of the sources in mind, the next three chapters turn to analysis of the language commentary in those sources in greater detail. Chapter 4 begins this analysis, focussing on the two Q+A publications, the *Courrier* and the

Internauts, and examining what areas of the language prompt readers to write to the language experts for advice.

Chapter 4 Areas of doubt and difficulty in the French language: *Le Courier de Vaugelas* and the *Courrier des internautes*

This chapter addresses Research Question 1 outlined in the introduction: What areas of the language are of particular interest for the French-speaking readers of the four sources? Which areas appear to cause the most difficulty or doubt, and does this change between the two time periods? The chapter presents both quantitative and qualitative analysis of readers' questions which seek answers and advice from language authorities in the two Q+A sources: Éman Martin's *Le Courier de Vaugelas* (1868-1881) and the *Courrier des internautes* run by the *Service du Dictionnaire* (part of the *Académie française*) (2011-2017). The parallel formats of the *Courrier* and *Internautes* are conducive to comparison: both publish questions from readers about the language alongside responses from a perceived expert. The fact that the two sources span two different time periods (late nineteenth-century and early twenty-first century) and two mediums (print and online) allows us to examine to what extent readers' concerns and doubts about language doubts have remained similar or have changed.

Questions published in each of the two sources were categorised by topic, as described in Section 4.1. Section 4.2 presents initial quantitative findings of the main areas of readers' doubt and difficulty in the two sources, comparing questions from readers in France with those from abroad to show, for instance, that questions about morpho-syntax and meaning are amongst the most frequent in both sources. However, we shall see that there are some significant differences between the two sources. For instance, questions about borrowings are rare in the *Courrier* – just three questions from a total of 2,019 – but, some 130 years later, they are much more frequent in the *Internautes* corpus. Section 4.3 then presents more detailed analysis of questions in each topic area.

Examples from each corpus are identified using the IDs presented in Section 2.4, in the form *Source_Q*+number for a question, or *Source_R*+number for a response, e.g. *Internautes_R500*. Italics are used in *Courrier* examples where small capitals were used in the original. In *Internautes* examples, use of italics reflects the italics in the original. Bold is used to highlight significant sections of questions and responses. The spelling and content of all examples is otherwise reproduced as originally published.

4.1 Categorisation of language topics addressed in the *Courrier* and *Internautes*

As a first step to analyse question topics, a combination of *a priori* and data-driven approaches was adopted to develop a categorisation of language areas. Questions were categorised according to what aspect of language they addressed, from details of phonology and spelling

to questions about meaning and morpho-syntax, for instance. The categories and sub-categories are shown in Table 4.2, with example questions. For the *Courrier* examples, I have cited the summary of the question provided by Martin on the front page of each issue (see Figure 4.1); for the *Internautes*, listed is my own summary of the relevant *Internautes* question.

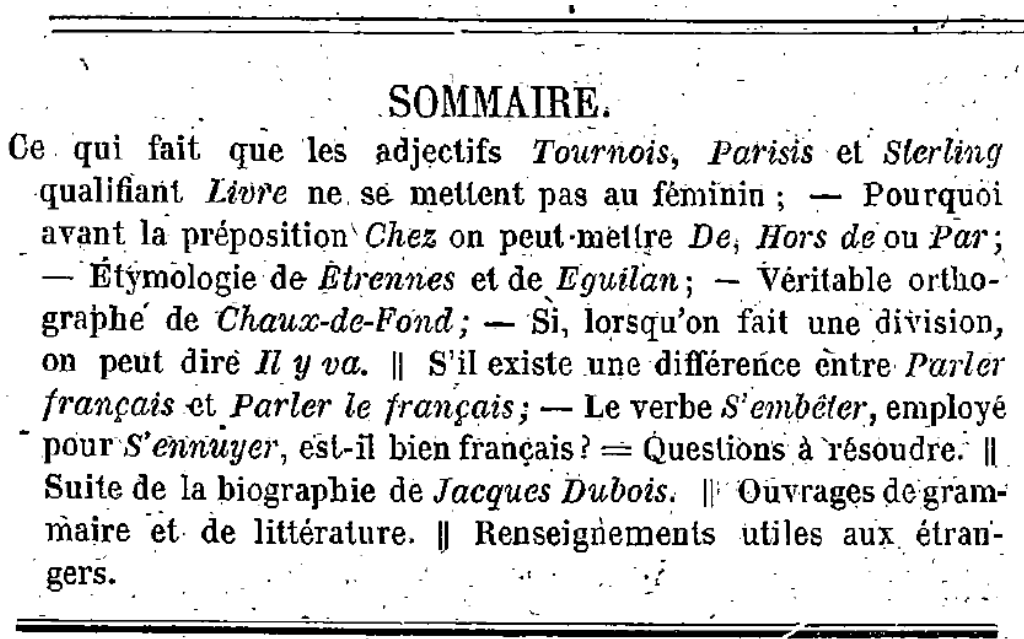


Figure 4.1 Example content summary (*Courrier*; 15/01/1869, p.57)

It should be noted that the number of questions analysed for each corpus in this section is higher than the total number of questions for each source presented in the methodology (see Table 4.1). This is because some questions in fact contain more than one question: in Martin's *Courrier*, for example, 91 (5%) of the 1,837 readers' questions published ask more than one question. For instance, the following question asks for both the etymology and meaning of an expression:

1. 'Que veut dire avoir ses grandes et ses petites entrées chez quelqu'un, et quelle est l'origine de cette expression ?' (*Courrier*_Q174)

In such cases, the individually published question was categorised more than once, to account for the multiple questions within the one correspondence. This brings the total number of *Courrier* questions categorised to 2,019. Similarly, the *Internautes* corpus presented in

Chapter 2 has 300 questions; this rises to 316 questions when multiple questions are included (16 questions, 5%).

	No. of published questions as single pieces of correspondence	No. of individual questions categorised
<i>Courrier</i>	1,837	2,019
<i>Internautes</i>	300	316

Table 4.1 Corpora sizes for quantitative analysis in Chapter 4 (Courrier and Internautes)

Category	Sub-category	Examples from <i>Courrier or Internautes</i>
Phonology	Consonants	Raison pour laquelle l' <i>r</i> de <i>Monsieur</i> ne sonne pas (Courrier_Q44)
	Vowels	Comment il faut prononcer <i>Paon, Laon, Taon</i> (Courrier_Q104)
	Liaisons	Peut-on faire la liaison dans cette expression : <i>les points sur les i</i> (Internautes_Q5)
	<i>H aspiré</i>	Une question relative à l'aspiration de l' <i>h</i> (Courrier_Q168)
	Foreign words	Prononciation de <i>bonzai</i> (Internautes_Q146)
	Proper nouns	Prononciation du village <i>Anglet</i> (Internautes_Q141)
Spelling	General	L'orthographe <i>Cuiller</i> est-elle meilleure que <i>Cuillère</i> ? (Courrier_Q524)
	Punctuation	Peut-on écrire <i>grand'mère, grand'place</i> , ou doit-on écrire <i>grand-mère, grand-place</i> ? (Internautes_Q56)
	Capitalisation	Si les titres des codes juridiques commencent par une majuscule ou non (Internautes_Q14)
	Diacritics	Pourquoi le nom propre <i>Châles</i> prend un accent circonflexe ? (Courrier_Q35)
Vocabulary	Word class	Si <i>Aidant</i> est adjectif dans <i>Dieu aidant</i> (Courrier_Q1077)
	Borrowings	Alternative pour <i>wearables</i> (Internautes_Q100)
	Gender	<i>Un dénivelé</i> ou <i>une dénivelée</i> (Internautes_Q192)
	Neologisms and archaisms	Si <i>Septennat</i> est un néologisme à accueillir (Courrier_Q722)
	Abbreviations	L'utilisation des abréviations pour désigner une personne ou un groupe de personnes (Internautes_Q264)
	Easily confused words and idioms	S'il faut dire <i>Golfe de Lyon, de lion</i> ou <i>du lion</i> (Courrier_Q28)
Meaning	Semasiology	Sens de l'expression <i>mettre hors de page</i> (Courrier_Q30)

	Onomasiology	Comment appelle-t-on l'action de savourer ? (Internautes_Q74)
	Semantic scope	Si <i>Compliment</i> peut se dire quand il arrive un malheur a quelqu'un (Courrier_Q841)
	Synonyms	Différence entre <i>cancérigène</i> et <i>cancérogène</i> (Internautes_Q95)
Morpho-syntax	Word order	Si <i>Jusqu'à</i> peut figurer avant le sujet d'un verbe (Courrier_Q1574)
	Derivational morphology	Pourquoi <i>Humoristique</i> quand le substantif est <i>Humour</i> (Courrier_Q1710)
	Inflectional morphology	Comment orthographier le mot <i>demi</i> dans : une demi(e) (-) poire : accord ou non ? (Internautes_Q94)
	Articles	Si après <i>Vers</i> suivi du mot <i>heure</i> , on doit employer l'article <i>les</i> (Courrier_Q177)
	Valency	Dit-on à <i>l'avance</i> ou <i>en avance</i> (Internautes_Q44)
	Pronouns	Pourquoi <i>Je, soussigné</i> , etc. et non <i>Moi, soussigné</i> (Courrier_Q443)
Language History	Word	Origine du mot <i>urgence</i> (Internautes_Q17)
	Expression/idiom	Origine de l'expression <i>c'est du gâteau</i> ? (Internautes_Q174)
	Spelling	S'il est vrai que l' <i>i</i> dans la finale <i>ier</i> des noms de métier soit justifié par l'étymologie (Courrier_Q1247)
	Grammatical point	Explication de l'origine de l'auxiliaire <i>être</i> (Courrier_Q75)
Style	Register and politeness	Si <i>Chic</i> peut s'employer dans la bonne société (Courrier_Q675)
	Pleonasm	Opinion sur <i>A-t-il été suicidé</i> (Courrier_Q1082)
Metalinguistic knowledge		Pourquoi deux genres en français quand le latin en a trois (Courrier_Q598)
Opinions about language		La langue des journalistes (Internautes_Q291)

Table 4.2 Categorisation of language areas covered by questions asked in the Courrier and Internautes corpora

The categories used for analysis, as presented in Table 4.2, were developed through a series of steps. Existing categorisations, as used in two editions of Grevisse's *Le Bon Usage* (1955, 2016) and Ayres-Bennett and Seijido's (2011) categorisation of the language areas discussed by the *remarqueurs*, provided a useful starting-point. Grevisse's *Le Bon Usage* is a well-known and frequently revised grammatical text of the French language; I looked specifically at the way in which the contents of the grammar are organised. This was supplemented by reference to the categorisation undertaken by Ayres-Bennett and Seijido (2011) of metalinguistic discussions, classifying the observations made by a corpus of *remarqueurs* into topics. The purpose of their categorisation is thus closely aligned to my own. However, initial examination of the *Courrier* and *Internautes* data showed that the observations of the *remarqueurs* and the questions asked by *Courrier* and *Internautes'* readers, whilst similar in some ways, do not always overlap in topic. This was particularly evident with regards to questions about language history, a very popular topic in the *Courrier* but not a separate category in Ayres-Bennett and Seijido's study. The etymology of words is covered in Grevisse but does not extend, for instance, to idioms. The inclusion and expansion of a language history topic was thus a data-driven decision, used in combination with established *a priori* categories, e.g. spelling and phonology.

The act of categorising or coding data is to some extent subjective, another researcher applying the same categorisation to the same dataset might arrive at different decisions in some cases. Questions did not always fit neatly into one single category, in which case a 'best fit' was decided. For instance, one reader asked:

2. 'Doit-on écrire *midi et demi* ?, ou *midi et demie* ?' (Courrier_Q500)

This could be interpreted as either a spelling or an inflectional morphology question. However, given that the difference in spelling involves an agreement (*demi* refers to an absent *heure*, a feminine noun), this question was categorised as inflectional morphology.

Often, I turned to the expert's response to shed light on the area to which they themselves saw the question as belonging. For instance, difficulty arose when categorising questions which ask: 'in which circumstances can this word/expression be used?'. When Martin's reply provides the word or expression's meaning and little additional information, these questions were categorised as semasiology. For instance, one reader asks:

3. 'Il me semble que l'explication que vous donnez dans votre *Sylllexie* de l'expression proverbiale : *ce bon cheval va bien tout seul à l'abreuvoir*, » n'est pas suffisante, car

vous ne dites pas **quand on petit l'employer**. Voudriez-vous bien la compléter ?'
(Courrier_Q112)

Martin's response centres primarily on the expression's meaning and the question was categorised according to this.

In the *Courrier*, Martin provided a short summary of content, including the questions published, on the publication's first page (see Figure 4.1). This summary was, however, not always an accurate reflection of a question's content. For instance, one reader's question was summarised by Martin as follows: 'Véritable orthographe de *Chaux-de-Fond*', suggesting that this was a question about spelling. Upon reading the question, it becomes clear that the topic is, in fact, meaning:

4. 'Je me suis souvent, mais en vain, demandé **ce que signifiaient** ces mots.'
(Courrier_Q56)

Martin's summary in such cases was ignored. Despite these limitations, the categorisation gives an overview of the frequency with which certain areas of language are discussed in the two sources.

Table 4.3 presents the three language areas asked about most frequently in each corpus. Questions about meaning are the second-largest category in both samples. They account for over one third of all *Courrier* questions (34%, 686 of 2,019) and just over one fifth of *Internautes* questions (21%, 68 of 316). Also frequent in both corpora are morpho-syntax questions, comprising 20% (404) of *Courrier* questions – the third most frequent category – and almost one third of *Internautes* questions (31%, 99). Together, questions about morphosyntax and meaning account for over half of all questions in both corpora: 54% of all *Courrier* questions (1,090 questions) and 52% of *Internautes* questions (167 questions). This suggests some stability in areas of doubt and difficulty for French speakers across the two time periods.

<i>Courrier</i>			<i>Internautes</i>		
Category	No.	%	Category	No.	%
Language History	691	34%	Morpho-syntax	99	31%
Meaning	686	34%	Meaning	68	21%
Morpho-syntax	404	20%	Vocabulary	43	14%
Total of top three categories	1,781	88%	Total of top three categories	210	66%

Table 4.3 Three most frequent question categories (*Courrier* and *Internautes*)

However, there are also important differences between the two corpora, most obviously in language history questions. Language history questions are the largest category in the *Courrier* sample (34%, 691 of 2,019), but account for only 6% (19 of 316) of *Internautes* questions, making it the sixth most frequent of the nine categories (see Table 4.4). Similarly, whilst questions about vocabulary rank third in the *Internautes* corpus, making up 14% (43 of 316) of all questions, vocabulary questions are only the fifth most frequent in the *Courrier* at 3% (61 of 2,019), alongside questions about phonology. These two findings suggest changing prominence of the areas of doubt and interest for readers across the two corpora, although caution must be exercised in the analysis of these data as the raw figures are small. As explored below, the frequency with which topics are covered may also be the result of editorial decisions.

Category	<i>Courrier</i>		<i>Internautes</i>	
	No. of questions	%	No. of questions	%
Language history	691	34%	19	6%
Meaning	686	34%	68	22%
Morpho-syntax	404	20%	99	31%
Spelling	88	4%	12	4%
Phonology	61	3%	29	9%
Vocabulary	61	3%	43	14%
Style	17	1%	14	4%
Metalinguistic knowledge	11	1%	7	2%
Opinions about language	0	0%	25	8%
Total	2,019	100%	316	100%

Table 4.4 Frequency of *Courrier* and *Internautes* questions by category (sorted from high to low by *Courrier* data)

Those writing to the *Courrier* had converging areas of doubt for which they sought advice; the three language areas that are asked about most frequently account for 88% of all questions (1,781 of 2,019) (Table 4.4), and the top two categories, language history and meaning, account for 68% (1,377) of questions. *Internautes* questions, on the other hand, are spread more widely across multiple categories, with the top three categories (morpho-syntax, meaning, vocabulary) forming a much smaller majority at 66% (210 of 316) of published questions. Even the five most frequent areas combined (84%) is still short of the total percentage of questions for the top three categories in the *Courrier* (88%), suggesting that the areas of difficulty and doubt are more diverse in the online corpus.

The differing focus of readers' questions may be indicative of editor selection and/or expertise. As shown in Chapter 3, it seems probable that all questions received by the *Courrier* were published (the number of questions varies per issue and repeated questions were still published, with a response signposting a previously published response). By contrast, the *Internautes* webpage receives far more questions than it publishes and, consequently, editorial decisions are made. Language history – the largest area of reader questions in the *Courrier* – remains an area of interest in France, and Paveau and Rosier (2008: 212) compare the French etymological interest to a 'sport national'. The relative infrequency of such questions in the *Internautes* corpus (19 of 316, 6%) may, then, result from editor selection, perhaps reflecting the *Service du Dictionnaire's* lack of interest in language history questions rather than that of *Internautes* users. On the other hand, the fact that almost one third of published *Internautes* questions are about morpho-syntax suggests that variety is not a key editorial criterion. I have been unable to verify the process of editorial selection with direct information from the *Service*. However, the *Académie* is known, and wishes to be known, for its opinions on language and correctness, rather than for its interest in etymology. Perhaps language history questions are being asked elsewhere.

4.2 Comparing readers' doubts from France and abroad: *Courrier* and *Internautes*

As described in Chapter 3, both sources publish questions from readers based in and outside of France. In the *Courrier*, questions are grouped by reader location; the first section is devoted to questions from readers in France, the subsequent *Étranger* section contains questions from readers based outside of France. *Internautes* questions are not separated by reader location, but the geographic location is provided in 94% of cases. It is again important to highlight that readers living outside of France may still be French L1 speakers. All data in this section and Section 4.3 were tested for statistical significance, using a chi square test or Fisher's exact test when the minimum samples for the chi square were not met.¹⁰³ Three levels of significance were tested for: $p \leq 0.05$ (reported in tables as: *); $p \leq 0.01$ (**); and the highest level of significance $p \leq 0.001$ (***)).

Martin's *Courrier* published (and therefore presumably received) more questions from readers in France (1,200 of 2,019, 59%) than from abroad (819, 41%). Analysis by category and subcategory of question topic suggests that the same areas of language cause doubt and difficulty for *Courrier* readers, regardless of geographic location (Table 4.5 presents the data

¹⁰³ The observed count for each variable must be at least 5 to use a chi square test. Fisher's exact test has no minimum observed count and is more suited to testing categories with small frequencies.

by category and Table 4.6 by subcategory). Two statistically significant differences were observed. Readers from within France asked more language history questions (37%, 448) than readers abroad (30%, 243) ($p \leq 0.001$), whereas significantly more meaning questions were asked by readers outside of France (39%, 321) than readers in France (30%, 365) ($p \leq 0.001$). This suggests that whilst readers from abroad use the *Courrier* principally in a functional way, asking questions to improve their language use, French readers are asking questions less out of necessity and more out of interest, as a hobby perhaps.

Category	% and number of France questions	% and number of abroad questions
Language history (***)	37% (448)	30% (243)
Meaning (***)	30% (365)	39% (321)
Morpho-syntax	20% (243)	20% (161)
Spelling	5% (60)	3% (28)
Vocabulary	3% (34)	3% (27)
Phonology	3% (33)	3% (28)
Style	1% (10)	1% (7)
Metalinguistic knowledge	1% (8)	0% (3)
Opinions about language	0% (0)	0% (0)

Table 4.5 Breakdown of corpus by categories for *Courrier* readers in France and abroad (ordered from high to low by frequency of questions from readers in France)

Subcategory	% and number of France questions	% and number of abroad questions
Meaning: Semasiology	20% (236)	25% (208)
Language history: Expression/idiom	20% (234)	17% (141)
Language history: Word	18% (210)	12% (87)
Morpho-syntax: Inflectional morphology	8% (97)	7% (61)
Meaning: Synonyms	5% (60)	9% (75)

Table 4.6 Breakdown of corpus by five most numerous subcategories for readers in France and abroad (*Courrier*)

The *Internautes* sample comprises 248 questions (78% of 316) from readers based in France, 49 (16%) from readers based abroad, and 19 (6%) questions for which the location is unknown.¹⁰⁴ Analysis of question topics by geographic location reveals greater variation than in the *Courrier* (Table 4.7). Whilst the top four categories are the same for all *Internautes*

¹⁰⁴ Questions for which reader locations are unknown are not analysed in this section but are included in all other analysis.

readers regardless of location (morpho-syntax, meaning, vocabulary and phonology), the order of the remaining five categories varies depending on location although no differences are statistically significant. *Internautes* readers from France ask proportionally twice as many spelling questions (France = 4%, 10 of 248 questions; Abroad = 2%, 1 of 49), and more than twice as many style questions (France = 5%, 13; Abroad = 2%, 1). Phonology questions were more frequent amongst readers based abroad (14%, 7) than France-based readers (8%, 21). This seems to suggest that users based abroad (possibly L2 French speakers) are more likely to have queries surrounding French pronunciation, whilst first language French-speakers have a more heightened awareness of style. However, these are speculations as the differences are not statistically significant and the raw figures are small.

Category	% and number of France questions	% and number of abroad questions
Morpho-syntax	32% (80)	29% (14)
Meaning	22% (55)	22% (11)
Vocabulary	13% (33)	16% (8)
Phonology	8% (21)	14% (7)
Language history	7% (17)	4% (2)
Opinions about language	6% (15)	4% (2)
Style	5% (13)	2% (1)
Spelling	4% (10)	2% (1)
Metalinguistic knowledge	2% (4)	6% (3)

Table 4.7 Breakdown of corpus by categories for Internautes users in France and abroad (ordered from high to low by frequency of questions from users in France)

Subcategory	% and number of France questions	% and number of abroad questions
Morpho-syntax: Inflectional morphology	15% (37)	10% (5)
Vocabulary: Borrowings	8% (20)	8% (4)
Meaning: Onomasiology	7% (18)	8% (4)
Meaning: Synonyms	7% (17)	12% (6)
Opinions about language	6% (15)	4% (2)
Morpho-syntax: Valency	5% (13)	6% (3)
Morpho-syntax: Articles	2% (5)	6% (3)
Metalinguistic knowledge	2% (4)	6% (3)

Table 4.8 Breakdown of corpus by most numerous subcategories for readers in France and abroad (Internautes)

Analysis of subcategories by geographic location showed no statistically significant differences in either corpus (see Table 4.6 and Table 4.8). Overall, analysis reveals no large differences in frequency of question topic between readers based in France and abroad, except in the *Courrier*, where readers from France ask significantly more language history questions ($p \leq 0.001$) and readers from abroad more questions about meaning ($p \leq 0.001$). The data suggest that the same difficulties and doubts prompt readers in France and abroad to seek advice from the *Courrier* and the *Internautes* experts.

4.3 Comparing readers' doubts and difficulties: *Courrier* and *Internautes*

Having given a quantitative overview of the areas of focus in reader questions, I turn now to a finer-grained quantitative analysis of the subcategories, comparing the proportions of questions for both sources (see Table 4.10). This is supplemented with qualitative analysis which digs deeper into some specific areas of uncertainty, including areas of repetition within and across the two sources. Categories are discussed from largest to smallest based on the *Courrier* data.

Whilst quantitative analysis in this chapter is based on the full corpora (as outlined in Section 2.5), it was necessary in two larger categories of the *Courrier* (meaning and language history) to sample the questions for qualitative analysis. The large category of morpho-syntax questions (404 *Courrier* questions), was the first to be analysed and was analysed in full. However, it became clear that sampling would be necessary for the two remaining large categories (meaning and language history). Samples were created by listing questions by date and then selecting every fifth question in the category, to ensure a representative spread of questions across time. This meant that the samples could still reflect any potential changes over time. The resulting samples (displayed in Table 4.9) were, in fact, closer to one quarter of each category due to questions which ask multiple questions, e.g. if a question asks about vocabulary (not sampled) and meaning (sampled) then the question was automatically analysed as part of the analysis of vocabulary questions. *Internautes* questions were not sampled as a total of 300 questions was manageable.

Sampled categories	No. of questions for qualitative analysis	No. of questions in the full corpus
Language history	180	691
Meaning	185	686

Table 4.9 *Courrier* language history and meaning question samples for qualitative analysis

Category	Subcategory	Courrier		Internautes	
		No. of questions	% of section	No. of questions	% of section
Language History	Expression/idiom (***)	375	54%	10	53%
	Grammatical point	5	1%	0	0%
	Spelling	4	1%	2	11%
	Word (***)	307	44%	7	37%
	Total	691	100%	19	100%
Meaning	Onomasiology (*)	76	11%	24	35%
	Semantic scope (***)	31	5%	9	13%
	Semasiology	444	65%	12	18%
	Synonyms	135	20%	23	34%
	Total	686	100%	68	100%
Morpho-syntax	Articles	28	7%	8	8%
	Derivational morphology	63	16%	7	7%
	Inflectional morphology (***)	158	39%	44	44%
	Pronouns	53	13%	9	9%
	Syntax (*)	43	11%	14	14%
	Valency (*)	59	15%	17	17%
	Total	404	100%	99	100%
Spelling	Capitalisation	1	1%	3	25%
	Diacritics	9	10%	0	0%
	Spelling of words (**)	67	76%	2	17%
	Punctuation (**)	11	13%	7	58%
	Total	88	100%	12	100%
Vocabulary	Abbreviations (*)	0	0%	2	5%
	Borrowings (***)	3	5%	26	60%
	Easily confused words/idioms	27	44%	7	16%
	Gender	17	28%	4	9%
	Neologisms and archaisms	8	13%	2	5%
	Word class	6	10%	2	5%
	Total	61	100%	43	100%
Phonology	Consonants	22	36%	7	24%
	Foreign words (***)	0	0%	5	17%
	<i>h aspiré</i>	5	8%	1	3%
	Proper nouns	6	10%	2	7%
	Liaisons (***)	3	5%	9	31%
	Vowels	25	41%	5	17%
	Total	61	100%	29	100%
Style	Pleonasm	6	35%	1	7%
	Register and politeness (***)	11	65%	13	93%
	Total	17	100%	14	100%
Metalinguistic knowledge	Total	11	100%	7	100%
Opinions about language	Total	0	100%	25	100%

Table 4.10 Questions by subcategory (Courrier and Internautes)

4.3.1 Language history

Language history questions – which broadly speaking concern etymologies – are the largest category in the *Courrier* (34%, 691 of 2,019), but only the sixth largest category in the *Internautes* sample (6%, 19 of 316). This category falls into four subcategories:

- Expression/idiom (questions about the etymology of a phrase or an idiom, e.g. *c'est du gâteau*; Internautes_Q174)
- Grammatical point (questions which ask for the etymology of a grammatical rule, e.g. the use of *avoir* as an auxiliary verb; Courier_Q5)
- The etymology of a spelling (e.g. why does *symétrie* only have one 'm'; Internautes_Q76)
- Word (questions which inquire about the etymology of an individual word, e.g. *mastroquet*; Courier_Q1330)

Figure 4.2 shows the frequency of questions for each subcategory. Qualitative analysis of *Courrier* language history questions is based on a sample of 180 questions (see Table 4.9).

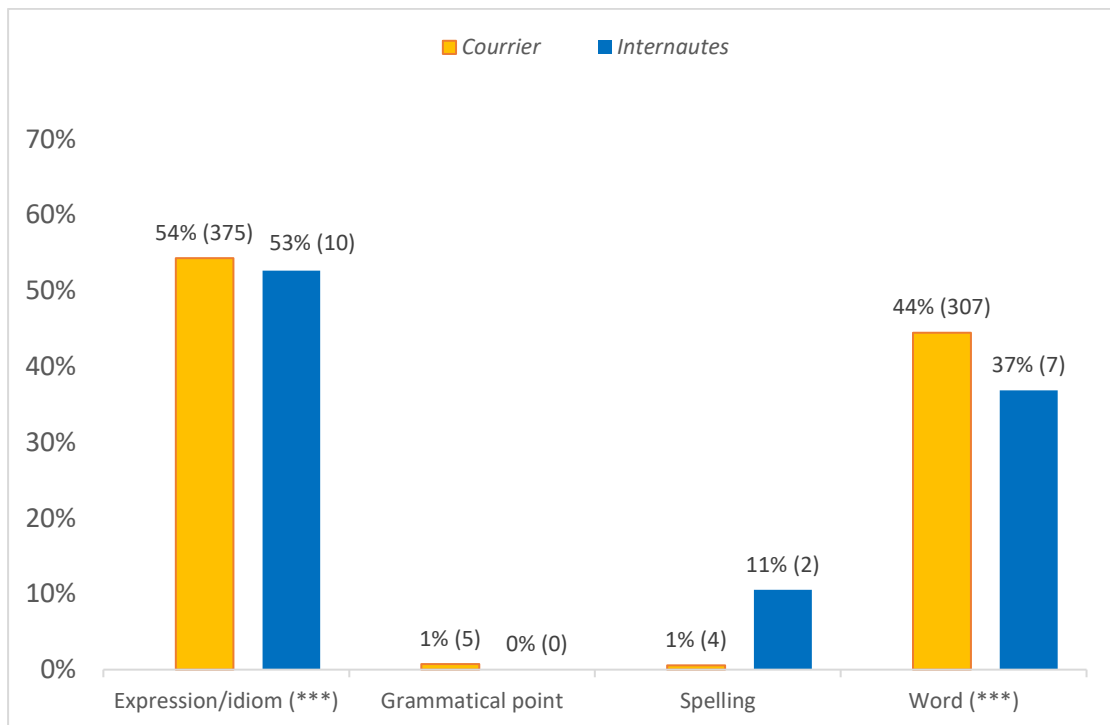


Figure 4.2 Language history questions by subcategory (Courier and Internautes)

A *Courrier* question published in 1869, during the publication's first volume, expressed a concern that etymology questions might not fall within the remit of the *Courrier*:

5. ‘J’espère que le *Courrier de Vaugelas* pourra me renseigner sur ce point, quoique ma question soit peut-être **un peu en dehors de son programme.**’ (*Courrier*_Q150)

This concern was seemingly unfounded, however, and questions about language history became increasingly frequent over time. As Figure 4.3 shows, language history questions accounted for just under one fifth of questions in the first print run (37) and close to half of all questions (97) in the tenth (the final under Martin’s editorship).¹⁰⁵

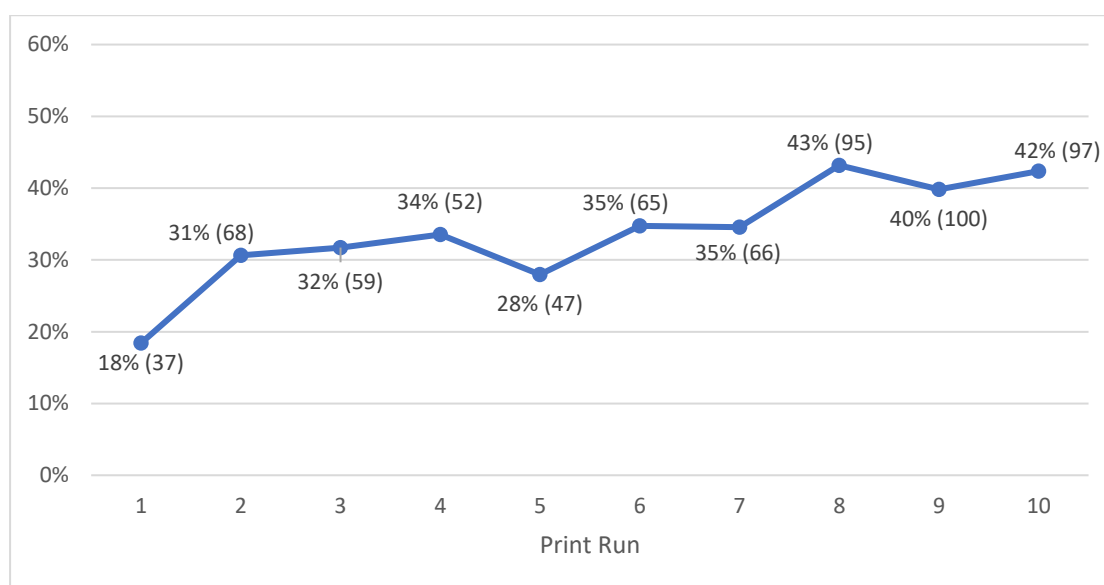


Figure 4.3 Percentage of language history questions per print run (*Courrier*)

Language history questions are split across two main subcategories for both sources: those about a word (*Courrier* = 44%, 307 of 691 language history questions; *Internautes* = 37%, 7 of 19) and those which focus on an expression/idiom (*Courrier* = 54%, 375; *Internautes* = 53%, 10). It is unsurprising that these two categories dominate; questions about the origin of a spelling or a grammatical point are, expectedly, more marginal. Questions about the history of expressions or idioms are the most frequent in both sources; a similar pattern, though less marked, to that which will be shown in the semasiology questions from the ‘meaning’ category (Section 4.3.2).

¹⁰⁵ An analysis of question topic frequencies over time was conducted for all *Courrier* and *Internautes* categories; only for *Courrier* language history questions did a noteworthy pattern emerge.

As explained in Section 4.1, occasionally a reader's question asks more than one question, e.g. a question published in the *Courrier* inquires both whether the word *Batignolles* needs an article and about the etymology of the word (Courrier_Q890). In the *Courrier* corpus, 159 questions (8% of 2,019) asked about both meaning and etymology; 32 (20%) of these were about an individual word, whilst 127 (80%) focussed on an expression or idiom. It may be unsurprising that most questions which ask about meaning and language history are on the topic of an expression or idiom whose meaning is not easily discernible as a single word due to the use of figurative language. One question mentions this difficulty:

6. **'Il y a une foule d'expressions dont on fait usage sans en connaître parfaitement le sens.** Par exemple, j'entends dire souvent « *Je ne suis pas chauvin* ». Quelle est la **véritable signification** de cette expression, et où a-t-elle pris son origine ?' (Courrier_Q146)

We may also suggest that expressions and idioms are harder to research than individual lexical items, which have their own headwords in a dictionary. By contrast with the *Courrier*, only two *Internautes* users ask about both meaning and etymology. Both questions concern expressions: *avoir du pep's* (Internautes_Q190), and *Gentil n'a qu'un œil* (Internautes_Q252).

Four questions arise more than once in the *Courrier* sample. Two concern individual words:

- *péquin* (Courrier_Q306; Courrier_Q1085; also discussed in six *communications*)
- *belluaire* (Courrier_Q1009; Courrier_Q1083)

Two are expressions:

- *La discorde est au camp d'Agramant* (Courrier_Q260; Courrier_Q690)
- *s'en battre l'oeil* (Courrier_Q1045; Courrier_Q1375).

Turning to *péquin*, Martin and his readers are unable to agree on an etymology for the term 'appliqué par les militaires aux civils' (Courrier_Q1085). After presenting and subsequently rejecting his own theories for the etymology of *péquin*, Martin defends, in four issues, an etymology provided by a reader based on their childhood memories of its use; the reader suggests it is from the Chinese city *Pékin* (Beijing). This draws criticism from Maisonrouge (a frequent contributor discussed in Section 3.1.2.5), who in three letters, presents a case for a Latin origin, stating in his final letter on this topic:

7. 'je ne puis me rendre à accepter pour bonne l'étymologie de *péquin*, telle que l'a donnée M. Philarète Chasles en s'appuyant simplement sur de vagues souvenirs d'enfance. Cela n'est en vérité point sérieux.' (15/02/1877, p.137)

Martin's final notes on the etymology suggest that *péquin* is perhaps two different words with different etymologies but the same spelling:

8. 'l'un, venu de *pecus*, donnerait le sens de ignorant [...] et l'autre, venu de *pékin*, étoffe' (15/02/1877, p.138).

Only 19 *Internautes* questions ask about language history and there is no repetition within this category or across the two corpora. Five *Internautes* language history responses provide answers given by other reference texts or sources:

- newspaper *Direct Matin* (*Internautes_R39*)
- Alain Rey's *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* (*Internautes_R68*)
- Nina Catach's *Dictionnaire historique de l'orthographe française* (*Internautes_R76*)
- Nineteenth-twentieth-century dictionary *Trésor de la langue française* (*Internautes_R98*)
- Rey and Chantreau's *Dictionnaire des locutions et expressions* (*Internautes_R224*).

As will be shown in Chapter 5, *Internautes* responses do not frequently reference other sources, and when they do these are most often *Académie* resources. This greater reliance on outside sources for language history questions supports my earlier suggestion that such questions are a little outside of the *Académie*'s usual remit.

4.3.2 Meaning

Meaning questions are the second most frequent topic in both corpora (*Courrier* = 34%, 686 of 2,019; *Internautes* = 22%, 68 of 316). Questions in this category fall into four subcategories (see Figure 4.4):

- Onomasiology (this includes questions such as 'what word expresses this concept?' and, frequently, 'is this word French?' and 'does this word exist?')¹⁰⁶
- Semantic scope ('can this word also be applied to this context?')
- Semasiology ('what does this word mean?')

¹⁰⁶ An argument could be made for classifying questions about the existence of words or whether words are French as 'vocabulary'. However, given that the responses usually draw heavily on meaning, they were categorised as onomasiology.

- Synonyms ('do these two words mean the same thing?' and 'in which cases do I use this word rather than this similar word?').

Given the very large number of meaning questions in the *Courrier* (686), the qualitative analysis here is based on a sample of 185 questions (see Table 4.9 above). *Internautes* meaning questions total 68 and were analysed in full.

Almost two-thirds of meaning questions in the *Courrier* are semasiological (65%, 444 of 686). Whilst questions about semasiology are relatively common in the *Internautes* corpus (18%, 12 of 68), questions about onomasiology are the most numerous subcategory (35%, 24), and a third category – synonyms – accounts for a further 34% (23). That is, no one subcategory dominates questions about meaning in the *Internautes* corpus; the interests and doubts of *Internautes* users are varied, compared to *Courrier* readers, whose questions are clearly dominated by questions about semasiology.

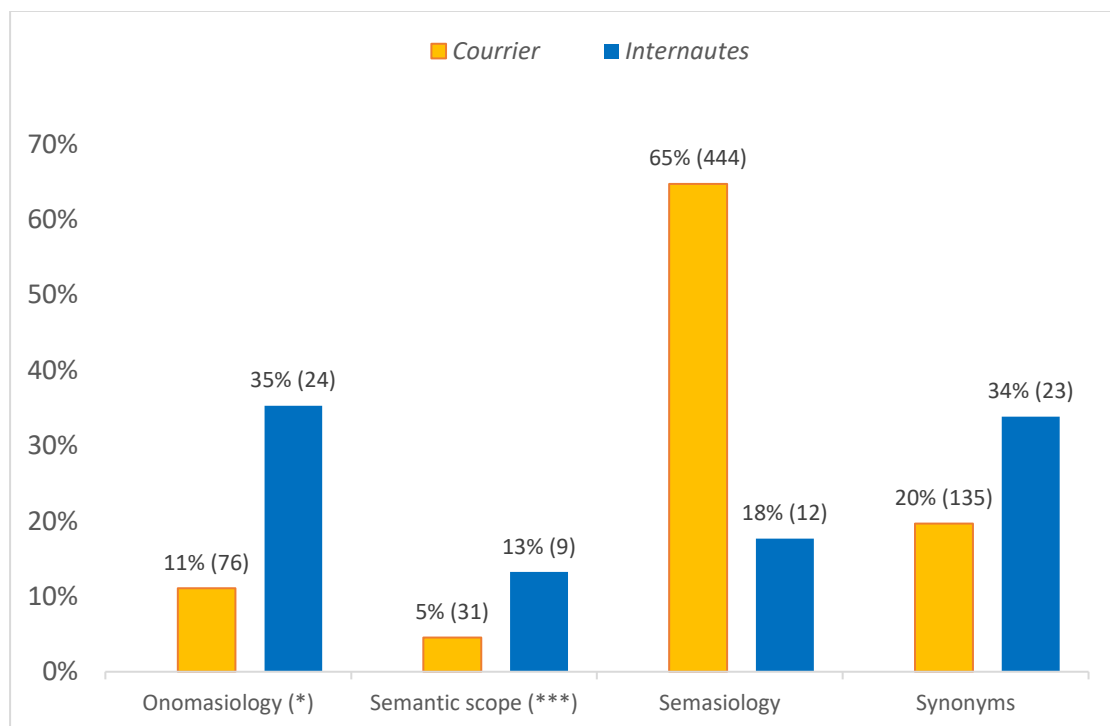


Figure 4.4 Meaning questions by subcategory (Courier and Internautes)

One question from a foreign *Courrier* reader, published in the third issue (hence their use of the future tense) reflects on the utility of the publication for semasiological questions:

9. 'Votre journal, en expliquant aux étrangers une foule de locutions de création récente que les dictionnaires n'ont encore pu enregistrer, rendra un grand service.'
(Courrier_Q26)

This perhaps goes some way to explaining the high frequency of semasiology questions in the *Courrier* and their relative infrequency in the *Internautes* sample. Online dictionaries can be updated instantly and as frequently as desired. Consequently, an online dictionary is more likely to contain recent additions to the language or changes in meaning than a print counterpart. Moreover, internet users need not even access a specific dictionary to find a definition, simply typing the word into a search engine suffices. For the nineteenth-century readers, who must rely on print dictionaries, the *Courrier* provides 'up-to-date' semasiological information.

Semasiology questions in both corpora predominantly ask about an expression or idiom, rather than about single words (see Figure 4.5). In the *Courrier*, these total 326 of 444 semasiology questions (73%); in the *Internautes* they account for 67% (8 of 12). As suggested in Section 4.3.1, whilst a dictionary will usually suffice to provide the meaning of individual words, expressions and idioms may be harder to locate, although online such information is more readily available. Additionally, and as noted above, figurative language in expressions and idioms can make them more difficult to understand than individual words.

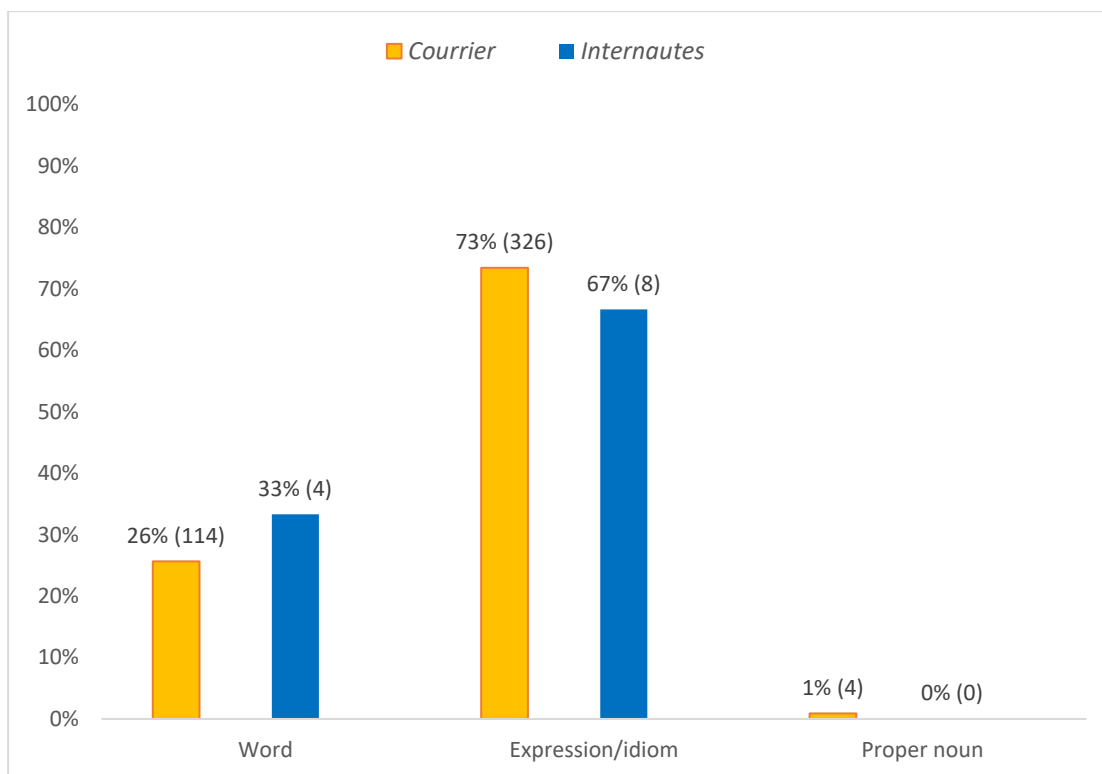


Figure 4.5 Semasiology questions by topic (Courrier and Internautes)

All four *Courrier* semasiology questions about proper nouns concern street names, suggesting that readers are inspired to ask questions based on their surroundings:

10. 'Il y a **près de chez moi une rue** qui s'appelle la « rue de la *Jussienne* ». Qu'est-ce que cela veut dire, s'il vous plaît ?' (Courrier_Q76)

Courrier readers' questions are frequently inspired by things they have read, for instance in the press (14) or in literature (16), with a total of 36 questions making such references (19% of the qualitative sample). See, the following example:

11. 'M. Eugène Pelletan, **dans le *Monde Marche***, a dit, page 4 : « Vous avez eu ce destin ; vous avez eu, vous aussi, *votre coup de tonnerre* sur la route de Damas. » Trouvez-vous que ce soit là **une bonne expression** pour signifier se convertir subitement à une doctrine qu'on avait jusqu'alors combattue ?' (Courrier_Q77)

Here, as in most cases, the reader presents an extract – in this case from a novel – alongside a question about a certain word or expression within it. Other references include a previous issue of the *Courrier* (Courrier_381) and other people, e.g. a friend (Courrier_772). This is discussed further in Section 5.2.

Discussions and debates related to meaning are mentioned in eight of 68 (12%) *Internautes* meaning questions. Six of these, including the following examples, concern onomasiology:

12. '**À la suite d'un débat houleux** nous n'arrivons pas à déterminer si le verbe *procrastiner* existe.' (Internautes_Q36)
13. '**Lors d'une discussion avec un collègue anglophone**, il m'a demandé pourquoi il n'y avait pas de mot pour dire « pas cher » en français.' (Internautes_Q38)

The existence of words, in particular, seems to be an area of disagreement for which users seek the ruling of the *Service du Dictionnaire* to resolve, as more explicitly articulated here:

14. 'Pourriez-vous donc prendre quelques minutes pour nous éclairer, nous dire **si ce verbe existe ou non**, et si oui, mon compagnon l'emploie-t-il dans **le juste sens** ?' (Internautes_Q163)

Not only do these questions demonstrate that conversations and debates about language are taking place amongst lay commentators, they also cement a perception that the *Service* can make rulings on such questions.

The media (the press, television and radio) are mentioned six times as the source of an *Internautes* meaning question, alongside more general statements about believed increasing usage of a term or of having heard a word used recently, which were found in 16 further meaning questions:

15. 'Récemment, si l'on en croit **les speakers et speakerines des journaux télévisés [...]**¹⁰⁷ (Internautes_Q85).
16. 'De plus en plus souvent, **j'entends dire** « mon binôme »' (Internautes_Q203).
17. '**J'ai entendu parler récemment** d'un concept que l'on appelle le « transhumanisme ».' (Internautes_Q175)

The language use of others inspires *Internautes* users and *Courrier* readers to seek advice; either because they have come across a word which they are unfamiliar with or have seen or heard a word used in a way which is jarring to them. Whilst *Courrier* readers frequently mention the language use of newspaper journalists and authors, *Internautes* users most

¹⁰⁷ The anglicisms *speaker* and *speakerine* (synonyms for *annonceur-euse*) are not found in the *Académie's* dictionary. The *Service* does not comment on their use.

frequently cite television and radio media and others around them as the source of inspiration for their question.

4.3.3 Morpho-syntax

Morpho-syntax questions fall into six subcategories (see Figure 4.6):

- Articles
- Derivational morphology
- Inflectional morphology
- Pronouns
- Syntax
- Valency

Questions about inflectional morphology are the clearly dominant subcategory in both sources, accounting for 158 of 404 (39%) *Courrier* morpho-syntax questions and 44 of 99 (44%) *Internautes* questions. Questions about valency are published significantly more frequently in the *Internautes* sample than in the *Courrier* ($p \leq 0.05$), and questions about derivational morphology are more frequent in the *Courrier* than in the *Internautes* corpus ($p \leq 0.001$). While inflectional morphology questions remain a consistent area of concern, they are more significantly prevalent in the twenty-first century *Internautes* corpus.

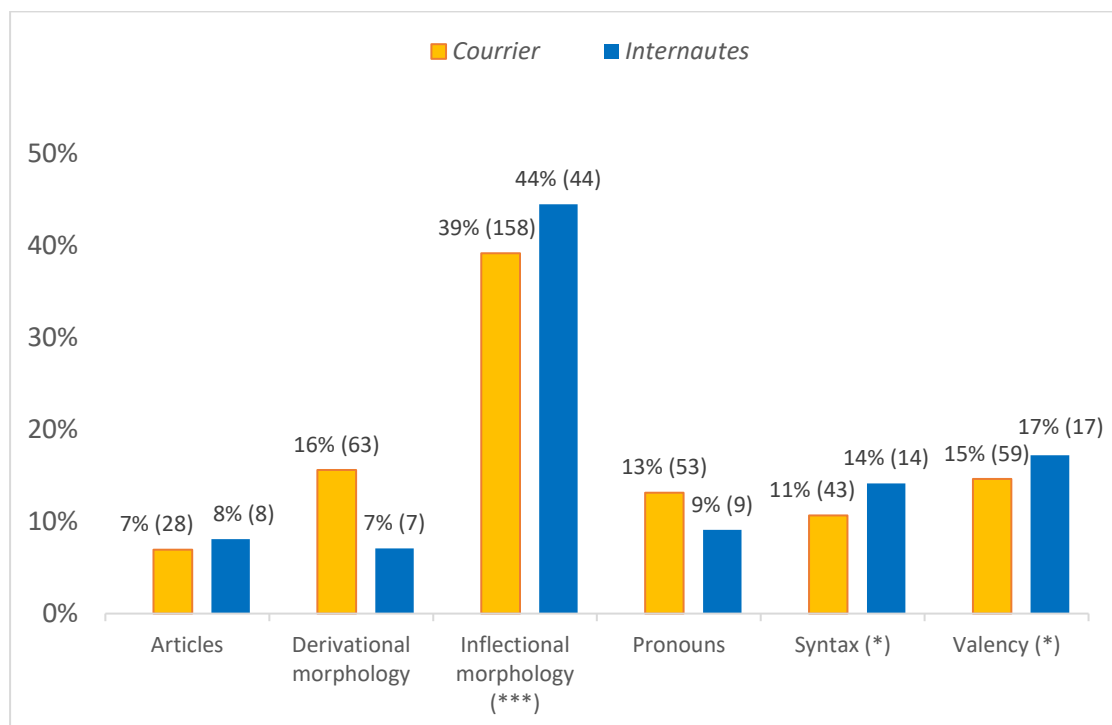


Figure 4.6 Morpho-syntax questions by subcategory (Courier and Internautes)

Syntax questions account for 11% (43 of 404) of morpho-syntax questions in the *Courrier*, compared to 14% (14 of 99) of *Internautes* morpho-syntax questions, a difference between the corpora which is weakly significant ($p \leq 0.05$). Questions about syntax seem to have grown slightly in prominence across the two time periods, or at least across the publications, becoming a more significant area of doubt or interest for the twenty-first-century *Internautes* audience. As we will see, what is perhaps more striking about morpho-syntax questions is the amount of repetition, with the same points of syntax or pronoun usage being the topic of multiple questions within the *Courrier* and across the two sources. For instance, the use of the expletive *ne* is the topic of five *Courrier* morpho-syntax questions.¹⁰⁸ The necessity of the *ne*, which is never obligatory and only used in a small number of constructions, is questioned, as is its status within the language:

18. 'Êtes-vous d'avis que ce *ne* avant *jette* et *crie* soit **bien nécessaire** ?' (*Courrier_Q1171*)

19. 'Est-il **réellement permis**, ou n'est-il **que toléré** de mettre la négation *ne* après *avant que*, comme dans cette phrase : Sortons *avant* qu'il *ne* fasse nuit ?' (*Courrier_Q284*)

The readers are unclear as to why the expletive *ne* is used and openly question whether it should be used.

Resistance to using the expletive *ne* is also found in one *Internautes* question:

20. 'J'écris (par exemple) « je crains qu'il mente » au lieu de l'habituel « je crains qu'il ne mente », car il me semble que l'emploi de l'adverbe de négation « ne » **contredirait ma pensée [...]** **Ai-je tort** de penser ainsi ?' (*Internautes_Q256*)

In Example 20, awareness of the rules is evident, but so is the user's personal preference. However, the fact that the user is writing to the *Service du Dictionnaire* suggests that they are willing to override their personal preference according to the response received. The use of 'tort' is also indicative of standard language ideology; there are right and wrong ways of using the language. The response explains that although the expletive *ne* is not obligatory, 'l'employer est de meilleure langue' (see Section 5.3), adhering to a hierarchical view of language in which some usages can be *more correct* than others.

¹⁰⁸ The expletive *ne* (or the pleonastic *ne*) does not carry meaning and is used in conjunction with expressions (which often do have a negative meaning) such as 'craindre que'. E.g., 'je crains qu'il ne vienne' contains an expletive *ne* and means 'I am afraid that he will come', whereas 'je crains qu'il ne vienne pas' contains the negation 'ne...pas' and means 'I am afraid that he will not come'. It is generally used in higher register language and omitted in lower register contexts.

A second example of duplication across the corpora concerns the construction *Je ne sache pas que* used at the beginning of a sentence, arising in no less than five *Courrier* questions and in one *Internautes* question. Readers query how or why the verb *savoir* is in the subjunctive mood, rather than the indicative, and all six questions from the two corpora frame the construction as incorrect. One *Courrier* question and the one *Internautes* question both label the construction as a barbarism (discussed in Section 5.3). The responses state:

21. '**Très singulier, mais pas inexplicable.** Cette forme, que quelques-uns appellent un gallicisme, est tout simplement la traduction littérale du latinisme *quod sciam'* (Courrier_R557)
22. 'Cette forme n'est **pas incorrecte** ; elle est vieillie ou littéraire et signifie *Je suis certain que'* (Internautes_R239)

Martin explains that the construction is a Latinism and uses examples to justify its use,¹⁰⁹ with four Latin examples from rhetorician Quintilianus and Roman playwright Plautus amongst others (accompanied by French translations) and fourteen French-language examples, ranging from sixteenth-century author Rabelais to contemporary usages from newspapers such as *Le Temps*. The *Service du Dictionnaire's* response does not explain the origins of the construction but instead delineates the registers in which it is used ('On emploie en effet, dans une langue soignée') and gives an example of the construction from a letter written by Chateaubriand, thus positioning the late-eighteenth early-nineteenth century author as an authority (see 5.2).

In both corpora, the construction *Je ne sache pas que* is considered deviant by readers who seek an explanation as to how it can be considered correct. The repetition of doubts surrounding certain constructions both within and across the samples – which is not limited to these two examples (other repetitions across the two corpora in the morpho-syntax category include questions about the euphonic *l'* and the agreement of *demi*) – shows that certain peculiarities of the language which caused concern or trouble for multiple readers in the nineteenth century still cause difficulty over 130 years later. In both examples analysed here, the prevalence of the doubt appears to have diminished over time; this cannot, however, be confirmed by the small raw figures available.

¹⁰⁹ Only Martin's first response to this question is discussed here as his subsequent responses simply signpost readers to this first response.

Quebecois syntax is implicitly framed as non-standard by one *Internautes* question, which references the *Banque de dépannage linguistique*,¹¹⁰ a website hosted by the *Office Québécois de la langue française* which provides French language resources for first language speakers:

23. 'Lorsque je cherche à remplacer « à la toute fin » par « tout à la fin » (indication que j'ai trouvée dans la Banque de dépannage linguistique), un interlocuteur sur la Toile me rétorque que cette source est québécoise et **ne représente pas la norme**. Qu'en est-il ?' (Internautes_Q3)

This question not only evidences an online discussion about syntax, but also shows the French of France being presented as the norm by an internet user, suggesting that features of Quebecois, fall outside of this norm. The user, from France, seems to disagree with this conflation and, consequently, has sought the advice of the *Service du Dictionnaire*.

A second syntax question, which, at 193 words, is amongst the longest questions in the *Internautes* sample,¹¹¹ concerns a syntactical point which arose when correcting a friend's writing:

24. 'En corrigeant un texte écrit par un étranger apprenant la langue française, il m'est apparu que **j'étais encore loin d'en maîtriser tous les aspects**. Cette personne avait écrit : « Un de mes sites de musique préférés », ce qui ne m'a pas semblé poser de problème, jusqu'à ce qu'un compatriote me demande s'il n'était pas **plus correct** d'écrire : « Un de mes sites préférés de musique ». J'étais dans l'incapacité d'expliquer pourquoi la première tournure me semblait **plus naturelle**.' (Internautes_Q249)

The reader expresses their insecurity about a lack of mastery of their own language due to their inability to explain a syntactic rule, suggesting that 'mastery' involves not only using the standard language but also understanding its intricacies. Linguistic insecurity (see Section 1.5.4) is common in societies where standard language ideology is prevalent. As this question demonstrates, speakers are not only concerned with using the standard but with perfecting their language use (cf. Paveau and Rosier 2008: 60). The response from the *Service* explains that whilst both constructions can be used, 'un de mes sites de musique préférés' is preferable

¹¹⁰ <http://bdl.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/bdl/> (Accessed: 07/09/2020).

¹¹¹ The longest question in the *Internautes* corpus is 199 words. The average question length is 80 words.

as it maintains the unity of the noun phrase, ‘sites de musique’, upholding a linguistic hierarchy.

4.3.4 Spelling

Questions about spelling account for 4% of all questions in each of the *Courrier* (88 of 2,019) and *Internautes* (12 of 316), but the subcategories vary quite widely between the two (see Figure 4.7). Questions range across four subcategories:

- Capitalisation
- Diacritics
- Spelling of words (questions specifically asking how a word is spelled)
- Punctuation (which includes the use of hyphens)

In each source, there is one clearly dominant subcategory. In the *Courrier*, questions about the spelling of specific words dominate (67 of 88 questions), whereas punctuation questions dominate in the *Internautes* (7 of 12). Questions about diacritics total nine in the *Courrier*, but do not feature in the *Internautes* sample. One *Courrier* question and three *Internautes* questions concern capitalisation.

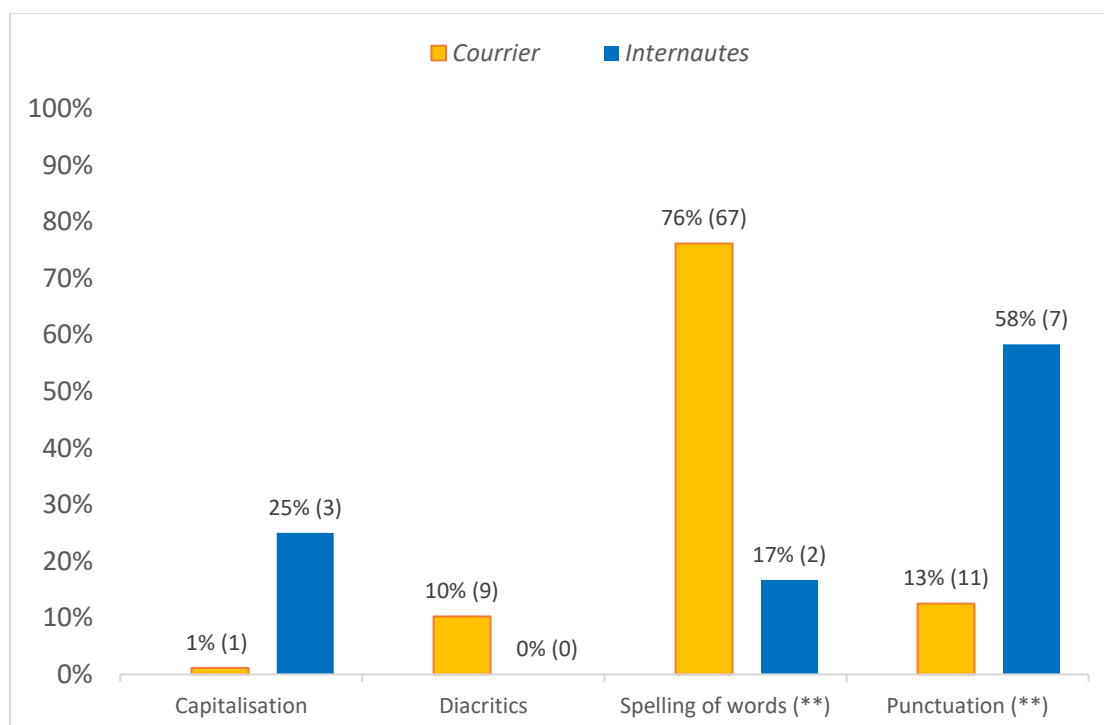


Figure 4.7 Spelling questions by subcategory (*Courrier* and *Internautes*)

For *Courrier* readers, ready access to reference materials such as dictionaries was more limited than it is today for the average user of the *Internautes* website, with online resources of many kinds widely available. This question of access may go some way to explaining the higher frequency of general spelling questions in the nineteenth-century publication. Additionally, in the twenty-first century, much writing uses a computer (including smartphones), where spellchecking capabilities can highlight – and, since around 2005, automatically correct – incorrect spellings. Word processing software is often less adept at correcting punctuation than general spelling, and questions about punctuation and capitalisation may be harder to answer via online searches and resources, hence the higher frequency of such queries directed at – and at any rate published by – the *Internautes*. What is more, questions about punctuation and capitalisation have no effect on spoken language, while the spelling of a word and its diacritics can impact the readers' knowledge of the spoken word.

In the *Courrier*, around one third of the 88 spelling questions (32) seek categorical responses. Two spellings may have been observed, for instance in an authoritative text (Example 25) or more generally (Example 26); it is assumed – in line with the principle of minimal variation that characterises standard language ideology (cf. Milroy and Milroy 2012: 22) – that only one spelling should be possible:

25. 'Le mot *sadducéen* **doit-il s'écrire** avec deux *D* comme l'écrivent **toutes les traductions françaises des Évangiles que j'ai consultées**, ou avec un seul *D* **comme l'imprime M. Littré ?**' (Courrier_Q1073)
26. '**Faut-il écrire** *Fénélon* avec un accent aigu sur chacun des deux *e*, ou seulement sur le premier ? **Je rencontre tantôt** la première de ces orthographe et tantôt la seconde.' (Courrier_Q952)

A further 30 spelling questions in the *Courrier* ask for the editor's opinion on a spelling matter, using constructions such as 'Pensez-vous' or 'à votre avis', and often asking which of two forms should be preferred, which is *mieux* or *meilleur*, presenting usages as a hierarchy. See, for instance, Example 27:

27. '**Louis Festeau**, que vous citez quelquefois, écrit *glue*, colle, avec un *e*, orthographe que, dit-il, **Boiste autorise. Pensez-vous que** cette manière d'écrire soit **réellement bonne ?**' (Courrier_Q597)

Although the reader explicitly asks for an opinion ('Pensez-vous'), the use of 'réellement bonne' adds a value judgement reflecting the standard language ideology with its underlying

assumption that although differing opinions/variants exist, there is, or should be, one correct, standard way.

In 23 of the 88 *Courrier* spelling questions, the reader knows the standard spelling but seeks an explanation for certain spellings or spelling rules. See Example 28 which seems to implicitly advocate for the principle of analogy in the language (discussed in 6.1.1):

28. ‘Comment expliquez-vous l’usage de l’apostrophe dans *grand’mère*, puisque *mère* ne commence pas par une voyelle ? Cet emploi est **vraiment singulier**.’ (Courrier_Q97)

Whether the question asks for a categorical ruling on a correct spelling or an expert’s opinion, the possibility of more than one correct option is rarely entertained by *Courrier* readers.

The wording of 11 of the 12 *Internautes* spelling questions, which present the *Service du Dictionnaire* with two options between which they should choose, suggests a clear expectation of one correct spelling, e.g.:

29. ‘Le Code civil ou le code civil ?’ (Internautes_Q14)
30. ‘Comment orthographier le mot demi dans : une demi(e) (-) poire : accord ou non, **trait d’union ou non**’ (Internautes_Q94)

Only one question suggests room for variation:

31. ‘**Met-on obligatoirement** des tirets pour les nombres supérieurs à cent ou est-il **encore toléré** de ne mettre des tirets qu’entre dizaines et unités (c’est ce qui encore indiqué **dans les manuels scolaires**) ?’ (Internautes_Q172)

In this case, the use of ‘encore toléré’ likely suggests an awareness of a change to the norm. The use of hyphens in numerals was targeted in the 1990 spelling reform, as the response reflects.¹¹² The reformed spellings were intended to be taught to children, becoming prevalent in usage over time, until which point the old spellings would remain tolerated (*Académie française* 1990: 9).¹¹³ Thus, the question may not necessarily indicate a positive attitude towards variation; on the contrary, the use of ‘obligatoirement’ strongly suggests a desire to adhere to the standard.

¹¹² ‘Les Rectifications de 1990 ont proposé de simplifier et de lier tous les numéraux par un trait d’union, y compris million et milliard.’ (Internautes_R172).

¹¹³ The reform became the subject of much media and online discussion in 2016 (Humphries 2019).

4.3.5 Vocabulary

Vocabulary questions account for 61 of 2,019 (3%) *Courrier* questions, in comparison to 14% of *Internautes* questions (43 of 316 questions) (see Figure 4.8). They fall into six sub-categories:

- Abbreviations
- Borrowings (all questions about borrowed words except for those about pronunciation)
- Easily confused words and idioms (e.g. which is correct: ‘rendre l’appareil’ or ‘rendre la pareille’?; Internautes_Q116)
- Grammatical gender (limited to questions which ask whether a word is masculine or feminine)
- Neologisms and archaisms
- Word class

There is no overlap in the questions asked in the *Courrier* sample and the *Internautes* corpora, however the raw figures are small in this category. There are two examples of inter-corpora repetition in the easily confused subcategory. In the *Courrier*, two readers ask whether the expression is ‘pantoufles de vair’ or ‘de verre’ (Courrier_Q777; Courrier_Q1575) and ‘combien’ and ‘quand’ are confused by two readers from the *Internautes* sample (Internautes_Q144; Internautes_Q185).

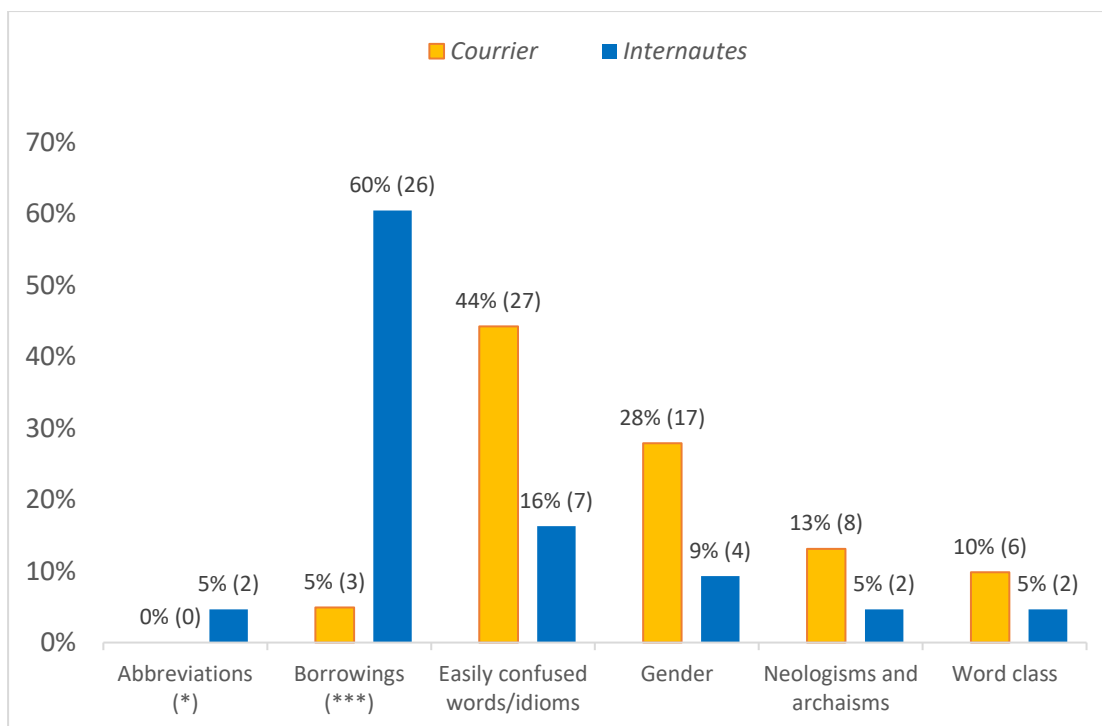


Figure 4.8 Vocabulary questions by subcategories (Courier and Internautes)

Of the 61 *Courrier* vocabulary questions, 44% (27) are about easily confused words and expressions. Questions about word gender account for a further 17 questions. This is greater than in the *Internautes* sample, where easily confused words and expressions account for 7 of the 43 questions and questions about gender total 4. In all cases, ‘easily confused’ questions are phrased to elicit a categorical response from the expert, with the reader presenting two or more options between which the editor should choose:

32. ‘Veuillez m’apprendre, je vous prie, **s’il faut dire** : parler *coulamment* ou *couramment*.’ (Courier_Q90)

33. ‘**dit-on** « poindre le bout de son nez » ou « pointer le bout de son nez » ?’ (Internautes_Q37)

Only three of 61 (5%) *Courrier* vocabulary questions concern borrowings, in comparison to 26 of 43 (60%) *Internautes* questions, meaning that such questions occur 12 times more frequently in the *Internautes* than in the *Courrier* (in percentage terms). Even in raw figures, questions about borrowings are more frequent in the much smaller *Internautes* sample (26 questions out of 316, in comparison to three out of 2,019). Questions about foreign words in the phonology category are similarly more frequent in the twenty-first century *Internautes* than in the nineteenth-century *Courrier* (Section 4.3.6), further evidence that borrowings are

a greater area of uncertainty for readers in the twenty-first century than they were in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Of the three *Courrier* questions about borrowings, two concern anglicisms – *confortable* (Courrier_Q871) and *ticket* (Courrier_Q1445) – and one concerns the use of the Italian phrase *in petto* (Courrier_Q1558). In the *Internautes*, questions about words from the English language account for 23 of the 26 questions on borrowings, with three other questions concerned with words from Japanese (*tanka* (Internautes_Q25); *koi* (Internautes_Q126); and *manga* (Internautes_Q236)). Just over half of the borrowings in French today derive from English (McLaughlin 2018: 657), which may explain the dominance of questions about anglicisms over other borrowings. Wider cultural and political changes over time, affecting the relationship between French and English, may also be a factor.

Throughout the nineteenth-century, France saw industrial and commercial growth, accompanied by an influx of lexical borrowings, particularly from the English language (Rickard 1989: 131). Whilst attitudes towards borrowings have not always been positive¹¹⁴ – Estienne’s (1531-98) critique of Italian borrowings in the French language is often cited as evidence of this (see, for instance, Spence 1976: 75) – a ‘social *anglomanie*’ was prevalent during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Wise 1997: 82). There was little fear surrounding anglicisms; the borrowing relationship between the two languages was reciprocal (Wise 1997: 82), France was a political power, the French language was spreading globally and was perceived to have high prestige (Walsh 2015: 28). The absence of questions about anglicisms in the *Courrier* is evidence that, at this time, the usage of borrowings aroused little uncertainty and possibly that negative feelings towards them were not widespread.

French is no longer the international language that it was (Oakes 2001: 154) and, in the twentieth century, institutional action against anglicisms through legislation sought to limit their use in certain contexts (see Walsh 2015: 29-30 for a summary of this). Although never strongly enforced, the introduction of legislation suggests negative attitudes towards borrowings and anglicisms on an official level (Walsh 2015: 31). In the twenty-first century, the global dominance of the English language, and the political power of the Anglo-American world is undeniable (Walsh 2015: 28). Wider societal attitudes towards the borrowings are often assumed to be negative (Walsh 2015: 33), although relatively few studies have attempted to test this (see Walsh (2016b) for an empirical investigation of purism in France

¹¹⁴ Ayres-Bennett, Carruthers and Temple (2001: 399-42) provide a useful summary of attitudes to borrowings.

and Quebec which shows that attitudes towards anglicisms are not as negative as has been assumed). Anglicisms are also more visible now than in the nineteenth century. Not only is there likely a greater quantity of borrowed lexis in the French language today than in the nineteenth-century, even if such figures are hard to quantify,¹¹⁵ but in the twenty-first century the growth of mass media and online communication has made borrowings, and unassimilated foreign words more generally, increasingly visible (Wise 1997: 85-6).

The role of the *Académie française* is also important. The institution's contempt for anglicisms in the French language has been well documented (as the meme in Figure 4.9 shows, it has even become a trope in popular culture), and its purism is often taken (perhaps wrongly) as evidence of widespread purism in France (Walsh 2014: 423). In 2019, the *Académie* published a statement on their website which claimed – in contradiction of the facts – that it had never previously been 'hostile' towards borrowings, but that 'aujourd'hui elle se montre gravement préoccupée par le développement du franglais' (*Académie française* 2019). The statement uses typical purist imagery, for example related to physical harm, unnaturalness and warfare (cf. Jones 1999; discussed further in 6.2):

34. 'Les **violations** répétées de la loi Toubon [...] **dénaturent** notre langue, autant par **l'invasion** des termes anglo-saxons que par la **détérioration** qu'ils entraînent de sa syntaxe.' (*Académie française* 2019)

Finally, the statement warns that if action is not taken, 'le français cessera d'être la langue vivante et populaire que nous aimons.'

¹¹⁵ See Ayres-Bennett, Carruthers, and Temple (2001: 326) for a brief discussion on the difficulties of calculating the number of lexical borrowings in a language.



Figure 4.9 Meme taken from Instagram (@langophilia) which depicts the Académie française as afraid of anglicisms (<https://www.instagram.com/p/CDIq-oNHqSm/?igshid=1pivf5qzsj3u>; accessed: 04/09/2020)

The *Académie*'s position on anglicisms may well influence both the type of questions the *Internautes* platform receives and the choices made about which to respond to. Users generally present anglicisms as incorrect or less correct than French equivalents, as in Example 35:

35. 'Quelles sont les bonnes orthographe pour les mots concernant le réseau social Twitter ? Utiliserait-on tout simplement les anglicismes « un tweet, » « un tweeteur, » « tweeter, » etc., ou les orthographe gallicisées que l'on voit parfois – « je touite », « un touiteur », etc. - représenteraient-elles un français **plus correct** ?' (Internautes_Q59)

A more extreme view is articulated by a user from Paris whose opening comment draws on purist and emotive imagery of war and death:

36. 'Il faut **combattre ceux qui massacrent la langue** sans faiblir, sans honte, sans répit. Le français est **suffisamment riche** et divers pour pouvoir tout exprimer. N.B. Je ne suis absolument pas contre l'anglais quand son utilisation est appropriée. La langue anglaise elle-même utilise beaucoup de mots français (Bon appétit, bon voyage, en route, entrepreneur, chef, etc.). **Pas d'intégrisme, mais de la fermeté !**' (Internautes_Q288)¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ See discussion of war imagery in 6.2.2 and richness in 6.1.5.

The use of *intégrisme* is suggestive of negative discourses surrounding immigration and religious tensions in France, suggesting that that which is ‘foreign’ is an undesirable ‘other’. A perceived need to control the number of anglicisms in the language is echoed by another user who asks for an alternative word for *thriller*:

37. ‘Dans le but de **limiter au maximum** l’utilisation d’anglicismes’ (Internautes_Q191).

Anglicisms in the French language are defended (exceptionally) by one *Internautes* user, whose comment begins with a criticism of the *Académie*’s approach to the borrowings. The reader, based in Paris, considers that anglicisms ‘enrichissent tout autant la langue qu’ils la trahissent’ and presents change to the language as natural evolution (Internautes_Q298). Whilst this is not a wholly positive attitude towards anglicisms (note the use of ‘trahissent’), the user articulates the reasons for anglicisms and disputes that their usage should be condemned. Not only are questions about anglicisms much more frequent in the *Internautes* corpus than the *Courrier*, they also present explicit and emotionally charged opinions about the use and presence of the borrowings in the language.

4.3.6 Phonology and pronunciation

Questions about phonology represent 3% (61 of 2,019) of *Courrier* questions and 9% (29 of 316) of *Internautes* questions, a difference which is statistically significant at the highest level ($p \leq 0.001$). The fact that phonology questions are three times more frequent in the *Internautes* than the *Courrier* suggests that, in the twenty-first century, a greater emphasis is placed – whether by laypeople, by the *Internautes* experts seeking to meet their needs, or both – on standard pronunciation than was true in the nineteenth century. Ager (2008: 98) suggests that the rise of spoken language as a more usual form of ‘widespread social interaction’ from the late twentieth century onwards has led to greater awareness of characteristics of spoken language.

The wider spread of the standard spoken language in the twenty-first century and the effects of dialect levelling – a process often associated with increased urbanisation involving the loss of regional accents (Hornsby 2007: 64) – may also play a role in the increased concern with phonology. Hornsby (2007: 68) reports ‘little evidence of regional accent diversity’ in France beyond a north/south divide, although that is not to say that there is no evidence of dialect in France (Hornsby 2009: 170). More widespread use of a standard accent in twenty-first-century France, as a result of dialect levelling, could explain greater insecurity surrounding pronunciation as speakers with non-standard accents are more marked. This may translate into a higher frequency of questions concerning phonology. However, the possibility that this

is simply a difference across the two sources, rather than more broadly across time, cannot be ruled out with the available data.

Phonological questions fall into six areas of concern:

- Pronunciation of consonants and consonant clusters (consonants)
- Pronunciation of borrowings and foreign proper nouns (foreign words)
- Use of the 'h' *aspiré* (where the letter *h* at the beginning of a word acts like a consonant – and so does not elide – but is also not aspirated)
- Pronunciation of proper nouns, excluding foreign proper nouns (proper nouns)
- Use of liaisons (liaisons)
- Pronunciation of vowels and vowel clusters (vowels)

As Figure 4.10 shows, the areas of phonological doubt differ considerably across the two corpora.

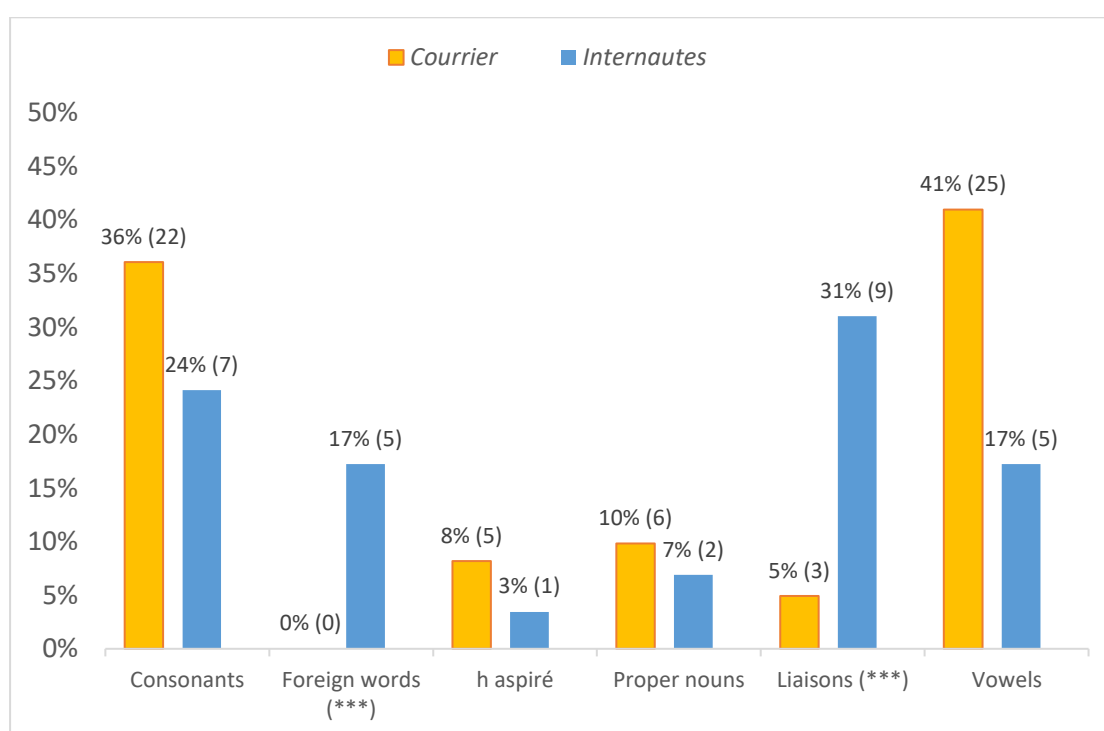


Figure 4.10 Phonology questions by subcategory (Courier and Internautes)

Phonology questions published in the *Courrier* were most frequently about sounds within individual words. This includes questions about consonants (22 of 61 questions) and vowels (25) e.g.:

38. 'Comment **doit** se prononcer le qualificatif *immanquable* ? **J'ai entendu soutenir** qu'il **devait** sonner *in-man-quable*.' (Courrier_Q1254)
39. 'Pourriez-vous m'expliquer pourquoi *e* suivi de *mm*, *nn*, comme dans *femme*, *solennel*, par exemple, **doit** se prononcer comme un *a* ?' (Courrier_Q128)

In comparison, liaison questions are the most frequent in the *Internautes* sample (9 of 29 questions), followed by 'consonants' (7). Questions about 'vowels' and 'foreign words' each total five questions. The differences between the corpora in frequencies of questions about foreign words and liaisons are statistically significant ($p \leq 0.001$), suggesting an increase in doubt in these areas at least across the two sources, if not also from the late nineteenth century to the twenty-first century.

While caution must be exercised in interpreting the data, as raw figures are small, questions concerning liaisons are proportionally over six times less frequent in the *Courrier* (5%, 3 of 61) than in the *Internautes* sample (31%, 9 of 29). In fact, even the raw number of liaison questions is greater in the smaller *Internautes* sample (3 vs. 9). Examples include:

40. 'J'ai étudié pendant quelque temps la question de la liaison des mots finissant par une voyelle nasale (an, ein, in, etc.), mais je n'ai encore pu me faire **une règle bien nette** à ce sujet.' (Courrier_Q33)
41. 'Bonjour, **quelque chose me turlupine**. Pourriez-vous m'expliquer pourquoi nous disons neuf ans (prononcé NEUVANS) alors que nous disons neuf ampoules (prononcé NEUFAMPOULES). J'espère que vous pourrez éclairer la torche de mon ignorance.' (Internautes_Q135)

A decrease in the use of optional liaisons over time is often lamented in complaints about contemporary language usage but has not been empirically proven (Durand *et al.* 2011: 111). Yet, even a perceived decrease in usage could elevate the correct use of liaisons to the status of a marker of 'good' language, those who *still* use liaisons correctly being distinguished from those who do not. This could, consequently, lead to greater anxiety surrounding their usage.

Questions about the pronunciation of foreign words do not feature at all in the *Courrier* but account for 17% (5 of 29) of *Internautes* questions. As we saw in Section 4.3.5, attitudes to anglicisms have changed from the nineteenth to twenty-first century (becoming increasingly negative) and the number of anglicisms in the language has increased (see Wise 1997: 80-86). Greater awareness of anglicisms and less clarity surrounding their usage may explain the presence vs. absence of questions querying the pronunciation of foreign proper nouns, such

as the German names Einstein and Strauss (Internautes_Q11). The response provides a general guideline for the pronunciation of foreign words:

42. 'Plus les noms sont récents, plus la prononciation est proche de ce qu'elle est dans la langue d'origine.' (Internautes_R11)

It may also be that in the more globalised world, pronunciation of foreign terms is considered a greater marker of *good* language use – or perhaps of 'worldliness' – than in the time of Martin's *Courrier*. However, a question about the pronunciation of originally Latin words *agenda* and *incipit* (Internautes_Q170) cannot be explained in the same way.

Questions about liaison reveal a desire for rules. Three *Courrier* questions concern liaisons, two of which, from readers abroad, explicitly ask for clear rules for liaison usage. The first explains that despite spending time researching the 'important' topic of liaisons, the reader has been unable to find a clear rule surrounding their usage (Courrier_Q33), whilst the second laments the explanation for liaison usage which they found in a pronunciation guide and asks Martin for a more prescriptive explanation:

43. "y a-t-il rien de plus positif à dire aux étrangers sur la question de savoir quand on **doit** faire des liaisons ?" (Courrier_Q635)

Whilst some liaisons are obligatory, others are optional and this fuzziness in the rules is unsatisfactory to readers. The readers want clear rules and show a desire to use them correctly, as evidenced in Example 43 by the deontic *devoir*.

Questions about liaisons are couched in a binary of correct and incorrect usage in eight of the nine *Internautes* questions, either implicitly as illustrated through, for instance, the use of *devoir* in three questions¹¹⁷ or explicitly, as in Example 44:

44. 'Pouvez-vous m'indiquer s'il est **correct ou incorrect** de faire la liaison avec le mot « oint » ?' (Internautes_Q111)

The remaining liaison question asks whether 'on **peut** faire la liaison' (Internautes_Q5). The reader starts with the assumption that not using a liaison would be acceptable and inquires whether the variation would also be acceptable. Although the question acknowledges variation, the user, writing from Morocco, is still interested in acceptability, seeking advice

¹¹⁷ Internautes_Q75; Internautes_Q102; and Internautes_Q267.

from an authority to validate the usage. The response draws on preference, differing from responses to all other liaison questions which give a categorical response:

45. 'Dire *les points sur les zi* ne serait donc **pas fautif**, même si la prononciation moderne est **préférable**.' (Internautes_R5)

As we shall see in Chapter 5, preference is used by experts in both corpora as a form of hedging, as well as suggesting the influence of standard language ideology. The overriding approach towards liaisons in the questions from both corpora is prescriptive, with readers appearing to believe that there are, or at least should be, set rules governing their usage.

Five questions about the *h aspiré* feature in the *Courrier*, compared to just one published in the *Internautes* sample. Within the six questions, half – two *Courrier* questions and the one *Internautes* question – asked about the word *héro* and variants of this (*héroïne* and *héroïque*) (Courrier_Q45; Courrier_Q210; and Internautes_Q117). The two *Courrier* questions (Examples 46 and 47) imply a desire for logic, with one question explicitly mentioning anomaly (see Section 6.1.1):

46. 'Comment peut-il se faire que la lettre *H* étant aspirée dans *héros* soit muette dans tous les dérivés de ce même vocable ?' (Courrier_Q45)
47. 'Dans votre langue, cette lettre est aspirée dans *héros* sans l'être dans *héroïne* ; il pourrait bien se faire qu'il y eût aussi quelque **anomalie** semblable dans les mots que je mentionne.' (Courrier_Q210)

The five *Courrier* questions about the *h aspiré* are all from readers abroad. This suggests that this is an area of French pronunciation which caused greater uncertainty amongst second language speakers than first language speakers, who have less exposure to spoken French, fewer model speakers to follow and, possibly, less confidence in their intuition than first language speakers.

Three readers seek to verify information or pronunciations which they have heard, as in the following:

48. 'Quelqu'un m'a assuré que vous aviez deux manières de prononcer *des haricots* [...] Est-ce donc que vous avez **réellement** ces deux prononciations ?' (Courrier_Q25)

The idea that multiple pronunciations are in common usage causes confusion; the base assumption is that there should be just one pronunciation. Martin explains that the *h* in this

case should always be aspirated, but begins his response with an anecdote about an ‘actrice de notre temps’ who supposedly claimed:

49. ‘« On doit dire *dè haricots* quand ils sont crus, et *dè zharicots* quand ils sont cuits ».’

A harder sound for the hard bean, a smoother sound for the softer, cooked vegetable. Martin continues to provide a categorical response removing, in this case, any uncertainty regarding multiple possible pronunciations.

4.3.7 Style

Questions about style, which break down into two subcategories (register and politeness; pleonasm), are amongst the least frequent in both samples, though are marginally less frequent in *Courrier* questions, 1% (17 of 2,019) compared to 4% (14 of 316) of *Internautes* questions (see Figure 4.11). Within this category, questions concerning register and politeness (e.g. ‘Est-il élégant de souhaiter « une bonne continuation » ?’, *Courrier_Q22*; and questions about letter-writing) account for the vast majority of the *Internautes* questions in this category (13 of 14 questions), compared to 11 of 17 *Courrier* questions. This difference is highly significant ($p \leq 0.001$) and suggests that the twenty-first century users of the *Internautes* website are more concerned about politeness and register than was true of nineteenth-century *Courrier* readers. In the *Internautes* sample, all questions (bar one) were sent from users in France and the one user from abroad identifies themselves as a French expat living in Germany (*Internautes_Q145*). This appears to suggest that for foreign users of the *Internautes* platform, style is not a topic for which they seek advice.

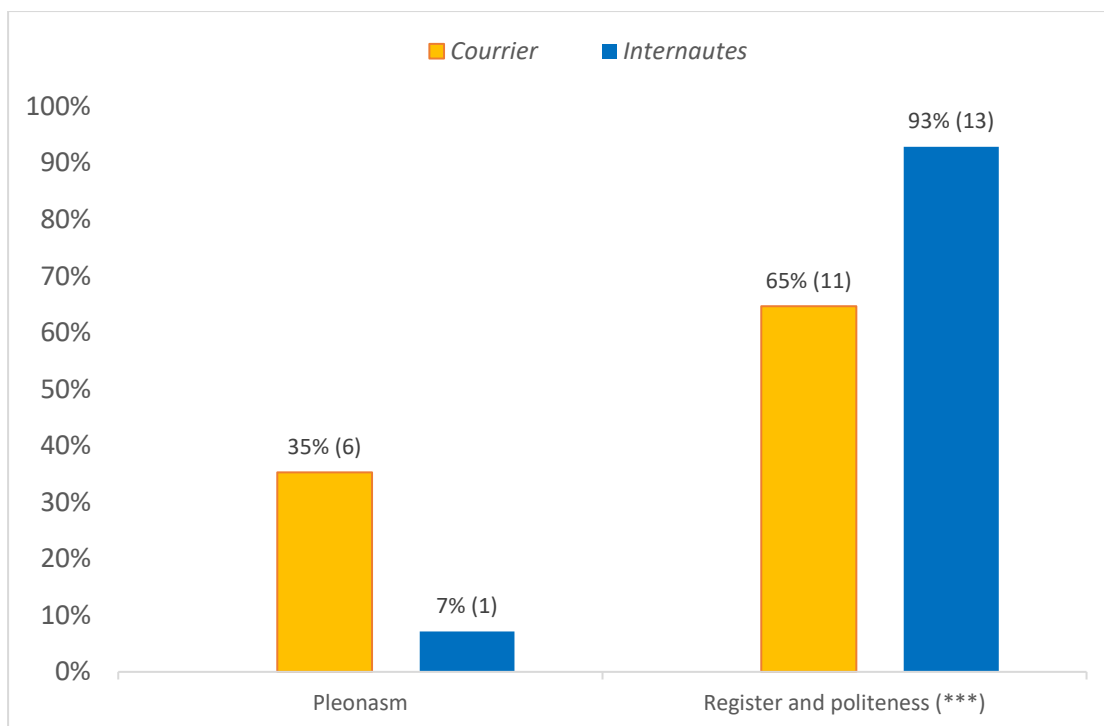


Figure 4.11 Style questions by subcategory (Courrier and Internautes)

Six of the 17 style questions in the *Courrier* concern pleonasm, in comparison to just one *Internautes* question. In all instances, the phrases in question were labelled explicitly as pleonasms by the readers. In both samples, pleonasm is presented as in contravention of the rules of the language. This can be explicit, as in Example 50 concerning the phrase *allumer une lumière* or implicit as in Example 51:

50. 'N'est-ce pas là un de ces pléonasmes qui **ne sont pas acceptables** dans notre langue ?' (Courrier_Q1564)

51. 'Je vous serais très-reconnaissant si vous vouliez bien traiter un jour dans votre journal la question de savoir **si on peut se servir de** l'expression *rien autre chose que*. **N'est-ce pas un pléonasm** ?' (Courrier_Q1125)

There seems to be little doubt in the minds of the readers that pleonasms should be avoided, but no explanation as to why. Likely explanations may involve logic and efficiency (see 6.1.2).

The formalities of letter writing prompt three (of 11) register and politeness questions in the *Courrier* and four (of 13) *Internautes* questions, and one further question about email etiquette. See Examples 52 and 53:

52. 'Il y en a qui mettent, dans la suscription d'une lettre, le numéro avant le nom de la rue ; dans l'*Almanach Bottin*, au contraire, il se trouve après. Quelle est **la meilleure manière d'écrire, selon vous** ?' (Courrier_Q823)
53. 'est-il **correct ou approprié** de dire « je vous prie d'agréer l'expression de ma considération la plus stricte » ?' (Internautes_Q184)

The presence of questions surrounding letter writing in both time periods suggest a continued perceived need to follow the stylistic conventions involved in formal correspondences.

4.3.8 Metalinguistic questions and opinions about language

Metalinguistic questions are infrequent in both corpora. They account for less than 1% (11 of 2,019) of *Courrier* questions and are the least frequent category in the *Internautes* sample, where they account for 2% (7 of 316) of questions. The questions cover a broad range of topics, asking, for instance, in the *Courrier* sample why the French language has two genders when Latin has three (Courrier_Q598), or in the *Internautes* sample about when we consider a word to truly be a part of the French language (Internautes_Q78). The infrequency of such questions suggests that readers are more concerned with specific points of the language and doubts in their language usage, than they are in the wider workings of the language.

No questions in the *Courrier* were categorised as opinions about language. This is explained by the format of the *Courrier*, which had other dedicated areas in which this sort of content could be published, for instance the *Réponses diverses* or the *Communications* sections. This allowed for the main Q+A section to be devoted entirely to questions, rather than comments. In the *Internautes* sample, 25 of 316 (8%) 'questions' are not, in fact, questions but comments which express opinions about language. That is, rather than asking a question, they share an opinion about the language and/or the *Académie* and the *Internautes* platform. Of these, 13 are amongst the 16 posts published on the *Internautes* webpage in its first two months (November-December 2011), with frequency then dropping over time to between zero and two posts per year. This shift from comments to questions after the first few months of the platform suggests that either the aim of the site evolved, or the type of content received from readers evolved from comment-based to question-based. The opinions expressed in these comments are analysed in Chapters 5 and 6.

4.4 Conclusion

Quantitative analysis of the question topics in the *Courrier* (1868-1881) and the *Internautes* (2011-2017) suggests stability in some areas of doubt and interest for readers across the two time periods. Questions about morpho-syntax (*Courrier* = 404 of 2,019 questions; *Internautes*

= 99 of 316) and meaning (*Courrier* = 686; *Internautes* = 68) are prominent in both corpora, while queries about style (*Courrier* = 17; *Internautes* = 14) and metalinguistic knowledge (*Courrier* = 11; *Internautes* = 7) are rare in both. There are two main changes apparent over time, from the nineteenth-century *Courrier* to the twenty-first-century *Internautes*, although it must be borne in mind that editorial choice of topics in the *Internautes* means we may have an incomplete or skewed picture of readers' interests. The three language areas most frequently asked about in the *Courrier* are language history (34% of all questions), meaning (34%), and morpho-syntax (20%), together accounting for 88% of all questions published. In the *Internautes* corpus, there is a greater spread of topics treated. The top three topic areas – morpho-syntax (31%), meaning (21%), and vocabulary (14%) – account for only 66% of the total, and even adding in the two next largest categories (phonology (9%) and opinions about language (8%)) still only accounts for 84%. The remainder are distributed among several topic areas.

Questions about language history, alongside meaning questions, are the dominant category in the *Courrier* (691 questions, 34%), accounting for 18% of all questions in the first print run and 42% of all published questions by the final run, but are infrequent in the twenty-first-century *Internautes* corpus (19 questions, 6%). It has been suggested that etymology remains an area of interest in French language commentary, popular because knowledge of etymologies allows speakers to feel sure that they are using words as originally intended (Paveau and Rosier 2008: 212). It may be, therefore, that the relative lack of attention paid to language history in the *Internautes* corpus is because users are pursuing questions of etymology elsewhere – perhaps by independent research, which is now radically easier, online, than in the time of the *Courrier* – or because the *Internautes* editors chose not to publish etymology-based questions, possibly seeing their role more as an authority for doubts about usage rather than for 'interesting' questions. The *Internautes* rubric is, after all, located in the *Dire, Ne pas dire* section of the website and its focus is on correctness, rather than on language history. It may also be, however, that there is genuinely less interest in this topic amongst *Internautes* readers, contrary to the expectations of Paveau and Rosier (2008).

There were few significant differences in either corpus in the kinds of question asked by readers in France and outside France, suggesting that, for the most part, the same areas of the language cause difficulty for lay audiences based in France and abroad. However, in the *Courrier*, France-based readers ask significantly more language history questions than readers abroad who show significantly greater interest in questions about meaning. This may reflect a difference in how readers from France and abroad use the *Courrier*. Readers from abroad

are likely to be more uncertain about usage because – we may assume – many are not first language French speakers; those within France, who likely have fewer queries about usage, may ask more questions out of interest than need. No statistically significant differences between these readerships were found in the *Internautes* corpus, although users from abroad ask marginally more questions about phonology and fewer about style than users from France.

It is striking that the same questions recur not just within each corpus but also between the *Courrier* and *Internautes* samples, e.g. concerns regarding *Je ne sache pas que* and the aspiration in *héro/héroïne*. These same points of language which caused doubt and difficulty in the late nineteenth century still cause the same uncertainty for lay language enthusiasts some 130 years later. In the categories of vocabulary and phonology, questions about borrowings, and specifically anglicisms, are significantly less frequent in the *Courrier* (3 of 2,019 questions) than in the *Internautes* corpus (31 of 316 questions). This increase in the frequency with which anglicisms are discussed from the nineteenth-century *Courrier* to the twenty-first century *Internautes* accords with a broader societal change in attitudes towards anglicisms: from Anglophilia in the nineteenth century to rejection and purism in the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Wise 1997; Walsh 2015). The *Académie's* role in condemning anglicisms may also be relevant, potentially affecting not just the *Internautes* editors' practice but also their readers' preoccupations. The *Académie française* is commonly known as a purist institution, and it is plausible that the *Académie's* online following share some of those purist attitudes towards the language.

Chapter 5 Creating and negotiating authority: *Le Courrier de Vaugelas* and the *Courrier des internautes*

Chapter 4 explored the areas of the language which inspire readers of *Le Courrier de Vaugelas* and the *Courrier des internautes* to seek language advice from the perceived experts, Éman Martin and the *Académie's Service du Dictionnaire*. This chapter addresses the question of how authority is created and negotiated by these experts and which authoritative works, individuals or institutions they and their audiences treat as exemplifying good usage. Section 5.1 provides an overview of the samples used for qualitative analysis in this Chapter. (The same samples are also used in Chapter 6.) Section 5.2 examines the references made to external authorities by readers and experts, focusing primarily on language reference texts and literature. Section 5.3 then analyses the language and rhetorical devices used by the experts behind both sources to present prescriptions to readers.

5.1 Data samples for qualitative analysis

The two full corpora of the *Courrier* and the *Internautes* examined in Chapters 3 and 4 differ in size and scope. The *Courrier* contains 2,019 questions, the *Internautes* contains 316 questions. In addition, the average word count of the expert responses differs considerably across the two corpora (*Courrier* = 304.7 words mean; *Internautes* = 80 words, see Table 5.1).¹¹⁸ The qualitative sample of 997 *Courrier* questions from Chapter 4 is used once again in this chapter. A new sample of *Courrier* responses is also presented here. As responses from the *Courrier* corpus are both more numerous than those in the *Internautes* (2,019 vs. 316) and much longer on average, conducting a qualitative analysis of all *Courrier* responses (totalling approximately 560,000 words) was not feasible. Consequently, a sample of *Courrier* responses was created. All 316 *Internautes* questions and 278 responses were analysed (early questions were often published without a response).

¹¹⁸ The figures in Table 5.1 for the *Courrier* are calculated using the qualitative samples of 997 questions (first introduced in Section 4.3) and 141 responses.

		Questions	Responses
<i>Courrier</i>	Mean	34.9	304.7
	Mode	31	183
	Median	33	247
	Shortest	6	51
	Longest	93	1,303
<i>Internautes</i>	Mean	56.1	80
	Mode	54	58
	Median	49	72.5
	Shortest	5	0
	Longest	199	406

Table 5.1 Average word counts for questions and responses based on qualitative samples (*Courrier* and *Internautes*)

Courrier responses were sampled to create a smaller subsection for qualitative analysis. A sample of 5% of each question category (e.g. meaning, morphosyntax etc.) was selected, but with a minimum of 10 responses per category (see Table 5.2). This 10-response minimum meant that for small categories, e.g. style which contains just 17 questions in total, far more than 5% of responses were selected. This method maintained the proportionality of the larger categories from the main corpus whilst also providing enough responses from the smaller categories for meaningful analysis. Responses were listed in chronological order and every 20th response was selected to collect 5% of the large categories. For smaller categories, e.g. phonology with 61 questions and responses, approximately every 6th response was collected, creating a sample of 10 responses. Ordering the responses chronologically retained the relative spread of responses per year/issue but does not necessarily ensure an even distribution of responses across years/issues.¹¹⁹ For clarity, Table 5.3 shows the samples of *Courrier* and *Internautes* questions and responses on which the following analysis is based. All examples are reproduced as published in the original sources, with bold added for emphasis.

¹¹⁹ This thesis does not consider change over time within the corpus. However, Glatigny (2001), who compares Martin's rulings (from the first and last print runs of the *Courrier*) with the linguistic codex, presents evidence of some change in Martin's approach over time.

Category	No. of items in corpus	Number of items in sample (5%, min. 10)	% of total category
Meaning	686	35	5%
Language history	691	35	5%
Morpho-syntax	404	21	5%
Spelling	88	10	11%
Vocabulary	61	10	16%
Phonology	61	10	16%
Style	17	10	59%
Metalinguistic knowledge	11	10	91%
Total	2,019	141	7%

Table 5.2 Qualitative sample of Courier responses by category

Courier			
Questions		Responses	
Sample	Total	Sample	Total
997	2,019	141	2,019
Internautes			
Questions		Responses	
316		278	

Table 5.3 Data sets for qualitative analysis (Courier and Internautes)

5.2 External authorities

This study distinguishes between lay and expert discourses, with language experts conceived of as persons or groups which are looked to as authorities. However, the question of who has authority in matters of language is not straightforward. Davies and Langer (2006: 43) use the term ‘language norm authorities’ to describe those members of the community ‘who have the power to correct other people’s language use, such as teachers and copy editors’, i.e. the actors disseminating prescriptions and prescriptivism. Ammon (2003: 2-6) suggests that the authority of perceived experts and ‘model speakers and writers’ is strong, and that their ‘criticism of the language codex is taken seriously’. For the experts responding to *Courier* and *Internautes* questions, authority must be created and maintained if their audiences are to continue to view them as experts. Initial authority for Martin comes from his professional experience, as a language teacher and the author of reference works (see Section 3.1.1). The *Service du Dictionnaire* benefits from the institutional authority of the *Académie française*,

not only is the *Internautes* service a part of the *Académie* website, but the *Académie's* name is attached to every response ('L'Académie répond').

The scope of prescriptive authority is in fact much broader than traditional and institutional sources, such as language reference texts and *grands auteurs*. Ordinary speakers play a significant role in maintaining the language (Pillière and Lewis 2018: para.10) and 'many people – certainly most members of the educated middle classes – consider themselves equally qualified to comment on linguistic issues' (Davies and Langer 2006: 44-45). This 'lay enthusiast as expert' view can be observed in *Courrier* and *Internautes* questions which query usages found in 'authoritative' texts and in the few instances where readers critique or challenge the opinions and approaches of Martin and the *Service du Dictionnaire*.

This section analyses questions and responses from the *Courrier* and *Internautes* samples to identify the language reference texts, literary works/authors and other sources that are held up as authorities by the experts and lay contributors. It also examines the ways in which the experts of each source assert and negotiate their own authority and the ways in which they refer to other authorities to reinforce that authority. A 'reference to authority' is defined here as any mention of a language reference text (whether specific, e.g. *le Dictionnaire de la langue verte*, *Courrier_Q1797*, or generic, e.g. 'dans les dictionnaires', *Internautes_Q50*), any mention of a literary author or work (again either specific, e.g. Molière, *Courrier_Q612*, or general, 'les meilleurs auteurs', *Internautes_R9*). Also discussed are mentions of the media, including newspapers, radio and TV, (e.g. 'le Figaro', *Courrier_Q1646*; 'la radio et la presse', *Internautes_Q193*), who are often looked to both as authorities on correct language and users of 'bad' language (Strelēvica-Ošiņa 2016: 256).

We shall see that while readers tend to mention authorities for broadly the same reasons, the frequency with which and the ways in which Martin and the *Service du Dictionnaire* mention authorities differs greatly. We saw in Chapter 3, for instance, that Martin legitimises his own authority by announcing the accolades and prizes which he and his publication have been awarded. Almost 90% of the *Courrier* sample of 141 responses contained one or more references to authorities (123 responses). In comparison, only one third of *Internautes* responses (93 of 278 responses) contain references to an authority (see Table 5.4). As noted previously, responses in the *Courrier* are much longer than those provided by the *Académie*, arguably giving more opportunity for a reference to occur; more than this, however, as we shall see in Section 5.2.1, Martin seems to use references to authorities to help create an interesting 'story'.

	<i>Courrier</i>				<i>Internautes</i>			
	Questions		Reponses		Questions		Reponses	
	No. of mentions (n=997)	% of questions (1+ refs.)	No. of mentions (n=141)	% of responses (1+ refs.)	No. of mentions (n=316)	% of questions (1+ refs.)	No. of mentions (n=278)	% of responses (1+ refs.)
Language reference texts	159	12%	227	64%	20	6%	102	25%
Literature	45	4%	269	62%	3	1%	51	10%
Media	35	3%	10	7%	19	6%	1	0%

Table 5.4 Total mentions of language reference texts, literature and media (Courrier and Internautes)

Readers from both corpora mention authorities for two main reasons. Firstly, authorities – usually language reference works – are used to evidence the writer’s own research:

1. ‘Quel est le genre de *camélia*, et doit-on mettre une ou deux *l*, à ce mot, car **les dictionnaires que j’ai consultés** là-dessus ne sont pas du tout d’accord ?’ (Courrier_Q15)
2. J’ai une question de typographie à laquelle **je ne trouve de réponse dans aucun guide.**’ (Internautes_Q90)

The readers may need help from the experts with a specific doubt, but these references show that they have access to and knowledge of suitable authoritative reference texts, constructing their authority.

Secondly, references to sources often seen as setting a standard of language – literature or the media – are the inspiration behind the question, where they seem to fall short of expectations:

3. Voici ce que je trouve dans **J. J. Rousseau (Émile, iv)** : « Le temps vient où la *même* nature prend soin d’éclairer son élève ». Ne pensez-vous pas que ce soit une **faute** ?’ (Courrier_Q1238)
4. ‘Je souhaiterais savoir si les expressions entendues **à la radio** sont **correctes** : « notre pays préfère s’hystériser » et « je trouve ça interrogeant ».’ (Internautes_Q40)

Signalling the errors made by assumed figures of authority bolsters the readers’ own authority; they are able to hold someone else to account for their language use. Additionally,

a certain level of cultural knowledge and authority is created by references to literature, particularly the *grands classiques*.

References to authorities can also reveal an expectation of adherence to the standard by perceived gatekeepers. For instance, one *Courrier* reader expresses disbelief at the possibility of an academic publication containing a syntactical error:

5. 'Je lis dans **le Journal des Débats (un journal lettré académique même s'il en fut)**, numéro du 4 octobre 1877, p.1, col. 3 : « Où en sommes-nous ? Quelle étrange perversion *s'est-elle* emparée des esprits ? » **Ne faut-il pas dire** : « Quelle étrange perversion *s'est* emparée des esprits ? » La **faute**, si c'en est une, m'a semblé mériter d'être relevée dans **une feuille si grave, si puriste** ; et elle ne peut évidemment s'expliquer que par une faute d'impression.' (Courrier_Q1304)

This reader assumes that the more serious and academic the publication, the *better* the grasp editors and writers should have of the language.

Courrier reader Maisonrouge (a frequent contributor discussed in 3.1.2.5), whose letter discusses whether *artisan* can have a marked feminine form (*artisane*), ironically equates their challenging a language authority on language matters with a crime (imagery of criminality is discussed in Section 6.2.3):

6. 'Il me reste à me disculper du **défaut de respect pour l'autorité linguistique des romanciers et autres fantaisistes contemporains**. J'avoue mon **crime** et je ne suis point prêt à m'en repentir ; car l'écrivain de l'une et de l'autre de ces catégories se goure trop souvent à propos des choses les plus vulgaires de ce bas monde, dont il est ignorant d'ordinaire autant qu'homme en France. Ce n'est pas à dire qu'à l'occasion les lexicographes en titre soient mieux renseignés.' (*Communications*, 01/11/1876, p.81-2)

Maisonrouge is clearly aware of the constructed authority of language experts but does not consider that they are above criticism.

Teachers are presented as gatekeepers and authorities in *Internautes* questions. For instance, five users refer to their schooldays and the education they received:

7. 'J'ai le souvenir de **mes cours de grammaire d'enfant**, il me semble que les prépositions à utiliser pour les verbes partir et aller sont respectivement « pour » et « à ».' (Internautes_60)

Users present their former teachers as language authorities, relying upon the lessons they learned to highlight a perceived error in contemporary language usage. One user bemoans the French grammar education which their child receives at a school in Germany:

8. 'Je sais bien que **j'ai quitté l'école il y a bien longtemps** et que le français évolue mais j'ai parfois des doutes sur la **qualité du français** qu'on lui enseigne.' (Internautes_145)

The explicit mention of the *quality* of French language education highlights not only the perceived importance of education in diffusing the standard, but also the influence of standard language ideology – it suggests that language can not only be correct-incorrect but also high-low quality. We shall see in Section 5.2.3 that correctness and the quality of language are, on occasion, conceived of as a continuum by both the readers and experts.

Whilst we can reasonably assume that the *Courrier* and *Internautes* audiences consider the experts from whom they are seeking language advice to be authorities on language, this authority does not go unquestioned. There is no evidence of this in the short questions published in the main Q+A section of the *Courrier*, but analysis of readers' *Communications* can shed light on how Martin's audience, who are often writing to refute his suggested solutions, view his authority. For instance, Martin and his frequent contributor Maisonrouge disagree in ten of 14 correspondences, e.g.:

9. "M. Maisonrouge l'avait prévu dès la première ligne de sa lettre, **il est impossible que nous puissions tomber d'accord** sur le verbe *sabler*.' (Martin to Maisonrouge, 15/02/1878, p.122)
10. 'Vous êtes tombé, Monsieur, dans **une grave erreur**' (Maisonrouge to Martin, 15/08/1879, p.89).

Publishing such disagreements allows the editor to engage with his audience, and the willingness of Maisonrouge to publicly disagree with the perceived language expert suggests that the readers too perceive themselves to have authority.

The *Académie's* rulings on language are not accepted by three *Internautes* users (316 published questions),¹²⁰ e.g. Example 11:

11. 'Je vous écris car je ne comprends absolument pas votre position sur l'utilisation de « le » ou « ce midi ».' (Internautes_Q202)

¹²⁰ In Internautes_Q105, a user expresses surprise at the *Académie's* advocacy of the pleonastic 'dépenses somptuaires'. In Internautes_Q254, a user is shocked to see 'Je n'ai plus une date de libre dans mon agenda' recommended rather than 'une date libre'.

Three further users criticise the *Académie's* position on language more generally. One reader (Internautes_Q279) denounces the *Académie's* approach to language and correctness, accusing the institution of elitism and of neglecting *la Francophonie* (French speakers and communities outside of France) (see Figure 5.1).¹²¹ The response focuses on the *Académie's* promotion of *Francophonie*. The *Service du Dictionnaire* does not respond to criticism of the *Académie's* position towards the linguistic norm, but it did choose to publish this reader's critical remarks.

François D.

Le 5 janvier 2012

Courrier des internautes

[...] Les académiciens étaient d'excellents élèves de terminale en 1950, et ont été formés dans les meilleurs lycées par des professeurs agrégés nés en 1900, dont ils reproduisent avec dévotion les enseignements. Il y a un moment où il faut se rendre à l'évidence : la rigidité absurde de l'Académie sur des points indéfendables ne la rend plus audible sur les points qui méritent d'être défendus (et qui sont, évidemment, beaucoup plus nombreux). Le repli de l'Académie sur les spécialistes français, et non francophones, est à l'opposé du mode de travail de l'Académie espagnole avec les académies latino-américaines : les meilleurs spécialistes de l'usage du français sont maintenant belges !

La censure qui règne sur les courriels du site « Dire, ne pas dire » empêche de poser ces questions et de provoquer quelques sursauts salutaires ! Ne publier que des points de vue qui soutiennent l'immobilisme en matière de norme de la langue est une position réactionnaire. On devrait pouvoir, aussi, avancer l'opinion que l'hypercorrection élitiste tue le bon usage de l'honnête homme.

François D.

L'Académie répond

La neuvième édition du Dictionnaire de l'Académie française, en accueillant des termes venus du Canada, de la Belgique, de Suisse, d'Afrique, montre une ouverture systématique au vocabulaire de la francophonie.

Que dire de la présence au sein de l'Académie française, naguère d'Henri Troyat, Julien Green, Marguerite Yourcenar, Léopold Sédar Senghor et, aujourd'hui, de Félicien Marceau, d'Hector Bianciotti, de François Cheng, d'Assia Djebar, d'Amin Maalouf, entre autres ?

Figure 5.1 Internautes question which criticises the Académie (Internautes_279)

5.2.1 Language reference works

In both corpora, mentions of language reference works can be general (Examples 12 and 13, which also include general references to literary authors) or specific (14 and 15):

12. 'On lit dans **toutes les grammaires**, d'accord en cela **avec tous les écrivains**, que *autrui* ne peut jamais s'employer comme sujet ; c'est là un fait remarquable, mais dont je n'ai vu nulle part l'explication.' (Courrier_Q459)

¹²¹ See also Courrier_Q285 and Courrier_Q298.

13. 'Je m'étonne que le mot « effectivité » ne figure pas **au dictionnaire** quoiqu'on le trouve sous **les meilleures plumes, dont celles d'académiciens.**' (Internautes_Q306)
14. 'dans **la première édition de l'Académie** (1694), on lit encore *concert de musique*' (Courrier_R976).
15. '**le Dictionnaire terminologique de l'Office québécois de la langue française** propose « micromessage » pour un *twitt*' (Internautes_R46).

The first quarter of the nineteenth century saw large growth in the language reference works market, with grammars and dictionaries being published 'at an exponential rate' (Henry 2008: 72). In *Courrier* questions (from the period 1868 to 1881), the breadth of texts available by then is reflected in the range of reference works cited: 27 different texts are mentioned, of which 17 are dictionaries, five are grammars and five are works focused on etymology. This may reflect the greater selection of dictionaries by then available to readers, although, as we will see, a reliance on Littré's dictionary (60 mentions) suggests that not all works saw the same popularity. Only one reference work, Ménage's (1613-1692) *Les origines de la langue française* (1650), was published before, and not republished during, the nineteenth century. The *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* (1694), the second most frequently referenced authority (20 mentions), was also published for the first time in the seventeenth century, but two new editions were published during the *Courrier's* history (1868-1881), in 1835 (6th) and 1878 (7th). Readers tend to refer to (roughly) contemporary reference works. Although it is not clear to which edition readers or expert are referring in most cases, it is unlikely that readers could easily access older editions of reference works.

The sample of 141 *Courrier* responses contain 227 mentions of language reference texts. References to unspecified texts total 31. The remaining 196 references are to 79 different specified authors/texts. Martin uses a wide selection of references and examples to create a narrative, tracing change in usage and opinions over time and highlighting opposing opinions. See, for instance, the beginning of a response about the meaning of the expression *boire sec*:

16. '**Nos lexicographes** sont bien peu d'accord à ce sujet. Selon **l'Académie, Bescherelle et Littré**, *boire sec* a deux significations ; la première, bien boire, boire beaucoup, boire excessivement ; et la seconde, boire sans eau. **D'après Landais**, cette expression veut dire les deux choses à la fois, boire beaucoup et sans eau. Enfin, **pour Poitevin**, elle n'en signifie qu'une, boire sans eau.' (Courrier_R802)

Martin then seeks to determine the ‘true’ meaning, by comparing the expression to similar French expressions (e.g. *boire frais*) and to translations of the expression into other languages (e.g. German), leading him to eventually conclude that the phrase means *boire sans eau*.

Although a much broader variety of reference works are mentioned by Martin than in his readers’ questions, the same two authorities are the most frequently mentioned in *Courrier* questions and responses. Littré is the most referenced authority in both questions and responses (60 mentions in *Courrier* questions, 26 in responses). First published in instalments between 1863-1872, with a second edition of the work released between 1872-1877, Littré’s *Dictionnaire de la langue française* – commonly referred to as *Le Littré* – was a relatively new publication for Martin and his *Courrier* readers. The number of reader references to the Littré increases over time, presumably reflecting its growth in popularity over the years.

Two *Courrier* readers inquire about the etymology of *belluaire*, and both note the word’s absence from ‘le dictionnaire de Littré’. The second reader’s observation of this prompts the following question:

17. ‘Est-ce un oubli, ou effectivement ce mot ne serait-il **pas français**, malgré l’**autorité de Victor Hugo** ?’ (Courrier_Q1083)

The reader not only positions Littré as an important language authority, but also demonstrates a belief that words that are not in a dictionary are not a part of the French language; a dictionary is the holder of the language. Literary authority is also drawn on by the reader who suggests that Hugo’s use of *belluaire* should be reason enough for its inclusion in Littré’s dictionary.

Martin’s discussions of Littré show clear respect for the lexicographer who Martin describes as, for instance, ‘l’illustre lexicographe’ (Courrier_R758). That is not to say, however, that Martin always agrees with Littré, as in Example 18:

18. ‘Je crois qu’ici l’illustre philologue, qui a voulu expliquer [sic] de par le rapport que marque cette préposition dans *la ville de Rome*, a **commis une erreur**’ (Courrier_R547).

Glatigny (2001), who analysed the first and final print runs of the *Courrier*, compared Martin’s rulings with those made by his contemporaries and the established codex and similarly noted Martin’s willingness to disagree with other authorities. As we shall see in Section 5.3.2, Martin often hedges his prescriptions in terms of opinion or belief (as here, ‘Je crois que’), as if unsure

of his own authority. His willingness, however, to disagree with important authorities suggests that this is not a genuine lack of self-confidence, but a sort of modesty topos. It also bolsters his own authority, placing himself and his opinions on equal footing with respected and established authorities.

The *Académie française* is mentioned 20 times in 997 *Courrier* readers' questions and 18 times in Martin's 141 responses. Whilst this suggests that the institution was similarly considered an important authority (Example 16, p.165: 'Selon l'Académie'), this is again not an indisputable authority. For Martin, unlike his reader in Example 17 (p.166), a word's presence in or absence from a dictionary does not determine its legitimacy or existence:

19. 'Je crois que bougrement (qui ne se trouve ni dans le dictionnaire de l'Académie ni dans celui de M. Littré, sans qu'on puisse toutefois lui contester sa qualité de mot français), vient de l'adverbe latin pulchrè' (Courrier_R29).

In the twenty-first century, dictionaries, grammars and style guides are widely available online and the choice is far larger than in Martin's time. *Internautes* users can easily research their question before turning to the language advice service. Reliance on the internet to answer language questions is highlighted in *Internautes* questions, which refer to websites such as Le Petit Larousse online (Internautes_Q16), Wikipedia (Internautes_Q103) or simply 'the internet'. Users also mention print copies of reference works, e.g.:

20. 'ma Grevisse' (Internautes_Q54).¹²²
21. 'Nous avons cherché, qui dans le Bled, qui dans le Bescherelle' (Internautes_Q147).¹²³

Despite the variety of choice and ease with which such texts can be accessed, very few mentions are made in *Internautes* questions to language reference works: only 20 in 316 questions. This may suggest that *Internautes* users consult reference works less frequently than readers of Martin's *Courrier*, or it may signal a shift from consulting published/official resources to simply 'googling'.

Four *Internautes* readers mention *Académie française* resources, including their dictionary and website, as in Example 22:

¹²² 'Le bon usage' by Maurice Grevisse, a grammar first published in 1936 and often referred to as 'le Grevisse'.

¹²³ 'le Bled' is a French language reference text named after two of its authors, Odette and Edouard Bled.

22. 'J'ai cherché la définition du langage courant ou familier sur **votre site internet** [<http://www.academie-francaise.fr/>] mais je ne l'ai pas trouvée, et **comme il s'agit là de la source suprême et indiscutable**, j'apprécierais beaucoup que vous répondiez à mon interrogation.' (Internautes_Q86)

The authority accorded to the *Académie's* website, which includes its online dictionary and *Dire, Ne pas dire*, is not the only complimentary comment made by *Internautes'* users but is one of few to explicitly reference the institution's perceived authority. However, given that reference material is readily available, and contacting the *Académie* is therefore a choice, we can reasonably assume that the *Académie* is considered an authority by those *Internautes* users who consult it on matters of language, as in the following examples:

23. 'Pourriez-vous intervenir publiquement pour **(r)établir la norme** ?' (Internautes_Q51)
24. '**De façon officielle**, par courrier si cela vous est possible, pourriez-vous me confirmer ou m'infirmer que la phrase de politesse suivante est correcte : « Veuillez agréer, Madame, Monsieur, l'expression de mes salutations distinguées. »' (Internautes_Q250)

The use of *officielle* positions the *Académie* as able to make formal rulings on language and demonstrates the power that some people attribute to the *Académie* which, in reality and as discussed in Section 1.4, has little official power over the language.

The *Service du Dictionnaire* references 21 named language resources (in 278 responses), alongside general references to dictionaries (7), usage guides (4), grammarians (2), lexicographers (1) and language encyclopaedias (1). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most frequently referenced source is the *Académie's* own dictionary, mentioned in 41 of 278 responses (approximately 40% of all mentions to reference texts and occurring in almost one in six responses). In one response, the orthographical history of the word *oignon* is charted through references to multiple editions of the dictionary:

25. 'Les **différentes éditions du Dictionnaire de l'Académie française** témoignent aussi de ces hésitations. Dans **les éditions de 1718 à 1762**, on écrivait *oignon* ; **en 1798**, *ognon*, **en 1835 et 1878**, on proposait les deux formes ; en 1935 *oignon* ; **dans l'édition actuelle**, on écrit *oignon* en signalant qu'*ognon* est accepté.' (Internautes_R234)¹²⁴

¹²⁴ This is the only response which mentions multiple editions of the same work. It was counted as one reference.

The frequency with which *Internautes* responses mention the *Académie*'s own dictionary firmly positions the *Académie* as an authority, with little need to seek external authority or justification for its answers. Littré is referenced in one *Internautes* question and seven responses, making him the second most referenced authority. Although mentioned more frequently in the nineteenth-century *Courrier* than the twenty-first-century *Internautes*, Littré is a point of reference in both time periods. A contemporary reference for Martin and his audience, the most recent edition of Littré's dictionary dates to 1877. Despite this, the *Service du Dictionnaire* still draws on its authority, suggesting perhaps the importance of prestige, rather than contemporaneity, in the choice of reference work.

Seven *Internautes* responses (but no questions) mention FranceTerme, an online database which recommends 'French' replacements for foreign terms (usually anglicisms), run by the *Délégation générale à la langue française et aux langues de France* (DGLFLF) and the Ministry of Culture. Users of the site can also suggest their own replacement terms, and the *Service du Dictionnaire* encourages readers to engage with both functionalities. For instance, in response to a question which seeks French equivalents for the anglicisms 'before work' and 'after work', the *Service* responds:

26. 'Effectivement, **les anglicismes se répandent** et il n'existe pas, à ma connaissance, d'équivalents pleinement **satisfaisants** en français. [...] **Vous pouvez soumettre ces termes pour étude dans la boîte à idées du site France Terme (www.culture.fr/franceterme)**.' (Internautes_R155)

The frequency of mentions and the formulaic way in which FranceTerme is discussed in the seven responses suggests that this is conscious promotion of the website. A similar Quebecois resource, the *Grand dictionnaire terminologique*,¹²⁵ is mentioned in three responses: once in response to a Canadian reader who asks whether they can use the word 'culturème' (Internautes_Q8) but also in two examples (Internautes_R16; Internautes_R46) where there is no obvious reason for promoting the Quebecois resource over the equivalent French website (readers are from France and the UK and do not mention quebecisms).

5.2.2 Literature

As Table 5.4 above shows, references to literature and/or literary authors are infrequent in the questions of both corpora (45 references in 997 *Courrier* questions; 3 references in 316 *Internautes* questions) and where they occur, are usually mentioned as the inspiration behind readers' questions (e.g. Example 3, p.161). Consequently, this section focuses mainly on the literature referenced in responses, particularly *Courrier* responses where references to

¹²⁵ <http://gdt.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/> (Accessed: 16/09/2020).

literature outnumber mentions of language reference texts (269 references vs. 227, in 141 responses). The pattern is reversed in the *Internautes*: the *Service du Dictionnaire* makes 51 literary references in 278 responses, in comparison to the 102 mentions of language reference works. References to literature bolster authority in two ways: through their presentation as examples of correct usage and their indexing of ‘cultural knowledge’ (Walsh manuscript submitted).

In *Courrier* questions, references to contemporary nineteenth-century literature are frequent: 15 references are made to 13 such authors (from a total of 45 references to literature, see Table 5.5). Ayres-Bennett and Seijido’s (2011: 242) study of seventeenth-century *remarqueurs* similarly found that references to contemporary literature are prominent, although those seventeenth-century references were used to exemplify usage, rather than as the inspiration for a question as in the *Courrier*. Whereas language reference texts mentioned in *Courrier* questions are almost exclusively contemporary, the literary works referenced go back to the sixteenth century. Seven literary figures from the seventeenth century feature in readers’ questions (16 total mentions), including Molière (mentioned four times) and La Fontaine (also mentioned four times). This suggests that seventeenth-century literature is a shared point of reference for the *Courrier* audience. In purist discourses, seventeenth-century literature is often portrayed as a ‘golden age’ of the French language (Paveau and Rosier 2008: 21), however there is no evidence of this in the qualitative sample.

Century	No. of mentions to literature or literary figures
16th	1
17th	16
18th	6
19th	15
General references	7
Total	45

Table 5.5 References to literature or literary figures by century (*Courrier* questions)

Of the 141 responses in the *Courrier* sample, 88 responses (almost two thirds) reference literature: there are 269 references to 161 authors/works. Not only are references to literature more numerous in *Courrier* responses than in any other section of the two corpora, they also span a broader time period, from the tenth to the nineteenth century (see Figure 5.2).¹²⁶ Whereas the oldest references in *Courrier* questions date to the sixteenth century,

¹²⁶ References in *Internautes* questions are not included as only one explicit literary reference is made (Orwell’s *Animal Farm*).

Martin’s responses contain 48 mentions of texts dating to between the tenth and fourteenth centuries. Looking at Table 5.6, which shows Martin’s literary references by century, we see that the number of references broadly increases as we move through the centuries. This may reflect the reference points with which Martin feels his audience will be more familiar. In these figures, seventeenth-century literature does not seem to stand out more than other centuries as a ‘golden age’ of literature and language, but the number of references does steadily increase from the sixteenth century, suggesting perhaps that literature from the seventeenth-nineteenth-centuries is a more familiar point of reference for the *Courrier* audience, or at least is assumed to be by Martin.

Century	<i>Courrier</i> responses		<i>Internautes</i> responses	
	No. of mentions	No. of authors	No. of mentions	No. of authors
10th	1	1	0	0
11th	11	3	0	0
12th	17	11	0	0
13th	13	7	0	0
14th	6	6	0	0
15th	15	6	0	0
16th	32	18	1	1
17th	40	23	3	6
18th	51	27	2	2
19th	48	29	16	19
Total	234	131	18	23
30 <i>Courrier</i> references not included as their author and/or publication date was unclear				

Table 5.6 References to literature by century (*Courrier* and *Internautes* responses)

Martin uses literature to exemplify usages and trace changing usage over time. In this way, his approach to authority is two-pronged: finding support both from reference works and from literature. More than this, however, mentions of literature – particularly such a broad history of literature – evidence Martin’s knowledge, presenting an image of a well-read, and in turn educated and cultured, authority to his audience. To take one example, in a response to a question which asks whether *ancêtre* can be used in the plural as well as the singular (Martin rules that it can; *Courrier*_499), Martin quotes four literary figures/works directly: a twelfth-century epic poem (*Garin le Loherain*) in which *ancêtre* is pluralised; and Chateaubriand, Montesquieu, and Voltaire (‘des écrivains du premier ordre’ in Example 27)

who use the singular. A postscript to the response explores the competing authority of the *Académie* and authors:

27. '[L'Académie] ne peut se refuser à admettre au singulier un nom que **des écrivains du premier ordre** emploient à ce nombre. Du reste, le fait qu'elle ne fournit pour *ancêtre* que des citations où ce mot est au pluriel, n'implique nullement la condamnation du singulier.'

See, also, the following response:

28. 'Quand il n'y aurait que les noms de Malherbe, de Mme de Sévigné et de Voltaire pour autoriser l'expression de *fleur d'orange*, cela pourrait, certes, sembler déjà suffisant' (Courrier_R394).

Martin suggests that literary figures, just like grammarians and lexicographers, can authorise certain usages. To take one specific figure, Voltaire is clearly an important reference point for Martin, positioned as an important authority in Examples 27 and 28, yet is not beyond the editor's criticism:

29. 'Voltaire a dit quelque part : « Il n'est pas question de savoir ce que notre langue fut ; mais ce qu'elle est. » **Pardon, grand homme** ; en sachant ce qu'elle fut, on peut expliquer ce qu'elle est' (Courrier_R54).¹²⁷

This once again shows that, despite relying heavily on authoritative figures to exemplify and justify his responses, he is willing to challenge even the most celebrated of figures.

In *Internautes* questions, a reference to *Animal Farm* is the only specific mention of a literary text,¹²⁸ alongside two other general references to literature: 'certains livres écrits par les plus grands de la littérature française' (Internautes_Q19); and 'sous les meilleures plumes, dont celles d'académiciens.' (Internautes_Q306). One further example (30) mentions 'la langue de Molière' (Internautes_Q142), a common phrase which nonetheless demonstrates that the seventeenth-century playwright is still revered as an authority:

30. 'Francophone depuis plus de 40 ans et ayant commencé à apprendre **la langue de Molière** à 11 ans, je me vante de parler très correctement, sauf des exceptions...'

¹²⁷ This is discussed further in Chapter 6, for the importance Martin places on language history.

¹²⁸ 'Nous avons commencé à lire le roman de G. ORWELL « La Ferme des animaux ». Un cheval est nommé Malabar. D'où vient l'expression « Fort comme un malabar » ?'.

One *Internautes* reader suggests that the rules enforced upon ‘ordinary’ speakers and literary authors differ:

31. ‘Dans votre formidable rubrique « Dire, ne pas dire », vous précisez que l’expression « à ce qu’il paraît » relève d’un médiocre niveau de langage, ce qui a été confirmé par mon aïeule. Cependant, j’ai retrouvé cette expression dans **certains livres écrits par les plus grands de la littérature française**, comme le roman « Pauline » d’Alexandre Dumas. Bien que certains auteurs puissent se permettre plus de choses concernant **notre chère langue** [sic]. Ainsi, pouvons-nous employer cette expression ?’ (Internautes_Q19)

The *Académie*’s response affirms that literary figures might be allowed to take more liberties in their works, but that this does not authorise the use of a phrase such as *à ce qu’il paraît* outside of informal spoken language, also highlighting the importance of register and the differing expectations of spoken and written language.¹²⁹

Internautes responses contain references to 40 authors/works (mentioned 51 times) and four general references. Of the 40 named authors, George Sand is the only female author (Internautes_165), featuring on a list of seven ‘grands auteurs’. Sand is also one of only two women mentioned in the *Courrier*, the second being Madame de Sévigné. It is disappointing that the invisibilisation of women’s literary achievements, which might not surprise us in Martin’s *Courrier*, continues into the twenty-first century in the *Internautes* responses. It is also striking that of the 40 authors mentioned, 15 are *académiciens*. That is, it is more likely that an *académicien* will be cited than that a woman is. This also mirrors somewhat the tendency demonstrated here for the *Service du Dictionnaire* to rely on *Académie* resources to support its responses, the same loyalty – or perhaps bias – extends to literary figures.

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century authors are the most frequently mentioned in *Internautes* responses (19 mentions of 16 nineteenth-century authors and 23 mentions of 18 twentieth-century authors; see Table 5.6). Whereas references to literature in *Courrier* responses dated back as far as the tenth century, the *Service du Dictionnaire* only looks back as far as the sixteenth century, perhaps assuming that readers will be less familiar with most works beyond the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (see Figure 5.2 for a comparison). Twenty-first century works receive no mentions. In fact, only one author mentioned was alive during the twenty-first century (former *secrétaire perpétuel* of the *Académie*, Maurice Druon, d.2009). With over

¹²⁹ The same expression is also discussed on *Dire, Ne pas dire*: <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/parait-il-que> (Accessed: 16/09/2020).

half of all references pre-dating the twentieth century, it seems that contemporary literature is not an important source for the *Académie*. Many nineteenth- and twentieth-century texts are on the school curriculum which suggests that, what seems to be of importance here, is the prestige of the literature and audience familiarity.

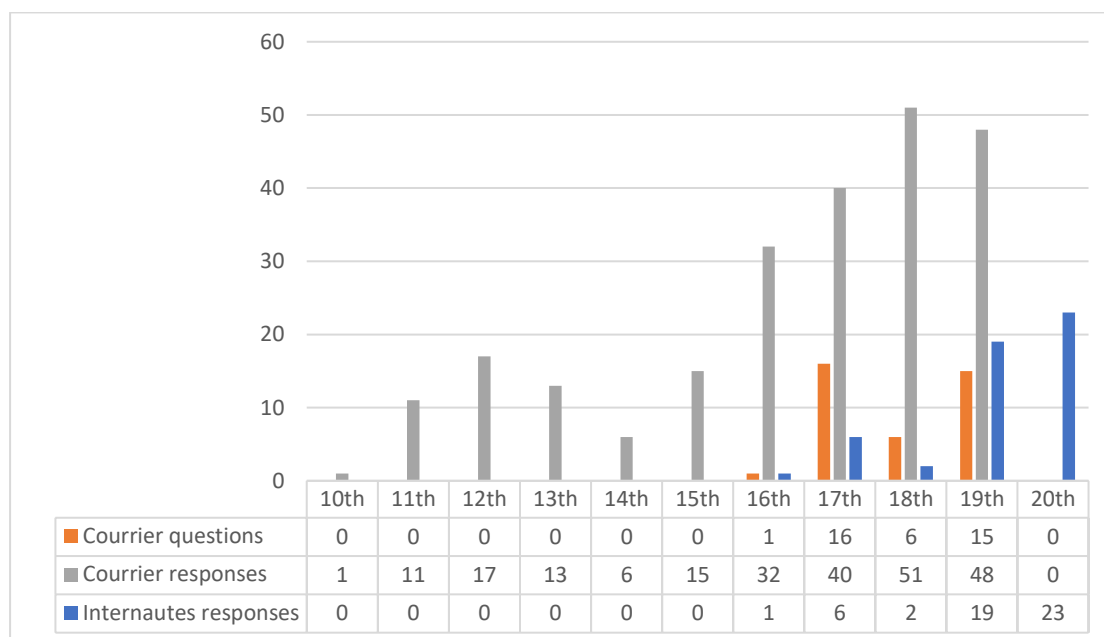


Figure 5.2 References to literature by century (Courier questions and Courier and Internautes responses)

5.2.3 Summary: References to authorities in the *Courrier* and *Internautes*

Readers of both corpora mentioned authorities either to evidence their own prior research on a topic or because the authority in question inspired their question. Whilst readers clearly view the experts as authorities (sometimes somewhat overestimating their authority, as in Example 23, p.168), the experts are willing to publish disagreements between readers and the experts (frequently in the *Courrier*, rarely in the *Internautes*). This suggests, not only, that the experts are not viewed as indisputable authorities but also that the readers consider themselves to hold a certain level of authority, or at least knowledge. The publishing of disagreements by the experts, whilst a slight on their authority in one way, allows Martin and the *Service du Dictionnaire* to reaffirm their positions and bolster their authority by, for instance, disproving their readers' complaints. Whilst we see evidence of the media being used for examples of incorrect usage, *Internautes* readers position teachers as gatekeepers of the language, and the education system as an important diffuser of the language. 6.3 will show that this is a key theme in lay language commentary in the *Bescherelle ta mère* dataset.

The *Courrier's* Martin relies heavily on outside authorities to justify his solutions and to give examples of correct usage and changing usage over time, with literary references dating back to the tenth century. Despite articulating respect for grammarians and lexicographers, Martin challenges decisions made by language professionals, as well as challenging the language use of literary figures. Mentions of Littré, for instance, show both a respect for rulings made by the lexicographer and a willingness to disregard Littré's decisions in favour of his own (see Examples 18 and 19, p.166-7), reinforcing Martin's own authority by positioning himself on a level with the esteemed Littré. Further examples of Martin's criticism of authorities will be shown in Chapter 6 (Section 6.1.2), where Martin discusses how he might have codified the language differently. References to language reference texts and literature are more numerous in Martin's responses than in *Internautes* responses and demonstrate a tendency to use references not only functionally but to create a narrative to his responses.

The use of authorities, in responses to *Internautes* readers, shows a tendency to advertise the *Académie's* own resources and projects. This extends even to literary references, among which mentions of former *académiciens* are numerous. Not so numerous are references to women. George Sand is the only woman mentioned, suggesting little consideration is given to ensuring diversity of sources. Littré's dictionary seems to have stood the test of time. Despite not having been updated since the 1870s, it remains the second most frequently mentioned reference work by the *Service du Dictionnaire* (7 mentions in comparison to 41 mentions of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie*). This, and a tendency to reference nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature, suggests that the *Service* may select authorities based on their prestige, rather than their contemporaneity. Having examined the use of external authorities as means of constructing authority, we turn now to the language and rhetorical devices used, mainly by the experts, Martin and the *Service du Dictionnaire*, to present their rulings on readers' questions.

5.3 Language use and rhetorical devices

The *Courrier de Vaugelas* and the *Courrier des internautes* provide readers with 'expert' language advice. Analysis of the language and rhetorical devices used by the experts and their audiences can reveal their approaches to constructing and negotiating linguistic authority, thus contributing to an established field of study of how language advice is formulated (see Section 1.6). This section therefore focusses on the following aspects: the use of the terms *solécisme*, *barbarisme*, *faute*, *erreur*, *correct(e)* and *incorrect(e)* (Section 5.3.1), the use of deontic expressions (5.3.2) and personal pronouns (5.3.3). The analysis focuses primarily on the experts' responses, because they are usually longer than the questions and so contain

more data. In both sources, the experts discuss language use in terms typically associated with language and correctness and consequently suggest adherence to standard language ideology. Other aspects of language also play a role in perpetuating standard language ideology, especially recurrent themes and figurative language, which are the subject of Chapter 6.

The experts in each source use different linguistic and rhetorical techniques to advise their readers. We shall see that the language used by Martin in the *Courrier*, and his tendency to present prescriptions implicitly, suggests a modest authority. Martin's reliance on other language authorities to exemplify usage and justify solutions was shown in Section 5.2, which might suggest that Martin lacks confidence in his own authority. However, we also observed that Martin confidently disagrees with authorities. Consequently, his approach may be more of a modesty topos, aimed at connecting with his audience, than a genuine lack of confidence in his abilities. We also see evidence of a deliberately methodical approach to answering readers' questions, presenting evidence and weighing up potential options. Meanwhile, the *Internautes'* responses draw frequently on *Académie* resources as authorities, and we shall see that the language used further positions the *Académie* as an authority.

5.3.1 Language and correctness

Most of the analysis of language use below is data-driven, i.e. driven by patterns of usage observed in the samples. However, before turning to that data-driven analysis, it is worth considering the use of the terms *solécisme*, traditionally referring to perceived errors in construction, and *barbarisme*, to perceived errors in single words (Ayres-Bennett and Seijido 2011: 77), in the light of previous work. Ayres-Bennett and Seijido (2011: 77) observe the use of both terms in the work of the *remarqueurs* (although their analysis also shows variation in usage of the terms across different *remarqueurs*). Ayres-Bennett (2015) also found usage of the two terms in twentieth and twenty-first century *chroniques de langage* (Hermant from the 1930s and Druon the 1990s, both of whom are openly purist in their approaches). This suggests continued usage of the terms across times and genres: *remarques*, *chroniques de langage* and, as we will see, Q+A publications.

Solécisme occurs only twice across both samples, in two *Internautes* responses published in 2013 and 2016, to two questions from two different readers on the same point: *partir à* or *partir pour*? (Internautes_60; Internautes_247). The majority of the *Académie's* response to each question is identical, as follows:

32. '*Partir à* a longtemps été **condamné** par **les puristes**. Littré écrivait Il ne faut pas dire *partir à* la campagne, mais *partir pour* la campagne. L'académicien et professeur de lettres Émile Faguet qualifiait *partir à* « d'affreux provincialisme de Paris ». ¹³⁰ Abel Hermant le présentait comme **un solécisme ignoble** [...]'.

As we saw in Section 5.2, Littré is the second most frequently referenced work after the *Académie's* own dictionary in *Internautes* responses; the implicit labelling of Littré as purist suggests that the *Service du Dictionnaire* too aligns with this position. The final lines of each response differ, but both distance themselves from the harsher criticism of Faguet and Hermant and allow *partir pour* to be viewed as correct but 'familier':

33. 'On considère *partir pour* comme **plus élégant** et **plus soutenu**, mais *partir à*, **plus familier**, est **également correct**.' (Internautes_R247, 2013)
34. 'On considère **que la forme correcte demeure** *partir pour* ; *partir à*, **sans être franchement incorrect**, est considéré comme familier.' (Internautes_R60, 2016)

The absence of the term *solécisme* from both corpora, except where *Internautes* appears to cite Hermant,¹³¹ suggests that the decline in use of the term, already observed for the seventeenth century by Ayres-Bennett and Seijido (2011), has more or less run its course by the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, we do find examples of *solécisme* in Abel Hermant's twentieth-century *chronique de langage*.¹³² However, Hermant, who was openly and strongly purist (Walsh manuscript submitted), may be an outlier.

In the *Courrier* sample, four questions and three responses use *barbarisme*; there is just one use in *Internautes* questions and one in responses. The constructions labelled as *barbarismes* by readers and experts show some crossover in topic. For instance, one *Courrier* reader asks:

35. 'Que pensez-vous de ce sens nouveau du **barbarisme** *se suicider* ?' (Courrier_Q1082)

One month later, a second question asks for the editor's opinion on the same verb, apparently labelled by the newspaper *L'Événement* as pleonastic (Courrier_1097). Martin writes:

36. 'Un **barbarisme**, selon la définition même de M. Littré, est « toute expression, toute locution qui viole la règle ». Mais en quoi *se suicider*, formé de *suicide*, qui a été admis

¹³⁰ Paris is usually presented as the opposite of *province* so this is an unusual description in that sense.

¹³¹ Hermant mentions *partir à* in, at least, two of his columns, describing it as a 'horreur' (*Le Temps*, 06/09/1934) and a 'bonne faute' (*Le Temps*, 23/03/1933).

¹³² Examples found using FranCHRO, a searchable online database of French language columns, including Hermant's column in *Le Temps*. Available here: <http://www.franchro.com/> (Accessed: 30/09/2020).

sans conteste par tout le monde, **viole-t-il la règle** qui permet de faire un verbe avec un substantif en donnant à ce dernier une terminaison convenable ?- J'ai beau chercher, je ne le trouve pas.'

The reader did not use the term *barbarisme*, but Martin's response suggests that he equates the possible pleonasm with *barbarisme*. It is striking that Ayres-Bennett (2015: 58) finds that Hermant (1930s) still calls *se suicider* a barbarism, some 50 years after Martin's reader, showing the longevity even of explicitly stigmatised usages.

An even longer-lived case of perceived *barbarisme* is the construction *Je ne sache pas que* (see also Section 4.3.3), which is described as a *barbarisme* in one *Courrier* question, and again as *barbare* 137 years later in the *Internautes* corpus:

37. 'Je vous serais bien obligé de **m'éclairer sur le mérite** de cette locution : *Je ne sache pas*, etc. A chaque instant et dans toutes les publications on la trouve, et cependant, quoi de **plus illogique** qu'un subjonctif servant de présent ! C'est donc **un barbarisme ?**' (Courrier_Q1034)
38. 'Je tiens, à tort ou à raison, pour **barbare** ou, **à tout le moins, incorrect**, ce début de phrase que j'entends parfois : « Je ne sache pas que ... ».' (Internautes_Q239)

In Example 38, the question appears to distinguish between 'incorrect' and 'barbare', presenting *barbare* as more negative than merely *incorrect*, and consequently views language on a continuum of acceptability where 'incorrect' is – perhaps surprisingly – not the least acceptable. Questions and comments regarding *Je ne sache pas que* and *se suicider* are evidence of how long-lived certain tropes in language commentary are, with the same label of *barbarisme* being attributed to them decades apart. Despite their presence in the language and continued discussion in language commentary, it seems that they remain constructions to which (some) French speakers cannot get accustomed.

Other terms associated with language and correctness but from a less technical register than *barbarisme* and *solécisme*, such as *faute*, *erreur*, *correct(e)* and *incorrect(e)*, are more common in both corpora, as we might expect for sources aimed at an interested but non-specialist audience (see Table 5.7).¹³³ The language is presented not as a binary of correct and incorrect usages, but as a continuum of acceptability; see the following additional examples:

¹³³ Searches for specific terms were limited to these four (in addition to *solécisme* and *barbarisme*) as the unsearchable format of the *Courrier* samples made this process time-consuming. These terms were selected as analysis showed that they were being used in both corpora. Searchable corpora would allow for a corpus linguistics-based approach, as seen in Straaijer (2009), for example.

39. 'Ne trouvez-vous pas **très-incorrecte** l'expression « J'ai l'honneur de vous informer *que* ? » On informe *d'*une chose, ou bien on fait savoir *que* cette chose a eu lieu ; *que* ne peut aller dans ce cas qu'avec un verbe actif. Le Dictionnaire de Littré ne mentionne pas cette locution, qui est cependant d'un usage journalier, et **qui me paraît fautive.**' (Courrier_Q988)
40. 'j'en conclus que cette phrase est **fautive**. Il fallait que l'auteur dît seulement : *il mit du linge sécher, et mieux encore : il mit sécher du linge*' (Courrier_R232).
41. 'On entend très couramment les gens dire « beaucoup mieux ». Cette expression, qui me hérise le poil, **est-elle grammaticalement incorrecte (comme je le pense) ou juste maladroite ?**' (Internautes_Q165)
42. 'Mais vous avez raison : *stricto sensu*, il reste **plus correct**, exact de dire *éteindre* ou *allumer*, même si l'autre usage n'est **pas non plus tout à fait fautif.**' (Internautes_R69)¹³⁴

	<i>Courrier</i>		<i>Internautes</i>	
	No. of uses in questions (n=997)	No. of uses in responses (n=141)	No. of uses in questions (n=316)	No. of uses in responses (n=278)
<i>erreur</i>	3	6	9	7
<i>faute</i>	25	11	4	7
<i>(in)correct(e)</i>	30	5	61	49

Table 5.7 Use of 'faute', 'erreur', 'correct' and 'incorrect' (Courrier and Internautes)

As we will explore in Section 5.3.2, a belief in a hierarchy of usages is further evidenced in the type of questions asked by readers. In the *Courrier*, readers frequently ask which of two variants is 'best', e.g.:

43. 'J'entends ici, à Paris même, des personnes qui prononcent *désir, désirer*, sans accent sur *de* ; d'autres qui prononcent ce *de* en y mettant un accent. **Lequel, selon vous, vaut le mieux ?**' (Courrier_Q345)

Whilst *Internautes'* users similarly ask which of two variants is to be preferred, some also give the option of both variants being correct, e.g.:

¹³⁴ See also Examples 33 and 34 above.

44. ‘Quand on donne l’heure officielle, par exemple « 00:10 », est-ce qu’il faut dire « il est zéro heure dix » ou « vingt-quatre heures dix ». Je voudrais savoir **quelle est la forme à proscrire ou si les deux sont possibles.**’ (Internautes_Q30)

Even when it seems that variation might be acceptable or at least acknowledged, other readers still often seek one prescriptive response. The scope of this thesis did not permit a more comprehensive exploration of this (somewhat unexpected) hierarchy of acceptability, but a more in-depth discussion of error types and reactions to these is given for *Langue sauce piquante* and *Bescherelle ta mère* in 6.3.

5.3.2 Advising and prescribing

Besides labels assigned explicitly to particular usages, of the kind considered in 5.3.1, the verbs and other expressions used to describe, permit, prescribe or proscribe usages can also be revealing (see Table 5.8). In both corpora, the experts present information as fact, e.g.:

45. ‘Que l’adjectif *feu* se dit seulement des personnes que nous ayons vues ou que nous aurions pu voir ; ainsi **on ne dit pas** *feu Platon, feu Boileau*, si ce n’est en plaisantant ou en style burlesque.’ (Courrier_R1187)

46. ‘Au-delà, **on dit, et on écrit**, « qui parle 5, 6, 7...langues ».’ (Internautes_R231)

There are 65 uses of expressions such as ‘one says/writes/uses’ in 141 *Courrier* responses in comparison to 135 in 278 *Internautes* responses. In such formulations, language usages are not framed as choices, nor are the responses framed as prescriptions; rather, the standard usages are presented as simple observations of what people (‘on’) do, with no other options available and no space for dispute.

Phrase type	No. used in <i>Courrier</i> responses (n=141)	No. used in <i>Internautes</i> responses (n=278)
Preference and opinion	82	9
Fact	65	135
<i>falloir + devoir</i>	41	26
<i>pouvoir</i>	25	37
Convention	4	10

Table 5.8 Breakdown of prescriptivist phrase types in *Courrier* and *Internautes* responses (ordered from high to low by *Courrier* frequency)

As we have seen, sometimes both Martin and the *Service du Dictionnaire* allow for more than one of two seemingly competing forms to be correct, but explicitly rank usages on degrees of acceptability.¹³⁵ In *Courrier* responses, Martin frequently uses such judgement formulations to summarise a question or to give his own opinion, e.g.:

47. 'vous me demandez **lequel vaut le mieux** de *assujétir* ou de *assujettir*' (Courrier_R517).

48. '**Je trouve fâcheuse** cette signification multiple' (Courrier_R60).

Rarely does Martin explicitly label one usage as categorically better or worse. However, if the reader views Martin as an authority (after all, he places himself as willing to challenge the views of Voltaire, as we have seen), even opinion-based judgements may be interpreted prescriptively (see Ayres-Bennett 2019: 190-91 who differentiates between the author's intention and the readers' interpretation of texts). *Internautes* responses are more direct than Martin when judging forms, e.g.:

49. 'Le *ne* que l'on trouve après « craindre que » est dit explétif, c'est-à-dire qu'il n'est pas exigé par la syntaxe ni nécessaire au sens de la phrase. Mais **l'employer est de meilleure langue.**' (Internautes_R256)

Whilst the *Académie* does not explicitly rule for or against the optional expletive *ne*, the two options are hierarchised, with use of the *ne* clearly favoured as 'better language'.

Deontic expressions with *devoir* and *falloir* are found in 41 *Courrier* responses and 26 *Internautes* responses, e.g.:

50. 'on **doit** écrire, sans employer ce signe, un *acte sous seing privé*, portant une signature privée.' (Courrier_R887)

51. 'il **faut** dire *san dessus dessous*, et pas autrement.' (Courrier_R1422)

52. 'On **doit** dire *ksilophone*.' (*xylophone*, Internautes_R1)

53. 'Il ne **faut** absolument pas le faire.' (Internautes_R199)

Martin uses 41 expressions with the deontic modals *falloir* and *devoir*, more than the *Académie*, and in fewer (but longer) responses (141 vs. 278). However, whilst some of these

¹³⁵ E.g. Examples 33 and 40.

instances present prescriptions (e.g. Examples 50 and 51), in others the modals describe the process required to find the 'correct' answer, as in the following:

54. 'Pour décider si un mot est bien ou mal fait, **il faut le comparer** avec ses similaires, et, selon qu'on lui trouve avec eux de l'analogie de formation ou qu'on ne lui en trouve pas, **on doit le déclarer bon ou mauvais.**' (Courrier_R126)

Other deontics are hedged by Martin, e.g. 'il me semble qu'il faut' (Courrier_R874). Despite this seeming formulation as mere impression or opinion in the early section of the response, Martin's final ruling is nevertheless more assertive and direct, not only using a deontic modal but also drawing on the trope of naturalness in language:

55. 'l'expression *langue d'oïl* **doit naturellement** se prononcer *langue d'oui.*'
(Courrier_R874)

Martin's argumentation and use of opinion are arguably rhetorical tools. Rather than showing a lesser sense of authority, it is a form of authority creation, of endearing himself to the audience and guiding them through his process. Examples 52 ('on doit dire') and 53 ('il ne faut absolument pas') are illustrative of the *Académie's* use of deontics and a broader tendency to present language as governed by a set of 'musts' with little to no leeway for personal preference or variation.

The verb *pouvoir* is used in responses in both corpora, both to express possibility and the restriction of possibility (25 uses in *Courrier* responses, 37 in *Internautes* responses). For example:

56. 'On **peut avoir** l'infinitif ou le participe passé.' (Internautes_R48)
57. 'On **peut seulement dire** « (...) agréer mes salutations » (« l'expression de mes salutations » est une sorte de non-sens).' (Internautes_R250)
58. '**On ne peut mettre** le trait d'union à cette expression **que** dans le cas où le substantif *acte* est sous-entendu' (Courrier_R887).

Whilst Example 56 presents two possible options to readers, Examples 57 and 58 explicitly rule out options, leaving only one possibility and, consequently, function as deontics.

In the sample of 141 responses, Martin uses 77 phrases expressing opinions such as 'à mon avis', 'je crois' and 'il me semble'; a finding which echoes Glatigny's (2004: 187) analysis of *Courrier* responses. When multiple options are available, Martin only very rarely explicitly prescribes one form. Instead, he presents his opinion, alongside the views of other authorities,

and argues for and against certain usages; expressions concerning logical argumentation, such as ‘d’où il suit que’, ‘il est évident que’ and ‘je conclus que’, are found throughout the responses as well as discussions of proof (25 responses). See, for instance, the beginning of a response about the pronunciation of *langue d’oil*:

59. ‘D’après M. Littré, *Langue d’oil* (la langue parlée au nord de la Loire au xvi^e siècle, et ainsi nommée parce qu’elle avait *oil* pour terme d’affirmation) doit se prononcer *langue d’oil* ; mais **tel n’est pas mon sentiment : il me semble qu’il faut prononcer *langue d’oui***, et cela, **pour les raisons que je vais vous dire.**’ (Courrier_R874)

Martin’s argument construction is deliberately methodical: presenting examples and explanations from different sources as proof from which a logical conclusion can objectively be drawn. This aligns him somewhat with a broader contemporary desire to demonstrate scientific validity in matters of language through the use of data (Joseph 2007: 1). Whereas the *Service du Dictionnaire* frequently presents a ruling without exemplification or justification from external sources, Martin’s responses almost always include both elements. However, the mention of *sentiment* in Example 59, and personal opinions elsewhere, soften the objective reasoning. Martin’s reliance on external sources, use of hedging and mentions of feeling and opinion seem to be a rhetorical feature, aimed at winning over his audience by showing willingness to engage in conversation with them as equal fellow language enthusiasts.

The *Service du Dictionnaire* takes a very different approach from Martin and firmly frames itself as an authority, as we saw in Section 5.2, in the tendency of the *Service* to rely heavily on *Académie* resources and literature from former *académiciens* and the experts present clear rulings on ‘correct’ language (e.g., through its use of deontics and *pouvoir*). Elsewhere the *Académie* uses expressions involving preference (nine examples), and recommendation (17):

60. ‘Il est **préférable** de dire, et d’écrire, *Je vous prie de m’en excuser.*’
(Internautes_R228)

61. ‘*Ensemble avec* est un germanisme **qu’il convient d’éviter.**’ (Internautes_R266)

Following Ayres-Bennett (2019: 190-91), we may interpret these expressions as covert prescriptions. Although less forceful than the deontic modals *devoir* and *falloir*, the expressions hierarchise usages and make it clear to the reader that there are better and worse ways of using the language, and often one best way.

5.3.3 The use of personal pronouns

The use of pronouns in responses from Martin and the *Service du Dictionnaire* further reflects how each approaches language advice. In the *Courrier*, *je* (512) and *on* (226 uses) are the most frequently used pronouns. The use of the first-person pronoun is further evidence of Martin's tendency to present his own opinions and authority when providing solutions, e.g.:

62. 'je me crois autorisé à penser que ledit proverbe n'a pas pris là son origine.'

(Courrier_R1240)

63. 'je suis d'avis qu'il faut tenir pour bon cet usage et continuer à le suivre.'

(Courrier_R1771)

As we saw in Section 5.3.2, *on* is frequently used as a shared pronoun phrases such as *on dit* and *on écrit*.

There are 84 uses of the personal pronoun *nous* in 55 responses from the sample of 141 *Courrier* responses: 35 in response to French readers, 20 in response to readers based abroad. It is used in deontic and advisory expressions to differentiate, for instance, contemporary usage from older usage (Example 64), and in descriptions involving other languages (Example 65):

64. 'pour être corrects, nous devons écrire aujourd'hui *grand'mère*' (Courrier_R97).

65. 'nous avons emprunté aux Anglais le mot magasin pour désigner une certaine production littéraire' (Courrier_311).

Internautes responses use a mixture of plural pronouns (*on* = 147 uses; *nous* = 35) and first-person singular pronouns (*je* = 24), sometimes using a mixture within one response. In both corpora, *on* is usually used in deontic and recommending expressions, e.g.:

66. '**on doit prononcer** celui du marquis de Cinq-Mars, né en 1620, comme on faisait au xvi^e siècle.' (Courrier_R1263)¹³⁶

In the *Internautes*, *nous* is not inclusive, as in the *Courrier*, but is used only to talk specifically about the *Dire*, *Ne pas dire* team, e.g.:

67. 'Au nom de toute l'équipe de *Dire*, *ne pas dire*, merci de vos compliments. **Nous essaierons** de continuer à en être dignes.' (Internautes_R83)

¹³⁶ See also Examples 50 and 52 (p.181).

Whereas the first-person singular pronoun *je* is used by Martin to present his opinion in responses, the *Service du Dictionnaire* uses *je* for personal knowledge or experiences (Examples 68, 69) and, infrequently, to give advice (Example 70):

68. 'Et, pour autant que **je sache**, Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869) n'a jamais été soupçonné d'abuser des québécoisismes.' (Internautes_R3)
69. '**Quand j'étais à l'école primaire, notre instituteur** parlait de Licence poétique et **nous disait** que si un jour **nous écrivions** des poèmes ou des romans, **nous serions autorisés à nous donner** ce type de liberté' (Internautes_R19).
70. '**Je vous conseille** de ne l'utiliser qu'en contexte privé, avec des proches.' (Internautes_R22)

As responses are written by a team of experts (members of the *Service*), pronoun use may vary depending on the author.

The phrase *notre langue* and variants of it (e.g. 'notre grammaire', Courrier_R302; 'notre belle langue', Internautes_Q89) are found in both corpora but are most frequent in *Courrier* responses, where they occur in just over one quarter (39) of the 141 responses sampled, in comparison to six uses in 278 *Internautes* responses. The first-person plural possessive pronoun *notre* highlights, firstly, a feeling of ownership of the language. As a corollary, it also creates a feeling of othering (as we saw with *nous*), highlighting the difference between the French language and other varieties. See, for instance, the following extract where Martin quotes a professor:

71. '« Les patois ont le mérite, dit le savant professeur, de conserver beaucoup de locutions délaissées ou rejetées par **notre langue officielle**, et qui l'enrichiraient beaucoup si elle les reprenait.' (Courrier_R106)

Whilst no value judgement is attached to *patois*, the use of *notre langue officielle* highlights the differences between the two, including a perceived difference in legitimacy. Also of note, is the use of *notre langue* alongside a mention of purity:

72. 'je dirai que je regrette vivement ce changement, parce qu'il porte **une atteinte de plus à la pureté de notre langue**.' (Courrier_R311)

The use of *notre* here is emotive, the language is a jointly owned asset which needs protecting (images of attack are further discussed in Section 6.2.2).

The connotations of ownership and boundary-setting of *notre langue* are evident in *Internautes* responses about borrowings from other languages:

73. 'les mots d'origine étrangère prennent les marques normales du français (accents, pluriels) quand ils sont intégrés à **notre langue**.' (Internautes_R236)
74. 'Il n'y a pas d'équivalent français à *thriller*, mot anglais entré dans **notre langue** en 1927 avec le sens de « livre qui donne le frisson »' (Internautes_R191).

The phrase is also found in two questions about borrowings; one discusses borrowing in the language generally (Internautes_298), the second (75 below) asks about the English word *kissogram*:

75. En effet dans l'un des épisodes il est dit que le métier de l'actrice principale est « bisougram » qui, sauf erreur de ma part, **n'existe pas dans notre langue**.' (Internautes_Q148)

Here, *notre* distinguishes between the French language and another language; the choice of 'notre langue', rather than *le français*, suggests shared ownership.

5.3.4 Summary: Language use and rhetorical devices in the *Courrier* and *Internautes*
Potentially inaccessible metalinguistic labels (e.g. *solécisme* and *barbarisme*) were not present or highly infrequent in *Courrier* and *Internautes* responses. However, labels such as *correct/incorrect* and *erreur* were found throughout the questions and responses of both samples and thus suggest the presence of standard language ideology. The analysis in Chapter 4 already showed that certain doubts persisted across the two time periods, with examples of similar questions being asked in the two corpora. This analysis has shown further similarities, with the same doubts across the two corpora, e.g. the construction *Je ne sache pas que*, being labelled as *barbarismes*, and with a further example of *se suicider* being labelled in the same way by a twentieth-century *chroniqueur*.

We saw earlier that Martin, the *Courrier's* expert, and the *Service du Dictionnaire*, representing the *Académie* in the *Internautes* corpus, take different approaches to creating and referencing authority. That difference is evident here too. The *Courrier's* Martin frequently frames his responses as opinions, albeit opinions which are bolstered by arguments and evidence. Martin's use of shared pronouns *on* and (less often) *nous*, alongside the personal input evidenced by his frequent use of *je*, further show how he constructs (and possibly downplays) his authority, by combining the logical weighing of evidence with hedging, presenting his voice as opinion rather than statements of fact. For both corpora, the authority of the experts must be considered, particularly its potential effect on the interpretation of responses. Whether an explicitly or implicitly prescriptive or descriptive response is provided, *Courrier* and *Internautes* readers position the experts as authorities and

as such may interpret responses of all kinds as prescriptive rulings. The *Académie* positions itself more assertively as an authority, presenting its rulings as prescriptions to be followed without need for justification. However, in both the *Courrier* and the *Internautes*, the experts allow for levels of correctness, and for a continuum of acceptability.

5.4 Conclusion

Readers of *Le Courrier de Vaugelas* and the *Courrier des internautes* draw on external sources in a variety of ways. Readers' references to language reference works usually serve to evidence prior research; literary works and the media are mentioned as the inspiration behind questions, and often highlight perceived errors made by authoritative language users. A similarity across the two corpora is the continued reliance on Littré and his dictionary. A contemporary and popular point of reference for Martin and his *Courrier* readers, Littré is still the second most referenced work in *Internautes* responses, despite not having been updated since the nineteenth century. This suggests that prestige is an important element of authority creation when discussing language, and that such prestige may mean that even an old resource may remain relevant for the *Service du Dictionnaire* as an authority.

As for the attitudes of those writing to the *Courrier* and *Internautes* experts, we can assume that they view the experts as language authorities – otherwise they would not seek their advice. However, this does not mean that all readers accept their authority without challenge. Examples were found in both corpora of readers questioning the authority of the experts. A small number of *Internautes* readers express dismay at rulings made by the *Académie française*, who sponsor the *Service du Dictionnaire*, and the institution's general approach to language is also occasionally criticised, e.g. for its strict approach to anglicisms and its perceived neglect of *Francophonie*. Turning to the experts' own references to authority, Martin's use of external authorities suggests a methodical approach to questions of language, presenting justifications and examples of usage from reference texts and literature to weigh up evidence and come to a conclusion. The *Service du Dictionnaire*, on the other hand, seeks support from external authorities far less frequently, and certainly less systematically, relying most frequently on the *Académie française*'s own resources, serving to reinforce the authority both of the *Académie* and of the *Service* itself.

One theme that emerges from the analysis of metalanguage used in questions and responses in the two corpora is an assumed hierarchy of acceptability. The hierarchisation of language varieties is a familiar element of standard language ideology (Vogl 2012: 15), but the hierarchy of acceptability implicit in some of the commentary analysed in this chapter takes a slightly

different form, extending to a hierarchy of acceptability among individual language variants, even within standard French. Readers' questions often show a desire for a binary of correctness, i.e. by asking which of two variants is correct, but they occasionally also ask which is the 'more' or 'most' correct form. For example, one *Courrier* reader labels the construction *informer que* 'très incorrecte' (Courrier_Q988); another has heard two pronunciations of *désirer* in Paris and asks 'Lequel, selon vous, vaut le mieux ?' (Courrier_Q345); two variants are acknowledged but one must be *mieux*. This implicit cline of acceptability is supported in some responses by the experts too, as when a response from the *Service du Dictionnaire* distinguishes between one usage which is 'plus correct' and a second which is 'pas non plus tout à fait fautif' (Internautes_R69).

The *Courrier's* Martin and the *Service du Dictionnaire* for the *Internautes* adopt different strategies in how they create authority and lend legitimacy to their status as experts. Martin's approach presents as rational, analysing all available evidence and presenting opinions and examples from many authorities. His opinion is also often prominent in responses, as evidenced by his frequent use of the first-person and phrases such as 'à mon avis' and 'selon moi'. However, given his authoritative position, readers may still interpret his conclusions as prescriptive or factual, regardless of his intention (cf. Ayres-Bennett 2019). Martin fosters a sense of solidarity with his audience, as he walks them through the argument before coming to a rational solution together. This rhetorical approach stands in stark contrast to the assertive style of *Internautes* responses. The *Service du Dictionnaire* positions itself firmly as an authority (as seen through its references to *Académie* resources) and presents its advice as linguistic fact. Rather than discussing and explaining why a usage is correct or incorrect, the *Service du Dictionnaire* simply presents its ruling, with little to no discussion.

A striking similarity between the two corpora separated by some 130 years can be seen in the fact that some of the same points of language are queried and labelled as *barbarismes* by both *Courrier* and *Internautes* readers. There are certain grammatical constructions in the language that, despite their longevity, continue to bother certain French speakers, perhaps coming to function as shibboleths. Chapter 6 continues the analysis of rhetorical strategies of the *Courrier* and *Internautes*, focussing on the language and arguments used by both the lay readers and the expert respondents to critique usage and justify decisions about language.

Chapter 6 Strategies of critique and justification: *Le Courrier de Vaugelas* and the *Courrier des internautes*

Drawing on the same qualitative samples as in Chapter 5 (presented again in Table 6.1 for the reader's convenience), this chapter analyses recurrent themes, motifs and figurative language in *Le Courrier de Vaugelas* and the *Courrier des internautes*, to uncover how language is conceptualised by the readers and experts. We shall see in Section 6.1 that lay and expert discourses from the two sources draw on tropes of a desirable French language, such as richness and beauty, showing that the Q+A sources form part of a wider tradition of language commentary in France, with the same or similar tropes arising in the nineteenth-century *Courrier* and twenty-first-century *Internautes*. Section 6.2 analyses the imagery used in both corpora and finds traditional purist metaphors in both the nineteenth- and twenty-first-century corpora.

<i>Courrier</i>			
Questions		Responses	
Sample	Total	Sample	Total
997	2,019	141	2,019
<i>Internautes</i>			
Questions		Responses	
316		278	

Table 6.1 Data sets for qualitative analysis (*Courrier* and *Internautes*), (repeated from Table 5.3 for convenience)

The starting point for the majority of judgements and justifications discussed in this chapter and 6.3, and a common thread in wider folk language commentary (Spitzmüller 2007: 271-72), is the hypostatization of the French language. The judgements made rely on the belief that the language is a distinguishable entity, clearly different from other languages and language varieties, that the language has positive characteristics, and that it is linked to a nation, a people and a culture (Gardt 1999; 2000 as summarised in McLelland 2009: 96). For instance, Section 6.2.1 considers metaphors which position the language as being diseased or wounded by incorrect usages. This personifying image, which has a long history in metalinguistic discourses (Jones 1999: 67), relies on framing the standard language as a clearly definable and distinguishable body for which changes or misuse are damaging. Similarly, commentary which praises the inherent clarity and beauty of the language, discussed in 6.1.5, relies on a belief that languages are entities to which such positive qualities can be attributed.

6.1 Common tropes

This section examines the salient recurring tropes found in *Courrier* and *Internautes* questions and responses. In practice, these largely occur in the responses, as they are usually much longer than the questions and allow for the elaboration of such tropes. Analysis of these recurring themes reveals the ways in which readers expect the language to be governed – e.g. we will see a preference for analogical word formation – and the justifications used by experts to either explain standard forms or ‘explain away’ forms which seem to be incorrect or problematic to readers. The analysis is primarily qualitative, with occasional support from quantitative analysis.

6.1.1 Analogy and anomaly

Language can be conceived of as being ruled by analogy, where usage and construction follow a logical pattern, and/or by anomaly, which allows for usage which does not follow a perceived logical pattern. The use of analogy and anomaly to justify certain usages, particularly in questions of morphology, is a trope which begins in Greek grammars where analogy was considered natural and anomaly unnatural (McLelland 2011: 92). Over time, grammarians have argued both for and against analogy and anomaly and about their scope, e.g. whether the principles of analogy apply only to words already in existence, as Vaugelas believed, or also to the formation of new words (Hassler 2007: 157-58). Roman scholar Varro, for instance, argued that anomaly had its place in ‘name-giving’, but once established, these newly derived words must then submit to ‘regular’ inflectional morphology, i.e. analogy (McLelland 2011: 91). Both explicit and implicit references to analogy and anomaly are found in the *Courrier* and *Internautes* samples; as we shall see, analogy is positioned as preferable and, in some cases, connected to logic, in line with Varro’s understanding.

Courrier readers draw on analogy and anomaly as arguments for and against certain usages, especially in derivational morphology questions, where it is explicitly mentioned or alluded to in 44 of 63 questions, as in Example 1:

1. ‘Je trouve très-singulier qu’on dise un *Russe* quand on dit un Prussien, un Autrichien. Y a-t-il **une explication satisfaisante** à donner de **cette anomalie** ?’ (Courrier_Q267)

The reader’s mention of a satisfactory explanation suggests that anomalies can be acceptable, if accompanied by a legitimate explanation. In response, Martin explains that both *Russe* and *Russien* were in use until the late eighteenth century but that slowly *Russien* fell out of usage thanks the ‘grande influence’ of Voltaire, who wrote in a letter to Russian count Shuvalov that he avoids *Russien* because it appears diminutive, ‘ce qui ne s’accorde pas avec la dignité’ of

the Russian empire. Martin explicitly mentions analogy and anomaly in 15 of 141 responses, ten of which respond to derivational morphology questions, and only three of which are to questions which make implicit or explicit references to the terms. Glatigny's (2004: 193) analysis of a sample of *Courrier* responses similarly found a heavy reliance on analogy/anomaly as a justification for usages in these two areas.

A similar expectation of analogy is evident in several questions about phonology (12 of 61); words which are spelled similarly should be pronounced similarly, as in Examples 2 and 3:

2. 'Comment expliquez-vous que les mots *Paon*, *Laon* (ville), se prononcent *pan*, *lan*, tandis que *Taon* se prononce *ton*, d'après l'Académie ?' (Courrier_Q104)
3. 'En discutant avec ma grand-mère, nous sommes tombés sur un problème pour le mot « oignon ». Elle prononce [wagnon], alors que ça se dit [ognon]. Je lui ai expliqué qu'il y avait deux orthographes possibles, mais que ça ne changeait pas la prononciation. Pourquoi *l'i* ne se prononce-t-il pas comme dans « poignet », par exemple ?' (Internautes_Q234)

Where analogy and anomaly are not explicitly mentioned, an expectation of or preference for analogous forms may still be evident:

4. 'Pourquoi dit-on, dans votre langue, *coupable* et *culpabilité* ? Ce dernier mot étant le substantif abstrait formé de *coupable*, on **devrait**, il me semble, se servir du mot *coupabilité* ?' (Courrier_Q644)
5. 'Pourquoi, dans *été* participe passé du verbe *être*, doit-on prononcer long le premier *e* ? Il me semble qu'ayant le même accent que le second, il **devrait**, comme lui, se prononcer bref.' (Courrier_Q656)

A preference for analogous forms can also be assumed from mentions about rules or exceptions to rules:

6. 'Dans les quelques leçons que j'ai prises de vous, vous m'avez recommandé de ne point faire sonner l'*r* de *monsieur*. Est-ce qu'on peut donner une raison de cette **exception** ?' (Courrier_Q44)

No explicit mentions are made to analogy or anomaly in *Internautes* questions, but the notion is still implicit in questions about the same two language areas: phonology (11 of 29 questions) derivational morphology (two of seven), e.g.:

7. 'Je me demandais pourquoi l'arbre de la pêche ou de l'orange ne sont pas formés comme les autres (oranger alors qu'on dit olivier) ? Existe-t-il **une règle de bonne formation** ?' (Internautes_Q237)

Mentions of rules, as in Example 7 and elsewhere, indicate a belief in or desire for a rule-governed and rational language.

Other readers more explicitly frame anomalous forms as negative or undesirable:

8. 'Pourquoi ne dites-vous pas *pharmacerie*, puisqu'on dit *apothicaierie* ? Il me semble que c'est encore là une de **ces singularités injustifiables** de la langue française.' (Courrier_Q198)
9. 'J'utilise oralement le terme « vraisemblablement »/« vraisemblable » régulièrement, et l'ai toujours imaginé comme écrit avec deux « S ». [...] Est-ce une **exception** à la prononciation du S entre deux voyelles ? Y a-t-il un historique orthographique qui a mené à cette « **aberration** » ? S'agit-il d'une règle qui me soit inconnue ? Et pourquoi un terme tel que « ressemblance » ne bénéficie-t-il pas du même traitement ?' (Internautes_Q248)

The use of 'ces singularités injustifiables' in Example 8 and 'aberration' in Example 9 frame the perceived anomalies as somehow unnatural and inexplicable. The use of *singulière* in six *Courrier* questions,¹³⁷ along with *bizarrie/bizarre* in three others,¹³⁸ similarly hint at the undesirable nature of anomaly. While readers' questions in both corpora show a preference for analogy, the nineteenth-century *Courrier* readers articulate this more explicitly than the twenty-first century *Internautes* audience.

Martin's *Courrier* responses frequently refer to analogy (explicitly mentioned in 15 responses) and, like his readers, he presents analogous forms as preferable to anomalous forms. In three (of 141) responses,¹³⁹ Martin even explicitly states that analogy should be a deciding factor when choosing between two possible forms. See, for instance, the following extract replying to a question which asks why the *p* in *baptême* and *baptiste* is silent when it is pronounced in *baptismal*:

¹³⁷ Courrier_Q43; Courrier_Q157; Courrier_Q358; Courrier_Q526; Courrier_Q544; Courrier_Q1687.

¹³⁸ Courrier_Q370; Courrier_Q847; Courrier_Q1608.

¹³⁹ Courrier_R82; Courrier_R126; Courrier_R758.

10. 'toutes les fois qu'il y a deux manières de dire ou de construire, prenons toujours **la plus conforme à l'analogie**. C'est le seul moyen qui nous reste de **débarrasser notre langue** d'une partie **des ridicules subtilités qu'on y a introduites**.' (Courrier_R82)

Martin is clear: language – both in usage and derivation – is best ruled by analogy and anomalies are to be avoided where possible. The final phrase in Example 10, in which *nous* refers to Martin and his readers and *on* to grammarians (a further example of the use of *nous* for othering, discussed in Section 5.3.3), further suggests that language and changes to it are decided by grammarians. This is articulated more formally earlier in the same response, where Martin also critiques earlier grammarians for embracing complexity and lack of logic:

11. 'Si au lieu de chercher à multiplier les exceptions, nos grammairiens s'étaient efforcés, au contraire, d'en diminuer le nombre, *baptismal*, qui est un mot de la vieille langue, se serait prononcé à la manière des mots de sa famille, c'est-à-dire sans le *p* ; mais ces messieurs **auraient sans doute cru déroger s'ils avaient fait des choses simples, logiques** ; et, pour notre malheur, ils ont semé à profusion les inconséquences, comme s'ils n'eussent eu en vue que d'exercer la patience de leurs arrière-neveux.'

Martin's response places considerable responsibility on grammarians for the condition of the language and promotes simplicity and logic as desirable characteristics.

By contrast, the nine *Internautes* responses which explicitly mention analogy simply explain that a word/construction has been formed by analogy, attaching no value judgement:

12. 'L'introduction d'un adverbe de degré dans des locutions constituées d'un verbe et d'un nom (*avoir mal, faire plaisir...*), **sans doute par analogie** avec d'autres locutions dont le second élément peut être analysé comme adjectif (*avoir froid, faire chaud...*), est généralement considérée comme familière' (Internautes_R71).

Three responses¹⁴⁰ explain how adherence to principles of analogy has led to hypercorrection and use of incorrect constructions, e.g.:

13. '*Abasourdi* se prononce normalement, *s* se prononçant *z* (comme la plupart des *s* entre deux voyelles). Certains font entendre un *s* plutôt qu'un *z* **par analogie avec l'adjectif *sourd*** mais cette prononciation **n'est pas correcte**.' (Internautes_R118)

In such cases, over-application of analogy has led to use of a non-standard pronunciation.

¹⁴⁰ Internautes_R118; Internautes_R206; Internautes_R271.

Whilst the notions of analogy and anomaly are present in the questions and responses of both sources, the importance of analogy varies. Readers from both sources show a desire and expectation for language to be driven by analogy, with words and constructions formed by anomaly dismissed or treated with caution. This is more explicit in the nineteenth-century *Courrier*, however. Amongst the experts, Martin is an explicit advocate for analogy, whereas the *Service* tends to refer to analogy only in passing or to explain examples of hypercorrection.

6.1.2 Logic

Often implied as a characteristic of analogy in these corpora and in language commentary more broadly, logic is presented as a desirable characteristic for a language. That French is a logical language is a long-standing trope. Rivarol's *Discours sur l'universalité de la langue française* (1784) famously praised the clarity and logic of the French language, and the myth of the clarity of the language is still present in contemporary language commentary (see Tarnarutckaia and Ensslin 2020). According to Rivarol (1784: 48), logic was specifically to be found in the syntax of the language: 'Le français nomme d'abord le sujet de la phrase, ensuite le verbe, qui est l'action, et enfin l'objet de cette action : voilà la logique naturelle à tous les hommes ; voilà ce qui constitue le sens commun'. Of course, even a rudimentary analysis shows that this is unfounded (see Yaguello 1988: 119-26).

In ten questions of morpho-syntax, explicit mentions of logic are made by *Courrier* readers; two additional explicit mentions are made in language history questions. Examples 14 and 15 illustrate the morphosyntax category:

14. 'Pourquoi écrit-on *après-dinée*, *après-soupée*, pour désigner le temps après le dîner, après le souper ? Il me semble que *après-dîner*, *après-souper* seraient **plus logiques** ? N'est-ce pas aussi votre avis ?' (Courrier_Q416)
15. 'Puisque vous dites *Bonheur* et *malheur*, et que ce dernier a pour adjectif *malheureux*, pourquoi, **en hommes logiques**, n'avez-vous pas fait *bonheureux* au lieu de *heureux* ?' (Courrier_Q412)

A desire for logic in morpho-syntactic rules is shown, both from readers in France (Example 14) and from abroad (Example 15); Example 15 explicitly labels the French as a logical people and suggests that their language should be equally logical.

No explicit mentions of logic are made in the questions posed in the *Internautes* sample, but the experts' responses in both corpora present logic as a desirable characteristic for a language. Responding, for instance, to a reader inquiring about the gender of the Japanese borrowing *koi*, the *Académie* explains that currently the gender 'n'est pas fixé' either formally

or in general usage, but that if the term is conceived as an elliptic form of *carpe koi*, ‘il est plus logique d’utiliser le féminin’ (Internautes_126). When there are two possible forms and doubts about which is preferable, speakers should turn to logic.

However, in some cases established usage is acknowledged to have won out over logic. In the *Courrier*, Martin explains, in response to a question seeking an explanation for the apostrophe in the word *grand’mère*, that even when illogical, speakers should adhere to the norms of the language. Describing firstly the apostrophe as an ‘ineptie’, Martin writes that it is the result of a leftover from Latin and that:

16. ‘Cette **énorme bévue** a trouvé créance dans le public, l’Académie l’a **sanctionnée**, et voilà pourquoi pour être **corrects**, nous devons écrire aujourd’hui *grand’mère*, *grand’tante*, *grand’messe*, etc., **en dépit du bon sens et de l’histoire.**’ (Courrier_R97)

Not only have logic and ‘good sense’ been forgone, but the word’s etymology too has been ignored. The lack of logic in certain parts of the language is lamented by Martin in a handful of responses, often with blame attributed to the past decisions of grammarians and lexicographers (as already in Example 10, p.193, regarding the pronunciation of *baptismal*). Martin’s rhetorical question in his response to a query about the use of the adjective *feu* provides a second example of his criticism of past codification decisions:¹⁴¹

17. ‘Pourquoi les grammairiens n’ont-ils pas eu la **sagesse** de conserver ce principe qui s’appliquait à la plupart des autres adjectifs ? Ils eussent **épargné plus d’un ennui à ceux qui étudient notre langue.**’ (Courrier_Q1187)

Whilst no explicit mention to logic is made, the implication is that a more logical language or a language which is more strictly rule-governed is preferable, as already seen in questions and responses which draw on analogy/anomaly. In this case, logic is specifically seen as a benefit for learners of French as a foreign language. We also see, once more, an assumption on Martin’s part about who controls and shapes the language, framing grammarians as powerful authorities, but, equally, not hesitating to criticise some of their decisions.

6.1.3 Usage

Experts in both corpora frequently draw on the established usage of a word or phrase as a criterion to answer readers’ questions. Deferring to usage can be descriptive (‘this is what most people say’) or prescriptive (‘this is the *correct* usage’). The experts do not always specify

¹⁴¹ The question asks: ‘Je vous serais très-obligé de m’expliquer tout ce qu’il faut savoir pour bien se servir de l’adjectif *feu* ; j’éprouve toujours quelque embarras quand je dois employer ce mot-là’.

the type of usage to which they are referring – sometimes this must be inferred. Martin makes no explicit references to *bon usage*, the *Service* just one. For the most part, Martin, when making references to usage, implicitly refers to an ideal usage, rather than common usage. For instance, in response to a question about letter writing, Martin writes:

18. 'Il est **très conforme à l'usage français** d'écrire deux fois *monsieur*, *monseigneur*, etc. sur l'adresse d'une lettre, ou dans une dédicace' (Courrier_R1541).

The response continues to provide examples of such usages in letter-writing from authoritative figures, for example referring to the language used by seventeenth-century historian Dupleix (quoted from Vaugelas' *Remarques*); medieval author Froissart, and fourteenth-century legal scholar Bouteiller as instances of good usage.

A bias towards identified *bon usage*, i.e. as evidenced in the work of authorities, is further shown in a response which overrides the usage of the *peuple*. In response to a question which asks whether using *sainte Mitouche* or *sainte Nitouche* is best (a noun meaning 'an innocent-looking person') (Courrier_1101), Martin highlights the fact that *sainte Mitouche* was used by Voltaire, 'le peuple' and speakers of some regional *patois*. *Sainte Nitouche*, on the other hand, was favoured by 'L'Académie de 1835, M. Littré et tous les lexicographes modernes', amongst others. Martin rules that *sainte Nitouche* 'est la seule qu'on doive employer', citing its etymology in justification, although the significance of support from other authorities cannot be underplayed here. A combination of etymology and usage by the right people leads Martin to disregard the usage of the *peuple* and Voltaire, showing once more (see also Section 5.2.2) that Martin is happy to disagree with the eighteenth-century author.

Martin relies on established usage alongside etymology in other responses too, such as when asked his opinion on variant spellings of the town *Le Hâvre* (with or without the circumflex accent):

19. 'j'en tire cette conclusion que l'accent circonflexe ne peut nullement s'y **justifier**, attendu qu'il serait **contraire et à l'étymologie** et à **un usage qui n'a jamais varié** depuis le commencement de la langue française.' (Courrier_R1202)

Where there is doubt between which of multiple forms or words to use, Martin suggests turning to established usage and etymology to decide, in this case looking back to the 'beginnings of the French language'.

Finally, in response to a question about the pronunciation of the town *Saint-Valery* (whether the *e* in *Valery* pronounced or not), Martin pays lip service to respecting local usage. The

response begins by presenting numerous dictionaries which spell the name of the town without an accent on the *e*. Consequently, he states:

20. 'il est évident pour moi que la **véritable** manière de prononcer le nom propre en question, c'est de n'y point faire sonner l'*e*.' (Courrier_R1781)

In a postscript to the response, Martin adds that the town's locals say *Saint-Vâry*:

21. 'Je trouve dans cette prononciation, qui est certainement **traditionnelle**, une **preuve** plus évidente encore que c'est commettre **une faute contre l'usage** que de dire *Saint-Valéry*.' (Courrier_R1781)

Local and traditional usage is presented by Martin as further evidence of correctness. As these illustrative examples have shown, Martin's approach varies. An adherence to an ideal *usage* is frequent, although there is no explicit use of the phrase *bon usage*. Etymology is often an important accompanying factor in deciding the *correct* form – when *bon usage* and the etymology point to the same form, even better. This was the case even when the form in question was in opposition to that used by the *peuple*, although when the usage of authorities and the *peuple* align, Martin stresses the importance of common usage.

Turning to the *Internautes*, usage is mentioned in approximately one sixth of responses. The *Service du Dictionnaire* makes just one explicit reference to *bon usage* (discussed below, Example 22). Explicit references to *bon usage* by the *Académie française*, which positions itself as a recorder of *bon usage*, are numerous, for instance, in the recently published *Dire, ne pas dire: du bon usage de la langue française*, vols.1-5, collections of posts from the *Dire, ne pas dire* website (including the *Internautes*).¹⁴² Mentioned, of course, in the collection's title, the *Académie's* commitment to *bon usage* is also stated in the prefaces to its dictionaries, for instance: '[L'Académie] doit de rester fidèle à sa mission, qui est d'indiquer le bon usage' (*Académie française* 2015).

In five *Internautes* responses the type of usage to which the *Service du Dictionnaire* refers is stated (e.g. 'usage littéraire', *Internautes_R61*), but it is still not always clear exactly what type of usage this really refers to, e.g. 'l'usage normal' (*Internautes_R18*) is a rather vague reference which could be interpreted as either the usage of 'ordinary' people or as *bon usage*. In the remaining 236 responses, usage is not mentioned and examples of usage are rarely provided. However, given the way in which the *Académie* has presented and continues to

¹⁴² The customer reviews for these volumes on Amazon could form the basis of their own study of figurative language and tropes.

present its role as a recorder of *bon usage*, what may otherwise appear to be vague, non-specific references to ‘usage’ can reasonably be assumed to be *bon usage*, unless otherwise stated in the response.

The *Service du Dictionnaire* highlights the importance of usage as the criterion for words to enter dictionaries, shedding light on both the *Académie’s* process and how it views/wants to portray its role as a lexicographer, as in Example 22:

22. ‘En effet, si l’Académie française prend connaissance des néologismes, elle a avant tout pour **vocation d’enregistrer les termes usuels** et de **fixer les bons usages de notre langue.**’ (Internautes_R175)

Examples 23 and 24, on the other hand, suggest that frequency of usage is key:

23. ‘l’Académie française n’accepte dans son Dictionnaire que les mots **correctement formés**, répondant à **un véritable besoin linguistique** et déjà **bien ancrés dans l’usage.**’ (Internautes_R213)
24. ‘l’entrée d’un tel mot [bisougram] dans les dictionnaires de **la langue française est tributaire de l’usage.**’ (Internautes_R148)

Except in Example 22, which specifically references ‘les bons usages’, the *Académie’s* process for measuring usage is opaque: at what point is a word considered ‘bien ancré’?

Even in cases where the type of usage is not explicit, we often find further evidence of a hierarchy of usage. For instance, in response to a reader who asks whether the adjectives *compréhensible* and *incompréhensible* exist, the *Service* writes:

25. ‘À ces adjectifs on doit **préférer les formes en usage compréhensible** et **incompréhensible**. À l’article *incompréhensible* Littré écrit d’ailleurs : « On **dit mieux** incompréhensible ». Et à l’article *compréhensible* : « **Peu usité** ».’ (Internautes_R305)

Compréhensible, which although previously used in France is now more associated with familiar Quebecois, is not recognised by the *Académie’s* online dictionary. Whilst a moderate position is presented in the *Internautes* response – ‘we should *prefer* these terms’ – the absence from the dictionary and reference to Littré suggests less tolerance. In Example 26, a reader criticises the *Académie* for taking a rigid position towards the language, specifically anglicisms, and against the hierarchisation which most users tend to seek:

26. ‘Il y a d’un côté ce qui est « grammatical » et de l’autre ce qui est « normatif ». « *Je travaille sur Paris* » se comprend grammaticalement, même si la norme est de dire « à

Paris »... N'est-ce pas **un appauvrissement** que de proscrire l'emploi de « sur » ? de ne proposer qu'une seule solution quand il pourrait y en avoir deux ?' (Internautes_Q298)

The user essentially opposes a concise language with a rich language (see Section 6.1.5), suggesting that having two forms of saying the same thing is preferable to just one; unfortunately the *Service* does not respond.

Agency is attributed to usage in five *Internautes* responses, highlighting the role played by usage in selecting and justifying forms:

27. 'C'est **cette forme qui a été choisie par l'usage** au XVIII^e siècle.' (Internautes_R76)
28. 'Dans la mesure où le déterminant indéfini *chaque* a une valeur distributive, son emploi implique forcément que le nom qu'il détermine appartienne à un ensemble pluriel. C'est pourquoi **l'usage autorise** la construction *entre chaque + substantif*, là où le **purisme** exigerait la forme *entre deux + substantif*.' (Internautes_R73)
29. 'Comme vous le voyez, on ne prononce le *g* ni à la fin d'*orang* ni après *outang*. **C'est l'usage qui l'a voulu ainsi.**' (Internautes_R267)

Usage personified has shaped the language by 'choosing', 'authorising' or 'wanting' one form over another. Example 28 highlights a situation in which two criteria are opposed: *usage* and *purisme*. The first line of the response demonstrates that the recommended form is that which is supported by usage, although – as is common in responses – this is not stated explicitly.

In three responses, the *Service du Dictionnaire* places 'common' usage and correctness in opposition to one another:

30. '*Grève par la faim* serait **plus juste**, mais c'est *grève de la faim* la forme **reconnue par l'usage.**' (Internautes_R233)
31. 'Comme *un* est le seul cardinal variable (*un, une*) en genre et qu'il varie aussi comme article indéfini, **l'usage tend** à le faire varier comme ordinal. Cela dit, **la forme correcte** est *ligne un.*' (Internautes_R244)
32. 'Toutes les formes que vous proposez sont **correctes**. *Il en est de même de/pour se rencontre plus que Il en va de même de/pour*, mais cette dernière forme est de **meilleure langue.**' (Internautes_R265)

The *Service* does not overtly advocate for one use over the other but does reinforce a hierarchy of acceptability; people are free to make choices, but some usages are better than others and the *Service* is happy to remind its readers of this. As we saw in Section 5.3, where

variation exists, the *Service du Dictionnaire* often avoids explicitly ruling in favour of one form over the other, but a strongly implied ruling is nevertheless frequently present (Example 32, for instance).

Readers in both corpora also show an awareness of a difference between ‘common’ usage and ‘correct’ usage. The following examples are typical of the wider *Courrier* sample:

33. **‘Lequel vaut le mieux d’écrire *boulevard* par un *d* ou par un *t* ? Je le vois souvent écrit avec un *d* dans les livres français ; mais je me rappelle très-bien aussi qu’à Paris, sur les plaques où sont inscrits les noms des rues, il est écrit par un *t*.’** (Courrier_Q472)
34. **‘Quelques personnes disent le *coran*, d’autres, l’*alcoran*. Laquelle de ces deux expressions est la **meilleure**, selon vous ?’** (Courrier_Q613)

For *Internautes* users, frequent usage of a term is not necessarily an indicator of correctness, as in the following:

35. **‘J’entends dire**, au lieu d’allumer ou éteindre l’électricité ou certains appareils électriques, ouvrir ou fermer, par exemple ouvrir ou fermer un ordinateur portable. Est-ce **correct** ?’ (Internautes_Q69)
36. **‘On entend de plus en plus souvent** des formules comme « au niveau du goût, au niveau du prix, au niveau de la durée », etc. Est-ce que c’est **correct** ? Étant étrangère, j’ai appris en classe : concernant ou en ce qui concerne. Est-ce que « au niveau » est **plus savant ou plus « chic »** ?’ (Internautes_Q91)

To summarise, usage is frequently referred to in both corpora as a deciding factor where doubt exists. Explicit mentions of *bon usage* are rare, but an alignment with the norm is still present, through the examples of usage chosen and/or the hierarchising of forms, e.g. indicating that both are used, but that one is better. Neither Martin nor the *Service du Dictionnaire* explicitly admonishes ‘common’ usages, but instead they find ways of implicitly endorsing preferred usages. Similarly, the lay *Courrier* and *Internautes* readers express an awareness of a difference in principle between what *is* said and what *should be* said and seek advice on how to tell the difference.

6.1.4 Old is best

As we have seen in Section 6.1.3, expert responses often turn to language history to determine or justify a correct form. A standard language with a recorded history and clear lineage is viewed as prestigious: ‘If a language can be shown to possess a known history, the sense of lawfulness of a language is strengthened’ (Milroy and Milroy 2012: 172). In purist discourses,

to draw on a word's etymology is often to draw on its 'true' sense (Paveau and Rosier 2008: 212). Furthermore, given the strong relationship between language and state, historical accounts of the standard entwine its history with that of the nation and the people, lending further legitimacy to the standard (Milroy 2001: 547; Milroy and Milroy 2012: 164). It is unsurprising, then, that the history of a language and etymology are used to legitimise the standard and the form/construction under discussion in the corpora examined here.

Looking back to a time of language passed contributes to the myth of a 'golden age' of the language (Watts 2000; Milroy and Milroy 2012: 40), a belief that the language was once in a state of perfection and that any subsequent changes are a sign of decline. This is not only evident in the reliance on etymology and language history to explain and justify forms, but equally, and as we saw in Chapter 5, in the authors and authorities used as examples. *Courrier* responses, for instance, draw heavily on literary texts from the seventeenth century. Importance is placed on the perceived influence of literary figures on the language, rather than the (generally unrecorded at the time) language use of the masses (cf. Milroy and Milroy 2012: 169).

Almost all *Courrier* responses draw on etymology to aid explanation or as an aside, regardless of the question topic. Example 37 illustrates how etymology can be used to justify the selection or use of a form:

37. 'Quoique nous ayons déjà *plein et rempli*, **qui nous ont suffi jusqu'ici, je ne m'opposerais point à l'introduction** de *bondé*, néologisme qui équivaut à un superlatif de ces derniers ; mais **il faut** qu'il soit employé, **conformément à sa signification originelle.**' (Courrier_R534)

The importance of respecting the history of the language is more explicitly articulated in the following extract from Martin (previously discussed in 5.2.2):

38. 'Voltaire a dit quelque part : « Il n'est pas question de savoir ce que notre langue fut ; mais ce qu'elle est. » Pardon, grand homme ; **en sachant ce qu'elle fut, on peut expliquer ce qu'elle est**, ce qui n'est pas rien, et l'on a encore l'avantage de pouvoir peut-être **contribuer heureusement** à ce qu'elle pourra être, ce qui est encore quelque chose.' (Courrier_R54)

Not only does Martin publish and respond to a large number of etymology-based questions (over one third of all *Courrier* questions; see Section 4.3), but his responses draw heavily on

the origins and history of the language. As Example 38 shows, this is not simply a narrative device to enliven his responses, but part of Martin's philosophy on language.

Language history is the topic of 19 of 316 *Internautes* questions and is discussed in around one tenth of *Internautes* responses. As with the *Courrier*, etymology is used in some cases to explain and/or justify usages. For instance, in response to a question about the pronunciation of the *-ll-* in *vrille* and *ville*, the *Académie* writes:

39. 'La prononciation d'un mot est **liée à son histoire** autant qu'à son orthographe. Votre question concerne la prononciation en français du groupe *-ill-* qui peut être articulé soit [iy], soit [il]. **L'étymologie de vrille est complexe** : il est issu du latin *viticula* qui donne *veille* [vèy] en ancien français puis, sans doute sous l'influence de *virer*, *vrille* prononcé [vriy].' (Internautes_R106)

Tracing a word or construction's history and etymology can reveal the *correct* usage, as in Example 40, which responds to a question which asks whether it is *correct* to write 'je vous prie d'agréer l'expression de ma considération la plus stricte':

40. 'On **s'abstiendra** de cette formule. Rappelez-vous qu'**étymologiquement**, *strict* signifie « étroit, resserré ». **Vous pouvez dire, et écrire**, *de mon entière considération, de ma parfaite considération, de ma respectueuse considération.*' (Internautes_R184)

The history of abbreviations is explored in one response to a question on the use of abbreviated forms in written youth language. The *Service du Dictionnaire* responds:

41. 'En ce qui concerne les SMS, le recul historique manque sans doute un peu pour savoir s'il s'agit d'**une menace**. Il me semble qu'il y a **peu de danger**. Il s'agit d'une technique d'abréviation qui a toujours été utilisée. Les étudiants qui prennent leurs cours en notes en utilisent d'autres, les moines copistes en utilisaient d'autres encore.' (Internautes_R52)

The 'older is better' trope is evident in this response, which continues to trace the use of abbreviations back to the ancient Greeks; the long history of abbreviations legitimises the current use of abbreviations. The idea that the *correct* answer can be found in the etymology of a word or construction is shown in the responses by experts in both corpora. In the *Courrier*, the history of the language also provides narrative detail, developing Martin's responses from informative to entertaining.

6.1.5 French is beautiful, elegant and rich

Language is frequently subject to aesthetic judgements and, as Rastall (2008: 104-06) observes, these judgements are connected to wider ideas held about ‘what people in a particular society respond to as beautiful or ugly, right or wrong (in the moral as well as prescriptive sense) and what is valued by a given group’. The use of aesthetic judgements in language commentary has a long history (Flaitz 1993: 180) and is still prevalent in contemporary discussions of language and correctness (Paveau and Rosier 2008: 57). For France, in particular, the myth of the French language as a beautiful language is well-established (Catach 1991: 11). My analysis of judgements of beauty, elegance and richness in the *Courrier* and *Internautes* conforms (more or less) to what we already expect and know of the tropes from this earlier work, but for new corpora.

Perhaps surprisingly, the well-established trope of the beautiful French language was not observed in any questions or responses from the *Courrier* samples. It is, however, found in three *Internautes* questions:

42. ‘Mon grand-père était très attaché à **notre très belle et si riche langue** française et à toutes initiatives pour sa défense.’ (Internautes_Q83)
43. ‘J’aime qu’on respecte **notre belle langue**.’ (Internautes_Q89)
44. ‘Et vive **la langue la plus belle du monde** !’ (Internautes_Q282)

Elegance is at once an aesthetic judgement and a judgement on the concision of the language and has long been considered a positive characteristic for the French language. In eighteenth-century descriptions of the language, ‘Elegance [...] was a product not just of rational structure but also of pleasing figures and tropes’, related both to the perceived inherent clarity of French syntax and to aesthetic qualities such as its ‘softness’ or ‘nobility’ (Mah 1994: 69). Ayres-Bennett (1987: 41) discusses Vaugelas’ judgements of elegance, which are part of a broader desire to avoid specialised language. The use of the notion of elegance in language commentary is however much older and is found, for instance, in the works of Cicero (Krostenko 2001: 114-21). It is also not limited to French commentators, with praise for the elegance of French also found in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century German texts (Jones 1999: 121).

Elegance is used as a criterion to judge usage by one *Courrier* reader in two *Internautes* responses:

45. ‘Auriez-vous la bonté de me donner votre avis concernant la prononciation **correcte et élégante** des // mouillées ?’ (Courrier_Q729)

46. 'C'est pourquoi certains considèrent qu'il est **plus élégant** d'utiliser *qui* et uniquement *qui* quand l'antécédent est une personne, même si, une fois encore, la forme *lequel* n'est pas **incorrecte**.' (Internautes_R177)
47. 'On considère *partir pour* comme **plus élégant** et **plus soutenu**, mais *partir à*, plus familier, est **également correct**.' (Internautes_R247)

The belief in a beautiful, elegant language elevates the status and legitimacy of the standard form, making it more desirable and precious. Once again, in the two *Internautes* responses, the *Service* does not explicitly select one form over the other, but elegance-based judgements are still made.

Alongside a long history of praising the elegance of the French language is the equally long history of discussing its richness; Estienne (1579), for instance, praised the superior richness of French in comparison to Italian. Lexical richness, in particular, is a common trope in French purist discourse, referring to both the quantity and quality of the lexis (Paveau and Rosier 2008: 206-07). Richness can also be metaphorical: 'If a language is said to be 'rich', that implies that it is a 'possession' (part of our 'inheritance')' (Underhill 2013: 174). As we shall see, it is employed in the *Courrier* and *Internautes* in arguments against borrowings.

Richness and poverty in the language is discussed in four *Courrier* responses and in four *Internautes* questions., e.g.:

48. 'Mais le vélocipède n'est point, que je sache, d'importation anglaise ; c'est une invention qui est nôtre, et il serait ridicule, ce me semble, de prendre pour la désigner, une terminaison étrangère, quand notre langue, Dieu merci, **n'en est nullement réduite à faire de tels emprunts**.' (Courrier_R258)
49. 'Il était impossible d'agir autrement : il fallait combler un vide qui eût **appauvri la langue**.' (Courrier_R1097)
50. 'Le français est **suffisamment riche** et divers pour pouvoir tout exprimer.' (Internautes_Q288)

In both *Courrier* examples, the editor is responding to questions about lexical items (*vélocipède* in Example 48 and *se suicider* in Example 49); as is common, richness is particularly associated with the lexis of the language. Unlike praising a language for its beauty, a desire for richness is presented as having a functional benefit; a rich language can say everything it needs to say, without resorting to, for instance, borrowings to fill gaps, as is expressed in Example 48.

6.1.6 Summary: Recurring tropes in the *Courrier* and *Internautes*

Readers and experts have clear ideas about how they expect the language to be governed. It is striking how consistently the criteria of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries continue into the nineteenth century and further still into the twenty-first century, even in the online sphere. Analogy and logic are preferable, and beauty (although only in the *Internautes*) and elegance are to be aspired to. Not only are these tropes repeated across the two corpora analysed here, from the nineteenth and twenty-first century, but all themes have long histories in language commentary, e.g. Estienne (1579) also praised the richness of French. Experts in these two Q+A sources draw on usage and language history to justify their provided solutions. Whilst lip service is paid to common usage in both corpora, correct usage and/or *bon usage* (although this term is not explicitly used) are frequently favoured over the usage of the *peuple*. Both Martin and the *Service du Dictionnaire* draw on language history to trace usage over time and to find the ‘truth’, but this approach is more systematically followed by Martin, for whom language history adds a further narrative to his responses.

6.2 Imagery

Having examined the key concepts and criteria by which experts and laypeople judge French in the *Courrier* and *Internautes*, I turn now to the imagery used in the same metalinguistic discussions. The use of metaphor and figurative language in language commentary dates back at least as far as Horace and Quintilian in the European tradition (Ayres-Bennett 2011: 239).¹⁴³ We saw in Chapter 1 that metaphors were common in French metalinguistic texts from the sixteenth century (Ayres-Bennett 2011: 239), and could connect the author and audience by drawing on shared knowledge and assumptions (Cowling 2007: 168-69). Figurative language is similarly found in folk linguistic commentaries on language (Hohenhaus 2002: 172).¹⁴⁴ As noted in the introduction to this chapter, many of the images used allow language to be personified, so that the perceived damage to the language has greater emotional impact. Little metaphorical language is found in the questions sent by the readers of the *Courrier*, unsurprising given their brevity. However, Martin frequently draws on classical purist metaphors in his responses. In the *Internautes* corpus, both those asking and responding employ a range of metaphors familiar from traditional, often purist, metalinguistic discourses. Purist discourses are rich in figurative language, which can enhance the rhetorical and persuasive force of the texts. Thomas’ (1991: 19-24) study of purism presents seven ‘self-

¹⁴³ Ayres-Bennett (2011) provides a succinct but comprehensive history of metaphors in French, see Jones (1999) for analysis of their use in a German context and Bermel (2007) for Czech.

¹⁴⁴ Underhill (2013: 237) suggests that any and all attempts to describe or compare languages are unavoidably metaphorical.

images' used as frameworks by purists: 'the miller'; 'the gardener'; 'the metallurgist'; 'the grinder' (found almost exclusively in Czech purism); 'the physician'; 'the genealogist and geneticist'; and 'the priest'. In all seven images, the purist is positioned as a protector, be this as an expert miller or a priest, possessing the knowledge and the skills to remove harm already inflicted and/or to protect the language from future harm. Imagery linked to 'the physician', which alludes to sickness and health, is the only one of the seven frameworks found in the corpora discussed here, although one image loosely linked to genealogy is presented. However, we shall see evidence of readers and experts positioning themselves as protectors of the language: for instance, one *Internautes* user describes themselves as 'fighting' against language tics (Example 53, p.207). Other examples will show the image of the purist protecting the language turned on its head, with the reader or expert themselves positioned instead as victim, rather than the language. Rather than seeking to maintain the purity of the language, these images are illustrative of a belief in perceived declining language standards and the perceived moral consequences of such decline.

6.2.1 Disease and pain

Health metaphors rely on a conceptualisation of the language as an 'organism', a living form which needs to be protected from disease and illness (Spitzmüller 2007: 272-74). This personification of the language adds an emotive layer to the discourses. Metaphors which centre on the health of the language, including ideas about disease, sickness and death, have long been found in metalinguistic discourses. Ayres-Bennett (2009: 241; 2011: 41) finds evidence of health and sickness metaphors in Vaugelas' *Remarques*, and Wise (1997: 79) suggests that metaphors of disease are common in discussions of anglicisms in the French language. In a German context, metaphors of disease are similarly widespread – found, for instance, in sixteenth- to eighteenth-century purist texts (Jones 1999: 67) and in late twentieth-century media reactions to anglicisms, for example (Spitzmüller 2007: 272). Thomas' (1991: 22) self-image of the purist as a 'physician' similarly draws on themes of health: the purist cares for the sick language by removing the diseased elements. Metaphors related to health and harm are found in both sources. We shall see, however, that in both the nineteenth-century *Courrier* and online *Internautes* corpora, the classic image of the language as sick has changed. Instead, in an evolution of the image, incorrect language usages are presented as bad for the health of other speakers. Evidence of this evolution has also been shown in, for instance, Cougnon and Draelants (2018: 93) study of language ideologies in CMC and will be further evidenced in 6.3's analysis of *Bescherelle ta mère* user comments.

The *Courrier* sample contains no imagery from the metaphorical field of health and disease in readers' questions. Just one example in the sample of 141 responses occurs, in response to a question which asks for Martin's opinion on the 'pléonasme intolérable' *C'est un zéro en chiffre* (*Courrier_891*),¹⁴⁵ where *en chiffre* is considered redundant (already implied by *zéro*). Martin, after having explained that the phrase is found already in Furetière's 1727 dictionary as well as Trévoux's 1771 dictionary, writes:

51. 'Ce serait donc entre 1727 et 1771, que cette confusion regrettable **se serait opérée** : **le mal** n'est pas assez ancien pour qu'on n'y puisse **porter remède**.'

This deliberate extended medical metaphor fits precisely with Thomas' (1991: 22) image of the purist as a physician; the language is a living entity which can be operated upon to remove diseased elements.

Imagery related to illness and pain features in six of 316 *Internautes* questions. See, for instance, the following post published without a response from the *Service du Dictionnaire*:

52. 'À propos de l'emploi **intempestif** et même **maladif** de la préposition sur. [...] Quand un(e) journaliste parlant **encore correctement** français se décidera-t-il (elle), à une heure de grande écoute, à ridiculiser avec humour mais efficacité ces **tics** de langage qui se répandent comme **une épidémie** grâce à la radio et à la télé et sèment le doute dans l'esprit de tous ceux qui parlaient encore correctement il y a seulement une dizaine d'années ?' (*Internautes_Q281*)

This damning commentary on the state of the French language, expressed as a rhetorical question, compares the spreading of incorrect language use to an epidemic, with connotations of contagiousness and of danger to health. A further three questions and three responses from the *Internautes* corpus describe usages as 'tics de langage'. See the following reader's comment for a second example:

53. 'Bravo pour votre initiative. Je commençais à me sentir un peu seul à **lutter contre** toutes ces **dérives linguistiques** et **tics de langage plus ridicules** les uns que les autres.' (*Internautes_Q287*)

The use of *tic* brings connotations of something undesirable, uncontrollable and frequently occurring, as well as linking the usages to a medical semantic field. This is accompanied by a defence metaphor ('lutter contre'), which further highlights the perceived negative effects of

¹⁴⁵ A familiar expression meaning 'They're a useless person'.

the unwanted language practices, and the theme of deterioration ('dérives'). Ironically, this commenter's use of *dérives* would not be accepted by the *Académie*, which condemns the semantic extension of the marine term: 'On évitera d'abuser de l'emploi figuré des termes *Dérapage* et *Dérive* lorsqu'on veut parler d'une perte de contrôle ou d'une évolution inquiétante et dangereuse'.¹⁴⁶

In both corpora, a noteworthy departure from the traditional health metaphor found in earlier studies is that rather than incorrect language being presented as harmful or damaging for the language, it is presented as having (usually negative) physical effects on other speakers:

54. 'Sans que je sache précisément pourquoi il me semble que ces phrasés **choquent l'oreille** ? Est-ce aussi votre avis ?' (Courrier_Q762)
55. 'Réellement, le verbe *se suicider* mérite-t-il la **répulsion** qu'il inspire dans les hautes régions du monde grammatical ?' (Courrier_R1097)
56. 'Inlassablement, je continue à multiplier les remarques à ceux qui **meurtrissent mon ouïe** par des tournures fausses, une syntaxe erronée et autres prononciations fantaisistes.' (Internautes_Q294)

Whilst references to euphony are common in language commentary – Rastall (2008: 104) goes so far to state that all spoken language productions are evaluated on this aesthetic level, as also discussed above in Section 6.1.5 – mentions of repulsion and murder are extreme images (the latter also related to crime). As well as framing usages as negative, this imagery also creates an 'us' and 'them' divide in which 'they' harm 'us'. No *Internautes* responses used such imagery, but 6.3, with its analysis of *Bescherelle ta mère* user comments, will show that such imagery is frequently found in online lay-lay language commentary.

6.2.2 Battles, attack and defence

When the language is viewed as an organism, as something which can fall ill and even die, it follows that it can, or *should*, be protected from dangers (Spitzmüller 2007: 274). These dangers can also be expressed using the imagery of war, tropes which have a long history in the purist language discourses of Europe (Jones 1999: 66). Nationalism is frequently considered to play a significant role in the development of linguistic purism (Thomas 1991: 43) and metaphors of war and invasion strengthen the association between protecting a language and the widely accepted need to protect a nation and/or cultural identity and wars which are often fought along national lines, exploiting the strong link that societies create

¹⁴⁶ <https://www.dictionnaire-academie.fr/article/DNP0301> (Accessed: 16/09/2020).

between language and nation (Gordon 1978).¹⁴⁷ The notion of the ‘defence’ of French dates back at least to du Bellay’s (2001 [1549]) *La deffence, et illustration de la langue françoise*. Furthermore, in presenting the language as something that can be invaded, the perceived ‘borders’ of the language as a delimited entity are highlighted; certain things belong within the borders, whilst others should be stopped from entering.

A need to protect the language is highlighted in other questions and responses, for instance, in the following *Courrier* response and *Internautes* question which explicitly mention defence:

57. ‘Réellement, le verbe *se suicider* mérite-t-il la répulsion qu’il inspire dans les hautes régions du monde grammatical ? Je ne le crois pas, et voici les arguments dont je compose sa **défense**.’ (Courrier_R1097)

58. ‘Mon grand-père était très attaché à notre très belle et si riche langue française et à toutes initiatives pour **sa défense**.’ (Internautes_Q83)

In the *Internautes* corpus, imagery of battle and fighting is used, with experts and readers positioned as protecting the language, one example of which we saw earlier (‘lutter contre’, Example 53, p.207). See, for instance, this *Internautes* response to a complaint about the language use of journalists:

59. ‘Nous nous efforçons de **combattre** ces travers. Nous notons ces fautes, mais plutôt que de faire une injonction *ad hominem*, nous préférons traiter la question de manière générale.’ (Internautes_R89)

In an extension of imagery of attack and invasion, the reader and experts position the language as under threat and themselves as authorised to – and trying to – defend it from that threat.

No *Courrier* questions use explicit imagery of invasion, but two *Courrier* responses do so. However, in neither case is the imagery used with reference to foreign words: the invasion is internal rather than external. Firstly, in a response concerning the gender of *orgue* (which at the time took the masculine gender in the singular, feminine in the plural),¹⁴⁸ Martin compares the prevalence of the masculine gender to an invasion:

¹⁴⁷ See Blommaert and Rampton (2011) for how named languages come to be considered representative of the nation.

¹⁴⁸ The *Académie*’s online dictionary now lists the masculine gender only, although the 8th edition (1935) states masculine in the singular, feminine in the plural.

60. 'Les **envahissements** de ce genre semblent ne pas devoir se borner au singulier ; il y a une tendance à l'appliquer aux deux nombres, et les exemples ne sont pas rares où des auteurs ont écrit conformément à cette opinion, que partagent de sérieux grammairiens.' (Courrier_R330)

In a second response, to a question about the circumstances surrounding the spread of *argot* in France – again, an internal threat – Martin states:

61. 'Tel est, esquissé à grands traits, l'ensemble des causes qui ont amené l'**invasion** de l'argot dans la langue française.' (Courrier_R810)

In a postscript which follows, Martin takes issue with the use of *argot* outside of specific registers and groups of speakers:

62. 'Que l'argot soit l'unique langage employé par les voleurs entre eux, [...] je n'y trouve rien à redire ; mais quand je vois ceux qui vivent dans **la société honnête** prendre plaisir, en quelque sorte, à émailler leurs discours de vocables d'une source aussi **impure**, je ne puis que m'en attrister profondément avec **les gens de goût**.'

Mentions of impurity and taste take this further than a simple observation on suitable registers; Martin makes a clearly negative assessment and reconfirms a linguistic hierarchy based on the language use of some speakers not belonging to the mainstream. These two examples of invasion imagery have distinct functions. In the first, the language is under attack from a purely internal influence, the masculine gender, which does not represent a threat; the invasion metaphor merely indexes frequency rather than danger. In the second, referring to *argot*, Martin presents the language as under attack from an 'other': although this 'other' is still internal to the language, it is differentiated from the usage of those with taste.

We may expect imagery of invasion to be prevalent in discussions of borrowings, rather than internal elements of the language. As we saw in Chapter 4, two *Courrier* questions concern anglicisms (one further question discusses an Italian borrowing, *in petto*). Martin does not use imagery of attack in these two cases but does draw on emotive imagery of genealogy when discussing the spelling of *comfortable* ('cet adjectif n'en est pas moins un membre de la famille dont le chef est confort'; Courrier_R871). In the second response, Martin uses images of pain and aesthetics to lament that *billet* was selected for usage over his preferred choice, the anglicism *ticket*, and draws on themes of nationalism in a, perhaps, unexpected way:

63. 'un *ticket* pris pour pénétrer dans l'enceinte du Champ-de-Mars n'offensait pas moins les yeux du patriote que ceux du grammairien.' (Courrier_R1445)

The *Service du Dictionnaire*, on the other hand, does use imagery of attack and threat in one of 19 discussions about anglicisms:

64. 'hélas la sobriété de l'orthotypographie française est **menacée** par d'autres manières d'écrire, principalement anglo-saxonnes, où l'emploi de la majuscule est **très fréquent**, et parfois quelque peu **anarchique**.' (Internautes_R82)

Rejecting the capitalisation of the term *direction juridique*, the *Service du Dictionnaire* positions the perceived 'threat' of such capitalisations as external to French, in this case coming from English. The word *anarchique* suggests that the usage is disruptive to the status quo and out of control. Whereas the *Courrier's* Martin used images of attack to highlight dangers internal to the language (cf. Thomas' internal purism (1991: 79-80)), the *Service* presents an external, specifically anglophone, influence as a threat, an instance of xenophobic purism (Thomas 1991: 79-80).

6.2.3 Law and punishment

Metaphors which present usages as against the law, criminal and punishable are found in both corpora, but are more frequent in *Courrier* responses. The use of legal imagery in metalinguistic texts has a long history. Seventeenth-century *remarqueurs* drew on customary law in their works, as did, for instance, the seventeenth-century German grammarian Schottelius (McLelland 2011: 76-77). Imagery and metaphor from the legal sphere positions usages and users as in contravention of the rules of society, as a problem which can and should be judged and punished. Ayres-Bennett (2011: 243), commenting on legal metaphors in Vaugelas' *Remarques*, suggests that, while metaphor is often used to make information accessible to readers, the use of legal jargon might be less accessible. As the following paragraphs will show, whilst legal imagery and language are used, jargon is avoided in these later corpora.

In both the *Courrier* and the *Internautes*, verbs from the field of law are used to present usages as offending against either a legal or moral code:

65. 'Vous approuvez des habitudes évidemment condamnables' (*Courrier Communication*, 15/07/1877, p.9).¹⁴⁹
66. 'Vous **condamnez avec raison** l'expression « au final ».' (Internautes_Q220)
67. 'Partir à longtemps été **condamné** par les puristes.' (Internautes_R247)

¹⁴⁹ Example 65 is taken from a letter of complaint from a *Courrier* reader, Bernard Jullien, published in the *Communications* section.

The use of *condamner* in language commentary is not uncommon and it may be that the semantic bleaching means that such uses of the verb are no longer read as related to the semantic field of legality.

Legal imagery is sustained in a *Courrier* response to a question about the word *bougrement* ('damn', 'bloody'), to which the reader attaches a negative judgement: 'un aussi vilain mot' (*Courrier_Q29*). The editor's 473-word response contains a sustained legal metaphor, as the following extract shows:

68. 'Les mots, pas plus que les gens, ne doivent, ce me semblé, être **jugés** sur l'apparence, et je vais sans doute bien vous étonner, en vous annonçant, tout d'abord, que je me propose, dans ces lignes, **d'innocenter** celui-ci [...] Certes, je suis loin de me flatter d'avoir porté une entière conviction dans votre esprit ; mais j'ai lieu d'espérer qu'après m'avoir prêté une oreille attentive, vous pourrez au moins m'accorder ici, en marge, ces mots de bon augure pour la réhabilitation de **mon client : Procès à revoir !**'

The sustained imagery, which lends coherence to the response, has a jocular effect, although Martin's self-styling as a defender of words nevertheless asserts his position as an authority. Metaphor for humorous effect has similarly been observed in French and Swiss *chroniques de langage* (Walsh and Cotelli Kureth, forthcoming).

Martin introduces imagery of justice when discussing the importance of respecting etymology, in a second extract from his response about the gender of *orgue* (see Example 60, p.210, *Courrier_R330*):

69. 'La **justice**, qui se doit aux mots aussi bien qu'aux gens, **la justice**, dis-je, n'exige-t-elle pas que, si jamais une tentative est faite pour ramener *orgue* à un genre unique, ce soit en faveur du féminin, ce genre dont nos ancêtres l'ont gratifié à l'origine'.

The language is not personified in this example, as it was in images of sickness, for instance, but Martin does advocate for the language to be treated with the same respect as people.

A more extreme image – presumably (and hopefully) for humorous effect – is presented by one *Internautes* user who describes their alarm at the language used by journalists ('Je suis effaré [...]'), asking:

70. 'Ont-ils **le droit** de dire des phrases telles que « En 1842, il mangera sa première soupe », sachant que la date citée est passée, mais que le futur est utilisé pour le

verbe. Si la réponse est positive, pensez-vous que **la peine de mort** soit avisée pour un tel **méfait** ?' (Internautes_Q201)

The *Service* does not respond to this question, but still chooses to publish it. Inciting punishment for certain language use firmly places usages as, at best, wrong and, at worst, illegal and criminal. Furthermore, such imagery equates use of the correct language with maintaining a safe society and as worthy of enforcement by law.

6.2.4 Fear

In Section 6.2.1, we saw language usages portrayed as having negative physical effects on those exposed to them, e.g. repulsion in Example 55 (p.208). Similarly, usages can be portrayed as dangerous or scary, producing negative mental effects. Usages are portrayed as dangerous to the language and/or as something to fear in four *Internautes* responses and two questions (there were again no such images in the *Courrier*):

71. 'Je me permets ce message pour solliciter l'avis de votre illustre assemblée sur les **ravages** de l'utilisation du mot « impact » dans les médias, donc dans les copies d'étudiants...' (Internautes_Q196)
72. 'Ajoutons pour conclure que *natalophobie*, mélange de grec et de latin est un **monstre**.' (Internautes_R211)
73. 'Une postposition du verbe aurait sans doute permis d'éviter cela mais alors c'est l'ordre des compléments et leur découpage qui aurait semblé **hasardeux**.' (Internautes_R303)

The description of the word 'natalophobie' ('fear of Christmas') as 'un monstre' in Example 72 references its mixture of Greek and Latin roots as well as introducing a jocular image of danger. In these examples, imagery of danger and fear highlights the negative impact the usages have on the standard language.

As with the imagery of disease, the traditional image of usages as dangerous and/or scary for the language seems to have evolved, and commentary is now discussing the fear and danger that usages pose to speakers. This has not previously been identified as a typical feature of purist and prescriptive discourse, and no examples were found in the *Courrier* sample. However, three *Internautes* questions and one response use this imagery:

74. 'J'avoue que s'ils ne **m'effrayaient** pas, l'abondance et l'ambiguïté de ces tics de langage m'émerveilleraient.' (Internautes_R149)

75. 'Quelle bonne idée ! **Terrifié** par le **désastre** linguistique que les médias et certaines « élites » s'emploient à entretenir, je me demandais qui allait prendre le problème en main.' (Internautes_Q278)
76. 'Il y a une autre tendance « branchée » et un peu ridicule depuis quelques années [...] qui consiste à utiliser un numéro pour désigner son département. Ainsi, on découvre **avec effroi** que les gens travaillent dans le 9-3, ou habitent le 85.' (Internautes_Q283)
77. 'Professeur de français en collège, j'entends chaque jour **des horreurs** dont je souhaite vous faire part.' (Internautes_Q296)

These images focus on the negative effects that language usages have not on the language itself, but on people, often specifically the reader making the objection. The use of the first person pronoun *je* in Example 74 is uncommon in *Internautes* responses (24 uses of *je* in 278 responses, compared to 147 uses of *on*, see 5.3.3) and suggests a deliberate distancing of personal opinion from the *Service du dictionnaire* and its institutional position. 6.3 will show that this type of figurative language is common in *Bescherelle ta mère* user comments, suggesting that this is perhaps typical of a hyperbolic and jocular style used in the online corpora, but particularly in *Bescherelle ta mère*.

6.2.5 Summary: Images of language

While very little imagery was found in *Courrier* questions, many of the images used in the *Courrier* and *Internautes* corpora are familiar from purist language commentaries. We saw, for instance, the personification of the language and its portrayal as a patient upon which the expert would operate to remove the illness (Example 51, p.207). What is novel, however, is a focus on fear and on the impact of usage on the individual (e.g. feeling physical pain as a result on a usage). We may consider that these evolved images are less motivated by a purist desire to protect the language, and more motivated by standard language ideology, allowing speakers to differentiate themselves from incorrect usages and certain speakers. Examples of images in which the individual rather than the language is the victim were found in expert and lay discourses of both corpora but are more frequent in the *Internautes* corpus. In 6.3, images which focus on the individual will be shown to be even more prominent in the sample of online comments from website *Bescherelle ta mère*, suggesting either a change over time or a change from print to online medium, with twenty-first-century online commentary taking a more hyperbolic and perhaps individualistic approach.

6.3 Conclusion

The language commentary of the *Courrier de Vaugelas* and *Courrier des internautes* reveals considerable consistency in what both lay readers and experts of the two sources, some 130

years apart, expect of a language: language should be logical and rule-governed, it should respect established usage (although the type of 'usage' to which they refer is not always clear) and the history of the language, and it should be rich and elegant. These are tropes which have also been shown to run through both seventeenth-century *remarques* and later *chroniques de langage*; their continued presence in the sources examined here strengthens the case for the inclusion of these Q+A publications in this same tradition of language commentary.

The questions and responses of both corpora draw on metaphors typical of purist discourses, such as images of invasion and of a sick language, suggesting the continuation of older purist ideologies in both readers' and experts' conceptions of the French language. However, whereas traditional pre-modern purist metaphor places the language in a position of victim (e.g. as diseased) and the purist as its saviour (e.g. the physician who can remove the diseased parts), in the *Internautes* particularly, lay contributors use figurative language to present themselves, rather than French itself, as suffering potential harm from misuse of the language. We may then interpret the use of such metaphors as motivated by standard language ideology, rather than by purism: the effect is not to protect the language *per se*, but to allow speakers of *correct* language to differentiate themselves from the dangerous speakers of *incorrect* language. We shall see in 6.3 that this development is even more prominent in the lay language commentary of the two websites *Bescherelle ta mère* and *Langue sauce piquante*.

Chapter 7 Comment analysis: Lay language commentary

While Chapters 4, 5 and 6 have examined expert-lay discussions in the *Courrier* and *Internautes*, this chapter examines lay language commentary on two websites, *Langue sauce piquante* (LSP)¹⁵⁰ and the *Bescherelle ta mère* (BTM) Facebook page.¹⁵¹ LSP is in many ways comparable to a language column: it is run by language professionals; aspects of language and correctness are discussed; and the 'About' section of the website explicitly encourages users to send in language-based questions.¹⁵² However, by contrast with language columns and with the two Q+A resources analysed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, the readers' questions are rarely published or mentioned in LSP posts, meaning the extent to which these questions are addressed is unclear. Nevertheless, the blog is of particular interest for the lay user comments section, the focus of the analysis in this chapter. The second source analysed in this chapter, BTM, is a completely lay source, an example of what Heyd (2014: 490-93) terms a 'grassroots prescriptivist photo blog' (see Section 3.4): it relies on photographic content; is run by lay-people; and its sole purpose is entertainment. The BTM corpus is thus a lay corpus both in the posts and in the user comments which accompany them.

The data analysed in this chapter are samples of user comments from LSP and BTM, complemented by some analysis of the post content (following a sampling process which is summarised in Section 7.1). Unlike the data from *Le Courrier de Vaugelas* and *Courrier des internautes* analysed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, which constitute the seeking and giving of language advice, the LSP and BTM posts and comments concern the discussion of and commenting upon *real* errors committed by others, rather than resolving questions of doubt.

An error is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as 'something incorrectly done through ignorance or inadvertence; a mistake, e.g. in calculation, judgement, speech, writing, action, etc.'.¹⁵³ A language 'error', then, is, firstly, a deviation from what is considered 'correct'. What is considered 'correct' may, or may not, align with what is considered standard. For instance, the use of non-standard language associated with 'textspeak' would be considered 'correct' in an appropriate texting context (see, for instance, Millet, Lucci, and Billiez 1990: 230). However, in this thesis, the context of the utterances is often unknown. My use of the term 'error' in this chapter does not make an assumption about whether the language used is, in fact, incorrect for its context and indicates only that the 'errors' discussed on the two

¹⁵⁰ <https://www.lemonde.fr/blog/correcteurs/> (Accessed: 17/09/2020).

¹⁵¹ <https://www.facebook.com/bescherelletamere/> (Accessed: 17/09/2020).

¹⁵² <https://www.lemonde.fr/blog/correcteurs/a-propos/> (Accessed: 17/09/2020).

¹⁵³ Definition 4a under the entry 'error': <https://www.oed.com/> (Accessed: 09/03/2021).

websites, *Langue sauce piquante* and *Bescherelle ta mère*, are framed as incorrect, either explicitly by the accompanying text or implicitly by the simple fact of their inclusion on the websites (BTM only publishes language ‘errors’ and LSP posts were sampled from two sections of the website - ‘La langue korrekte’ and ‘La confusion des sens’ – which almost exclusively feature ‘errors’) . Secondly, errors are unintended – they are the result of ‘ignorance or inadvertence’. Applying this to my corpora, although ‘errors’ are presented and portrayed as unintentional on the websites, particularly on BTM, again without the wider context of the errors reported, conclusions regarding intentionality cannot be reliably drawn.

In this thesis, a language ‘error’ is a deviation from what is considered correct, decided by the website contributors through their publishing of the utterances. Given that all features are framed on the two websites either implicitly or explicitly as errors, the context of the error and the issue of intentionality are not considered. However, as we will see in Section 7.2, errors which appear to be typographical have been removed from analysis. Section 7.2 describes the written language error types most common in the LSP and BTM data samples, particularly spelling errors; we shall see that BTM, in particular, tends to feature very specific types of errors.

Featuring *real* errors, rather than giving advice, attracts different audiences to those of the *Courrier* and *Internautes*. Those contacting the Q+A resources are looking to learn and improve their language (sometimes proving their own expertise by highlighting the language use of others) and are presumably reflecting on their own language practices. While LSP provides explanations of errors and broader discussions of language and thus clearly attracts lay language enthusiasts, its readership is not limited to the linguistically ‘insecure’ (in the words of *Service du Dictionnaire* member Vannier, cited by Ratouis (2018) in newspaper *Le Point*). Uniquely among the four sources analysed in this study, BTM’s accessibility on Facebook and its positioning as a form of entertainment allow it to attract a more varied audience. Its comments section gives access to the metalinguistic discussions of laypeople. While we have always assumed such lay language commentary has been taking place in informal conversations, it has generally been largely inaccessible (Osthus 2018: 25). BTM offers a valuable insight into both the content and discourse of such commentary.

Whilst the errors featured on each website are from a variety of sources (discussed in Section 7.1), all LSP and BTM user comments are instances of computer-mediated communication (CMC). The internet is not a single homogenous space; adherence or non-adherence to a standard language are both acceptable depending on context (Phyak 2015: 379). While LSP

and *Internautes* users and experts broadly adhere to the offline norm, instances of standard and non-standard language (including features ‘typical’ of CMC, cf. Barton and Lee 2013: 5) are found in the BTM comment sample. Even though a wide variety of linguistic practices are enacted in online spaces, this does not mean that they are accepted by others. In fact, users tend to protect offline norms (Heuman 2020: 1), irrespective of whether or not they are strictly adhering to them themselves.

We shall see that BTM users, although judging the language use of others, themselves make errors (e.g. Example 47, p.245). The errors featured on BTM are usually ‘obvious’ errors related to spelling, rather than stylistic or grammatical errors (cf. Heyd 2014: 497), and have already been singled out and shared on the site explicitly as errors. This means that the errors (and those making the errors) are easy to judge, with no risk of mistakenly identifying an error. The presence of users’ errors in their own comments suggests, firstly, that some errors are more salient than others (so that users do not notice them in their own writing, even as they comment on others), but also that some users’ knowledge of the standard is incomplete. Despite this, users feel qualified to criticise and pass judgement.

Section 7.1 presents the data samples used in this chapter, including a summary of the sampling techniques used. This is followed, in Section 7.2, by a discussion of errors types, in order to categorise and exemplify the common spelling errors featured on each website. In Sections 7.3 and 7.4, I present analysis of the tropes and images used in BTM and LSP comments on the errors featured. The analysis yields additional examples of the traditional lay myths and misconceptions about language already discussed in Chapter 6, such as aesthetic judgements of the language and physical and emotional reactions to errors. We shall see that some of these images – for instance, of a language defended against threats – are still being played out in lay online language commentary, but in a slightly altered form. Rather than images of a *language* under attack, as observed in the *Courrier* and *Internautes* datasets, in BTM, ‘Frenchness’ is under threat. In this way, the comments show some continuity with the *Courrier* and *Internautes* corpora, but also shed further light on the use of imagery and figurative language in lay commentary, and on the recurring tropes and the characteristics associated with people who make errors. We will also see that discourse features which were either absent or uncommon in the *Courrier* and *Internautes*, in particular humour, extreme imagery, and the targeting of individual users, are prominent in BTM lay discourse.

BTM and LSP posts are referred to using the ID: BTM.post_54 and LSP.post_12. Comments use the ID: BTM_345 and LSP_7. It is common in the BTM sample for other users to be tagged in

comments (Section 2.5). To ensure anonymity, tags in comments are displayed as '@user', e.g.: '@user oh non 🤔', where 'user' replaces a username. Otherwise, comments are reproduced as they originally appeared, preserving any non-standard features, errors and typos. Bold has been added for emphasis.

7.1 Data samples: *Bescherelle ta mère* and *Langue sauce piquante*

This chapter analyses two samples of comments and posts from LSP and BTM (see Table 7.1; a full explanation of the sampling methodology was given in Sections 2.4 and 2.5). As explained there, data collection had to deal with two problems. First, the set-up of Facebook hinders certain collection techniques. Second, users interact with the two websites in quite different ways: BTM posts are published almost daily and receive large numbers of short comments, whereas LSP posts are published less frequently – one every few days – and receive fewer but much longer replies. The initial collection of data produced two very different sized corpora (summarised in Table 2.3):

- LSP: 300 posts, 18,371 comments (14/11/2011-30/03/2017)
- BTM: 150 posts, 54,866 comments (15/12/2018-26/04/2019)

Sampling was necessary to create two samples suitable for detailed qualitative analysis, and with similar total word counts. Posts were not selected at random but, rather, an effort was made to include a variety of error types published on the websites, and from a variety of sources and individuals. Ensuring the representativeness of the wider content of the two blogs was not prioritised. For LSP, only posts with the tags 'La langue korrekte' and 'La confusion des sens' were included in the selection, as their content most closely resembles BTM content. For each post chosen, a selection of comments on the post was made using a random sampling technique.

		<i>Bescherelle ta mère</i>	<i>Langue sauce piquante</i>
No. of posts		50	31
No. comments		2,866	454
No. words		29,214	30,724
Average word counts	Mean	10.2	67.7
	Mode	3	14
	Median	8	37

Table 7.1 Qualitative sample sizes (BTM and LSP)

All errors discussed in the BTM sample are from written language, a natural consequence of the website's post template, i.e. an image and one or two lines of accompanying text (16.4 words on average). Eight of the 50 BTM posts in the sample present linguistic features from the linguistic landscape, i.e. 'the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings' (Landry and Bourhis 1997: 25). An example is shown in Figure 7.1, a park sign containing a silent morphology error; the second person pronoun *vous* has been used rather than the third person plural pronoun *nous*, changing the intended meaning of the sign. Such signs are public-facing and have been through editing. Other public-facing sources in the sample include print and television media (10 posts) and the song title of a French rapper, Jul (BTM.post_109). Although not part of the linguistic landscape, these are also examples of public-facing, written language, which again, we might assume to have been through an editing process.



Figure 7.1 BTM image: error on a public park sign (BTM.post_43)

The public/private nature of online language has become increasingly complicated, with the two spheres increasingly intertwined online (Landert and Jucker 2011: 1422-23). Almost half of all sources (24 of 50) featured in BTM posts are forms of CMC and are a mixture of more/less private/public forms. Errors taken from Facebook are the topic of 16 BTM posts, nine of which are posts from 'buying and selling' pages (a classified ads service), so are public facing (e.g. BTM.post_29). The 'publicness' of six other Facebook posts is more ambiguous. For instance, the post shown in Figure 7.2 begins with an address to the user's friends and family, implying that, even though publicly accessible, the post's content is more private and not necessarily

intended for a wider audience. These examples, whether classified as public or private, differ from the public-facing examples from the linguistic landscape (e.g. Figure 7.1) in that they are written by individuals, not institutions or companies, with no expectation of an editing or checking stage. The expectation of adherence to standard language is therefore not the same. Finally, six BTM posts chosen concern offline sources intended for a limited and specific audience, including two examples of handwritten feedback from teachers (BTM.post_20, BTM.post_57) and another post about a tattoo (BTM.post_53). We shall see that the examples taken from teachers are subject to different treatment to all other source types.

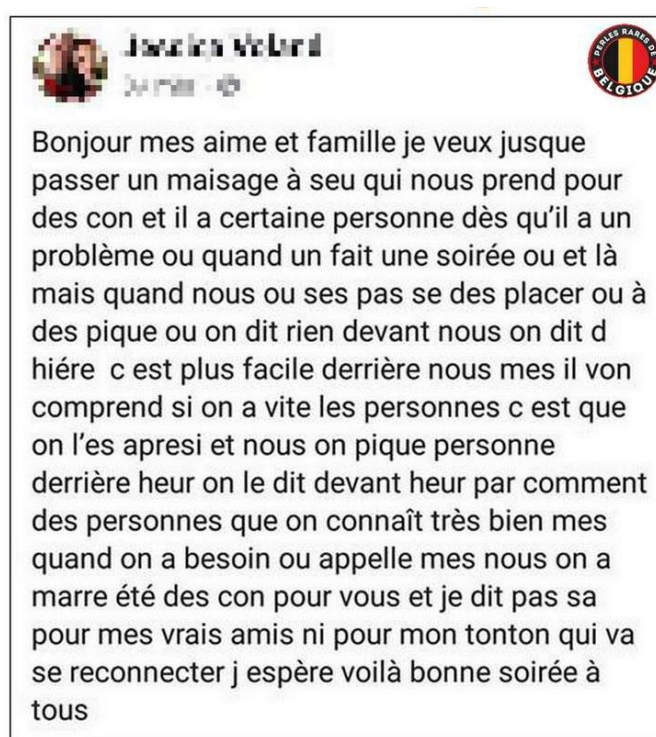


Figure 7.2 BTM Image: Facebook post containing spelling errors (BTM.post_128)

All LSP posts are also a mixture of image and text, typically with more text than in BTM posts. The post, written by the bloggers, introduces the error, explaining where it was found and discussing the correct grammar relevant to the feature. Less frequently, the text may also contain a point unrelated to language, e.g. in a post which discusses the language used by the lawyer working on the Concordia ship disaster,¹⁵⁴ a postscript discusses where responsibility in the legal case should lie (LSP.post_179). Whilst the LSP images sometimes show the error under discussion (see Figure 7.3, a Duracell advert which contains an error in preposition

¹⁵⁴ The Costa Concordia cruise ship overturned in Italy in 2012, killing 32 passengers. The ship's captain was sentenced to 16 years in prison and was widely criticised for abandoning the wreckage.

choice – *Il n'est pas prêt de s'arrêter*, for *à s'arrêter*), in other cases the images simply allude to the wider context of the post (see Figure 7.4, an image of a boat from the Costa Concordia post).



Figure 7.3 LSP image: Duracell advert with incorrect preposition (LSP.post_77)

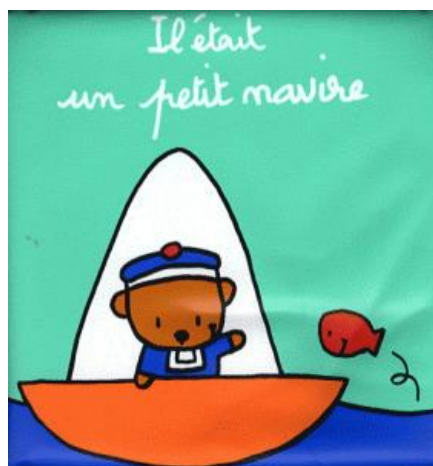


Figure 7.4 LSP image: Cartoon bear in a boat (LSP.post_179)

LSP focuses primarily on the language used in the French media. In my sample, 17 of the 31 posts present errors from online, print and radio media. Seven posts feature errors from *Le Monde* (the print newspaper, the website and the magazine), not surprising since the blog is hosted on *Le Monde's* website and the two bloggers, alongside running the blog, have worked as proof-readers for the newspaper. Beyond examples from the media, four posts feature errors taken from the linguistic landscape, two of which are commercial: a sign in a bakery window (LSP.post_284); and an advertisement in a metro station (LSP.post_280). A further two are from individuals: a sign stuck to a letterbox (LSP.post_293); and some graffiti (LSP.post_165).

Unlike in the BTM sample, errors in spoken language feature in LSP, and five such posts were selected for the sample of 31 LSP posts. These include: a post about language use in the media and on the radio (LSP.post_282); a post about a speech given by former French president Sarkozy (presented using a video clip, LSP.post_164); and three posts which discuss a spoken language error subsequently transcribed in the press, e.g. a conversation reported in *Le Monde* between Brigitte Macron, First Lady at the time, and an MP from the *Parti Socialiste* who is told by Mme Macron, 'Tu n'as rien à faire ici, tu sors !' (LSP.post_127). The post describes the First Lady's choice of the present tense, rather than the imperative 'Sors !', as an archaism. This is the only example of spoken language in the LSP sample which edges towards the 'private' sphere, although it is unclear who was reporting on the encounter and, consequently, just how private/public it was. Almost all examples discussed by the LSP editors are indisputably 'public', and very few examples are drawn from private individuals, i.e. not companies, government agencies or people in the public eye. This represents a significant difference from BTM posts, which frequently feature the language of ordinary people and have a relatively even mix of public/private sources.

Not every comment in the samples was directly related to the content of the post under which it was published. Discussions in LSP comments frequently become disagreements between users on related but non-metalinguistic topics, often between the same group of frequent commenters. One such disagreement is found in the post featuring a Duracell advert (Figure 7.3 above). A question to the bloggers about the feminine form of the noun *recteur* ('education officer', standard = *rectrice*) prompts a discussion of the difference between a *métier* and a *diplôme* and then when it is appropriate to use the title *docteur*. Whilst the frequency of discussions and disagreements suggests that these users enjoy such interactions, for some users, too much deviation from the topic of language is undesirable:

1. 'Il est vrai que nous sommes chez Langue sauce piquante et non chez Politique sauce piquante. J'aurais dû me méfier' (LSP_7292).

I focus exclusively on the metalinguistic discussions found in the samples.

7.2 Error types

Langue sauce piquante and *Bescherelle ta mère* discuss and present language errors made by individuals. In this, they differ from the two Q+A sources, the *Courrier* and *Internautes*, which, in giving language advice, focus on learning (encompassing questions of etymology and language history, for example), and on guidance to avoid potential future errors. Consequently, the language topic categorisation developed in Chapter 4 is not appropriate to analyse the narrower, error-focussed discussion in LSP and BTM. It will be useful to provide an overview of salient error types found in the samples of LSP and BTM posts, which, for BTM in particular, are almost exclusively a select group of spelling errors, summarised in Table 7.2. Grammatical errors are discussed at the end of the section but are not included in the table which only presents spelling errors. I also consider how errors are perceived by speakers, how reactions to errors differ depending on the type of error, the context in which the error was produced (e.g. formal/informal, academic/social), and the number of the different error types in the (deliberately non-random) sample.

Spelling error type	Explanation	Example from BTM data
1. Typos	Errors caused by mistyping (usually additional, omitted or substituted letters). Errors are considered typographical when no phonological or other logical explanation for the spelling can be found. Posts which only feature typos were excluded from analysis.	Error = 'goupe' Standard = 'groupe' https://bescherelletame.re.fr/des-fautes-des-fautes-toujours-des-fautes/
2. Autocorrection error	Any of the errors analysed could be the result of autocorrection software. As it is not possible to know when autocorrect is in use, this possibility is acknowledged but not considered further.	N/A
3. Ideogram errors	Following Cougnon <i>et al.</i> (2013), this category covers omitted or additional diacritics or punctuation marks.	Error = 'Aujourd dh ui cest un bon noel' Standard = 'Aujourd h ui c 'est un bon noël' https://bescherelletame.re.fr/jul-vous-souhaite-un-joyeux-noel/
4. Selection of incorrect grapheme for the phoneme	The error involves the selection of the incorrect grapheme. The graphemes involved carry no morphological information.	Error = 'verglassante' Standard = 'verglaçante' https://bescherelletame.re.fr/si-vous-lisez-ce-panneau-de-la-ville-de-lyon-vous-finirez-surement-dans-le-fosse/
5. Silent morphology	Any error which involves morphological information where the spelling used and the standard are homophonous. (Errors involving morphological information in which the two forms are not homophonous would be considered grammatical errors.)	Error = 'Le prix des carburants (re)flambent' Standard = 'Le prix des carburants (re)flambe' http://bescherelletame.fr/faute-classique-mais-toujours-enervante/
6. Misanalysis	An unfamiliar word is spelled using the spelling of other recognisable units (Rundblad and Kronenfeld 2000: 30; see also McMahon 1994: 75-76). This is similar to a folk etymology, but many examples found in the corpus are nonce occurrences	Error = 'une canne de tous' Standard = 'une quinte de toux' https://bescherelletame.re.fr/si-vous-avez-cinq-minutes-pour-dechiffrer-ces-deux-maladies/

Table 7.2 Summary of main spelling error types in BTM and LSP samples, including examples from BTM

There are both functional and inadvertent reasons for using spellings which deviate from the standard (Nuessel 2015: 298). For Nuessel (2015), functional motivations include technological limitations (e.g. character limits on Twitter), imitating spoken language (e.g. to recreate spoken features of a dialect in writing) (see also Androutsopoulos 2000: 517), and for trademarking purposes. Nuessel (2015: 298) provides numerous examples including the doughnut company 'Krispie Kreme', whose trademarked name is a playful spelling of 'Crispy cream'. 'Inadvertent' misspellings are defined by Nuessel (2015: 292) as being caused by ignorance of the standard orthography. The spelling errors discussed on BTM and LSP fall within, or at least are treated by commenters as if they fall within, the inadvertent misspelling category.

Typographical errors (typos) are not mentioned by Nuessel (2015), despite their frequency in typed texts (Tavosanis 2007: 101). Clearly also inadvertent, typos are, however, not caused by 'ignorance', but by inattention or a lapse in motor skills (Kreiner *et al.* 2002: 7). They are mechanical errors caused by pressing or not pressing a key (see Ringlstetter, Shulz, and Mihov 2006: 302 for a discussion of typos types). Typos 'are generally and explicitly tolerated' in online interactions (Tavosanis 2007: 101), and consequently, reactions to typos are not often influenced by standard language ideology, though they may provoke humour (e.g. writing *baise* (slang noun for 'sex') for *braise* ('ember') (BTM.post_45)). For these reasons, although typos feature in the content of both LSP and BTM websites, posts which only feature unambiguous typos were excluded from the sample. However, reliably distinguishing between typos and other spelling-based errors is not always possible (Tavosanis 2007: 101). Given that language errors 'are rarely if ever random or arbitrary' (Rundblad and Kronenfeld 2000: 20-21), I categorised an error as typographical when no phonological or other logical explanation for the spelling could be found. This may have led to some misclassifications but was the most practical solution in the absence of researcher interaction with participants.

When dealing with CMC, the possibility that some errors are caused by autocorrection must also be allowed for. Although designed to help avoid errors, autocorrection can often lead to amusing mistakes. A post in BTM features a Facebook classified advertisement in which 'bolognaise' appears in place of 'boulonnaise' (BTM.post_127). The inclusion of a photo of the item for sale clarifies the user's intended word. It is possible that the user's device corrected a misspelling of the intended word to a similarly spelled alternative. As the focus of this analysis is lay reactions to, rather than causes of, errors, the source of the typographical error is not important, however.

In their examination of the language used by French school pupils on social media, Cougnon *et al.* (2013) present seven spelling error types, adapted from Catach *et al.* (1980). These include: 1. three types of phonological errors, e.g. errors which change the phonetic production of the word (*creuvée* rather than *crevée*); 2. errors related to morphemes, e.g. incorrect past participle agreement; 3. errors related to non-functional letters (*cauchemard* rather than *cauchemar*); 4. ideogram errors, e.g. omission of apostrophes; and errors caused by homophones (*a* and *à*).¹⁵⁵ For the purposes of this analysis, Cougnon *et al.*'s (2013) classification is too detailed, but the distinction between phonological, morphological and ideogram errors is useful, and is included in Table 7.2.

The French language has approximately 36 phonemes which can be transcribed using 130 different graphemes (Catach 1973: 34-38). Consequently, knowing and reproducing the *correct* grapheme is not an intuitive task (Tavosanis 2007: 100) but relies on the user having learnt the spelling of the word (Fejzo 2015: 210). This can lead to omitting the final non-sounded letters from words, e.g. *foulard*, or doubts surrounding the use of double letters when the pronunciation would be the same with a single letter, e.g. *addition* or *adition* (Fayol and Jaffré 2016). I differentiate between spelling errors which involve the selection of incorrect graphemes, e.g. *illettré/illétre* (LSP.post_203; see also row 4 in Table 7.2) and those which involve morphemes, e.g. *illettré/illetterés* (row 5, Table 7.2).

The 'silent morphology' of French (Fayol, Largy, and Lemaire 1994), where more morphological information is conveyed in writing than is evident in the spoken language (Sénéchal 2000: 76), can lead to spelling errors. These include, for instance, proximity concord errors, where an agreement is made 'between the verb form and a local noun, rather than the actual subject' (Sandra and Fayol 2003: 491-92), e.g. '**La montée** des eaux inquiètent les autorités' (standard = inquiète, the verb agrees with the singular subject, *la montée*; LSP.post_110). A second example is shown in row 5 of Table 7.2. Such errors can be caused by either applying the 'wrong' morphological information (i.e. conjugating the verb to match the closest object, rather than the actual subject of the verb) or when one pronunciation has multiple possible spellings, each carrying different morphological information (e.g. -e, -es, -ent).¹⁵⁶ There are three main silent morphology errors featured in the LSP and BTM samples:

¹⁵⁵ Whilst the seven error types offer a comprehensive breakdown of frequent errors, difficulties arise, as the authors admit, when trying to apply the categorisation to data (2013: 140).

¹⁵⁶ See also Cougnon *et al.*'s (2013: 6) category 'Erreurs à dominante morphogrammique'.

- proximity concord errors, whose presence in the written press is described in an LSP post as ‘la tendance friponne à oublier cette règle d’or de la grammaire française’ (LSP.post_110); in one BTM post a proximity concord error is referred to as a ‘faute classique mais toujours énervante’ (BTM.post_7).
- adjectival agreement errors, where the additional morphemes do not change the pronunciation, e.g. ‘ses nouveau amis’ (standard = *nouveaux*, plural; BTM.post_46)
- confusion between homophonous verbal conjugations, e.g. ‘Il marcher bien’ (standard = *marchait*, imperfect tense, rather than the infinitive; BTM.post_93).

Whilst these errors also entail selection of incorrect graphemes, they differ in that the error leads to the incorrect signalling of morphological information.

Errors of misanalysis arise from a process similar to folk etymologies. To simplify somewhat, hearers of an unfamiliar multi-syllabic word seek recognisable ‘meaningful units’ (Rundblad and Kronenfeld 2000: 30; see also McMahon 1994: 75-76). There are 13 such misanalyses in the BTM sample. For instance, the post in Figure 7.5 features two tweets. In the tweet on which the post is centred, a user has written ‘bip au l’air’ for *bipolaire*. The second tweet lists similar misanalyses, including ‘comme même’ (*quand même*) and ‘sang blanc’ (*semblant*).¹⁵⁷ While all are misanalyses, *comme même* is a more widespread error (see Figure 7.6); *bip au l’air* seems to be more idiosyncratic. In the LSP sample, a patisserie shop sign on which is written ‘Sintonoret’ (*Saint-Honoré*, a choux pastry based cake; LSP.post_284) could also be interpreted as a misanalysis (given the extent to which the misspelling differs from the standard).

¹⁵⁷ Also shown are ‘kantanter’ (‘contenter’) and ‘lapin d’ici te’ (‘l’appendicite’).

Bipolarité de la langue française



Dédoublement de l'orthographe.

Figure 7.5 BTM screenshot: Misanalysis errors (BTM.post_134)

Contre le « comme même » :



Figure 7.6 Image from BTM website which advises the use of the standard 'quand même' over 'comme même'¹⁵⁸

Finally, we turn to non-standard features, which would not necessarily be considered errors by those writing them, but rather as acceptable ways of writing, especially online. Again, these are not simple to classify. For instance, it is common in CMC to write 'sa' for the homophonous 'ça', perhaps because it is easier than inserting a diacritic. Use of 'sa' could, then, be a conscious choice or confusion of two common homophones. In Figure 7.7, there are four

¹⁵⁸ <https://bescherelletamere.fr/des-chatons-pour-vos-amis/> (Accessed: 17/09/2020).

occasions where ‘sa’ is used in place of ‘ça’, e.g. ‘On est dans la merde si sa continu comme sa’. The consistent use of ‘sa’ may indicate a conscious decision. However, the use of ‘sencer’ in the third line (standard = *censé*) shows two incorrect mappings of the same sound /s/ (alongside other errors). It is thus unclear whether the use of ‘sa’ is a conscious decision or the incorrect selection of a grapheme.



Figure 7.7 BTM image: Facebook user writes ‘sa’ for ‘ça’ (BTM.post_58)

Posts in the LSP sample address grammatical and stylistic errors (20) as well as spelling errors (11). The grammatical and stylistic errors include:

- errors of conjugation and tense/mood choice: e.g. ‘Que le bonheur et la réussite vous **sourisse** en cette année d’élections’ (standard = *sourient*, present subjunctive in the third person plural; LSP.post_22)
- an observed tendency to avoid inversion in question-asking (LSP.post_282)
- discussions about precise language, e.g. the difference between ‘décès’ and ‘mort’ (LSP.post_299)

Of the 50 posts in the BTM sample, only one contains an error entirely unrelated to spelling, and related instead to style, more specifically repetition: ‘une autopsie du corps retrouvé dans l’épave de l’avoin va etre autopsié en vue de son identification’ (BTM.post_52).

Spelling errors are judged differently not only depending on type but also on context and frequency. For instance, a survey by Groupe RO (2012) found that past participle agreement errors were judged to be more acceptable by teachers and future teachers than confusing two homophones, yet past participle agreement errors have often been a particular focus of

prescriptivist and purist language commentators (Paveau and Rosier 2008: 172).¹⁵⁹ Numerous grammatical works have also been published on the topic, including one work from the LSP bloggers entitled: ‘Retour sur le participe passé et autres bizarreries de la langue française’ (Herlin, Houdart, and Rousseau 2016). In a study of school pupils, Millet, Lucci, and Billiez (1990; see also Maskens *et al.* 2015) found that whilst the pupils considered adherence to normative orthography important for their school career, correcting spellings in social contexts was not appreciated. Finally, the frequency with which errors are made can affect how individuals are perceived; whilst a small number of errors may be deemed acceptable, a high frequency is ‘severely condemned’ (Cougnon and Draelants 2018: 93-94).

7.3 Humour in *Bescherelle ta mère* and *Langue sauce piquante*

As explained in Section 2.5, posts where the error (often a typo) simply resulted in an inappropriate or humorous meaning change, e.g. *baise* for *braise* as cited above (BTM.post_45), were not included in the qualitative sample, because initial analysis showed that they rarely occasioned metalinguistic commentary. However, humour is still an important feature in many metalinguistic posts and comments in both LSP and BTM. In online interactions, humour may make criticism of someone’s language, which in other contexts may be considered rude, more acceptable (Švelch and Sherman 2018: 2394). On the other hand, Heuman (2020: 4) interprets humour as a form of discipline, ridiculing the error and the person making the error. Humour, a frequent feature in Facebook interactions between friends and strangers alike (Pennington and Hall 2014: 15), is particularly prevalent in BTM comments, as the examples below illustrate, some of which are taken from the original larger corpus.

Online, amusement or humour can be expressed or reinforced by, amongst other things, expressive punctuation (Example 2), emojis (Example 3) and playful spellings (Lewin-Jones 2015: 79-81). Examples 2 and 3 are BTM reactions to the spelling of *médaille* as ‘maidaye’:

2. ‘Une maidaye, c’est une personne qui “sauve-qui-peut”!!!’ (BTM_40415)

3. ‘Mdrrrrr j’en peux plus 🤔🤔🤔’¹⁶⁰ (BTM_40504)

¹⁵⁹ The hierarchisation of difficulties appeared to be motivated by the perceived difficulty of the point of grammar or spelling, its frequency in usage, and the stage at which the rules are introduced to school students (Groupe RO 2012). See Groupe RO (2012) and Ho-Dac, Muller, and Delbar (2016) for more on the basis upon which a grammatical point or spelling is judged as difficult.

¹⁶⁰ MDR = *mort de rire*, ‘dying of laughter’.

The deliberate use of apparent errors or non-standard features for humorous purpose is observable in BTM and LSP comments. In the LSP sample, during a discussion about the neologism 'fooding',¹⁶¹ one user extends the morphology of the neologism to other words:

4. 'Gus, rectification, vous ne pouvez pas dire « je t'emmerding », mais à la rigueur : « tous les matins sur LSPeeding, je fais du free-emmerding » ou « une petite séance d'emmerding au réveil » à votre choix.' (LSP_10011)

Subsequent comments on the same post provide further examples of this playful morphological productivity, creating new forms based on existing morphological rules (cf. Bauer 2001).

The deliberate use of non-standard language is found in 210 of the 2,866 comments in the BTM sample, e.g.:

5. 'La phote à la Rephorme de Laure Tograf ! ;P' (BTM_22228)
6. 'En même temps il a dit parler et non écrire ! Il à kompris ke s'est plu façil de parlé ke ekrir 😊' (BTM_44410)

In Example 5, the replacement of the letter *f* in standard spellings for the letters *ph*, e.g. 'phote' rather than the standard 'faute', is a deliberate exaggeration of the incorrect grapheme selection in the post, where 'graphique' is spelled as 'grafique' (see Figure 7.8). In Example 6, features of CMC (see Barton and Lee 2013: 5), such as the abbreviations of words (*ke*, standard = *que*) and spellings based on phonology (*kompris*, standard = *compris*), are used to parody online language use.

¹⁶¹ The original post discusses the printing of the non-contracted 'de les' (standard = *des*) in *Le Canard Enchaîné* (LSP.post_170).

Comment le stagiaire de Franceinfo a-t-il pu laisser passer ça ?

Je veux savoir : que s'est-il passé dans sa tête à ce moment précis ?



Figure 7.8 BTM screenshot: Incorrect grapheme selection ('grafique') (BTM.post_73). Error underlined by me.

Comments on 47 of the 50 selected BTM posts contained jokes based on the posts' content, totalling 541 of the 2,866 comments. Across the original BTM corpus, posts often feature a typo or error which results in a humorous or inappropriate unintended meaning. For instance, a post entitled 'Pauvres couilles' (see Figure 7.9) shows examples of Twitter users who rather than writing the colloquial phrase 's'en battre les couilles' (roughly 'to not give a shit' but literally 'to have one's balls beaten') have instead written 's'emballer les couilles' (translating as 'to wrap one's balls'). Responses make jokes based around this imagery, e.g.:

7. 'C'est bientôt Noël, ça se voit, on prépare les paquets cadeaux...' (BTM_49267)
8. 'Ils ont raison, sous cellophane c'est quand plus hygiénique 😊' (BTM_49281).

Pennington and Hall (2014: 17) showed that humorous Facebook updates received more 'likes' than posts without humour; making jokes can be interpreted as a feature in building or maintaining relationships. However, as we shall see throughout this chapter, the use of humour in the context of metalinguistic discussion can equally serve to position the error, and often the person making the error, as inferior.

Il va falloir pas mal de papier cadeau



Merci à @TommeBlur

Figure 7.9 BTM screenshot: a series of tweets in which a 'humorous' error has been made (BTM.post_137)

Humorous posts incite reactions of laughter-emojis from users. In the BTM sample, 350 of the 2,866 comments reacted with a laughter-emoji and little or no additional content. Reactions of laughter came in multiple forms as per Vázquez's (2019) taxonomy: emojis, e.g.:

9. '@user 😂🤣' (BTM_52963).

laughter tokens, e.g.:

10. 'Hahahaha !' (BTM_44933)

11. '@user mdr !' (BTM_28112)

and, less frequently, metalinguistic comments, e.g.:

12. '@user celle là m'a fait rire' (BTM_5875).

Other users 'tag' friends who they believe will enjoy the post:

13. '@user ça va te plaire 🤔' (BTM_43708).

BTM posts presenting errors which result in unintended sexual connotations are amongst the most frequently commented upon in the wider corpus. Receiving 1,992 comments, for instance, was a post entitled 'Drôle de recette' which showed a fast food restaurant menu in which the standard *rosbif* was written as 'rose biffle' (*bifler* is a slang term created from the words *bite* ('penis') and *gifler* ('to slap')). The linguistic feature discussed has 'humorous' connotations and the text in the post similarly has humorous intentions (see Figure 7.10). Users respond to such posts with either reactions of laughter (as above) or with jokes based on the content.

Sandwich à la biffle ? Vraiment ?



Désolé, je vais prendre un jambon crudités.

Merci à Yannick L.

Figure 7.10 BTM screenshot: a misanalysis with unintended sexual connotations (BTM.post_37).

In LSP, the largest proportion of user jokes in response to a single post (8 of 17 comments) is in response to a verbal construction used by Sarkozy, former French president (see Figure 7.11, LSP.post_164). The post, which encourages laughter at Sarkozy's language use ('une leçon de grammaire sarkozyenne, c'est toujours l'assurance d'une bonne tranche de rigolade') provokes similar reactions from users, including this ironic comment:

14. 'Cet homme souffre (déjà, tout jeune, souvenez-vous, sur la P. de Clèves). Il offre sa vie aux peuples, qui ne sont qu'ingratitude. Il mérite la médaille, un CDI...'¹⁶² (LSP_9577)

Whereas the humour found in BTM comments mainly centres around the error discussed in the post and word play, the humour in LSP comments is more varied, covering a wider variety of topics and using a wider variety of humour, such as irony and anecdotes. For instance, one user recounts that their son believed that 'la didascalie' ('stage directions') referred to a brand of sports shoes (presumably confusing the word with Adidas) (LSP_7473).

¹⁶² CDI = *contrat à durée indéterminée*.

Saucisson sec ou à l'aïe aïe aïe ?

TRANCHER – verbe transitif direct

http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xopt6v_nicolas-sarkozy-chaque-fois-qu-il-y-aura-blocage-je-ferai-trancher-le-peuple-francais_news

**“Chaque fois qu’il y aura blocage,
je ferai trancher le peuple français.”**

(président Sarko,
15 pluviôse, an V de la Sarkozye)

Allez, tant pis pour l’peupl’ en rondelles,

une leçon de grammaire sarkozyenne, c’est toujours l’assurance d’une bonne tranche de rigolade.

**Tranchure ? Vidéo effacée ? qu’à cela ne tienne,
voici le lien.....**

(merci typo et madiot !)

Figure 7.11 LSP screenshot: laughter encouragement at an error made by Sarkozy (LSP.post_164)

Given that the purpose of the BTM website is to entertain, it is perhaps unsurprising that such amused reactions are frequent throughout the comments, found in the comments of 42 of the 50 posts. These reactions confirm that the errors of others are a source of entertainment and amusement for users. Ridiculing the error can distance oneself from the person making the error and create a feeling of superiority (see Heuman 2020). Posts which feature errors of misanalysis received the highest proportion of laughter reactions from BTM users. Silent morphology posts receiving almost 10% fewer reactions of this type (Table 7.3).¹⁶³ This may suggest that errors in which the resultant form is much further from the standard, i.e. misanalyses, are funnier to users than silent morphology errors which tend to deviate less

¹⁶³ This table only includes posts which contained one error type. Posts which include two types of error were excluded as it is not possible to distinguish whether the reaction of laughter is to one particular error or all the errors in the post.

from the norm and involve both orthographical and morphological information. Incorrect past participle agreements, for instance, are a more tolerated error (Groupe RO 2012).

Error type	Total no. of comments for error type	No. of comments which are reactions of laughter	% of total comments for error type
Grapheme/phoneme	441	50	11%
Misanalysis	878	169	19%
Silent morphology	977	95	10%
Total	2,296	314	14%

Table 7.3 Frequency of reactions of laughter by error type (BTM)

For some users, what was initially amusing, now provokes more negative or serious reactions. For instance, in response to the misanalysis of *congélateur* as ‘conchaile a tere’, one user writes:

15. ‘Je ne trouve plus trop ça drôle car ces fautes émanent de personnes illettrées.’ (BTM_43474)

A second user, in response to an image which shows a misanalysis of ‘entre guillemets’ as ‘en très guimer’ in a text message, writes:

16. ‘Putain, onent rigoule, Mais comme meme, C grave...’¹⁶⁴ (BTM_38729)

While acknowledging the perceived amusement to be found in these examples of misspellings (neither of which result in a ‘taboo’ or sexual pun), the users frame the errors, either genuinely or ironically, as concerning (‘C grave’).

Reactions of laughter are infrequent in the LSP sample and no emojis are used. In general, the language used in LSP comments is closer to standard language, the absence of emojis further reflects the offline norm. One laughter token, ‘mdr’ (‘mort de rire’), is used to make a joke about the use of abbreviations in ‘text language’:

17. ‘– Tordant, ça ne se dit plus ? – Mais non ! tout ces mots sont bien trop longs, en langage sms c’est mdr. – Ah, alors mieux vaut ne pas l’écrire en entier.’ (LSP_8048)

¹⁶⁴ ‘Putain, on rigole, mais quand même c’est grave’. This seems to be a further example of errors used deliberately for humorous effect.

Instead, amusement is expressed in LSP through metalinguistic comments, e.g. ‘trop marrant’ (LSP_10695).

Although the use of errors as sources of entertainment is more prominent in BTM posts and comments than in LSP, there is certainly an element of laughing at usages in some LSP posts, as in Figure 7.11 above. It is unclear whether this has the purpose of disciplining those making errors (cf. Heuman 2020: 4) or to soften criticism (cf. Švelch and Sherman 2018: 2394). However, Heyd (2014: 499), who emphasises the importance of considering both the overt and covert prescriptivist positioning of language blogs, argues that ‘the sheer activity of focusing on a specific linguistic phenomenon as a source of entertainment is a kind of covert positioning, as it implies that the language use in question is noteworthy in terms of being nonstandard and thus a target for mockery’. Although LSP does not always overtly ‘shame’ the language usages which it features, the sheer fact of featuring them – particularly under the tag of ‘La langue korrekte’ – positions them as out of the ordinary.

7.4 Tropes and images in *Bescherelle ta mère* and *Langue sauce piquante*

Building directly upon corresponding analysis of expert and lay discourses from the *Courrier* and *Internautes* samples in Chapter 6, this final section discusses the tropes and images observed in BTM and LSP comments and posts. We shall see that some of the same imagery and ideologies, e.g. aesthetic judgements about the language, continue in the online lay commentary of BTM and LSP, in some cases becoming more extreme and more vehemently targeting individuals rather than usages (Section 7.4.2) – a tendency which we saw hints of in Chapter 6. Making judgements about language is nothing new and, in fact, ‘an integral part of using it’ (Cameron 2012: 3), so too the drawing of parallels between an individual’s language use and assumed social status and characteristics (Chapman 2012: 200).

We will also discuss tropes which were not observed in the lay and expert commentary of the Q+A resources, firstly, in Section 7.4.3, discussions surrounding declining standards – primarily linguistic and educational. Prescriptivists frequently present language as in decline or decay, with linguistic decline linked to moral and societal decline (Milroy and Milroy 2012: 32). In common lay misconceptions about language, non-standard language use is consequently portrayed as a danger to polite society and, more broadly, to a united community (Battistella 2005: 150-53). These fears stem from the ideology that language is (or should be) a fixed entity which at some time in the past reached a point of perfection, and that subsequent change or variation is undesirable (Watts 2000: 35).

Secondly, we observe manifestations of the relationship between language and nation, a pervasive ideology in standard language cultures (Milroy 2007: 138). Arising from the presenting of language as a fixed entity, languages are considered to have clear and identifiable borders (Milroy 2001: 543); what is or is not French is an apparent fact. In reality, language ‘borders’ are changeable and negotiable (Wolfram 2007: 77). Languages come to represent nation states and prescriptivist commentary can then be interpreted as a desire to protect linguistic and societal boundaries (Edwards 2012: 13). In BTM, we shall see users who present errors as an attack on the notion of ‘Frenchness’ (Section 7.4.4), a departure from imagery of the language under attack as observed in Chapter 6.

7.4.1 Aesthetic judgements

Through the discussion of previous research and analysis of the *Courrier* and *Internautes* corpora, we have seen the sustained use of aesthetic judgements in language commentary. Imagery related to the language myth of French as a beautiful language is used in LSP and BTM comments in two distinct ways: genuinely (as observed in traditional prescriptivist discourses and in the *Internautes* sample) and ironically (unique to LSP and BTM). Three LSP comments present the standard language as a thing of beauty (‘genuinely’). For instance, in response to a post about proximity concord errors one user writes:

18. ‘Autre exaspération: « avant que ne ». Avant que, sans ne, pour les neuneus qui se piquent de **beau langage**.’ (LSP_6365)

A second LSP comment (Example 19) which mentions aesthetics sparks a discussion with two others users (e.g. Example 20):

19. ‘[...] le **joli mot** «réclame» n’avait pas encore été supplanté par celui de « promotion » [...]’ (LSP_17072)

20. ‘@user : que trouvez-vous de « **joli** » au mot réclame ? [...]’ (LSP_17077)

Example 20 seems to be a sincere question, rather than a criticism of the initial user’s aesthetic judgement on the word, as the user then discusses their own feelings of nostalgia towards certain words before relating an emotional attachment to the language:

21. ‘j’ai mes faiblesses biographiques et je me garde le droit de **regretter l’évanouissement de certains mots**.’

The notion of a beautiful language is used ironically by the LSP bloggers to describe errors, using phrases such as:

22. ‘Une **très belle coquille**’ (LSP.post_255).

23. '**belle** invention d'écriture' (LSP.post_284).

This same imagery is also found in BTM posts, e.g. the following Facebook post titles:

24. 'Deux livres Disney, **deux belles fautes**, bravo !' (BTM.post_46)

25. 'encore une **belle faute** de BFM' (BTM.post_95).

Errors are presented as beautiful, either ironically (meaning they are not beautiful) or as beautiful examples of incorrect language – whether or not these examples deliberately draw on the trope of a beautiful language is unclear. The ironic use of aesthetic judgements is also found in 55 (of 2,866) BTM comments. For instance, in response to a post which showed a Facebook user wishing her friends and family 'd'infections' rather than 'd'affections' (BTM.post_103), one user writes:

26. '@user c'est **tellement beau**... 🤔🤔🤔' (BTM_32740).

BTM and LSP commenters and bloggers show awareness of the traditional myth of French as a beautiful language, in some cases reproducing the myth as is found in traditional metalinguistic commentary, but more frequently using it for humorous effect. In BTM (and only in BTM), we begin to see the idea of *collecting* errors as a hobby; users collect *beautiful* errors as they would beautiful gems, for instance.

Six BTM comments explicitly present errors as collectible items, portrayed as precious and varied for the error collector:

27. '@user une nouvelle trouvaille 😂😂😂 comment font-ils ???!! 😂😂' (BTM_31439)

28. '@users on en a un nouveau 😂😂😂' (BTM_31508).

The imagery in Examples 27 and 28 not only places a value on the errors but also introduces the idea that they can be 'owned' by the finder. This is also a joint ownership, as users 'share' the errors and discuss them with other Facebook users, creating a dynamic of 'us' (the collectors of errors) and 'them' (those who commit the errors). This is further evidenced in BTM comments which compare errors to pearls and/or label errors as precious (19 of 2,866 comments). This imagery is used by three users in reaction to the misanalysis of *congélateur* as 'conchaile a tere' (BTM.post_123):

29. '@user une perle' (BTM_44004)

30. 'La perle des perles' (BTM_43686)

31. ‘une mine d’or !!’ (BTM_43718) [referring to the website where the error cited was found].

Beauty is not the only positive quality to be turned on its head ironically by BTM users. The following are just three examples of other positive values attributed to errors:

32. ‘**Merveilleux** tant de poésie’ (BTM_ 38753)

33. ‘La canne de tout est **magique**.’ (BTM_ 10575)

34. ‘Le verbe sorcier. Ok... C’est tellement con que ça en devient presque **mignon**.’ (BTM_ 27673)

Whilst Examples 32 and 33 both have connotations of magic and wonder, the use of *mignon* (‘cute’) in Example 34 adds an element of condescension, further positioning the commenter as superior to the user who has made a conjugation error and again implying that collecting errors is a hobby (i.e. here’s a cute one). The ironic use of positive attributes to describe non-standard features creates humour, further supported by the accompanying use of emoji and hyperbole, and ridicules the error and the individual (cf. Heuman 2020: 4).

7.4.2 Emotional and physical reactions to errors: Suffering, pain and death

Chapter 6 showed that beyond the typical purist imagery of a sick language (Ayres-Bennett 2011; Jones 1999), commentators in both the nineteenth-century *Courrier* and, especially, the twenty-first-century *Internautes* extended this imagery to suggest that some usages cause emotional responses (e.g. fear) and physical responses (e.g. pain). This extension of the image of a sick language into errors as painful or dangerous to others has been found in other studies of contemporary attitudes to online language (for instance, Humphries 2016; Cougnon and Draelants 2018: 93). The analysis in this section builds on this finding and shows, firstly, the prevalence of the ‘language as painful’ image in BTM comments and posts. Secondly, whilst there are no examples in the BTM corpus of a diseased or sick language, we find a more extreme version of this image, a murdered language, in its place.

Images suggesting emotional reactions are not found among the 454 LSP comments,¹⁶⁵ but are relatively common in BTM, where they occur in 32 (of 2,866) comments. These include, presumably performative, expressions of sadness (Example 35) and distress (Examples 36, 37):

35. ‘Mes yeux pleurent!!! Ma maitresse de CM1 se retournerait dans sa tombe...’
(BTM_35090)

¹⁶⁵ LSP commenters tend to use the comments section to engage in critical and ‘intellectual’ discussion of the post’s content, rather than to express personal opinions.

36. '😱😱😱😱😱 affligéant 😱😱😱😱😱'(BTM_17948).

37. '@user Ooooooh 😱 L'angoisse 😱' (BTM_47191).

The use of emojis in Examples 36 and 37 further emphasises the extreme emotions which users claim to be experiencing. In her analysis of prescriptivism in English-language letters to the editor, Lukač (2016: 330) found frequent expressions of sadness, often at perceived declining standards, suggesting that this is a tendency more broadly in language commentary. Declining standards are explicitly mentioned in one comment as the cause of the user's sadness; in the remaining comments, it is unclear for whom or what exactly the users perform their sadness.

Turning to physical reactions, in BTM, the language is portrayed as injured in 14 of 2,866 comments. Although the 'victim' is the same here as in traditional metalinguistic images of healthy/diseased languages, the inflictor of the pain differs and the images are more extreme. Examples 38 and 39 are two of 12 comments which discuss the massacre of the French language, an extreme response that is matched by the emphatic repetition of '!' and '?' :

38. 'C'est une langue VIVANTE ! La preuve, **on peut la massacrer !!!**' (BTM_ 31218)

39. 'Et le retrait de la nationalité à **ceux qui massacrent la langue ???** Franchement pathétique' (BTM_ 44476).

Example 38 is a response to a BTM post which also used the hyperbolic image of massacre:

40. 'Le **massacre** du français est total' (BTM.post_113).

As in traditional uses of the image, the language is portrayed as a living entity that is under threat and in need of protection (cf. Spitzmüller 2007: 272-74), but the harm is attributed more directly to the language users as agents, 'ceux qui massacrent la langue' rather than a particular usage damaging the language.

Example 41 is a particularly extreme case of the same phenomenon. In reaction to the image in Figure 7.12, the user writes:

41. 'Je ne savais pas que cela soit possible, mais **mes yeux viennent d'être violé (la langue française aussi)**' (BTM_ 39849).

A second comment in the BTM sample also used the image of eyes being violated:

42. 'ce viol de la rétine 😱' (BTM_40017).

This somewhat unusual and extreme image combines the tropes of violence and harm with aesthetic reactions to seeing errors. Absent from the *Courrier* and the LSP comment corpus, extreme imagery was also found in two *Internautes* questions (one suggested the death penalty as a punishment for incorrect language use (Internautes_Q201), the other complained about ‘ceux qui massacrent la langue’ (Internautes_Q288). Lay metalinguistic commentary has historically been difficult to study as it was considered to be mainly found in spoken language (unrecorded and inaccessible) (Osthus 2018: 25), it is unclear, therefore, whether these extreme images are an artefact of lay language commentary, both offline and online, or specific to the online medium. It has been suggested that online discourses may be more prone to extreme language and imagery due to the distancing effects of CMC, which remove users somewhat from the consequences of their discourses (Demjén and Hardaker 2016: 354). However, such disinhibition in CMC is often attributed, in part, to anonymity (Hollenbaugh and Everett 2013: 283). While LSP commenters are anonymous, the BTM commenters are using their personal Facebook accounts to comment.¹⁶⁶



Figure 7.12 BTM image: a Facebook post containing numerous errors (BTM.post_113)

¹⁶⁶ Facebook requires that accounts reflect ‘real’ offline identities (Section 2.6). However, users can circumvent this and control how much of their ‘real’ identities are disclosed (Hardaker 2013: 59).

Images of pain caused by seeing/hearing errors are the most frequently arising theme in BTM comments (156 of 2,866 comments). Eyes are the site of the pain in over one third of these comments (60 of 156; including Examples 41 and 42 above, 43 and 44 below), and the ears in three comments. Other pains and illnesses include headaches (Example 45), vomiting (46) and even strokes (47):

43. '@user mes yeux saignent 😭' (BTM_ 3916).
44. 'Lui c est une souffrance pour les oreilles et pour les yeux.' (BTM_ 36835)
45. '...ouuuuhhhh, j'ai la migraine.....' (BTM_48261)
46. 'Je suis venu J'ai lu J'ai vomi' (BTM_ 9770).
47. '@user j'ai fais un AVC.' (BTM_ 47189)¹⁶⁷

Users position not merely the language as a victim (the object of massacre, above), but themselves as victims, framing errors as harmful to their health. Images concerning pain and sickness were not found in LSP comments. However, in a discussion about the use of *quelque* followed by a specific number, two users label usages as *tics*, a label which was used six times in the *Internautes* corpus (three questions, three responses). See the following example which attributes the use of *quelque* to the media:

48. 'Il s'agit d'un **tic médiatique**, pour le moment, du moins. Et très probablement propagé par les agences de presse, **comme beaucoup d'autres tics.**' (LSP_175)

7.4.3 Declining standards

Discussions of declining linguistic standards, though a common trope in language commentary (Pullum 2004: 6-7; see also discussions of the 'Golden Age' topos in Watts 2000), were not observed in the *Courrier* or *Internautes* samples, although mentions of the *poor* language used by the media in *Internautes* questions could be interpreted as contributing to a discourse of decline (Chapter 5). As we shall see, declining standards are lamented in BTM – and hinted at in the LSP sample – ranging from a belief in the general decline of the language, to more specific declines of educational standards, for instance. A belief in the decline of the French language is tackled explicitly in 64 (of 2,866) BTM comments:

49. "“On est dans la merde.... ” dixit..... et bien , j'espère que les élèves de 4e ont bien suivi les cours d'apnée à la piscine.... on touche le fond !!! Lamentable et triste, quelle génération ! 😞' (BTM_18035).

¹⁶⁷ The standard past participle for *faire* is *fait*, not *fais* as written in this comment. This is one of many examples of a BTM user criticising the language use of another user whilst themselves making an error (as noted above).

50. '@user mais ou vaton? 🤔' (BTM_38469).

51. 'Le nivellement par le bas' (BTM_36852).

There are no explicit comments about language decline in the LSP sample, but the frequency of certain errors is mentioned and are similarly part of a discourse of declining standards. For instance, when discussing 'tirer partie de' for 'tirer parti de', the LSP bloggers write:

52. 'La faute est fréquente, et nous lui avons même consacré une note' (LSP.post_120).

The frequency of errors is similarly discussed in 28 BTM comments, e.g.:

53. 'Marre de tous ces gens qui ne savent même plus écrire notre langue correctement!!!!' (BTM_30819)

Concerns about the state of the language and society are also expressed in mentions of education, intelligence and illiteracy. Looking firstly at education (directly discussed in 104 of 2,866 BTM comments and five of 454 LSP comments), we find concerns expressed in BTM comments that the general level of teaching in schools has deteriorated, including three claims that the entrance exam for teachers ('le CAPES') has lowered its entry requirements, as in Example 54, a reaction to a teachers conjugation error (see Figure 7.13):

54. 'En même temps pour obtenir le capes il fallait avoir un minimum de 10 de moyenne, aujourd'hui comme il n'y a plus de candidats, la moyenne d'admission est tombée à 6 ! Oui vous avez bien lu.' (BTM_17622)

Three comments question how individuals making language errors could have passed the *baccalauréat* examinations, e.g.:

55. 'mais les gens passent le BAC avec un français pareil ??' (BTM_18261)

Such comments not only suggest a belief in declining linguistic and educational standards but also ignore the possibility that individuals switch between different registers of language, in a similar way to that in which responses to 'Netspeak' manifest in fears that young people are wholly unable to use the standard language because they sometimes do not (Maskens *et al.* 2015; Moïse 2015: 7).

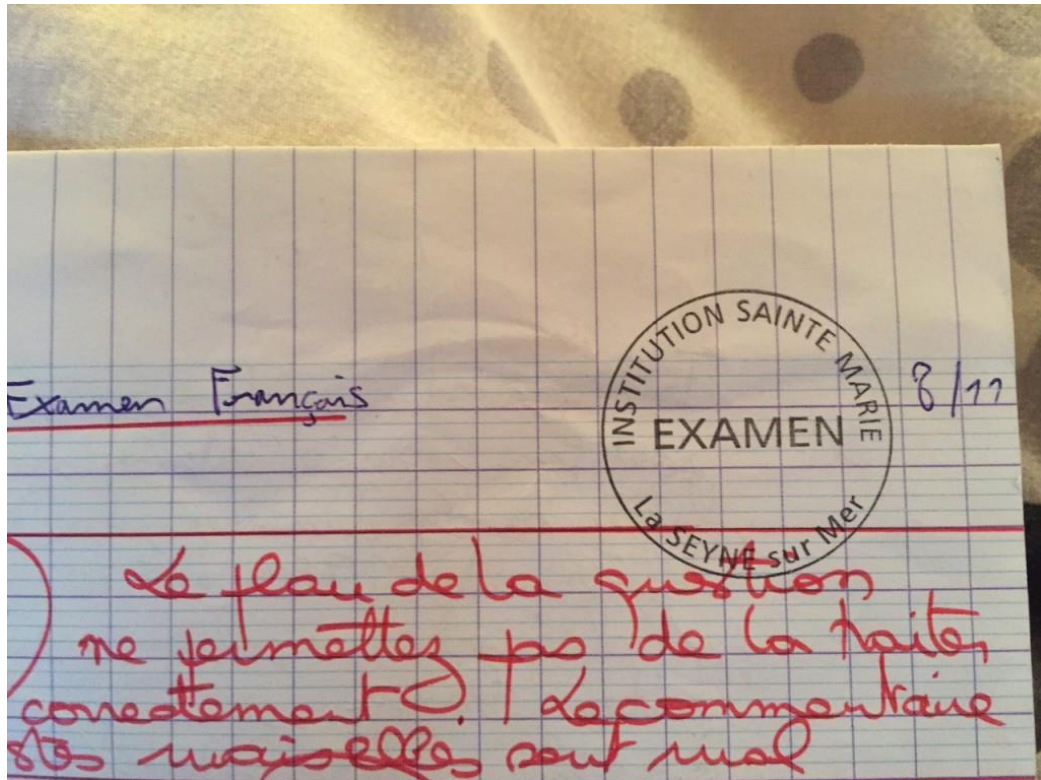


Figure 7.13 BTM image: handwritten feedback from a teacher with conjugation errors (BTM.post_57).

Discussions of declining standards in BTM comments are part of a wider, and much older, narrative in language commentary regarding a perceived golden age of the language, as well as wider malaise with declining standards (cf. Hohenhaus 2002). Examples 56 and 57 implicitly address this in the context of education:

56. 'Ces gens ont de très graves problèmes d'orthophonie Les écoles ne doivent même plus avertir les parents Je me souviens de mes copains de classe, aller en cours d'orthophonie en primaire (fin des années 80-90) Ça ne doit même plus exister' (BTM_38316).

57. 'enseignants des années 2000 ca, on se demande pk les gamins sont nuls , ben voila la reponse!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!' (BTM_6942)

Generational difference, which was not mentioned in either the *Courrier* or *Internautes*, is discussed in two LSP comments which highlight a perceived disconnect between school pupils and some aspects of the French language, such as the *passé simple* in Example 58:

58. '[The pupils] se demandent sincèrement si c'est du Français.' (LSP_17139)

The focus here is a perceived gulf between an element of the standard language and the language needs of young people, which may or may not be interpreted as declining language standards amongst pupils.

In Chapter 5, we saw that *Internautes* users positioned teachers as language gatekeepers and saw the education system as important for standard language diffusion. Teachers have long-held this position in correctness discourses (Strelēvica-Ošiņa 2016: 258), fulfilling a role of a 'language norm authority' (Davies and Langer 2006: 43). Three BTM posts in the sample focus on errors made by teachers.¹⁶⁸ Reactions to these posts imply both a belief that teachers should be using and teaching the standard (32 comments), and a critique of this expectation (48). A hierarchy which judges errors as more/less acceptable depending on the source is either upheld or criticised.

In 32 BTM comments (of 193 total comments for the three posts about teachers), the fact that the error was made by a teacher is considered significant, as in the following:

59. 'Tous **les profs devraient avoir une orthographe irréprochable**, surtout en ce qui concerne la grammaire et la conjugaison. Et c'est loin d'être le cas. Les journalistes, également. 🙄🙄🙄' (BTM_43177).

60. 'Ce n'est pas rigolo, **c'est une honte qu'une maîtresse fasse d'aussi grosses fautes**. j'en éprouve du dégoût.' (BTM_6889)

One user suggests reporting the teacher to their school:

61. 'Peut-être que ça vaudrait le coup d'envoyer cette publication à l'établissement ...' (BTM_17873)

Three commenters highlight the potential effect of errors on pupils, the following two examples of which use quite emotive language:

62. 'C'est grave quand même. On leur **confie** nos gamins... ' (BTM_43247)

63. 'c'est quand même **lamentable**, non ? et ça enseigne ???' (BTM_6927)

Ça in Example 63 seems to be a dehumanising reference to the teacher.

Slightly more frequently (48 of 193 comments, vs. 32), users defend the teachers under discussion and/or teachers more generally. Users provide justifications for how or why errors

¹⁶⁸ No LSP posts feature errors made by teachers.

arise, including fatigue (Example 64), workload (Example 65), a lapse of concentration (Example 66) and even inebriation (Example 67):

64. 'P'tite fatigue de fin de corrections?' (BTM_17903)

65. 'Oui d'accord, c'est drôle et tout mais comme la plupart des enseignants, surtout à l'école primaire, il s'agit probablement d'une enseignante qui travaille tard la nuit pour remplir tous ces bulletins...' (BTM_6887)

66. 'Cela peut être juste une faute d'inattention. Je sais que lorsque je remplis les bulletins, je me relis plusieurs fois pour éviter des petits incidents de ce genre et que l'on juge ma capacité à assurer ma fonction sur UNE erreur' (BTM_6062).

67. 'L'alcool...' (BTM_17932)

Other users highlight that the expectation placed on teachers to never make language errors is unrealistic, e.g.:

68. 'Ce qu'il y a de sidérant, c'est qu'on attend d'un professeur qu'il soit en tout point irréprochable, et pas seulement dans son domaine de compétence !' (BTM_17895)

Although the view that teachers must use flawless French at all times is criticised, the need to justify how the errors might have arisen suggests agreement that such errors are problematic.

Seven users reflect on the reactions of BTM and its users to teacher errors, as in Example 69:

69. 'Bescherelle ta mère, vous êtes infiniment plus drôle quand vous nous dégotez des petits bijoux tels que le "potchibol" (publication suivante) plutôt que quand vous semblez vous jeter avec délectation sur une faute d'orthographe commise par un(e) enseignant(e) sur un bulletin (lequel est probablement loin d'être le premier, ce qui explique bien des choses). C'est toujours de votre part l'occasion de légèrer votre photo avec un certain mépris dans le registre "la maîtresse devrait redoubler", et la porte ouverte à un flot de commentaires qui ne brillent pas par leur intelligence. Il flotte alors sur votre page comme une petite odeur d'élitisme bouffi de suffisance qui l'éloigne de sa vocation première... humoristique, non ?' (BTM_6345)

The user suggests that the practice of sharing teachers' errors is elitist and that other posts are more amusing; the example the user gives is a post which shows a Facebook classified ad in which the anglicism *punching-ball* is written as 'potchibol' (BTM.post_19). Whilst the two errors are different ('potchibol' is a misanalysis, in comparison to the teacher's proximity

concord error), for the user the main difference between the two posts is that one features a teacher and is therefore judged more harshly.

Related to judgements about declining educational standards are judgements regarding a person's intelligence, which can be affected by 'only a small amount of information about the person' (Kreiner *et al.* 2002: 50). Use of anything but the standard may be considered to indicate an inability to do so and, in a further step, a lack of intelligence (see Niedzielski and Preston 2000 and Lippi-Green 2012). Kreiner *et al.* (2002: 6-12), whose study involved English-speaking students reading film reviews containing different errors, found that a high quantity of spelling errors can affect the perception of the author's writing abilities, but that only 'misspellings in which the word is still pronounceable' affect the perception of a person's cognitive abilities. French-speakers who make errors were labelled as unintelligent in 57 (of 2,866) BTM comments, using various terms (as exemplified in Table 7.4). Unlike in Kreiner *et al.*'s (2002) study, the BTM comment data showed little difference depending on the number of errors made in the post: 31 comments concerning intelligence for posts with a single error, 26 for multiple errors. The labelling of speakers as *neuneus* ('idiots') by one LSP user is not even motivated by an error, but by the omission of the non-obligatory expletive *ne* in the construction *avant que* (Example 18, p.240, LSP_6365).

French	Translation	Example ID
<i>con</i>	idiot, twat	BTM_44437
<i>bouffon</i>	fool, idiot, buffoon	BTM_45057
<i>couillon</i>	moron, asshole	BTM_44485
<i>les QI négatifs</i>	people with negative IQs	BTM_37154
<i>nuls</i>	dimwits, losers	BTM_2965

Table 7.4 Synonyms for 'stupid' from BTM comments

One LSP user questions the ideology that language use indexes intelligence. The user, who suggests that proximity concord errors are an error of reasoning, writes:

70. 'Accord exaspérant et fréquent. Exaspérant parce qu'il montre qu'en fait **les utilisateurs de la langue ne la comprennent pas, et finalement ne savent pas penser**. Il s'agit de **plus qu'une faute d'accord, une faute de raisonnement**. Quitte à passer pour un vieux con (j'ai bien dit « passer pour »...), j'affirme ici de nouveau que l'orthographe est une des clefs du raisonnement logique. Certes pas la seule, mais indispensable.' (LSP_6353)

A second user disputes this perceived relationship between language and intelligence:

71. 'votre assimilation « orthographe => langue => pensée » est non seulement fausse, mais méprisante. Alors la personne qui fait des fautes est forcément une abruti ? **L'orthographe n'a rien à voir avec la logique, l'orthographe n'est pas la langue (et la langue n'est pas la pensée).** L'orthographe n'est qu'un code standardisé. Et comme n'importe quel code, on pourrait en changer que nous ne deviendrions pas plus bêtes... Heureusement pour tous les locuteurs de langues qui n'ont pas une orthographe et une grammaire aussi complexes que les nôtres.'
(LSP_6356)

The user dismantles the belief that orthography, language and thought are one entity and argues that those whose language use is not standard are not unintelligent.

In Cougnon and Draelants' (2018: 92-93) survey study of French-speakers' attitudes to errors in online language, some participants compared incorrect language usage to the language of children. Errors are assumed to result from a lack of cognitive ability, which in turn indexes age. This same association is found in two BTM comments, e.g.:

72. 'On dirait un enfant de trois qui parle... et encore. Affligeant' (BTM_46832).

Age is mentioned in four (of 454) LSP comments (see also Example 70 above), but the perspective varies. For instance, in a discussion about the spelling reform of 1990 (*Académie française* 1990), older people are criticised for being unable to adapt to language change:

73. '[...] L'ancienne orthographe reste tolérée, disons jusqu'à la disparition **des plus vieux incapables de s'adapter** et qui parlent d'ailleurs encore en (anciens) francs ... Il faudrait quand même un jour vivre avec votre siècle, chers amis !' (LSP_3921).

Another user responds defensively:

74. '[...] Je mets soigneusement les circonflexes sur toutes les voyelles qui le méritent et j'utilise l'imparfait du subjonctif chaque fois que l'exige la concordance des temps ; vous pouvez donc me considérer comme un vieillard qui s'assoit sur la réforme de l'orthographe. [...] Le vieillard de l'autre siècle vous souhaite le bonsoir, jeune Bruxellois-de-son-siècle-et-adapté et vous remercie profusément de bien vouloir le tolérer, lui et son orthographe dépassée.'
(LSP_3927)

Once again, we see a suggestion of generational difference in language use, which was not observed in the *Courrier, Internautes* or BTM samples, and a perceived conflict between age, language change and language use.

The relationship between age and language is further explored in a third comment from the same post in which a user, when referring to members of the *Académie française*, implies that older people should not make decisions about the language:

75. 'Les autorités de la francophonie ? Ces vieux birbes ? Mais ils étaient déjà centenaires en 1990 !' (LSP_3985)

Whereas youth is presented negatively in some BTM comments, associated with lower cognitive and linguistic ability, in these LSP comments the older generation is criticised for a desire to control the language and an inability to adapt, in contradiction to common popular discourses which often attribute, for instance, declining standards to the younger generations (Moïse 2015: 4; Drummond 2017: 641). The need for language authorities is not questioned but is assumed.

A final judgement related to intelligence and education, found in both sources, is the charge of illiteracy. Illiteracy is mentioned in 17 BTM comments, including Example 76, a reaction to the spelling of 'une médaille' as 'une maidaye':

76. 'Une médaille, c'est ça le mot 😞😞. Bon Dieu, ceci m'indigne, me consterne devant tant d'abrutis. **Ces gens illettrés** sont plus présents sur les RS que devant le Bescherelle.' (BTM_40273)¹⁶⁹

Mentions of illiteracy – extrapolated from spelling problems – develop and exaggerate the ideological relationship between spelling and intelligence further so that orthography is perceived to represent an individual's ability to read and write, i.e. spelling errors mean that the language user is illiterate. Five comments frame illiteracy as a growing problem in France, e.g.:

77. 'En France malheureusement ... L'analphabeterave est un fléau ... Alors que l'apprendage du Français se fait à l'école ... Pfff bande de ignorants De gens sans culturation!!! Je vous hais tous !!!!' (BTM_38307)

78. 'Pauvre France ! Génération d'illettrés' (BTM_34693).

¹⁶⁹ RS = *réseaux sociaux*.

The repeated punctuation (!!!) in Example 77, which seems to be inspired by a radio sketch which parodied Bernard Pivot,¹⁷⁰ suggests an emotional force to the statement (cf. Schneebeli 2018). The examples present illiteracy as widespread and indicative of broader societal decline – ironic given there have probably never been higher literacy levels in France.

A discussion of illiteracy is found in LSP comments during an interaction about the use of professional titles (LSP.post_77). A multi-comment interaction is sparked by one user's question about why French people do not publicly use their professional titles. One frequent commenter states that the diminishing use of titles is a positive rejection of hierarchical structures and that from a philosophical viewpoint:

79. ' [...] nous puissions préférer qualifier quelqu'un en raison de ses compétences et/ou de ses valeurs humaines, plutôt qu'en raison d'un parcours universitaire ! [...] **Je préfèrerai toujours un berger illettré** capable de reforester une montagne ou de bousculer mes réflexions par sa perception fine des relations humaines ou des questionnements philosophiques, **à un docteur ou un ingénieur régurgitant sans imagination 15 ans d'un parcours scolaire** convenu sans rien chercher à ajouter à la beauté du monde.' (LSP_4504)

Literacy, for the user, is not a marker of intelligence. Illiteracy is also mentioned in one LSP post title, 'L'illétrisme, ce fléo' (LSP.post_203), which features a newspaper headline from 1981 in which, ironically, *illettrés* is misspelled, 'illétrés' (see Figure 7.14). The hyperbolic conflation of an omitted letter with illiteracy is presumably for humorous effect.

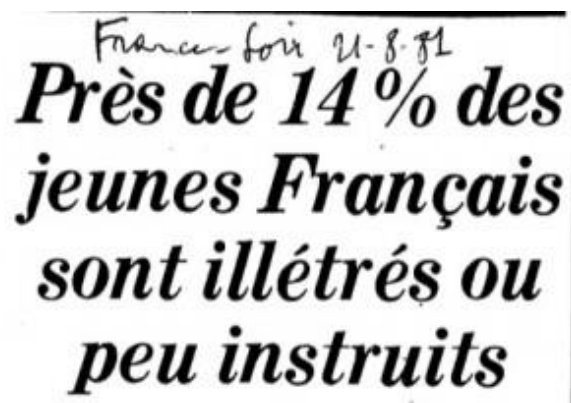


Figure 7.14 LSP image: a newspaper headline with a spelling error (LSP.post_203)

¹⁷⁰ The sketch, from *Les deux minutes du peuple*, is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWXQoXHBrSY> (Accessed: 17/09/2020).

7.4.4 Comprehensibility and ‘Frenchness’

Comprehensibility is discussed in one (of 454) LSP comments and 146 (of 2,866) BTM comments. The one LSP user highlights the importance of language as a means of communication in their defence of the use of *quelque* followed by a specific number, stating that:

80. ‘L’usage de « quelque » précédant un nombre est parfaitement correct dès que sa nouvelle signification est comprise à la fois par la personne qui écrit et par celles qui lisent.’ (LSP_185)

In BTM, all 146 comments concerning comprehensibility mention a struggle to understand the language used in posts. This is unique to the lay commentary in BTM, likely due to, firstly, the difference of dealing with *real* errors, rather than avoiding potential future errors (*Courrier* and *Internautes*) and, secondly, the types of errors featured, chosen to shock and amuse. See, for instance, two reactions to the Facebook post in Figure 7.15:

81. ‘Mon dieu, mais je ne comprends rien !’ (BTM_9913)

82. ‘Peuchère, j’ai RIEN bité 😞’ (BTM_9818).¹⁷¹

Other users claim that without the inclusion of photos or a ‘translation’ (i.e. where the standard French is also included in the post), they would not have managed to understand the original. Criticisms based on comprehensibility anchor the complaints in the rational. In some cases, e.g. Figure 7.15, the concerns about comprehensibility appear to be genuine (14 such complaints in the sample of 30 comments). I, for instance, am still unsure what was intended by ‘rocha lol’.

¹⁷¹ The verb *biter* (also spelled *bitter*) is a slang verb meaning ‘to understand’.



Figure 7.15 BTM image: a Facebook classified ad with numerous errors (BTM.post_29)

In 24 of the 2,866 BTM comments, errors are portrayed as beyond the boundaries of the distinguishable entity which is 'French'. The following are reactions to a Facebook post which contains multiple errors of numerous types (Figure 7.2, p.221):

83. 'j'abandonne ! je ne comprends rien, parce que si il manque la ponctuation, manque surtout et avant une langue écrite puis parlée, parce que **là ce n'est pas du français** , non ?!!!' (BTM_ 46693)

84. 'J'ai cru que j'allais mourir étouffée (pas de ponctuation) et la rétine en feu (incroyable de faire autant de fautes) Même en lisant 2 fois, le contenu de ce message reste un mystère pour moi 😞 **les hiéroglyphes à côté, c'est de la gnototte !**' (BTM_47152)

In Example 84, a reference to hieroglyphics hyperbolically takes the criticism further than simply 'not French' to exoticize the errors as not even in the same script. A scale of 'Frenchness', which echoes somewhat the scale of *correctness* implied in *Courrier* and *Internautes* questions and responses (see Chapter 5), is implied by one BTM user:

85. 'Et les noms..... se transforme.... ça ne choque personne ????? Les noms se transforment, c'est un peu plus français non?' (BTM_ 24796)

The portrayal of language usages as 'not French' is taken further still by users who mention translation or decoding. For instance, in response to a second Facebook post with multiple errors (see Figure 7.12, p.244), one user writes:

86. 'Non seulement c'est une **torture pour les yeux**, mais en plus **ça fait mal au cerveau d'essayer de déchiffrer cette chose**. Depuis quand on est obligés de faire des efforts parce qu'eux n'en font pas??? C'est en dehors de ma logique. C'est vraiment si compliqué de prendre le temps de bien écrire? 🙄' (BTM_ 39822).

In drawing on images of torture and pain associated with understanding the text featured, the user not only presents the language used as 'not French' but as a personal affront to which they are victim. The use of the third person pronoun *on* then suggests this suffering is more widely shared and suggests that correct language is necessary for a society and that errors are disrespectful.¹⁷² In Chapter 6, we saw instances of speakers presenting themselves as victims of other peoples' language use, as here in Example 86, and previously in Section 7.4.2.

Usages are labelled as 'not French' in three LSP comments, including the following, which positions the media's language use as a different language:

87. 'Exercice corrigé. **Traduire en novlangue journalistique** la phrase suivante :
Après la mort d'un militant le conflit continue ; les écologistes critiquent le gouvernement et soulignent l'absence de dialogue [...].' (LSP_3570).

In this case it is the style of the language, rather than the presence of error which triggers criticism. Relying on the belief that French is a distinguishable entity with fixed boundaries, these comments frame non-standard usages as 'not French'.

In Chapter 6, we saw the use of imagery of attack and defence of the language in both the *Courrier* and *Internautes* samples, imagery which has been used in metalinguistic commentary since at least the sixteenth century in France (Moïse 2015: 4). In BTM comments, we find not the suggestion that the language is under attack, but rather that errors are an attack on 'Frenchness', exploiting the ideological relationship between language and nation, which is often played out in prescriptivist and purist discourses (Edwards 2012: 24-25). Images concerning 'Frenchness' are about more than the language, they concern society more

¹⁷² The comment also links making errors to laziness.

broadly, and a way of life. Consequently, they are reminiscent of anti-immigration discourses (similarly to the *Internauts* user who, in Chapter 6, opposed *intégrisme*). BTM reactions to a tweet sent to the *Front National* provide illustrative examples of this trope. The original tweet reads:

88. 'pour avoir la nationalité française sa serai la moindre des choses de parlé le français'.

The following examples are reactions to this tweet:

89. 'Et le retrait de la nationalité à ceux qui massacrent la langue ??? Franchement pathétique' (BTM_44476)

90. 'Totalemment d'accord ! Il fait déchoir de la nationalité celui qui massacre la langue française aussi' (BTM_44242)

91. 'Expulser cet individu 😂😂😂' (BTM_44900)

These jocular reactions (signalled by the emojis in Example 91 and the hyperbolic nature of the suggestions), play with the familiar trope of language and community and the related notion that failure to use the standard should or could result in exclusion from society (Langer and Nesse 2012: 611).

7.5 Conclusion

The qualitative sample of posts from the websites *Langue sauce piquante* and *Bescherelle ta mère* has given an insight into twenty-first-century lay linguistic commentary, a type of commentary that has hitherto received somewhat less attention in studies of French metalinguistic commentary. We have seen that humour is common in the posts and comments of both BTM and LSP, evident in jokes, jocular hyperbole, playful spelling and punctuation. The frequency of humour and of reactions of laughter reflects the position of BTM and LSP as forms of entertainment. However, more than this, humour seems to play an important role in BTM as a tool for disciplining error makers (cf. Heuman 2020: 4), rather than as a way to soften criticism (cf. Švelch and Sherman 2018: 2394). While Martin also used a range of techniques to create a sense of shared interest in *Le Courier de Vaugelas*, he did not often use humour. The humour in BTM and LSP also contrasts with the twenty-first-century source examined in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, the *Courrier des internautes*, which assumes a sober authority rooted in its connection to the *Académie française*.

Both LSP and BTM comments use the trope of declining standards, and in some cases the related ideology of a 'golden age'. These tropes were particularly prominent in discussions of

errors made by teachers, held up as gatekeepers and disseminators of the standard language in both samples. The importance of teachers in using and promoting the standard is also expressed in the *Internautes* corpus but was not observed in the nineteenth-century *Courrier*. In BTM comments, whilst some users consider errors by teachers to be particularly egregious, others label the expectation that teachers use the language flawlessly at all times as unrealistic.

The manipulation of traditional metalinguistic imagery for ironic effect, of which we saw hints in the *Courrier* and *Internautes*, is also present in LSP and is at its most prevalent in BTM. The users of these sites are clearly familiar with traditional imagery from the purist and prescriptivist discourse traditions (McLelland 2021) – for there are examples of the imagery being used in ways familiar from those discourses – but users also develop that imagery in a new way that particularly focusses on the supposed harmful impact of errors not just on the language, but also on those who encounter the errors.

There is a notable tendency in BTM, an exclusively lay space with no ‘expert’ input, to use extreme imagery and hyperbole. While both have often been viewed as typical characteristics of CMC because of its potential disinhibition effects (Demjén and Hardaker 2016: 354), LSP contains no extreme imagery and the *Internautes* corpus has just two examples, despite the fact that they also contain heated debate and passionate language. The extreme imagery of BTM may, then, be a particular feature not of CMC in general, but of (lay) ‘grassroots prescriptivist photo blogs’; Heyd (2014: 497) suggests that this type of text is characterised by ‘harsh’ critique. While it is still unclear whether offline lay language commentary has the same tendency towards extreme and vitriolic imagery, since the commentary of ‘ordinary’ lay speakers remains very little studied (Osthus 2018: 22-23), we nevertheless now have a much clearer picture of lay-lay language commentary.

In Chapter 6, we saw a move away – more so in the *Internautes* than the *Courrier* – from purist images which present the *language* as a victim (e.g. as ill or under attack) to the presentation of French *speakers* as the victims of incorrect language use. This tendency is even stronger in the BTM sample, where users are positioned as victims much more frequently than the language itself. On the few occasions when the language is the victim, it is other users who are portrayed as inflicting harm, rather than elements of the language. This suggests that users believe speakers have an *obligation* to use correct language, to avoid the harm that incorrect usage can cause others. The idea of obligation is also evident in BTM discourses of language use and citizenship. Users jokingly suggest that French citizenship should be revoked from

speakers who make errors, positioning correct language use as a joint endeavour and a necessary component for a polite and unified society (cf. Battistella 2005: 150-53).

The activity of prescriptivism is now open to its largest ever audience (McLelland 2021), and as Osthus (2003) affirms judging language no longer requires professional skills or expertise, 'Il suffit de se brancher sur Internet'. BTM is the embodiment of this. Its audience is likely the largest of all four sources, and it is the only one of the four sources which can be said to be, firstly, representative of exclusively lay discourse, and, secondly, of the commentary of 'ordinary' people, rather than lay enthusiasts. It is also striking that, even while not necessarily experts, some BTM users framed themselves as collectors of 'precious' errors, implying, albeit in jocular style, an assumed shared, prescriptivist endeavour of error-spotting. LSP, on the other hand, remains much closer to a language column, and the discussions between users in the comments section suggest an audience of language enthusiasts, similar to that of the *Internautes*. Rather than engaging in harsh criticism of the errors featured, LSP users more frequently discuss the language more generally and often descend into off-topic discussions of politics and other shared interests.

Overall, analysis of BTM comments shows more personal investment and emotional involvement in language prescriptivism than is true for the discourses in the nineteenth-century *Courrier* or in either of the other two online sources, the *Internautes* and LSP. It has thus yielded valuable new insights into discourses of prescriptivism. The question remains to what extent features of the language commentary observed on BTM might be found in lay language commentary in informal conversation and exchanges, which still remain largely inaccessible to systematic research. That inaccessibility makes such online spaces of lay language commentary all the more valuable as a source for folk linguistic discourse.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined lay and expert discourses on language and correctness, through an analysis of four sources of language commentary: *Le Courier de Vaugelas* (1868-1881); *Courrier des internautes* (2011-present); *Langue sauce piquante* (2004-present); and *Bescherelle ta mère* (2014-present). It has built upon an established body of work concerning language commentary in France, but with a focus on relatively understudied time periods (the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries), in relatively new forms (Facebook pages and blogs), and from lesser studied perspectives (laypeople). In particular, analysis of *Bescherelle ta mère* comments has given access to the language commentary of an often inaccessible section of society: ‘ordinary’ French speakers who are not experts, nor necessarily lay language enthusiasts. The combination of historical sociolinguistic methods with computer-mediated communication methods, as well as the need to limit the scope of the study, necessitated different, and at times complex, data sampling. Nevertheless, the combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis facilitated two main comparisons.

Firstly, a diachronic comparison of two language advice resources from two different time periods and two different mediums was presented: *Le Courier de Vaugelas* from the late nineteenth century (offline and print) and the twenty-first-century *Courrier des internautes* (online). Both sources have a Q+A format and publish readers’ questions about the French language alongside responses from ‘experts’, thus allowing for the direct examination and comparison of both lay and expert language commentary. Secondly, I undertook a synchronic comparison of two blogs, the blog posts and the accompanying user comments. Analysis of these two sources gave greater insight into lay discourses on language and correctness, particularly how users react to errors made by other people. This conclusion now draws together the findings from the study to address the research questions set out in the Introduction.

Research Question 1 asked which areas of the French language are of particular interest for French-speaking readers, which areas appear to cause difficulty and doubt, and whether this had changed over time. Analysis in Chapter 4 approached this question using mainly quantitative analysis to examine readers’ questions published in *Le Courier de Vaugelas* and the *Courrier des internautes*. Striking similarities were observed across the two corpora, with questions about meaning and morpho-syntax amongst the most frequent for readers from France and abroad. What is more, a small number of the same constructions caused doubt for readers in the two time periods. For instance, *Je ne sache pas que* was the subject of questions in both corpora. Perhaps even more strikingly, qualitative analysis in Chapter 5 then showed

that the same label of *barbarisme* was attributed to this construction by readers separated by some 130 years.

Stability in question topic was not equally evident across all language areas. Questions concerning language history were the largest category in the *Courrier* (691 of 2,019) but amongst the least frequent in the *Internautes* (19 of 316). Additional data would be necessary to confirm whether this reflects a lesser interest in questions of language history or a question selection bias – we know that the *Service du Dictionnaire* receives far more questions than it publishes. Language history is occasionally discussed in LSP posts, but usually as an aside and rarely as a principal topic. Perhaps, despite Paveau and Rosier's (2008: 212) assertion, language history is no longer the popular language topic it once was. The errors featured on *Langue sauce piquante* and *Bescherelle ta mère* have similarly been through a selection process, so that it is unclear how representative they are of errors actually made by French speakers more widely. Quantitative analysis of the *Courrier* was limited by the non-searchable nature of the corpus, online and offline. The transposition of this data, and similar historical sources, into searchable formats would greatly facilitate future historical sociolinguistic research. Despite this limitation, analysis of readers' questions published in the *Courrier* and *Internautes* has offered direct insight into the doubts and difficulties faced by French language speakers, rather than areas of perceived difficulty, as found in the expert-only perspective in grammars and usage guides, for instance.

Analysis of reactions to errors in LSP and BTM comments showed no significant differences in reactions based on the number of errors made or the type of error. What was important, however, was *who* made the error. Teachers and the media were mentioned in all four corpora, presented as gatekeepers of the language by some and as examples of *bad* language by others. In BTM comments, users discussed the expectation placed on teachers to use the standard language without error, with some defending that expectation whilst others labelled it unrealistic and unfair. Given that error type did not appear to affect reactions, future studies would benefit from analysis of a larger proportion of comments from fewer posts, allowing for greater analysis of lay-lay interactions. More generally, the analysis of LSP comments was somewhat limited by the sampling method. The LSP sample matched the BTM comment sample in word count, which meant that, since LSP comments are on average much longer, the LSP sample contained fewer comments. Since my analysis showed that any individual comment rarely touched on multiple tropes or images, matching the number of comments rather than word count would have been preferable.

Research Question 2 asked how expert and lay commentators create and negotiate authority in the four sources examined. Chapter 5 showed that the experts behind the *Courrier* and *Internautes* have different approaches to the delivery of language advice. Martin's responses in the *Courrier* – longer on average than those published by the *Service* in *Internautes* – rely more heavily on external authorities, using language reference texts to justify his decisions and literature to give examples of good usage. Whilst this suggests a more modest authority for Martin himself, Martin's relationship with external authorities is not so simple. The editor is also ready to disagree with the same authorities which he uses to support his decisions. We saw examples of disagreements with just two figures, Littré and Voltaire, but examples are more numerous (not discussed due to limitations of space). Martin's approach is methodical, walking his readers through his process and creating a 'story' for them to follow. He seeks to provide language advice which is both informative and interesting for its audience. The *Service du Dictionnaire*, on the other hand, bolsters the *Académie's* authority through the frequent promotion of *Académie* resources. The literary figures mentioned show a similar bias towards the *Académie*, with more *académiciens* cited than women authors in total (15 male *académiciens* to just one woman). The *Service* justifies and discusses its decisions minimally in comparison to Martin's *Courrier* responses, and frequently provides short responses which simply state its position, with no explanation or justification.

Courrier readers and *Internautes* users reference external authorities for two main reasons. Language reference texts are drawn on to evidence prior research, reinforcing their own authority by showing that although they have a query, they are aware of how to research such questions and of the *right* sources to consult. Secondly, literary works and language in the media were put forward as examples both of correct and incorrect language. Once again, such references serve to strengthen the readers' authoritative position by, firstly, having the cultural knowledge of literature and secondly, the ability to single out possible instances of incorrect language usage by perceived language gatekeepers, e.g. authors and journalists. Readers' use of external authorities further consolidates the assumption that those contacting these language advice services are lay language enthusiasts. To return to *Service du Dictionnaire* member Vannier's observation, 'Nous écrire, c'est déjà s'intéresser à la langue' (Ratouis 2018).

In the LSP blog, the authority of the experts is institutional, gleaned from their association with *Le Monde* and their professional roles as proof-readers, much like the authors of language columns who are often language professionals, e.g. Thérive, a novelist and literary critic, whose column was published in *Carrefour* (1953-55). LSP users engage with the content

of the blog and engage in a community of discussion with other 'LSpistes' and with the bloggers. This engagement rarely descends into explicit ridiculing or shaming of others for the errors made, but the premise of the website, which highlights and discusses errors made by others, supports an ideology in which language errors are, at best, worthy of discussion and, at worst, *bad*.

BTM was started by a 21-year old lay person who saw an opportunity for online virality when he realised that the Twitter handle '@Bescherelle' was not in use. The crowdsourced nature of BTM places its users in the position of authority. It is the users who single out errors in the writing of others, be that other internet users, celebrities or institutions. A binary hierarchy is created: those who make errors are subject to the examination of those who single them out and judge them. This hierarchy is reinforced in the user comments. For instance, whilst in cases of 'humorous' errors which result in an unintended taboo or sexual meaning, reactions of humour target the error itself; in most other cases, laughter and criticism are aimed at the person who made the error, cementing the superiority of those judging both the error and the individual. I suggest that criticism based on the elevation of certain speakers over others is a manifestation of standard language ideology, where one form of language and, by extension, the speakers of that form, is viewed as superior.

In all four sources, we saw evidence of the positioning of acceptability not as a binary of acceptable/unacceptable, but rather as a cline, in which usages can be more or less acceptable or unacceptable. A possibility for future study using these two datasets, is the question of how the experts' rulings compare to the linguistic codex, considering the areas of divergence from the expected norm. Glatigny (2001) began to explore this using the first and final print runs of the *Courrier* and observed that whilst Martin did not take a purist approach to the language, he was also not 'lax' in his adherence to the codex; a comparative approach could be illuminating. Glatigny's (2001: 156) study also suggested a possible change in approach to correctness over time, from first to final print run; a synchronic exploration of Martin's full editorship could therefore be worthwhile.

Research Question 3 concerned what tropes were used to pass judgement on language in the lay and expert commentary of the four sources. My analysis of BTM revealed discourses of decline which were not explicit in any other source and which centred principally on a belief in declining educational standards, further highlighting the assumed important role of education and teachers in the diffusion of the standard language. Of particular note from this analysis was the continued presence of criteria for the ideal language from seventeenth- and

eighteenth-century language commentary in the nineteenth-century *Courrier* and twenty-first-century *Internautes*. For instance, the desirability of analogy in the formation of words was explicitly referenced in *Courrier* questions and responses and in *Internautes* responses, alongside implicit references in the questions and answers of both samples. Other recurring tropes included logic, elegance and beauty. The ideal characteristics of a language seem to have remained stable across time, and in both lay and expert commentary.

Research Question 4 concerned the use of imagery in the four sources. Chapters 6 and 6 identified examples in all four corpora of purist and prescriptivist imagery with a long history in language commentary. Noteworthy was the way in which traditional metaphors and images had evolved in the twenty-first-century online corpora, in two main ways. Firstly, in BTM posts and comments, and in LSP posts, we saw the ironic use of traditional metaphors, e.g. the presentation of errors as beautiful or precious, rather than the standard language as an object of beauty. This shows users' awareness of traditional myths and metaphors associated with language commentary and a subversion of their intended meanings. Secondly, we saw traditional purist metaphors, such as suffering from illness or disease, being applied to present those seeing or hearing errors as suffering, rather than the language itself. Similarly, whereas traditional metaphors present incorrect language usages as inflicting pain on the language, we more frequently saw that those making errors are presented as causing the damage or pain. In both cases, the focus is on the people, not the language itself. The focus on the individual in these metaphors may be motivated by standard language ideology, rather than by purism: users do not aim to protect the language, but to differentiate themselves, speakers of *correct* language, from the dangerous speakers of *incorrect* language.

Frequently in BTM, and in two *Internautes* questions, we saw the use of extreme images (e.g. images of rape and murder), often aimed at other speakers. Neither extreme imagery nor *ad hominem* attacks were found in the LSP corpus, suggesting that this is not simply a broad online phenomenon. It may be that the use of extreme imagery is characteristic of specific forms of online language commentary, here what Heyd (2014) calls the 'grassroots prescriptivist photo blog'. It remains an open question whether this phenomenon is an artefact of such online sources, or whether it might be similarly prevalent in lay offline prescriptivism. The question warrants future study, firstly, by examining other similar instances of online language commentary, perhaps extending the examination to sites on which users have greater anonymity, given suggestions that anonymity increases disinhibition online (Hollenbaugh and Everett 2013: 283). Secondly, there remains a need for more

examination of offline lay prescriptivism, difficult though that is, to allow for comparison of offline and online discourses.

Finally, Research Question 5 asked what explicit and implicit language ideologies are present in lay and expert language commentary and to what extent they differ both diachronically and among the three online sources. Standard language ideology and prescriptivist ideology run through all four sources, evident in, for example, a desire to use correct language in *Courrier* and *Internautes* readers' questions and negative reactions to errors in BTM and LSP (more frequently in BTM than LSP). This is perhaps unsurprising in the Q+A sources, whose purpose is, after all, to provide advice; the format encourages prescriptions in answers to specific queries. Standard language ideology conceives that a language exists in a standardised form and that this form is the 'best' or 'proper' variety, an ideology which is applied to both written and spoken language but more forcefully to written language. The cline of acceptability found in Chapter 5's analysis of *Courrier* and *Internautes* samples, which suggests that usages within the standard variety can be more or less acceptable, is arguably a refinement of standard language ideology, or at least of the binary conception of the ideology which I presented in Chapter 1. Analysis of BTM, in particular, suggests that standard language ideology is still largely focused on written, rather than spoken, language; the errors featured on the blog are almost exclusively spelling errors. LSP posts occasionally feature spoken language errors but written language is more frequently targeted.

In LSP, the blog posts themselves engage in prescriptivism, highlighting and explaining the incorrect language use of the media and others. However, those interacting with the content rarely express explicit prescriptivist views and occasionally attempt to dispel folk linguistic myths (e.g. that spelling ability is indicative of intelligence). In BTM, prescriptivism is so taken for granted that error-spotting serves as a form of entertainment, and prescriptivism is enacted through finding and collecting errors, and subsequently judging both them and, often, those who make them. Furthermore, the tendency in BTM comments and posts to link the making of errors in the language to other characteristics (e.g. lack of intelligence, not being properly French) enforces the prescriptivist ideology that prescriptions should be followed; anyone not using the standard language is presumed to be incapable of doing so, rather than choosing not to.

While all four sources show clear prescriptivist tendencies, purism is less overtly evident and only in the *Courrier* and *Internautes* corpora. As discussed in Chapter 1, Walsh (2016: 8-9) shows that although the two ideologies overlap, purism goes further than prescriptivism in

two ways, in the belief, firstly, that the current form of the language is pure and any change to it is a form of contamination and, secondly, that the language should be protected from this change. Purist discourses are most prominent in *Internauts* questions and responses, apparent in the metaphors which portray the language as under attack or in need of defence, and in discussions of the threat of external influences on the language (cf. Thomas' (1991: 80) 'external purism'). For example, questions about anglicisms are numerous, readers' reactions to them are often explicitly negative, and the advice given by the *Service du Dictionnaire* is to avoid them. Some evidence of metaphor typical of purist discourses is also found in Martin's *Courrier* but this is not extensive, and no 'external' threat is presented by the authority or his readers.

The exploration of both expert and lay implicit and explicit ideologies has shown that long-held myths and beliefs about the standard language in France still manifest in online language commentary, and thus suggests that standard language ideology played and continues to play a significant role in these four sources of lay and expert French language commentary. Whilst some of these enduring views are harmless (e.g. the myth of a beautiful language), others are more damaging and can have further reaching and potentially prejudicial consequences (e.g. the belief that language use is indexical of intelligence). Prescriptivism is alive and well online, even amongst users who make errors themselves: judging the language use of others has now become a part of popular culture.

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