

The Linguistic Complaint Tradition in the Internet Age

**-a study of Internet blogs as a new channel for complaints about
the English language.**



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PART 1: THEORETICAL PART

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Opinions about language have been strong ever since people realized that language was about much more than just a means of communication, a tool facilitating the exchanging of messages. From early times, and still today, people's language has been an important factor when it comes to deciding their social and geographical background and their actual social ambition, i.e. where they tend to place themselves on the social ladder. One's ability to use language, or lack of such, can come to decide a number of outcomes in a person's life: where one settles down, one's eligibility and opportunities when it comes to education and career, one's social circle, choice of life partner and a number of other things. Some people may be puzzled by these statements, and wonder if language really can have such a decisive power in people's lives. Are education and career not more about dedication and obtaining great skills? And can a person not choose his or her friends independent of their way of speaking? The answer may probably be both positive and negative, but most likely negative, and that is one of the things that I aim at demonstrating in this thesis. People's opportunities are often proportional with their linguistic abilities, with how well they adapt to standard measurements of both spoken and written language transition. I will briefly refer to how the idea of a standard variety of English has come to win widespread support in the English-speaking world, particularly in Great Britain and the United States, for the past 500 years. I am interested in the workings of the linguistic complaint tradition throughout history, but most importantly today. I strongly believe that the complaint tradition still contributes to a widespread sense of insecurity among people when it comes to one's own linguistic capacities. People who complain about language, and they are often very influential people, make other people believe that there are actually rational reasons behind the complaints and that they ought to act according to these complaints¹.

In the first part of this thesis I will give a review of the theoretical issues raised during the last half a century of establishing Standard English as a prestigious variety. This is a variety supposedly "spoken by an educated group of people" (see e.g. Honey 1997:35), reportedly a variety available only to some vaguely defined high-class group, elevated over ordinary speakers. I am interested in how language evaluation has been a concern of both professional linguists and many lay people who have seen it as their duty to set things right

¹ Some people tend to believe that people who complain, do it because they can tell good language from bad.

when it comes to language. Lay people tend to believe that extensive complaining about language will ultimately set things right. Issues concerning opinions on language have led to a lot of fierce arguments, not to mention a lot of anxiety among ordinary language users. Today, however, there is an atmosphere of optimism among linguists; there is a strong belief that the times of struggling under the dictatorship of Standard English are coming to an end (Crystal 2005).

The second half of my thesis will focus on the present day situation. I will present the results of my own research concerning language complaints in Internet blogs. Linguists claim that the critical evaluative activities concerning language are coming to an end but I find that people still complain. Perhaps some people believe that all the complaining eventually will lead to some sort of divine pre-Babel situation (Wardhaugh 1999), where everyone gets their split infinitives right, where nobody uses slang or subject-verb contractions and where there are no incomplete sentences or hesitating expressions whatsoever. The goal of my project is to demonstrate that people are still very much concerned about correctness in the English language and that they are willing to take both time and effort to make explicit complaints when they find that the various rules within the English language are being violated.

On a number of occasions lay language users have made attempts at defining Standard English. I have already mentioned one frequently used definition, namely that Standard English is the variety spoken by educated people. What *educated* actually means is the first of many obstacles on the way to a deeper understanding of Standard English. One important concern of the people trying to define Standard English is which of the two –written or spoken English, sets the standard for Standard English, i.e. whether standard English springs from written or spoken English. At this point it suffices to state that written and spoken language are two very different ways of expressing a message; a thorough examination of the aspects of written and spoken language will follow in chapter 1.

It is useful to clarify my use of some key notions that appear throughout the thesis. One important notion is *standard language*. By a standard language I mean a particular variety within a language that is granted higher status by a significant number of people, both standard and non-standard users. In English, the standard is often considered to be a variety without any regional accent, spoken by educated people (see e.g. Bex and Watts 2000).

Grammaticality is another notion to be specified. Lippi-Green (2004) highlights the rather different views lay people and linguists have when it comes to grammaticality. Lay people consider grammatical everything that is said or written according to traditional

grammatical rules of standard English. Hence, many utterances in, for instance, African American Vernacular English (AAVE, by many seen as a highly stigmatized variety) would be considered ungrammatical by lay people. Linguists, on the other hand, see as grammatical every sentence that could ever occur in a language or variety as long as it reflects one of the possible sets of rules valid for a dialect. If any *native* speaker of a variety could ever produce a certain kind of sentence, it is considered grammatical by linguists (Lippi-Green 2004).

The notion of *correctness* may be compared to grammaticality, since lay people tend to consider correct and grammatical synonymous, i.e. a sentence is correct if it is constructed according to standard English grammatical rules. Conversely linguists consider correct everything that is considered grammatical within a certain variety, standard and non-standard alike.

My focus in this thesis will be on both written and spoken English. I will argue that most people do not experience linguistic freedom, rather the contrary. Due to the widespread complaining about language, there is a feeling of inferiority among many users of English, of which I will provide many examples in the second part of the thesis. People are still feeling insecure about their language after decades of being told that the way they speak is not nice or good enough. People are given limited opportunities in life often because of how they speak and not due to lack of skills. The pedantic critic may be one's next employer, one's teacher or a potential friend. One may write an excellent application for a job which one is more than qualified for, be called for an interview, and later walk out of the interview, disappointed and still without a job for reasons one does not understand. However, linguists are optimistic that this will not last for much longer, that we are now waking up from a "bad dream" or "escaping the linguistic prison house" to use Crystal's words (Crystal 2005:529, 534).

Traditionally, linguistics has consisted of two supposedly opposing camps: prescriptive versus descriptive linguistics. Since the 1960s when the concept of modern linguistics started to gain ground (see e.g. Chambers 2003), most linguists have subscribed to the descriptivist tradition, taking an observer's position when it comes to linguistic research. Students of linguistics learn about the binary opposition of prescriptivism and descriptivism from day one (Cameron 1993), as a well-defined and thoroughly agreed upon opposition. However, it may be that these, like many other good vs. bad, black vs. white oppositions are over-simplified. Cameron (*ibid.*) explores this topic in detail. She suggests that the nature of the two perspectives may not be very different after all.

Prescriptivism in language concerns setting up rules for how a particular language should be used (e.g. Crystal 2006). These rules tell people exactly how they should speak and write, and how they should not allow themselves to speak and write (*proscriptivism*). Such rules can be of almost all kinds: from parents prohibiting their children from swearing, to academies and boards set up by a government in order to “protect” or give advice concerning a national language, as we will see below (page 10). To many people, prescriptivism is also about setting up a particular *type* of rules, in order to improve and preferably conserve the language in a certain direction, enhancing conservative and elitist forms (Cameron 1993). Crystal (2005:399-400) also supports this view on prescriptivism:

“It is important to appreciate [...] why prescriptivists have had such a bad press. It is because they select, from the range of expressive opportunities found in the language, one of the options to the exclusion of others, on the basis of reasoning which, upon investigation, turns out to be spurious. The chosen option is *prescribed* as the ‘correct’ usage, and the excluded options *proscribed* as ‘incorrect’, and all the sanctions of educational practice are brought to bear on instilling a proper sense of the former in child intuitions, as well as antipathy towards the latter – and, of course, a correspondingly critical attitude towards those people (the less well-educated majority) who continue to use them.”

Especially Crystal’s statement about critical attitudes towards people who, either by choice or simply by lack of ability, do not live by the rules of the prescriptivists is very interesting here.

When it comes to *descriptivism*, this has been the branch of linguistics where most modern linguists have placed themselves for the past 50 years. Descriptive linguistics is concerned with describing language, as opposed to setting up a “user’s manual”. Descriptive linguists are interested in variation and change in language, emphasising that language is flexible and forever changing. This again is in sharp contrast to the prescriptivist’s aim at finding and conserving one particular and prestigious variety meant for all speakers.

The “neutral” position of linguistic descriptivism has provoked outrageous reactions. Lay-people feel frustrated because they think professional linguists ought to be able to give true and absolute answers to language questions. Not being able to approach linguists in order to get a true or absolute answer has led to a feeling of insecurity among people. This again has led to linguists being accused of being irresponsible and careless when it comes to such a serious matter as language (Cameron 1995). Referring to Aitchison (1996), Honey (1997:148) provides a clear example of this view: “The 1996 Reith Lectures were a classic example of

the linguist's contempt for popular concerns about language, dismissed as "a cobweb of ideas" which "must be swept away", and ridiculing the assumption that "someone, somewhere, knows what 'correct English' is".

In a discussion on the somewhat complicated relation between prescriptive and descriptive linguistics, Cameron (1993) suggests that the descriptivist position may not be exactly as descriptivist and neutral as it may appear. As I understand it, Cameron claims that descriptive linguists prescribe language almost as much as prescriptive lay people do. In Cameron's view the difference between the descriptivist and the prescriptivist approach is, however, that the descriptive branch does not explicitly set up rules. Still, a lot of people appear to be so anxious to get correct answers about language usage that they are willing to take any comment a professional linguist makes about language to be absolute and true, i.e. a rule. As a result, language anxious lay people tend to treat descriptive recommendations in a prescriptive way. However, linguists study varieties, and come up with results where a majority of speakers within a particular language or variety tends to abide by particular norms. The results are presented in works such as *The Oxford English Dictionary*, as Cameron (1993:8) points out. Although this dictionary is a descriptive result of linguistic research concerning RP, it is constantly used to "settle any argument about the existence, meaning and spelling of English words" (ibid. 8). Cameron (1993:8) also claims that since "science itself has authority in modern society, while at the same time the discourse of value remains a highly salient one for everyday talk about language, the absolute distinction between observing norms [i.e. accounting for the use within a particular variety] and enforcing them [prescriptivism] cannot be maintained in practice."

CHAPTER 2

SOME MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT LANGUAGE

Wardhaugh (1999:49) investigates the many ideas and beliefs people have and have had about language. He states that “Language is such an intimate part of our reality that each of us can set up as an expert on language matters”. But he then continues: “However, true expertise demands disciplined study of the relevant phenomena and what often passes for expertise in language has little or no basis in any kind of discipline”(ibid.). Since lay language users often prescribe language and seldom turn to linguists for advice, it is important to be aware of what is myth and fact in language so that we do not allow myths and misunderstandings to be seen as facts.

Lippi-Green (2004:10) presents what she labels “linguistic facts of life”. These facts are the following:

1. “All spoken language changes over time.
2. All spoken languages are equal in linguistic terms.
3. Grammaticality and communicative *effectiveness* are distinct and independent features.
4. Written language and spoken language are historically, structurally, and functionally fundamentally different creatures.
5. Variation is intrinsic to all spoken language at every level” (numbers added).

In the following I will discuss the myths connected to the above points and I aim at finding out to what degree the linguistic facts may weaken the myths.

All spoken language changes over time

Few people, linguists and lay people alike, would disagree that language changes over time. Evidence for this is easily accessible. Some people may point at how the *meaning* of words may change; others refer to writers like Shakespeare and Chaucer to illustrate how, for instance, the English language has undergone huge changes over time. However, there is a lot of disagreement about *how* we should deal with the fact that languages change.

Lippi-Green (2004) illustrates the fact that languages are constantly changing employing examples of literature from the fourteenth to the twentieth century. This is indeed a good way of showing how different the English language is today compared to how it used to be hundreds of years ago. Battistella (2005:8) also refers to old and new literature, saying “If they [i.e. languages] did not change, we might still be using dictionaries from one hundred

years ago and Chaucer and Beowulf would be much more popular with students.” As we know, Old English texts -in order to be understood- require a lot of close studying for a speaker of Modern English; it is almost like reading a text in a foreign language.

Honey (1997), whose opinions are strongly in favour of a fixed standard variety of English, also admits that language change is constantly taking place. However, Honey defends a different approach to language change than do (descriptive) linguists. In France, The *Académie Française*, according to Honey, takes care of all changes the French language undergoes (1997). The *Académie* gives advice on the use of new words, new meanings of words, words being used in new ways (nouns being employed as verbs etc.). The *Académie* evaluates change, and determines whether the change may be officially accepted or not (ibid.). Germany and a number of other countries have similar controlling organs (ibid.). According to Honey, there ought to be a similar system for English. The ideal would be an academy of language control which would evaluate and filter all linguistic innovations in the English speaking world and then come to an official agreement on the use in all the countries:

“In Germany, the standing conference of the Ministries of Culture of the various länder appoints, from time to time, a commission responsible for proposing changes in German usage, and after a consultation with Switzerland and Austria and *with ordinary citizens*, changes in spelling punctuation etc. become official” (Honey 1997:144, italics added).

Honey presents what sounds like a very efficient way of handling language change, if one subscribes to the myth that language change can be controlled or supervised. But who are the “ordinary people” Honey refers to in the German example? Perhaps they are educated people. Lacking an official organ to control language change, Honey points out who the unofficial control organ for English ought to be: “traditionally, any new use, whether by some scholar, or, more commonly, by groups of less educated people, must pass through the filter of approval by educated people generally” (ibid.147). In other words, uneducated speakers should test their language innovations in front of more educated people, and their potential scorn or acceptance should determine the future of the particular new usage.

In sum, both linguists and lay people agree that it is the nature of language to change over time. The point at which linguists and lay people disagree is whether language change can and should be monitored. Linguists believe that language change cannot be supervised, while lay people subscribe to the belief that a possibility exists of arriving at one standard

English language, which may be conserved eternally. In the empirical part of this thesis I will investigate whether or not language change is of interest to people complaining about the English language on the Internet.

All spoken languages are equal in linguistic terms

French and Italian are sometimes said to be especially suited for romantic utterances (see e.g. Wardhaugh 1999). Lippi-Green (2004) disagrees and claims that all languages are equally suited to convey any given utterance. Linguistic equality suggests that one may convey as romantically felt utterances in Russian or Chinese as one may in Swahili or Norwegian. This may be interpreted in various ways, but Lippi-Green's main point is that all languages are "equally capable of expressing a full range of ideas and experiences, and of developing to meet new needs as they arise" (Lippi-Green 2004:11). Lippi-Green mentions as an example a language in which there reportedly is no term for *snow*, while reportedly local languages in Greenland have several hundred terms for *snow*, depending on the *quality* of snow and a number of other factors. In this case even a world language like English appears not very sufficient when it comes to talking about *snow*. So, linguistic equality or inequality obviously fascinates people to a rather great extent, passing this kind of anecdotes as mentioned above on to one another. The main point is that no language is intrinsically better suited than others to discuss any topic, for example, technically advanced topics or everyday matters, such as romance. If the society where a language is spoken advances in a particular direction, for example, industrially or technically, the language of that society will evolve in such a direction that new words will come up to cover the demand of special terminology.

In spite of the seemingly clear conclusion of Lippi-Green's (2004), we encounter one problematic area with varieties *within* one language. Marenbon (1991) agrees with Lippi-Green on the view that "no language is superior to any other", stating that "there is no reason why one set of letters and sounds should be intrinsically better than another at standing for a certain sort of object or playing a certain role in sentences [...] (ibid. 248). Marenbon's argument however takes a rather prescriptive turn. For instance, he claims that non-standard dialect speakers or Creole English speakers will naturally be familiar with Standard English (or other standards') rules, and therefore not be entirely true to the rules of their own variety (Marenbon admits that also non-standard varieties do have a set of rules). Speakers of Standard English on the contrary will not be influenced by the rules of other varieties, and therefore, according to Marenbon, their speech will be linguistically superior. In my opinion,

it is quite outrageous to make such a claim. The claim suggests that speakers of Standard English are less likely to be linguistically influenced by other varieties.

It was stated above (page 11) that all languages are linguistically equal, i.e. equally adequate to express the ideas that the speakers of the language are in need of. However, sometimes there may occur interaction between speakers of different languages or varieties. The linguistic backgrounds of the interlocutors are different, and one speaker may introduce a topic where his or her interlocutor has very limited vocabulary (see e.g. Wardhaugh 2002). A typical situation would be a farmer talking to an inner-city inhabitant or an Inuit and a native from Chad approaching a *snowscape*, as in Wardhaugh's example (2002:12). Whether the conversation between the two persons is successful or not depends on linguistic appropriateness (Crystal 2006b). Crystal's main point is that a speaker of English, or any other language, ought to "be linguistically prepared" (Crystal 2006b:103). This means that a person should have a wide repertoire of linguistic varieties ready to be applied when a particular situation calls for it, for example, in a meeting with a speaker of a different variety than one's own. That is, one should be able to be formal in formal situations and informal when that is called for. If a speaker has merely one variety at his or her disposal, it may cause embarrassment and even conflict on a number of occasions. I will return to the notion of linguistic repertoire below.

Marenbon (1991) attacks the notion of all languages being adequate for expressions of all kinds, the notion that languages always will serve the needs of the users, as stated above. Here, once more as out of the blue, Marenbon claims that "[i]t was almost impossible to present clearly a complicated abstract argument in the English of King Alfred's day" (1991:249). It seems that Marenbon compares the English of King Alfred to Modern English. Obviously a certain "complicated abstract argument" expressed in Modern English is clearer to us as Modern English Speakers. We certainly would struggle to conceive of it as clear if we received the argument in Old English. However, we are not users of Old English and that is why Old English as a language does not adjust to serve our needs. I think the point Marenbon is trying to make is that languages develop from a primitive stage (here the stage is Old English) and eventually after, in this case, hundreds of years, they finally reach the stage where "complicated abstract arguments" may be successfully expressed. I conclude in Marenbon's own words: "This is a remarkable position, and a mistaken one." (ibid. 249)

To sum up, we may state that linguists and lay people disagree on the actual value of languages and varieties. Linguists say that all languages and varieties of languages exist for

the sake of the users and not vice versa. A language adjusts to the needs of the users; an urban, industrial society will have very different linguistic needs compared to a rural, agricultural society. This type of adjustment is the nature of language, all languages are capable of fulfilling the needs of the users, also when new demands come up. There is, for example, a reason why the word “ringtone” did not exist prior to the invention of the “mobile phone”.

Grammaticality and communicative *effectiveness* are distinct and independent features

Some people, perhaps supporters of standard English in particular, but also non-standard speakers, claim that certain varieties departing from the standard variety are difficult to understand. But are certain varieties in fact less adequate for getting messages through than others, or do the listener’s lack of willingness and possible prejudice towards a non-standard variety represent an obstacle for the message? I will argue that the claim that certain non-standard varieties are more difficult to understand than other varieties is another myth about language, but most of all it is an attempt to strengthen the argument for the promotion of uniformity in language, i.e. the promotion of standard English.

In my introduction, I presented the different views which linguists and lay-people hold when it comes to the notion of grammaticality. Since language and social interaction are so closely related (see e.g. Wardhaugh 2002), we also need to take another kind of grammaticality into consideration. Lippi-Green (2004:15) introduces “*socially constructed grammaticality*” which has to do with, for example, parents correcting children when they need to use the bathroom during religious services. No one is in doubt what the children mean when they say for example “I gotta pee”. In other words, the message is clear and the speech act *per se* is efficient. However, the listener will evaluate the message and probably find it inappropriate in the religious context for a number of reasons. This particular example concerns a child who does not know about social conventions i.e. socially constructed grammaticality. For this reason, children are often exempt from social sanctioning caused by inappropriate language use. If adults perform similar types of speech acts, the reactions to their language are bound to be different. An example could be adults swearing during religious services or producing socially ungrammatical utterances in a court of law. Such utterances could potentially involve severe consequences. The important point is that in spite of being socially ungrammatical *and* perhaps being rendered in a non-standard variety, such utterances are rarely misunderstood. Lippi-Green (2004:18) concludes: “*the variety of the language spoken cannot predict the effectiveness of the message*[.] [W]hile true, it is only a

partial truth. The variety of the language spoken cannot predict the effectiveness of the message, but it can predict some of the social evaluation the listener brings to the message and his or her willingness to listen". This means that if e.g. an AAVE-speaker says something, there is a possibility that a non-AAVE speaker would not understand his or her message, and this could happen for a number of reasons. One of the reasons is that the listeners' social evaluation of the speaker affects them to not wanting and not being able to listen to the actual message (see for example Wardhaugh 1999:69).

Above (page 12) I briefly mentioned the notion of linguistic repertoire. Linguistic repertoire has to do with the ability to be flexible when it comes to a speaker's own use of language. A speaker who is able to shift between styles, perhaps varieties and even between languages, depending on context, interlocutor etc., is indeed a very competent user of language. Such a user will know that using only one variety of English at all occasions will impair efficient communication instead of promoting it. The important point is to know when to be formal and when to be informal, which style to use in interaction with family, children, employers and employees, the priest at the local church or with friends at the pub. Using formal language in informal situations will lead to strange and embarrassing situations and so will the use of informal language in formal situations. As a concluding remark, I will refer to Crystal (2006b). He states that the prescriptive notions of "'always' and 'never'" (2006b:104) may help someone do well in the limited linguistic surroundings of high society. However, "[a]s a means of surviving in society as a whole, and especially in a modern multidimensional society, which makes a multiplicity of ethnic, specialist, and technological demands upon all of us, they are a disaster" (2006b:104).

Written language and spoken language are historically, structurally, and functionally fundamentally different creatures

Already in the eighteenth century, with Johnson's dictionary, there were debates on the relationship between spoken and written language. When Johnson was to give his recommendations for the pronunciation of English words, he "took the written language as a guide: For pronunciation the best general rule is, to consider those as the most elegant speakers who deviate least from the written words" (Crystal 2006b:171). Cameron, also referring to Johnson, claims that written language is "standardized earlier and more comprehensively than speech" (Cameron 1993:42). And: "any codification of speech norms is usually dependent on a standard for writing [...] [hence] non-standard pronunciation is

stigmatized as ‘dropping letters’, which rather absurdly implies that speakers are ‘really’ reading from an invisible teleprompter” (ibid. 42). These statements suggest that the spoken language should imitate the written, and this is where we may identify the myth of spoken and written language. Linguists draw a sharp line between spoken and written language, most commonly stating that written language is secondary to spoken language for a number of reasons (Bex and Watts 1999). Historically, written language has always reflected spoken language. Children learn how to speak before they learn how to write. The range of areas where spoken language is used is much wider than written. And finally, there is the issue of function; “basic units of the script can be put into correspondence (not necessarily one-to-one correspondence) with units of the spoken language” (ibid. 73). Lippi-Green (2004:21) states that written language is a tool to “convey decontextualized information over time and space”, writing helps us store “masses of information for ourselves or those who come after us”.

Crystal emphasizes the importance of written language in a standardization process (2005 and 2006b). Historically in the standardization process, the main focus has been on written language and this has become even more detectable “as written English increasingly diverged from spoken English” (2005:254). It is quite interesting that Crystal, as a linguist, allows himself to make a claim of this sort, considering the salient agreement that exists² around the dubious link between written and spoken language, where one is reported to be a model for the other. Crystal concludes:

“The view that a writing system is a way of representing a speech system became steadily less relevant, as the standard evolved. Few of the developments which took place in writing bore any relationship to what was going on in speech. The written language [...] was taking on a life of its own –speech developing in one way; writing in another. We live with the consequences today: a language where there is a stark contrast between the dynamic world of spoken regional English and the static world of written Standard English” (ibid. 255).

Written language is permanent i.e. normally one can return to a written text and go through it several times. As a consequence, it is also possible to control and sanction written language. A text is read and the content, grammar and spelling are being evaluated by both the writer and the reader. Based on evaluation, the text may be rewritten in order to correct the possible errors. Such an evaluation process is extremely important in printed published texts. It is also,

² See for example the heading of this section, from the linguistic facts presented by Lippi-Green (2004).

according to Crystal (2006b), more important to have a certain standard in written language than in spoken, since the contact between the author of a text and the reader may be extremely remote both in time and space compared to a spoken conversation. In speech we have the opportunity to clear up misunderstandings as they occur (marked by explicit comments such as ‘*what?*’ or a puzzled facial expression), while these are not available tools in written texts.

Written language does not come naturally to human beings (ibid.) the way spoken language does, given human interaction as opposed to social isolation. Crystal concludes: “[Written language] has to be learned, through formal processes of teaching, usually in school” (ibid. 23). Crowley (1991) refers to the Swann-report³ which also represents the myth that spoken English is a representation of written and not the contrary: “although we are more concerned with the ability to write in Standard English than to speak it, we feel that pupils should have the spoken form at their command, should they want to use it” (Swann 1985:451 in Crowley 2003:253). Crowley aims at explaining the core message of this statement, and suggests that a possible interpretation could be that “‘written Standard English’ and ‘spoken Standard English’ are the same” (ibid. 253). Or is there “some sort of idealized code [of] ‘Standard English’, of which there are two forms realized in practice: one written and one spoken?” (ibid. 253).

Linguists believe that the reference to written and spoken language where one is a model for the other is wrong. It is wrong due to the very different natures of written and spoken language. Spoken language is natural to human beings exposed to social interaction with other human beings. Written language is something we as human beings, with varying success, may learn after careful instruction and training. Lay people may describe good speakers as people who speak the way they write. This statement makes no sense at all when we consider, for example, the arbitrary relationship between sounds and symbols i.e. letters of the alphabet (e.g. the different realizations of the letter c in a word like *consequence*).

Variation is intrinsic to all spoken language at every level

The last linguistic fact discussed by Lippi-Green (2004) concerns variation as a natural and unchangeable part of language: “Spoken language varies for every speaker in terms of speech sounds, sound patterns, word and sentence structure, intonation, and meaning, from utterance

³ A report of a commission set up by the British government in 1985 to give advice on the teaching of the English language in British schools (Crowley 2003).

to utterance” (Lippi-Green 2004:25). According to Lippi-Green (2004) there are “three sources of variation in language”:

1. “Language-internal pressures, arising in part from the mechanics of production and perception[.]
2. [L]anguage-external influences on language, as a social behavior [sic] subject to normative and other formative social pressures[.] [...]
3. [V]ariation arising from language as a creative vehicle of free expression” (ibid. 25 numbers added).

This linguistic fact contradicts the myth about uniformity in language, i.e. that a language without variation may be achieved. Thomas Sheridan, famous for his elocution courses in the eighteenth century, emphasized ‘*linguistic consciousness*’. He claimed that “people did not take enough care when they used [language]” (Wardhaugh 1999:66). Sheridan’s goal was “to inform [speakers’] habits of mind together with habits of speech” (Mugglestone 1997:53), i.e. to give people a linguistic awakening with *linguistic consciousness* as the result. However, what happened according to Mugglestone (ibid. 53), was that Sheridan succeeded in creating an “‘idea in the mind’, a set of beliefs surrounding the emerging and non-localized ‘received pronunciation’ which in themselves were often at some *remove from linguistic reality*” (1997:53, italics added). In spite of this, people accepted Sheridan’s ideas, and widespread linguistic insecurity and complaining about language is the legacy still present in the twenty first century.

Variation may be used consciously or sub-consciously as Lippi-Green (2004) points out. She states that we as language users have a wide range of varieties and variables to choose from when we speak, and the choices we make, deliberate or not, will indicate who or what we are and where we are situated socially. Equally, we make similar evaluations about the speech of other people: “We perceive variation in the speech of others and we use it to structure our knowledge about that person” (2004:30). Mugglestone presents a similar argument about variation:

“it is [...] heterogeneity rather than homogeneity, pluralism rather than the monolithic which in real terms will mark linguistic usage in a multi-dimensional society. This, rather than uniformity, is the normal state of language and, as language history reveals, all the prescription in the world will not necessarily effect any change, nor will it bring that national uniformity of usage which its advocates in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had hoped for.

Language instead, especially in its spoken forms, varies regionally, socially, and contextually as speakers modify aspects of their linguistic behaviour in keeping with the demands of register or style, formality or its converse” (Mugglestone 1997:52).

This statement explicitly contradicts the myth of an achievable and desirable uniformity in language, *one* single variety to be suited for all situations. Claims of this sort from professional linguists, however, do not stop lay people from believing the contrary. Self evaluation tests reveal, according to Mugglestone (ibid.), that people are generally highly aware of what is considered ‘correct English’. This is in spite of the fact that the same people do not necessarily apply the particular prestigious variants to their own speech (ibid.).

Sheridan’s legacy has left twenty first century speakers with a certain set of myths and particular ideas about how language works. Pronunciation and grammar have become a “national status symbol” and either a speaker is in or out of the exclusive club of successful speakers. Group-belonging is easily determined based on a few key features such as h-full or h-lessness (ibid. 54) in words like *heart* (pronounced variably as /hart/, /hɑ:rt/ and /art/) or glottal stops. Lay people’s prescriptive view on language issues tends to be black/white, either/or, as mentioned above. Mugglestone labels these views as “binary absolutes” of good/bad, right/wrong, and prestigious/vulgar (ibid. 55). Lay people tend to continue subscribing to these beliefs, disregarding the “empirical evidence of the contrary” (ibid. 55) Most likely the lay prescriptivists have a hard time categorizing speakers most of the time, given the fact that variation is ever-present in language: a person’s spoken language may be close to standard English in formal interactions, while in informal conversation the same person’s speech may both comprise glottal stops and multiple negations.

In sum, linguists believe that variation within language is normal and natural. As formerly stated (page 12), there is a constant demand for speakers to be able to adjust their speech according to style, degree of formality, one’s interlocutor and a number of other factors. Lay people tend to subscribe to the belief that uniformity in language is both desirable and achievable, the ideal would be one single variety of, in this context English, suited for all speakers and contexts.

CHAPTER 3

STANDARD ENGLISH AND THE COMPLAINT TRADITION IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

According to Milroy and Milroy the *ideology of standardization* has been “promoted and maintained” through the complaint tradition (Milroy and Milroy 2003:26). This is a tradition within the history of the English language where people from all layers of society have complained about English. The goals and purposes of the complaints have varied according to the changing position the English language has had in society throughout history. Before English was established as the official language in England people also complained. However, at that time the important issue of complaint was the extensive use of French, and about the fact that the use of French was imposed on all citizens (ibid.).

When English finally came into official use, in 1362 with the opening of Parliament (Crystal 2005), the character of the complaints changed. The new type of complaints concerned lack of correctness and misuse of the English language on every level: spelling, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. These types of complaints are still salient today: “Complaints about non-standard usage [...] continue to appear in very large numbers in newspapers and journals” (Milroy and Milroy 2003:33) and in recent years on the Internet which provides the main source of complaints for this thesis. The people complaining come from almost all walks of life: “ordinary newspaper readers [...], prominent journalists and established literary men and women” (ibid. 33).

Milroy and Milroy divide the complaints into two categories (ibid. 30): Type 1 includes complaints concerning correctness. They “attack ‘mis-use’ of specific parts of the phonology, grammar [and] vocabulary of English (and in the case of written English ‘errors of spelling [and] punctuation [...]’)” (ibid. 31). Type 2 complaints are concerned with the moral aspects of language. These complaints emphasize the importance of “clarity in writing and attack what appear to be abuses of language that may mislead and confuse the public” (ibid. 31). Obviously the types of complaints overlap (ibid.) and it is often difficult to place complaints in one category or the other. Milroy and Milroy finally provide some typical characteristics of the complaint tradition:

- The people complaining tend to refer to a point back in time when language was used “more correctly and effectively”. Milroy and Milroy however claim that there was no such “Golden Age” for the English language (2003:40).

- “Someone or something has to be blamed for this alleged decline” (ibid. 40-41). In modern day debates about the English language linguists are sometimes accused, as we will also see in the following.
- “Linguistic decline is believed to be bound up with a general moral decline –a decline in general standards of behaviour” (ibid. 41). In the following we will see for example how some people link bad grammar to crime in their complaints (see page 40 on grammar and hooliganism).

In order to understand the situation of the English language today it is important to consider the history of English in order to achieve a fuller perspective. The standard English of today is a result of several hundred years of language change. Some of these changes have come naturally over time; other changes have been created by language users experiencing different types of unease using the language. Such unease in the most extreme case is lack of intelligibility (see for example Crystal 2005) and becomes a very practical problem since language is our main tool of communication at all levels. But unease about language can also be a result of a number of factors other than actual problems in understanding one’s interlocutors.

Already in the fifteenth century people started to evaluate language (Crystal 2005: 225), and we have been able to trace a number of “standardizing trends” (ibid. 254). During the late Middle Ages complaints concerned mostly the position of English as compared to French in society: “Medieval complaints about language were not usually of the kind that have become most familiar since about 1700, i.e. complaints about supposed incorrect usage; they were more concerned with the relative status of French and English in the Kingdom” (Milroy and Milroy 2003:26). In other words, the debates over correct and incorrect usage came later, in the eighteenth century (Crystal 2005) when the “ideology of standardisation” was established (Milroy and Milroy 2003:29). The actual term ‘Standard English’ did not appear until the early nineteenth century (Crystal 2005). Although the label Standard English appeared relatively late in the history of English, it does not mean that there was no equivalent to it earlier. A very strong linguistic awareness started to grow as soon as English began gaining ground from French and Latin as a language for both religious and judicial purposes, as well as a common language to be used among ordinary people (Crystal 2005).

In the fifteenth century there started a process that would transform the English language, which at the time was rather unstructured with no one fixed system of either vocabulary and pronunciation, or punctuation and spelling (ibid. 254). Before reaching the

position the English language holds today, there were 500 years of “accumulation of formative influences, which affected different aspects of the language at different rates at different periods” in Crystal’s words (2005: 254). The focus when it came to language change and debate would “relate[...] to vocabulary; sometimes to grammar; sometimes to spelling, or to the relationship of spelling to pronunciation” (ibid. 254), until reaching the present form. Supporters of an eternal, stable variety of English may say that the Standard English of today is to be kept, that the language has reached its final stage. However, history has shown that this is not very likely to be true. If we could compare the English spoken in a hundred years from now, we would most likely find it just as different from present day English as the English that was spoken a hundred years ago.

The complaint tradition -spelling

A number of different landmarks in history are often mentioned when it comes to the rise of Standard English (Crystal 2005). In this thesis I choose to let the invention of Caxton’s printing press in 1476 mark the beginning of Standard English. It may be said to mark the beginning since the printing of the written word came to win such “enormous authority” (Honey 1991:13). Honey characterizes the first printed English as “reflect[ing] the linguistic usages of London” and that it “came to be regarded as *standard written* English” (Honey 1991:13). His conclusion about “standard written English” was a bit premature since the notion of a standard variety was only established in the eighteenth century, as mentioned above (page 20).

Milroy and Milroy (2003) suggest that Caxton needed a variety as close as possible to a standard, probably a necessity since he wanted his books to be bought, read and understood by as many people as possible. According to Milroy and Milroy (2003), he chose the “South-East Midland” dialect as the basis for his books (ibid. 27) but not only for linguistic reasons. The area where this variety belonged was also “the most prominent politically, commercially and academically” (ibid. 27).

Caxton was a businessman whose main aim was to earn money. His linguistic capacities were not of the most sophisticated (Crystal 2005). His publications also suffered due to Caxton’s desire to publish as many books as possible in a very small amount of time in order to make the production economically efficient. Efficient production left little time to revise and correct, which was only one of the many reasons why Caxton’s publications left many a reader feeling confused. Crystal mentions the fact that many of the typesetters

working for Caxton came from the European continent since native typesetters were hard to find on the British Isles at the time (2005). A number of Caxton's employees were Dutch, and that is why we find traces of Dutch spelling in present day English. An example is the gh-spelling in a word like *ghost* (Crystal 2005). Being foreigners, many of Caxton's workers did not have any natural "intuition about English spelling norms and what would count as an error" (Crystal 2005:257). As a result they made decisions based on other judgements than language; for instance, one would not hesitate to add the letter *-e* to the end of a word if it suited print-technically, i.e. to make a line become complete (ibid.).

Regardless of efficient production and foreign typesetters with poor intuition for spelling, Caxton had to make actual linguistic choices. Crystal on many occasions refers to the many different house-styles of present day publishers: Caxton, importantly, had to invent a style; there were no guidelines from publishers before him, "[h]e was the first" (Crystal 2006:15). Wardhaugh says about Caxton's linguistic choice that he "chose to print materials in the literary dialect of English with which he was familiar, using the spelling conventions of that variety[.] Printing therefore quickly established one variety of English as being more important than others as printers followed Caxton's example" (Wardhaugh 1999:136). Caxton was from Kent, but had lived several years abroad. His English was influenced by his years in Belgium (Crystal 2005), and he himself realized that the language had undergone change only within the course of his lifetime: "'certainly our language now vsed varyeth ferre [far] from whiche was vsed and spoken whan I was borne'" (Crystal 2005:256).

As already mentioned, many scholars award Caxton with the label "founding father" when it comes to the rise of Standard English. Crystal asks whether the raise of Standard English actually could have happened at an earlier point in history (2006b:25), but arrives at the conclusion that the language in the Middle English period was far too unstable for people to be able to make linguistic agreements. Crystal claims that "A standard presupposes a certain level of stability in a language. And in Middle English, that stability wasn't there" (ibid. 25). This ties up with Milroy and Milroy's argument that in the Middle English period the main goal was to establish English instead of French as the official language (Milroy and Milroy 2003).

Great variation characterized the birth of a standard written English language (Crystal 2005) and Caxton's early printed texts are characterized by individual choices and inconsistency. It therefore becomes clear that as soon as many people could get access to the exact same written texts (Crystal 2006b), a "linguistic stability" could be achieved and "a

climate for the emergence of a standard language was being formed” (Crystal 2006). With Caxton’s printing press the evaluation process was bound to begin.

The evaluation process, or the complaint tradition, would start eventually after the first printed texts were spread to the educated readership of the late fifteenth century. Spelling was the first aspect of the English language which came under attack (Crystal 2006b). There was a widespread view that the English spelling was out of control (Crystal 2005) and scholars with presumably genuine interest in language stepped forward with suggestions as to how the English spelling could be improved and stabilized. Again it may be useful to remember that Caxton’s main goal was to reach financial success in the printing industry and “his observations about language were [...] sporadic and incidental, and not a reflection of any language policy on his part, or perhaps even of any particular interest in the language as such” (Crystal 2005:258). So Caxton’s educated and language oriented contemporaries were naturally eager to make their comments, and also to publish written work using their own spelling norms.

Crystal refers to two early reformers; Sir John Cheke (1514-57) and Sir Thomas Smith (1513-77). Soon after we find the Chester Herald John Hart (?-1574), William Bullokar, Alexander Gil (1565-1635) and perhaps most importantly Richard Mulcaster (1530?-1611) in the linguistic spelling debate (2005) and in the complaint tradition.

John Hart advocated for a spelling norm in which the written word came, in his view, as close to the spoken equivalent as possible. The written language ought to have “a phonetic basis [...]—one sound, one letter” and this would “rid the language of its ‘divers vices and corruptions’” (Crystal 2005:268) The vices and corruptions Hart is referring to are for example the use of one letter for several sounds (as in *gentle* and *together* where the letter *-g* has different realizations) and the use of several letters for one sound (as in *sette* and *hadde*, for *set* and *had*).

Superfluous letters also became an issue when the Renaissance introduced spelling based on *etymology* (Crystal 2005) in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. Etymology concerns the original meaning of words (Crystal 2006). Focus on etymology led to a number of changes in English spelling, changes whose results are present in the language today. People believed that if one was able to detect a Latin origin in an English word, one would be able to spell the word correctly with greater facility. A word like “*det*” had its origin in the Latin word “*debitum*”. In order for people to see the Latin in this word, the letter *-b* was inserted and the result is the present day “*debt*”. Similarly, “*iland*” became “*island*” because of Latin

“insula” (Crystal 2006:29). In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the etymology approach to spelling may have had some relevance, although in Hart’s opinion it promoted further confusion among the language users (Crystal 2005). As an experiment of thought, we may conclude stating that etymology hardly helps anyone spell correctly in Modern English, 600 years later.

Ironically, it is the name of the person perhaps the least interested in language, Caxton, which became one of the most influential in the process of establishing an English spelling system. He became influential not because of his language, but because he created an awareness of language among people. Other reformers may have had noble ideas about fixing the language once and for all (as many reformers after them), but their individual views were far too different, and they were never able to reach any common agreement (Crystal 2005 and 2006b). Crystal suggests that ordinary language users also had difficulties getting to grips with the reforms being introduced. The suggested reforms came with new letters and were “unfamiliar, complex, idiosyncratic and not entirely self-consistent” (Crystal 2005:268). Also, there was an attitude among people that they would not accept any linguistic novelty being imposed on them by self appointed authorities in linguistics. Means of sanctioning those who would not conform to the suggested linguistic reforms did not exist in early times like they do today; nobody would lose their job for not spelling words according to the suggestions. Hence, the linguistic efforts of John Hart and the other spelling reformers of the sixteenth century did not have the strength to root in the English language, and the common attitude towards the development of the spelling in English was largely “laissez-faire”, in Crystal’s words (2005:268).

It may seem like the English language would be left on its own from this period on, since no two proposals of spelling reform were equal (Crystal 2006b). However, a proposal by the headmaster of Merchant Taylors’ School, Richard Mulcaster proved to be successful to a large extent. Mulcaster’s idea of a reform was to *organize* the language based on the way it was in the sixteenth century. In Mulcaster’s view, the current language of that time was a result of a natural development, and *custom* was a key term (Crystal 2005). He, like Hart, did admit that it was “a very necessary labor to set the writing certain” (ibid. 268) but Mulcaster chose to organize into systems what was already in the language (spelling, grammar etc.) without adding anything new (ibid.). Mulcaster sought to “gather [...] all those roaming rules, that custom had beaten out, into one body’.” He realized that the written language and the spoken language (with all its regional varieties present) had taken different directions and was

now too separate for a spelling system based on sound in the spoken language to make sense (ibid.). Looking at the English language of today, we see that Mulcaster's proposal was one of success. His collection of 8,500 words shows a remarkable similarity to the present day spelling (50% are spelled similarly and the cases of different spelling are predominantly in the category of *elementaire vs elementary*) (ibid.). Mulcaster was wrong only at one point, namely, he claimed that new elements should not be added to the language. After his time two new letters were added to the alphabet, the total number rising from 24 to 26 letters. This happened as a result of the new distinction between the letters *i/j* and *u/v* (ibid.).

By the end of the sixteenth century the arguments over spelling started to settle down (Crystal 2006b). However, then we reach Shakespeare's time, the seventeenth century, and we still find considerable variation in the spelling system (ibid.). In Shakespeare's First Folio, Crystal finds various spellings of *accused*: *accused*, *accusde*, *accust* and *accus'd* (ibid.). Crystal also provides a statistical perspective of how different the English spelling of the seventeenth century was from present day spelling. "[A] sample of 100 words beginning with A from the First Folio[...] displayed 180 variant forms, and 53 of them were different from those in use today" (ibid. 162). This equals one in three words as different from today (ibid.). Measuring writings from approximately 80 years later, from the end of the seventeenth century, Crystal finds that the figure is one in 50 words, which shows a considerable step towards the spelling of the twentieth century (ibid.). A hundred years later, Crystal finds a difference of one in 400 words (ibid.), which is not a very large number of words. Johnson's dictionary came out in 1755 (ibid.) and we find that most of the words are now spelled in a familiar way to modern day users, despite that we do find that "choice between -l and -ll" (ibid. 163) was still not fixed (as in *downfall/-l* and *pitfall/-l*); nor was "the choice between -or and -our" yet stable (as in *confessor/-our* and *inheritor/-our*) (ibid. 163). The arrival of Johnson's dictionary consolidated English spelling. Johnson, being aware of the problem of alternative spellings, made a number of recommendations of use. As a result, the authority of the printed word again became very significant (see above on Caxton, page 21) and Johnson's recommendations were highly influential (ibid.).

Simultaneously with the debates over and complaints about spelling in Europe, the New World Society in North-America was expanding in a number of ways. Not only was the population growing in numbers, leading to the founding of increasingly big cities (see e.g. Crystal 2005), but the new American people was also growing conscious about linguistic matters. Noah Webster, a teacher, clerk and lawyer stated: "Nothing can be more ridiculous,

than a servile imitation of the manners, the language, and the vices of foreigners’” (Crystal 2006b:164). Webster would gain a position in American English studies similar to that of Johnson in British English (ibid.). He published a dictionary, a grammar and a guide to spelling (ibid.). He also made several proposals for language reform, and a few of them were largely successful. In modern English, one of the main differences between British and American English are fewer letters in the American English spelling (as in e.g. colour in British English vs color in American English). To omit “superfluous and silent letters” in the American spelling was also one of Webster’s main goals (ibid. 165).

Webster actively contributed to the bringing of the complaint tradition to the New World. “British English was too corrupt and in a state of decline” (Crystal 2005:420). Crystal claims that the arrival of American English made it impossible to believe that there could ever be such a thing as a common standard language for the whole English-speaking world (2006b). From the end of the eighteenth century, with Webster’s work and growing patriotism as main catalysts, a new standard started developing on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, and it could not be stopped (ibid.). However, language history tends to repeat itself. As soon as some sort of American linguistic identity was established, it started to fragment. The American continent was enormous, and the people who settled down there were from different backgrounds and did not always share attitudes about what the new nation and its language ought to be like (Crystal 2005). Numerous attempts were made to create a national society of language that could deal with language issues but they all failed. People continued to complain and disagree without coming up with results (Crystal 2005). At the same time, people in Britain would now complain about the new English of the colonies, here by Thomas Hamilton, a Scottish visitor in America:

“Unless the present progress of change be arrested by an increase of taste and judgement in the more educated classes, there can be no doubt that, in another century, the dialect of the Americans will become utterly unintelligible to an Englishman” (Crystal 2005:422).

Not only American English is the reason for the variation still present in the English language today. Crystal mentions the Internet as another source of variation. This is because differences which have traditionally been considered regional (such as American English, British English, Australian English etc.) are losing their regional or national specificity with readers and writers all over the world. And a consequence of this is a spelling variation on a

“world scale”, “with no easy way of deciding which variant belongs where” (Crystal 2006:168).

In short, Caxton marks the beginning of the notion of standard English. The linguistic choices and the spelling in his printings may be characterized as arbitrary and Caxton’s main goal was to make a living out of printing and the bookselling industry. However, as a result of his work, his educated readership grew a linguistic consciousness which opened up to linguistic evaluation followed by complaints. Already at this point, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the debate circled around the supposed link between written and spoken language as well as etymology i.e. the original meaning of words. Finally, what is interesting when it comes to spelling is that, according to Crystal’s measurements, the latest from 1755 (Crystal 2006b) the English spelling has been rather stable during the last 200 years. This suggests that a certain stability in the English spelling has been achieved.

The complaint tradition -vocabulary

As demonstrated in the previous section, debates over spelling were strong during the sixteenth century (Crystal 2006b). But throughout this century another linguistic component became important, as the issues over spelling started to settle down. The new favoured issue in the complaint tradition was the English vocabulary (ibid.). The gist of the debate was whether the English vocabulary could be considered as equal in value to the culturally well-established languages of Europe such as Latin, Italian and Spanish (ibid.). The literary work which really heated up the debate on vocabulary was the Bible, which was translated in a number of different English versions during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (ibid.). Choices in vocabulary upset a number of people, and this debate split the participants in the language debate in two opposing camps: those who saw foreign influence on the English vocabulary as linguistic enrichment and those who considered it a sign of decay (ibid.). After Tyndale’s version of the New Testament in 1525-6 (ibid.), some critics commented the use of, for example, “*senior* instead of *priest*”. An even more trivial example was Tyndale’s mixing up of “*naye* and *no*” (ibid. 36).

“Complaints about English in the sixteenth century usually focus on its supposed inadequacies when compared to Latin and Greek and even with other more fashionable non-classical languages such as French and Italian. They [i.e. the complaints] are associated with the rise to

prominence of English as a 'standard' language in so far as they reflect the feeling that English needed a wider vocabulary" (Milroy and Milroy 2003:27).

When translating for example Latin and Greek texts into English, translators feared that the English vocabulary would turn out to be inadequate in expressing ideas in, for instance, poetry (Crystal 2006b). Crystal sees the solution to this issue as simple. If the English language as it was in the seventeenth century proved unsuited for expressing meanings found in texts in a foreign language, then an easy way to make the language more adequate would be to import the words which the English language appeared to be lacking (ibid.): "If languages like French and Latin were superior to English, then English would automatically improve its quality by adopting their properties, such as their vocabulary" (Crystal 2005:288). This was also how English came to deal with the excessive need of new words as society expanded culturally, religiously, technically and globally (Crystal 2005). Milroy and Milroy refer to this process of "acquiring more functions" in the English language as an "*elaboration of vocabulary*" (2003:26).

Borrowing words from other languages was already common in English in the Middle English Period (Crystal 2005), when there had been extensive import of Latin words (ibid.). However, the rate at which English then adopted foreign words predicted that the result was bound to be remarkable (ibid.). The fact that the English language adopted foreign words at such a large scale at this particular time may have had several possible explanations. If we take the historical period into account, we find ourselves in the Renaissance. The Renaissance represented the "rebirth of learning" (Crystal 2005:288) and the new focus on classical languages, literature and art, and "rethinking of religious and scientific values" (ibid. 288) created a need for new words and terms that did not previously exist in the English language. Also, the Renaissance was a time when European explorers set sails to discover the world and their discoveries were sometimes of linguistic character, bringing words such as *potato* into the English language (Crystal 2005). Language never exists in a vacuum (see e.g. Wardhaugh 2002) independent of what is going on in the society where the language belongs. Accordingly, the English language adapted to the changes and new interests of its society.

Critics eagerly attacked the lexical innovations. Crystal includes a passage from the Preface to Edmund Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579) to illustrate this point:

“they patched vp the holes with peces and rags of other languages, borrowing here of the french, there of the Italian, euery where of the Latine, not weighing how il, those tongues accorde with themselues, but much worse with ours: So now they haue made our English tongue, a gallimaufrey [“dish made up of all kinds of odds and ends of food” (Crystal 2005:291)] or hodgepodge of al other speches” (Crystal 2005:291).

Other complaints included writer George Gascoigne’s claiming that “[t]he most auncient English wordes are of one sillable” and Sir John Cheke stating that “I am of the opinion that our tung shold be written cleane and pure, vnmixt and vnmangeled with borrowing of other tungen” (Crystal 2005:292). The belief that monosyllabic words in English had an “original” status also led to the “inkhorn-controversy”. Inkhorn-terms were loanwords which were considered lengthy (i.e. polysyllabic words), and more ink spent when writing such words was a natural consequence (ibid.). The complainers sometimes used extreme means to illustrate their point, creating passages constructed of neologisms exclusively (see for example Crystal 2005:292).

As English multiplied its vocabulary (Crystal 2005), the language became more suited to serve the official functions which until then had been exclusively French or Latin. These functions included “legal, scientific, religious, educational [and] medical” functions (Crystal 2005:289). Some of the loan words which entered English to serve an actual need soon became natural in the language. Others disappeared as silently as they had come in. There are different explanations for why some words are “accepted and some rejected” in a language (ibid. 293). One reason may be that the language already has sufficient words and terms for the subject that the new word comes in to represent. Crystal mentions *visible vs aspectable* as an illustration (ibid.). Another reason why a word is naturally adopted into a language may be that an author writes an influential text using neologisms (ibid.). Whatever the reason, the English vocabulary expanded throughout the seventeenth century and some writers did not hesitate to praise the new linguistic prosperity. Richard Carew (in *The Excellencie of the English Tongue*, 1614) states:

“the longe wordes that we borrowe, being intermingled with the shorte of our owne store, make vp a perfitt harmonye.” (ibid. 294)

There obviously must have been an actual need for new words in the English language, so that the gaps could be filled as society expanded. Crystal (2005) mentions a linguistic system of “checks and balances” (ibid. 293), a system monitoring change so that the main purpose of language, communication, is always safeguarded. It is this same system which

takes care of language when change is at hand. One group may go to linguistic extremes during a certain period of time, but the system of “checks and balances” (ibid. 293) will always assure a natural development of the language.

We can conclude that the main debates and complaints over vocabulary took place in the sixteenth century. The position of English as a language to be used in all areas, from, for example, art and religion, to law and science required a number of new words and terms for concepts formerly covered by Latin, Greek, French and Italian.

The complaint tradition -grammar

In the history of Standard English, prescriptivism and the complaint tradition, there is one period in particular that stands out when it comes to preoccupations about language. I am referring to quite a brief period, about 20 years, in the mid-eighteenth century when prescriptivist writing made a tremendous impact on language thinking (Crystal 2006b). There was a new attitude to grammar, and later it came to be referred to as “the *prescriptive* or *normative* approach, because of the way it formulated rules defining what was to count as correct and incorrect usage” (Crystal 2005:396). Milroy and Milroy refer to this period as “a successful culmination of a long process” (2003:29). They claim that the achievement from the eighteenth century involved codification of the English language, which led to “a much more widespread consciousness of a relatively uniform ‘correct’ English than had been possible before” (ibid. 29). Milroy and Milroy finally suggest that the “ideology of standardization” was established during this significant period (ibid. 29).

A considerable part of the linguistic activity of this period was a result of centuries in which Latin and Greek had been highly influential in all parts of Europe because of these languages’ advanced and respected position in both science and literature (Wardhaugh 1999). Battistella claims: “English prescriptive grammar has its roots in the classical education model that relied heavily on the study of Greek and Latin, and hence on grammar, translation and parsing” (2005:46). There appeared to be a belief that the grammatical systems of the classical languages could be adequate for any language. When efforts soon were made to fit English into the grammatical frames of Latin, English came out as both “irregular and inferior” (Battistella 2005:46). Action had to be taken, and now that a grammatical system was at hand, proper use could be established to avoid further decline in the English language (ibid.).

As we have seen above, Battistella states that one reason for the prosperity of prescriptivism in the eighteenth century was the interest in classical languages: “Education should exercise reason and memory and [...] this exercise was provided by the study of classical languages” (Battistella 2005:46). However, there was a cause other than interest in classical languages which also resulted in increasing attention to grammar, and this cause was the industrial revolution. With the industrial revolution emerged an urban, upwardly mobile middle-class, and “[s]ocial mobility reinforced the role of grammar as a means of marking class distinctions and increased attention to class distinctions” (Battistella 2005:47). Crystal asserts: “For there is nothing quite as clear cut as a grammatical distinction. Either a preposition goes at the end or not. [...] If you want to make social distinctions, grammar is an easy way to do it” (Crystal 2006b:110). He concludes: “The prepositional issue was perfect. [...] [T]he kind of construction illustrated by *That is the man I was talking to* is very common in English, so the rule would act as a good discriminator. Eventually, it became one of the most widely known of all the prescriptive rules [...]” (ibid. 112).

It was also during the period between 1750 and 1800 that one of the first major grammars for the English language was published; *A Short Introduction to English Grammar*, in 1762 by Robert Lowth (Crystal 2005 and 2006b). Lowth’s grammar became very influential when it came to the teaching of English (Battistella 2005). Lowth became especially famous for his dislike of end-placed prepositions (Crystal 2005), but also for criticizing a number of members of the literary canon, from Shakespeare to Swift, for the overflowing of grammatical errors in their writings (Crystal 2006b). “It was not that there was any inherent defect in the English language, in his view; these were simply people failing in their efforts to speak or write properly” (Crystal 2005:397).

Another grammarian, Lindley Murray (1745-1826), had even more success than Lowth (Crystal 2005). He borrowed a significant amount of material from Lowth, in his *English Grammar, adapted to the different classes of learners; With an appendix, containing Rules and Observations for Promoting Perspicuity in Speaking and Writing* from 1795 (Wardhaugh 1999). Murray’s approach to teaching grammar was based on a system where he would set up a number of examples containing grammatical errors, an approach often referred to as a “correctionist teaching method” (Battistella 2005:47). The students were expected to be able to correct these errors as part of the learning process. This method Murray combined with strict moral values, “helping to establish a tradition of promoting virtue, patriotism, and religion through grammar study” (ibid. 47). Wardhaugh concludes:

“Consequently, Murray’s grammar was like Lowth’s before it, a grammar of rules and prohibitions, of examples of the good alongside examples of the bad, and of essentially Latinate statements about English mixed with appeals to grace, logic, and morality” (Wardhaugh 1999:120).

According to Wardhaugh, the type of grammar represented by Lowth and Murray has been highly influential throughout the nineteenth and even the twentieth century. Wardhaugh compares the grammars to a catechism: “a set of beliefs and facts to be learned, recited, tested, and followed, one that would lead you to a better life somewhere” (ibid. 123), which ties up with Milroy and Milroy’s complaint type two; “moralistic” complaints (Milroy and Milroy 2003:31).

Even though Lowth and Murray were highly successful and influential in their work with the grammars; even they were met with the complaints of people who had different views. Crystal provides an example, “an issue of *Athenæum*” where an article had the title “The Bad English of Lindley Murray and other Writers on the English Language” (Crystal 2005:397).

Whereas prescriptive grammar emphasized that “traditional grammatical rules are based on logic, reason, and truth independent on usage” and “that language and society will suffer unless grammatical inaccuracies are corrected” (Battistella 2005:48), opposing views also existed. Eighteenth century rhetoricians represented early views of what later, in the second half of the twentieth century, would be the descriptive view of modern linguistics. For example, George Campbell and Joseph Priestley in England and Thomas Jefferson in the United States (ibid.), advocated for a view where usage determined the correctness of language (ibid.). Priestley claimed that the grammarians were rushing to conclusions in their standardization process, and that “the custom of speaking is the only original and only just standard of any language” (Priestley 1791 in Battistella 2005:48). The kind of descriptive views which Priestley advocated for only caught on 200 years later, in the twentieth century. The linguistic trend in the eighteenth and parts of the nineteenth century was highly prescriptive as we also will see in the following section about pronunciation.

In sum, the main period of debate over grammar was the eighteenth century. Efforts were made to put the English language into a fixed system, and because of the respected position of Latin and Greek in both literature and science, the grammatical systems of these

languages were set up as frames for English. Finally, the industrial revolution led to an increasing interest in grammar, since grammar was an efficient method of deciding a speaker's class.

The complaint tradition -pronunciation

Pronunciation represents the final of the four main aspects of language of interest to me in this chapter. Throughout the history of the English language there have been just as heated debates over pronunciation as there had been over spelling, vocabulary and grammar. But, as Mugglestone states, compared to attitudes towards spelling and grammar, “attitudes to accent had, in a number of ways, indeed seemed to lag behind, even during the eighteenth century with its habitual prescriptive zeal” (Mugglestone 1997:22). One reason why the question of pronunciation seems to have been a minor issue compared to spelling, vocabulary and grammar may be that the actual access to spoken language was limited compared to written language. As soon as a sentence was written down, it would be open to scrutiny and evaluation by whoever was interested. Pronunciation was hardly tangible before the tape-recorder was invented (see e.g. Milroy and Milroy 2003). In the fourteenth century a sentence was history as soon as it was uttered by the speaker (Mugglestone 1997). It also seemed more important for the advocates of a national English language to deal with written English first in order to replace French as the language for the court and other official use (Mugglestone 1997). The most important thing was not *how* people spoke English, but that they spoke English instead of French (see also page 19). English gaining status as the official language in England was the early focus in the complaint tradition, as discussed above (page 19) (Milroy and Milroy 2003).

However, as soon as English was established as the official language of the courts in the fifteenth century (Mugglestone 1997), pronunciation, as well as spelling, grammar and vocabulary became an issue. The fact that there was indeed variation within the English language was nothing new but the view on such variation had earlier been of a rather neutral character. Mugglestone illustrates the wide acceptability of dialects:

“the absence of a dominant, non-localized, or super-ordinate standard variety meant that all regional varieties of language had not only spoken, but also written forms: the author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* wrote in the dialect of the north-west Midlands, while Chaucer selected that of London English, not by virtue of any intrinsic merit he happened to perceive in

it, but simply because it was the form of language current in the area where he lived” (Mugglestone 1997:8-9).

That Chaucer happened to write in London English was a coincidence according to Mugglestone. But the fact that Chaucer became a very popular writer may have been an important reason why London English gained such a prominent position. Regardless of this being true or not, Chaucer’s work written in London English would be but one reason why London English became the variant of English selected to represent the new spoken standard.

Honey points at the invention of the printing press (see page 21) as the decisive factor when it comes to selecting London English as the standard also for spoken English. Caxton’s printed texts “reflected the linguistics usages of London” (Honey 1991:13), and came to be regarded as standard written English because of the “enormous authority of the written word” (Honey 1991:13). Honey and Crystal also refer to George Puttenham and his *The Arte of Poesie* from 1589 (Crystal 2006b and Honey 1991) in demonstrating how London English became the spoken standard. Puttenham has a very clear idea of what a standard language ought to be like, and where it is to be found:

“[...] Puttenham[,] with his clear depiction of an emergent standard of speech (based in ‘the vsuall speech of the Court and that of London and the shires lying about London within lx. myles’) [...] moreover evince the marked awareness that the speech of London was, in a number of ways, already to be seen as ‘better’ than that of the provinces” (Puttenham 1589:121 in Mugglestone 1997:13).

Interestingly, Honey employs Puttenham’s directions to demonstrate the prestigious position of spoken London English already at this early stage in history (Honey 1991). Crystal however, puts Puttenham’s directions on the spot, demonstrating that the 60 mile radius around London must have included significant linguistic regionalism and a number of different spoken varieties (Crystal 2006b).

Prescriptive views on what good, English pronunciation ought to be like were widespread. Puttenham’s work mentioned above provided a number of guidelines as to where the good spoken language was to be found, and who the best speakers were. However, he also made several exemptions, and, in the end, it seemed like *everyone* was prone to make mistakes, “even those to whom one would expect to turn for guidance: the writers and the schoolteachers. They all make mistakes” (ibid. 46).

Samuel Johnson, famous for his dictionary claimed: “For pronunciation the best general rule is, to consider those as the most elegant speakers who deviate least from the written words” (Johnson 1755 in Crystal 2006b:171). At the same time, Johnson was well aware of the challenges that language variation represented to standardization: “He knew that English had a ‘double pronunciation; one, cursory and colloquial; the other, regular and solemn’” (Johnson 1755 in Crystal 2006b:170). The linguistic trend of prescribing an educated, prominent variety of speech obviously forced Johnson into selecting the “solemn pronunciation” for his dictionary project. He chose to do this in spite of his own belief that efforts of establishing one, national spoken variety were futile (Mugglestone 1997 and Crystal 2006b). However, as Mugglestone emphasizes, Johnson had a very positive attitude towards variation in accent, and once compared spoken variation to “the notes of different birds concur[ring] in the harmony of the grove” (Mugglestone 1997:25).

At the end of the above section, I mentioned Campbell, Pristley and Jefferson as representing descriptivist views in the eighteenth century (Battistella 2005). Campbell says the following about pronunciation: “It is not the business of grammar, as some critics seem preposterously to imagine, to give law to the fashions that regulate our speech” (Campbell 1776 in Mugglestone 1997:25).

John Hart, mentioned earlier in this thesis for his influence on English spelling (page 23), recognized London pronunciation as the “flower” of speech (Mugglestone 1997:15). However, he did not dismiss regional pronunciations, and declared “that speakers of dialects outside the standard variety have a right to spell as they pronounce, and that their way of doing so should give no more offence than should the fact of their speaking differently” (Mugglestone 1997:15). The above examples including Johnson, Campbell and two centuries earlier, Hart, show that liberal views on pronunciation did exist, even though the predominant view was a prescriptive one in the eighteenth century and even more so in the nineteenth (Wardhaugh 1999).

Throughout the eighteenth century, efforts to acknowledge linguistic variation with respect to pronunciation should be characterized as futile (Mugglestone 1997) since two extremely influential prescriptivists came to engage in the process of standardizing English pronunciation in the course of the century. As I have mentioned above, people have been complaining about language issues, from spelling to vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation for more than 700 years. But, in my opinion, the complaint tradition reaches its highest point with John Walker and Thomas Sheridan in the eighteenth century. Walker wrote his *A*

Critical Pronouncing Dictionary in 1791, and it became a huge success with over a hundred editions (Crystal 2006b). Walker admitted that variation in speech was intrinsic to any language, including English (Mugglestone 1997). However, in Walker's view, this should be seen as a challenge where mankind would stand up against nature: "one of those very evils left by Providence for man to correct" (Walker 1791:vi in Mugglestone 1997:27). And he left no doubt about his own view on language variation: "A diversity of pronunciation [...] is at once so ridiculous and embarrassing" (Walker 1791 in Crystal 2006b:175). It should be no surprise today that Walker contributed to a strong feeling of linguistic insecurity in the eighteenth century. This is a sense of linguistic inferiority that has been strong up until modern times as I will also argue in the empirical part of this thesis. Crystal illustrates with the following statement from Walker: "those at a considerable distance from the capital, do not only mispronounce many words taken separately, but they scarcely pronounce, with purity, a single word, syllable, or letter" (Walker 1791 in Crystal 2006:174).

Thomas Sheridan, one of the most important writers on pronunciation in the eighteenth century (Mugglestone 1997) was equally harsh in his attacks on regionalism in pronunciation: "all other dialects [except London English] are sure marks, either of a provincial, rustic, pedantic, or mechanic education, and therefore have some degree of disgrace attached to them" (Sheridan 1762 in Mugglestone 1997:15). Sheridan made a fortune on his book *A Course of Lectures on Elocution* (1762) (Crystal 2006b), which spread linguistic fear throughout the population. People were willing to pay a substantial amount of money to regain their linguistic self esteem. Sheridan's courses were the first courses of the kind that we today label "accent reduction classes" (see e.g. www.lessaccent.com and Lippi-Green 2004). Sheridan represented the birth of "no accent" (Crystal 2006b:175).

As a result of centuries of notorious prescriptivist struggle, RP emerged in the nineteenth century (ibid. 179). RP, or *received pronunciation*, (ibid. 181) was reportedly the educated, "non-localized, supra-regional 'standard'" (Mugglestone 1997:16) accent which Walker and Sheridan among others had advocated for. This accent was, according to Crystal (2006b), characterized by a few features and the most important goal of the RP speakers was to distance themselves "as far as possible from the way Cockneys talked" (Crystal 2006:180). When it comes to the actual oral performance of RP, Crystal mentions for instance the importance of pronouncing word-initial *h*-, as well as word-medial *tt* in, for example, the word *bottle*, where a glottal stop is widespread –and stigmatized (ibid.). Although RP appeared to be "supra-regional" to a larger extent than any spoken variety before, the variety

never obtained total uniformity among its speakers (ibid.). However, RP came to be closely associated with public school education and consequently with highly estimated professions within “civil and diplomatic service [...] and the Anglican Church” (ibid.180). RP may be said to have reached its most popular point in the early-/mid twentieth century when the BBC also adopted RP as the preferred variety spoken by the announcers (ibid.).

In the mid twentieth century one could have assumed that the struggle to find and preserve one single national spoken variety was over and that RP was the linguistic dream coming true. However, exactly according to the nature of language, even the seemingly uniform RP was going to be a disappointment. As more speakers adopted the new standard spoken variety, variation within RP was detected and the debate over what was considered good and bad pronunciation started over again. The differences within RP were largely age-related, according to Crystal (2006b), with a traditional divide between conservative older speakers and more liberal young speakers (ibid.).

The status of RP throughout the latter part of the twentieth century was slowly descending. The reason was that regional accents became more acceptable, and varieties of RP with hints of regional colour became widespread (ibid.). Such new varieties seemed to appeal to a lot of speakers, and in the 1990s the situation of traditional RP started to become critical. It was by many speakers considered posh (ibid.), and instead of associating RP with an attractive, high-status group of people, people began to equal RP with a group of snobs, 2% of the British population (ibid.), a group most people did not want to be associated with.

CHAPTER 4

STANDARD ENGLISH AND THE COMPLAINT TRADITION IN PRESENT DAY ENGLISH

In Great Britain during the last decade of the twentieth century, there was widespread preoccupation with the British school system, and especially the teaching of English language became subject of much debate (Cameron 1995:78).

It is also interesting to look at the role that media plays when it comes to preserving Standard English and finally this chapter provides examples of how popular books on linguistics perform very well in the marketplace, taking economic advantage of people's continuing insecurity when it comes to language use. I will argue that although non-standard accent acceptability increased during the latter part of the twentieth century, there is significant evidence suggesting that the linguistic complaint tradition and prescriptivism are still strong, especially with respect to style and vocabulary (both in written and spoken contexts) and pronunciation.

Educational institutions

The first part of the twentieth century was marked by a decreasing interest in the teaching of grammar in British schools (Crystal 2006b). The reasons were various; Crystal mentions teachers finding "the old approach complex and unrewarding" as one reason (ibid. 199). Another reason was that grammar teaching was seen as irrelevant to "children whose primary need was literacy" (ibid. 199). As grammar teaching disappeared, one would have imagined that the school system found a proper replacement for traditional grammar in the teaching of language, but this was unfortunately not the case. Consequently, in the late 1960s (ibid.), students entering university had no means of discussing language issues since traditional terminology on grammar had completely vanished from the teaching of the English language, and no replacement had been found. However, the language teaching took a new turn as modern linguistics was developing. Influenced by modern linguistic theory numerous reports on the state of the teaching of English in British schools, from the 1960s and onwards, backed "the new orthodoxy" in a way that would come to vex the conservative right wing in British politics (Crowley 2003:232). I will refer to a selection of these reports in some detail since they reflect the new modern linguistic approach emerging in the 1960s. These reports became highly influential in descriptive linguistic thinking, but also proved very provocative to the political right wing (Crowley 2003), and eventually this provocation led to the educational

reforms of the 1980s. Especially important among the reports were *Children and their Primary Schools* (the Plowden Report) of 1967, *A Language for Life* (the Bullock Report) of 1975, *English from 5 to 16* (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools (HMI)) of 1984, *Education for All* (the Swann Report) of 1985 and later the Kingman Report (1988) and the Cox report (1989) (ibid.). These were reports set up by the British government in order to consider the teaching of English (www.wikipedia.com on e.g. "the Plowden Report"). According to Crowley, the reports triggered a conservative right reaction, and kept the complaint tradition alive at four major points: the standards of reading and writing among British schoolchildren, the aspect of linguistic correctness, pronunciation, and, finally, the teaching of traditional grammar (ibid.).

As stated above, traditional teaching of language, with grammar playing an important part, gradually disappeared in the first part of the twentieth century, and no obvious method of teaching came as a replacement. The Plowden Report stated that the grammar taught in British schools was "a theory based on Latin, many of whose categories, inflexions, case systems, tenses and so on do not exist in English" (Plowden 1967:222-3 in Crowley 2003:238). Bullock expressed a similar view: "Such a prescriptive view of language was based on a comparison with classical Latin, and it also mistakenly assumed an unchanging quality in both grammatical rules and word meaning in English [...] [since] 'growth and change are essential characteristics of a language'" (Bullock 1975:169-70 in Crowley 2003:238-239).

Increasing attention to language standards in "journalism, politics and armchair social observation" (Crowley 2003:232), along with complaints from employers about young job-seekers' poor spelling, drew negative attention to the new line in language teaching (ibid.). However, the Plowden Report (1967) concluded that "the standard of reading in the country as a whole has been going up steadily since the war" (Plowden 1967:212 in Crowley 2003:232-233), a strong counter argument to Honey stating increasing concern "'over the standards of written and spoken English by the products of our school system'" (Honey 1983 in Crowley 2003:232). The Bullock Report (1975) eight years later stated that this result may not have been too trustworthy since the first reading assessments after the war were carried out in 1948 (ibid. 233) and the Plowden Report of 1967 was made with a minimum of material for comparison.

The issue of correctness in language also became an important point of debate following the reports. The Plowden Report argued "'usage is always changing and teachers

must not burden their pupils with the observance of out-worn conventions. Correctness should be sacrificed rather than fluency, vigour or clarity of meaning” (Plowden 1967:211 in Crowley 2003:233-234). While the Bullock Report emphasized the difficulties involved in speech assessment, based on “the increase in the number of variables and in the element of subjectivity” (Bullock 1975:40 in Crowley 2003:234), *English from 5 to 16* (HMI) backed the Plowden argument: “the main criterion for assessing pupil’s competence in speaking is the communicative effectiveness of what they have said” (HMI 1984:18 in Crowley 2003:234). The Bullock Report also commented on communicative effectiveness and stated the importance of a pupil’s ability to alternate linguistic behaviour depending on the situation: “Many people find this notion of relativity [i.e. the level of formality, the speech style should be relevant to each particular situation] hard to accept” but then concludes: “but it seems to us far more reasonable to think in terms of appropriateness than of absolute correctness” (Bullock 1975:143 in Crowley 2003:235). As we see from these quotes, the issue of communicative effectiveness was widely agreed upon in all the reports. However, the complaint tradition was still very much alive, and, in a prescriptivist tradition, many people started to feel very insecure and unhappy about the new descriptive approach to language in the reports. The hitherto safe black vs. white view on language gone, where one usage was definitely correct and another definitely incorrect, provoked a feeling of great danger. Cameron claims it led to moral panic (1995:82) and senior Tory minister Lord Trebitt “announced on BBC Radio that the decline in grammar teaching had led directly to football hooliganism” (Cox 1988:34 in Crowley 2003:249)⁴. The Bullock Report stressed however that one should “seek[...] to extend the child’s range of language use, not restrict it [and] enlarge his repertoire so that he can use language effectively and [also] use standard forms when they are needed” (Bullock 1975:143 in Crowley 2003: 235). This means that the aim should be to train children for different linguistic contexts, where the standard and the non-standard forms that children brought from their homes were awarded equal status. An important skill would be to obtain a sophisticated awareness of linguistic propriety according to context, i.e. sociolinguistic appropriateness.

Following the lack of traditional teaching of grammar, lack of focus on correctness, pronunciation was the third point of complaint following the reports. Pronunciation always was (and is still today) an important decisive factor when it came to people’s class-membership (see e.g. Fox 2004). Based on accent, people are categorically divided into

⁴ The belief that there is a link between behaviour and grammar is also mentioned above with Milroy and Milroy’s (2003) two complaint types (page 19).

groups of “the ‘vulgar’, those of ‘low breeding’, ‘inferior education’ and the scarcely human” (Crowley 2003:236). Especially the Bullock Report offered a solid defence for the descriptive approach on the aspect of pronunciation (ibid. 237). Bullock declares that “[t]o criticise a person’s speech may be an attack on his self esteem” (Bullock 1975:143 in Crowley 2003: 237), and *English from 5 to 16* concludes that “[n]o form of English accent[...] is inherently superior to any other” (HMI 1984:15 in Crowley 2003: 237). Still there was a die hard belief among people in a hierarchy of varieties where RP reigned at the top and local accents at the bottom (ibid.). According to *English from 5 to 16* however, speakers of all accents would necessarily have to adjust their pronunciation to the interlocutor or audience (ibid. 238).

The reports provided convincing signals of what the teaching of the English language ought to be like. One should focus on sociolinguistic appropriateness and linguistic repertoire, and at the same time value and encourage linguistic variation. However, strong forces within society, and not least in politics, claimed “that the British population was in grave danger of becoming illiterate” (Crowley 2003:218). Crowley also suggests that the worried atmosphere in language questions was closely related to other things presumably going wrong as a result of the “permissive society” of the 1960s. The new, modern approach to language teaching was just one the of many indicators suggesting that things were about to go wrong; “slack morals in public life, declining standards of politeness among the young [, and] bolshie union bosses” (ibid. 218) were other indicators.

In the mid 1980s, it was decided that some sort of action had to be taken within the entire British school system, and the 1988 Education Reform Act was the result (Cameron 1995). The act most importantly “provided for a National Curriculum which all state school pupils aged from 5 to 16 were required to follow” (ibid. 80). The new curriculum evoked strong reactions among the British people, and especially the role that English grammar was to have in the curriculum became an important point of debate (ibid. 79). Cameron emphasizes that in the curriculum, the question of English teaching was not an issue specific to Britain. Both in Britain and in the United States, right wing conservatives claimed that there had been “an alleged decline in standards and an alleged drift away from the values education had traditionally sought to transmit” (ibid. 79).

In 1987, a committee was set up by the British government to “make recommendations on a model of the workings of the English language to help improve teaching in schools” (Crowley 2003:226). The Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Baker, announced in a press release his aim for the committee: “[...] Pupils need to know

about the workings of the English language if they are to use it effectively. Most schools do no longer teach old-fashioned grammar. But little has been put in its place” (Cameron 1993:87). In other words, the Secretary of State for Education was rather explicit in this announcement, stating that traditional grammar needed to be present in the teaching of English.

The committee of 1987 was under Sir John Kingman, but as this committee failed to bring about the results that the Secretary of State for Education had imagined, the committee being too much in favour of descriptive linguistics, a new committee was set up under Brian Cox (Cameron 1993). Even this committee failed to live up to the goals of the Secretary of State. In the aftermath of the two committees a period of bitter struggle broke out between the right wing conservatives who appointed the committees hoping for pro-grammar results and expert linguistic opinion that managed to sway the committees to their side (ibid.). According to Cameron (1993), the controversy in the struggle was focused on three points: whether grammar should be taught at all, and if so, which grammatical model should be adopted, and finally, for which purpose grammar should be taught (ibid. 88).

The first point, whether grammar should be taught at all, was strongly promoted by former public school headmaster John Rae (ibid. 85). He stated in a newspaper piece already in 1982 that “self-expression had been valued over conformity to rules, and grammar-teaching had been abandoned in favour of ‘creative writing’ in the classroom. [...]It was time [...]to halt the rush toward anarchy and barbarism by reintroducing grammar to the nation’s schools” (Rae 1982 in Cameron 1993:85-6). Faced with the potentially fatal consequences of moving away from grammar, there was no doubt among the pro-grammar conservatives that grammar needed to be reimplemented in the teaching.

Points two and three in the debate about grammar teaching in British schools were closely related; if grammar was to be taught, which model was to be employed and for which purpose? Here, the conservatives favoured a prescriptive option, “based on Latin paradigms and expressed as a set of commandments”, in order to “ensure that pupils would learn to use standard English correctly” (ibid. 88). Expert opinion, or the “educational establishment” (ibid.) however, opted for the contrary. They wanted “a descriptive [approach] based on linguists’ analyses of how people actually use English” (ibid. 88). This approach included the study of standard English, which also the expert opinion agreed was a variety which all pupils should learn to master (ibid.), alongside with the various (non-standard) varieties of their upbringing.

In short, both Cameron (1995) and Crowley (2003) present the Kingman and Cox committees as failures. The conservative right did not get what they had hoped for when employing expert groups to give recommendations on the teaching of English, and in the end the Cox report was ridiculed in the British press with comments such as: “‘English report fails the test’” and “‘Bad grammar is acceptable for schoolchildren’” (*Mail on Sunday*, 13 November 1988 and *Daily Mail*, 16 November 1988 in Crowley 2003: 249). The Secretary of State for education was satisfied with neither the Kingman report nor the Cox report for the presumable lack of “emphasis on grammar, spelling and pronunciation” (Cox 1988:11 in Crowley 2003:249). In the end a strongly revised and significantly shortened version by the Education Secretary was the report being used as the basis for the new National Curriculum. This report was one where the Secretary had selected particular bits and pieces from the original Cox report to fit into his own picture of what the recommendations for the curriculum ought to be like. In this report all 14 explanatory chapters were left out, and what was left was two chapters of plain “recommendations for attainment targets and programmes of study” (Crowley 2003:249) Crowley further concludes:

“There is not a sign of the deliberations which lay behind the prescription of the content or the setting of the attained targets. Teachers were not to be given access to the detailed and expert thinking about language and education in which the Cox Committee had engaged” (ibid. 250).

The above account of the precedents of the National Curriculum which came to pass in 1990 (ibid.) shows that prescriptivism was not dead in the late twentieth century. Conservative politicians applied their powers in promoting traditional grammar teaching in schools, an approach to language teaching which we have seen is highly prescriptive and unrewarding in that it prohibits variety and promotes uniformity. And what brought about the conflict over the curriculum in the first place was again the infamous complaint tradition, where the main grieving point was “language decay” as a result of carelessness in teaching.

I have chosen to dedicate the larger part of this chapter to education. The educational system is, in my opinion, one of the few areas in society where refusal of obedience to prescribed rules of, for example, language may be effectively sanctioned. Students know that disobedience (however often involuntary) to rules will lead to lower grades and in the next instance difficulties in continuing education at a higher level and starting a career. In short, the school system is one of society’s most important institutions of language monitoring,

empowered by the opportunity of grading students, but also by the trust that people generally have in the school system.

The media

Milroy and Milroy (2003) claim that mass media, in this context radio and television, does not have such an impact on speech as the general belief among lay people suggests. In fact they state that “[t]his is not a proven fact: it is merely a belief” (Milroy and Milroy 2003:24). After 70 years of listening to RP on the radio, this variety is still spoken only by 3-5 per cent of the population, a number suggesting that most people’s speech is not affected by the “model variety” heard on the radio (ibid. 24). To support this argument further, they refer to three particular areas of research. One area is the study of the pronunciation of British varieties of English. Admittedly, some rural varieties die out, but the general pattern is that no variety appears to be moving rapidly towards the standard (ibid.). This suggests that the media does not influence the speech of the audience to any significant extent. The second area of research in question are studies of “the language of the mass media themselves” (ibid. 24). Such studies suggest “that broadcasters tend to adapt to the language of their target audiences” (ibid. 24). The final reason why Milroy and Milroy have come to the conclusion that mass media does not influence the audience’s speech is research on innovations, including “fashion, speech and technology” (ibid. 25). Such studies suggest that “*personal channels* of communication are much more influential than *mass media* channels in persuading persons to adopt innovations” (ibid. 25). This means that friends and family represent a stronger influence on people’s speech than does the speech of the people they listen to on television and radio.

The above claims of Milroy and Milroy to a large extent dismiss mass media as insignificant when it comes to linguistic influence on ordinary people. It is very interesting to note the very opposing view of Lippi-Green (2004): “news media uses propaganda to “inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior [sic] which will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society””(Herman and Chomsky 1988 in Lippi-Green 2004:134). When it comes to language, this statement means that the media attempts to impose one particular uniform (spoken) variety on the audience, i.e. standard English, or in the United States “General American” (2004:138). She continues:

“Language is one area in which the news media representatives vigorously advance the notion of homogeneity, directly and indirectly. The process of linguistic assimilation to an abstracted standard is cast as a natural one, necessary and positive for the greater social good” (ibid. 135).

General American is referred to as the variety spoken by a majority of Americans, i.e. the variety spoken in the vast area of the West and Midwest (ibid.). Lippi-Green refers to “The NBC *Handbook of Pronunciation*” (ibid. 139) where the limitations as to which geographical areas belong to General American are specified. Obviously it does not suffice to specify an area, since variation is bound to exist within the thousands of kilometres of the West and Midwest. That is the reason why the handbook gives only “one correct pronunciation for each word” (Ehrlich (ed.) 1951 in Lippi-Green 2004:139) since “‘inconsistencies in pronunciation irritate some listeners’” (Ehrlich (ed.) 1951 in Lippi-Green 2004:139).

But mass media’s linguistic influence on people does not only concern spoken language. Lippi-Green states that “[p]rint journalists have always taken a special interest in preserving and promoting a standard written language[...]. In this process, superior access to information is linked to superior knowledge of the language in which it is shared. Many of the mass market books available on language are written by newspaper journalists” (2004:136).

What we read and the type of language found in newspapers and magazines also affect people’s attitude to language, and it contributes to a quest for unrealistic standards. Cameron (1995) focuses on another institution besides the media with significant linguistic influence. She states that in modern times, people are so used to reading printed texts that we tend to take correct spelling for granted: “[There is a] belief that accurate spelling is the norm, while spelling mistakes are an aberration” (Cameron 1995:40). However, in Cameron’s view, this is an illusion caused by “constant exposure to published printed text” (ibid. 40). What we tend to forget, however, is that the immaculate writing often found in printed texts such as newspapers (and books, as I will discuss below) is a result of careful considering and correcting in the editing process; “the addition of an extra stage of production during which trained specialist professionals explicitly check every word” (ibid. 40). Readers tend to consider this to a very limited degree, and most of the times we take the words we read to be the author’s own (ibid. 34). This creates an ideal that is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to live up to for most ordinary language users.

The marketplace

Since the mid 1990s, when Cameron's book *Verbal Hygiene* (1995) was published, many publishers have aimed at reducing production costs, and one way to do this has been to limit the costs of editing since it consumes both time and money. Routledge is one publisher who practices minimal editing, and leaves most of the stylistic choices up to the author (Cameron 1995). Still it seems like a number of editors will continue their nitpicking even if they have to work longer hours than the publisher is willing to pay: "copy editors generally take pride in their knowledge of arcane rules, and they do regard minor stylistic tinkering as a crucial part of their function" (ibid.) After interviewing a number of copy editors about their position as linguistic watch dogs, Cameron found that there are two main principles in editing: consistency and clarity (ibid. 37). To be consistent is important since, for instance, random use of -ise/-ize would irritate readers. And if a reader is irritated due to inconsistency, then clarity, the second principle, is also hindered (ibid.). On questions concerning consequences of random use, the copy editors claimed that there would be "immediate complaints" (ibid. 37). That is another statement strongly suggesting the well-being of the complaint tradition also in the twenty first century.

I would like to return to the important argument that Cameron is making about the belief English speakers have in both the "existence and [the] desirability" (ibid. 39) of uniformity in language. This is an illusion promoted by the activities of copy editors:

"The fact that published printed text is more nearly uniform than any other kind of language underpins the 'ideology of standardization' by persuading English speakers, against all evidence to the contrary, that uniformity is the normal condition whereas variation is deviant; and that any residual variation in standard English must therefore be the contingent and deplorable result of some users' carelessness, idleness or incompetence" (ibid. 39)

Cameron continues the argument referring to spelling tests among adults carried out by The Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit⁵. The results showed, as any linguists would have expected, large variation in spelling: 73 % failed at the most "difficult" word, *accommodation* (ibid. 39-40). What do such results tell people? It is clear that this type of attention to one's own abilities in e.g. spelling or perhaps punctuation, combined with the above mentioned

⁵ The Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit is connected to the "Skills for life" strategy. "Skills for Life" is the national strategy in England for improving adult literacy, language [...] and numeracy skills" (www.wikipedia.com on "Skills for Life").

belief that uniformity in language is both possible and desirable, makes people feel insecure about one's own capacities in using language. A natural consequence of such feelings of inferiority is a desire among people to perfect both speech and writing. This desire to improve language has proved to be a gold mine for a number of authors writing linguistic self-improvement literature. Previously such information was treated with maximum secrecy (ibid.) but today the house style books of, for instance, the most prominent newspapers have become national bestsellers. Clearly, the complaint tradition is still helping a small number of people earn a living, as thousands and thousands of people buy books and take expensive courses to get their language right.

William Safire, a columnist in the *New York Times Magazine*, has published a number of books, some of them based on writings from his column "On words" in The New York times Magazine. Safire is without doubt one of those who most actively complains about English today, and he has made a good living on his complaints. On the blurb of one of his books, he is referred to as "the guru of contemporary vocabulary, speech, language, usage and writing. [...] [He is] America's go-to guy when it comes to language" (Safire 2004). Other examples include *How Not to Write* (Safire 1990), *Junk English* (Smith 2001) and *The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage* (Siegal and Connolly 1999). All such works may be considered as the modern equivalents of Sheridan's *A Course of Lectures on Elocution* from 1763. The English language continues to change according to the nature of language, but the complaining goes on, and people get rich claiming to know good language from bad.

PART 2: EMPIRICAL PART

INTRODUCTION

In the present part of my thesis I report on and analyse data from two Web sites where complaints about language abound. In part one of this thesis I focused on vocabulary, grammar, spelling and pronunciation as related to the linguistic complaint tradition. Complaints about these aspects of language are also widely represented on the Web sites that have been selected for the purposes of the present study.

Research questions and hypotheses

The following are research questions (RQ) for the study:

1. Are people concerned about correctness in present day English?
2. What do people think about language change?
3. Which of the two media of the English language, written or spoken, are people most likely to complain about?
4. Which components of language do people complain about?

The hypotheses for the present study are as follows:

1. People complain about language change (concerns RQ 2).
2. People mostly complain about written English (concerns RQ 3).
3. People mostly complain about grammar (concerns RQ 4).

Needless to say, all the three hypotheses also concern RQ 1.

CHAPTER 5

METHOD

In sociolinguistic research various methods of research may be employed. One approach is to investigate, for example, how often particular linguistic phenomena occur in, for example, a set of interviews. This type of approach, where the results typically come in the form of statistics including numbers and percentages, is called a quantitative method (Johnstone 2000). A different approach involves analysing the data qualitatively, in order to reveal interesting issues behind the statistics. In a qualitative sociolinguistic analysis a researcher may discover additional information about how certain aspects of language are used and why. In many sociolinguistic studies researchers combine quantitative and qualitative methods, since the two methods fill different functions:

“The analysis phase of sociolinguistics research is often quantitative as well as qualitative. This means that analyzing sociolinguistic data often involves some counting , explicit or implicit, in order to answer questions about how often things happen, in addition to the descriptions that help answer qualitative questions about how and why things happen” (Johnstone 2000:37).

In the present thesis I combine both quantitative and qualitative methods.

The Internet has over the past ten to fifteen years revolutionized public communication and access to information: “The **Internet** provides a capability so powerful and general that it can be used for almost any purpose that depends on information, and it is accessible by every individual who connects to one of its constituent networks” (www.britannica.com).

The process of collecting data for my study started by browsing the Internet for sites where lay people state their opinions and pose questions about language. A useful kind of Web sites to consider was *blogs* about language. According to Britannica.com a blog is an

“online journal where an individual, group, or corporation presents a record of activities, thoughts, or beliefs. Some **blogs** operate mainly as news filters, collecting various online sources and adding short comments and [Internet](http://www.britannica.com) links. Other **blogs** concentrate on presenting original material. [...] “To **blog**” is the act of composing material for a **blog**” (www.britannica.com).

Crystal (2006a: 240) observes the following about blogs:

“Blogs rapidly came to be used for a remarkable range of purposes. At one extreme there is the personal diary, kept by an individual who wants to inform the world of his or her activities, interests, and opinions. At the other extreme, there is the corporate blog, maintained by an institution –such as a radio station, a music store, a university department, a search engine, or a political party – to inform a potential readership of its activities. Larger blogs tend to be multi-authored. Many of them are interactive, welcoming spontaneous or invited feedback about the topic of the blog”.

People may post almost anything in blogs. There are numerous Web sites where people may open personal blogs and www.blogger.com is an example of such a Web site. Blogger.com writes the following about the blog service:

“Blogger is a free service for communication, self-expression and freedom of speech. We believe that Blogger increases the availability of information, encourages healthy debate and makes possible new connections between people” (<http://www.blogger.com/content.g>).

Restrictions to content are very few, but users are asked to refrain from particular types of material, for example, hateful or violent content, as well as pornography, obscenity and violation of copyright rules (<http://www.blogger.com/content.g>).

I soon found that language blogs were rather numerous and clearly the interest in language was as significant on the Internet as it up until now has been in newspapers, radio and television. I had quite a clear idea of what type of sites I would need in order to find the data of interest to me. I searched for blogs where a number of (lay) people (i.e. not just one single person) were able to write letters or comments *in* blogs: “In addition, many **blogs** provide a forum to allow visitors to leave comments and interact with the publisher” (<http://www.blogger.com/content.g>).

After careful consideration of a substantial number of Web sites and blogs I selected two sites which rendered 826 data to my study. They are the following:

1. SPOGG- The Society for the Promotion of Good Grammar (<http://spogg.org/>).
2. Pain in the English (PITE) (www.painintheenglish.com).

The data collection consists of all the letters which were available on the two Web sites in the beginning of July 2007. The letters from SPOGG were posted between March 30, 2006 and July 9, 2007 and the letters in PITE were posted between November 2, 2002 and July 9, 2007.

SPOGG -The Society for the Promotion of Good Grammar

SPOGG (<http://spogg.org/>) represents “The Society for the Promotion of Good Grammar”. SPOGG introduces the views and goals of the organization in the following way:

“**There are huge problems in this world**, and then there are problems that can be solved by everyday people with red pens and a little moxie. The Society for the Promotion of Good Grammar is for pen-toters appalled by wanton displays of Bad English. (And we're not talking about Bad English, the band, although their song "Heaven is a 4 letter word" needs a hyphen.) SPOGG is for people who crave good, clean English — sentences cast well and punctuated correctly. It's about clarity. And who knows how many of the world's huge problems could be solved if we had a little more of that?”

SPOGG welcomes and encourages people to post opinions about the English language, report on errors (i.e. to complain) and ask questions about usage. A random search among the posted letters suggests that people find reasons to complain about a number of linguistic issues.

Martha Brockenbrough, the founder of SPOGG, says the following about the background of SPOGG:

“I founded the organization in 2004, as a way to use humor to teach people about grammar. The organization has about 3,500 members, though I am responsible for the site's content. Members do often send in grammatical errors they find; these are usually on signs. Probably most have to do with spelling and punctuation, though misused words come in third place. SPOGG's goals are educational: to get people to think about language, understand the rules (and when to break them[]), and to use good language to help with clear communication”.

After analyzing the 312 letters found on SPOGG, I divided them into 4 main categories⁶:

1. SPOGG's owner/moderator, Martha Brockenbrough, complaining about language⁷.

⁶ These categories were created in order to give a general idea about the contents of the blog. The categories were not employed in the actual research.

⁷ Language found on signs, in advertising, in the media, on the Internet etc.

2. Members and non-members of SPOGG complaining about language.
3. Questions to SPOGG's owner/moderator about the English language or SPOGG's owner/moderator giving advice on linguistic usage.
4. SPOGG's owner/moderator, Martha Brockenbrough, reporting linguistic news or curiosities.

Of the four categories, the first two were the most relevant for the purposes of my thesis since it is in these categories that we find actual complaints about language. However, even the third category was taken into account, since complaints sometimes also come in the form of a question or an answer.

In my opinion, SPOGG does not represent an obvious prescriptive approach to language. Brockenbrough also states this when she says that people should “think about language, understand the rules (and when to break them[]) [...]”. There are other examples of a rather descriptive approach to be found in the data, as well as a few examples taking a more prescriptive direction. One example of a prescriptive approach is a comment from SPOGG on what the term “non-standard” means: “a non-standard word (think “irregardless”) is the verbal equivalent of wearing your underwear as a hat. You can get it over your head (hey, eye holes!). But it looks pretty silly” (SPOGG, June 7, 2006).

Pain in the English

painintheenglish.com is the other blog from which the data in the present study have been collected. Whereas SPOGG is a site where people report on what they see as language mistakes, painintheenglish.com is a blog where people predominantly write to ask questions about language. The questions are filtered by the moderators running the Web site in order to achieve an interesting range of question types: “Many discussion forums [...] allow anyone to post questions, which makes them less useful because you face the daunting task of sifting through uninteresting questions and comments” (www.painintheenglish.com). Interestingly, the moderators do not come forward as language experts and they do not claim to have any kind of linguistic expertise. On the contrary, the managers of the site leave it up to the actual users to answer questions or to discuss different answers to each posted question: “[w]e review all the questions before posting them. The idea here is that interesting questions should inspire interesting answers and comments. As long as we quality-control questions, we should

not have to quality control comments [sic]" (ibid)⁸. One may agree or disagree with such a statement. I believe that the answers posted on this Web site could also use some quality control. The discussion following the letter "The Toronto Maple Leafs" (PITE, September 28, 2005, posted under "Usage") concerns many issues, language not being one of them. The founders of painintheenglish.com call the Web site "A forum for the Gray Areas of the English Language. Because meaning is fundamentally indeterminate"

(www.painintheenglish.com). The latter sentence in the quote is especially interesting, since it may be a sign that the founders do not take an essentialist approach to language. A non-essentialist approach to language combines with a descriptive approach.

The total number of letters found on painintheenglish.com was 514. When it comes to the actual letters collected from this Web site, I was able to see a pattern in the types of questions being asked. First of all, most users of this blog appear to be quite competent users of English, native and non-native speakers alike. A significant number of letters are from non-native speakers of English asking advice from native users of the blog on very specific usages in the English language. In such cases native speakers are seen as the experts.

Example⁹:

1. **"Steak –correct pronunciation** [...] is it possible to pronounce steak as the /ea/ in weak is pronounced? Or should it always be pronounced as the /a/ in bake? I'm from Norway, and we've [sic] got steakhouses here, it's [sic] no word for this in Norwegian. So when people pronounce this as the /ea/ in weak, is this incorrect, or is this possible in English too?" (PITE, 31 October 2005, posted in "Misc").

Distinguishing complaints

The letters found on SPOGG and Pain in the English (PITE) were of various kinds:

1. information and news concerning everyone with interest in language
2. neutral questions about language
3. complaints about language disguised as questions
4. straightforward complaints

For this study, the relevant categories were number three and four.

⁸ Answers and comments to the posted questions are not taken into account in this study. Note the ambiguous punctuation of "quality-control"/"quality control".

⁹ All examples are given consecutive numbers.

The process of distinguishing between letters of complaint about language and those including neutral questions or information about language was challenging. In order to distinguish which letters were to be counted as complaints, I focused on the way a person put his or her message forward in the letter. The following example represents a neutral letter, one that would not count as a complaint:

2. “**Genius and Ingenious** [.] Genius has no ‘o’ in it and yet ingenious does. Why the difference in spelling?” (PITE, 12 March 2006, posted in “Etymology”).

However, my working definition of a complaint is the following: whenever a letter expressed negative feelings of confusion, amazement, hatred or anger it would be categorized as a complaint. The following statements represent such negative feelings:

- This doesn’t sound right to me...
- This sounds awful
- This makes me feel awkward...
- This annoys me...
- I am very confused
- This issue is killing me...
- I hate...
- I am having a dispute...
- I am having a fight

The following are examples of letters expressing negative feelings:

3. “All negations don’t sound right to me. I’m accustomed to hearing people make grammatical mistakes, but occasionally [sic] I’ll start hearing new and painful trends that are so pervasive that I wonder if someone changed the rules while I was asleep” (PITE, June 21, 2006, posted in “Grammar”).
4. “There was a pop song out a few years back that used the latter phrase, and although it sounded so awful to my ears, [...]” (PITE, June 5, 2005, posted in “Expressions”).

5. **“Punctuation Inside () While ending a sentence** So; I wrote this e-mail to my girlfriend that went: Have fun in your meeting (or don’t have fun at all!). That leaves me with an awkward feeling; an exclamation mark, a parenthesis, and a period to end off my sentence. Can I do that and still be correct?” (PITE, July 23, 2004, posted in “Mechanics/Punctuations”).
6. “I came across it reading “Long Day’s Journey Into Night” and was reminded how much this phrase has always annoyed me [...]” (PITE, March 3, 2006, posted in “Expressions”).
7. **“Apostrophe with Acronym** I work for the Louisiana State Employees’ Retirement System, or LASERS as it is commonly known. My question concerns the correct usage of an apostrophe after LASERS, in instances such as: LASERS website [...]. It seems as though it should be used in some cases, but not in others. We are very confused and would like to have your modern input on this unique situation” (PITE, July 8, 2004, posted in “Mechanics/Punctuations”).
8. **“Double/Single Quotation Marks** This issue is killing me. I know that when writing a dialogue, double quotation marks are used, as in, “The road is icy and wet,” he said. However, when putting quotation marks around a single word or phrase intra-sentence, what is the correct procedure? [...] (PITE, February 4, 2004, posted in “Mechanics/Punctuations”).
9. ““all but” –I hate that expression!” (PITE, October 15, 2004, posted in “Etymology”).
10. **“Everyday** I am having a dispute with a colleague about the use of the word ‘Everyday’. Can you please clarify for me if the word has been used correctly in the following example: [...] (PITE, October 22, 2005, posted in “Grammar”).
11. “My co-worker and I are having a fight over the correct end punctuation for items in a bulleted or numbered list.” (PITE, February 10, 2006, posted in “Mechanics/Punctuations”).

However, there were a number of fuzzy cases in the data. The following example, (12), illustrates such cases.

12. **“Odd sentence?** Anything odd about this sentence? “All of a sudden, there was a bottle breaking on the table.”” (PITE, September 6, 2005, posted in “Grammar”).

The fuzzy cases found in the data were ultimately not categorized as complaints.

A complaint could also be dressed as a question, but the expression of negative feelings similar to the ones mentioned above (in examples 3-11, page 54-55) would still place the letter in the “complaints” category:

- 13. **“I wonder why?”** On page 89 of “Eats, Shoots & Leaves”, Lynne Truss writes, “I wonder why?” Many people put a question mark at the end of this phrase, but to me it doesn’t seem like a question. Isn’t it a statement? “I wonder” is a statement. “Why” is a question in and of itself. In this context, though, the question mark is *not making sense to me*” (PITE, June 7, 2006, italics added, posted in “Mechanics/Punctuations”).
- 14. **“Log into or log in to** I’m damn confused about this... Can anybody tell me which is the right way to say? [sic] “I am sorry to hear that you have trouble with login to our website [sic].” OR “I am sorry that you have trouble with log in to our website [sic].” I feel both are wrong. If so, what is the right way to say this?” (PITE, March 9, 2005, posted in “Usage”).
- 15. **“Methodology** If Methodology means “they [sic] study of different methods” (in the same idea as Biology or Geology) then why do people always say “Let me explain our methodology” instead of just saying “Let me explain our methods”? Am I wrong or do I have the right to be annoyed!” (PITE, April 2, 2007, posted in “Expressions”).

The total number of letters from SPOGG and PITE as well as the number of letters that were categorized as complaints are displayed in table 1 below.

Table 1:

	Total number of letters	Complaints
SPOGG	312	222
PITE	514	167
Total figures	826	389

In table 1 the middle column shows the total number of letters found on SPOGG and PITE. The column at the far right shows the number of letters that were classified as complaints.

CHAPTER 6 RESULTS

A quantitative analysis

Hypothesis 1: People complain about language change.

Table 2:

Total number of complaints	389	100%
Total number of complaints about language change	25	6%
Total number of complaints not concerning language change	366	94%

Table 2 shows the number of complaints concerning language change in relation to the total number of complaints.

The following are examples of complaints about language change:

16. “Does anyone else find it annoying that reference is being used, more and more, as a verb?” (PITE, March 31, 2006, posted in “Usage”).
17. “I do not understand how “impression” has come to mean “imitation” as in “This is my impression of Marlon Brando.” “Impersonation” seems to be the better choice in this situation, but it seems that these two words are used interchangeably” (PITE, October 27, 2006, posted in “Usage”).
18. “When I first heard someone use the word ‘substantive’ to mean ‘substantial’ three or four years ago, I assumed that they’d made a mistake. [...] Now I hear it so much, that I’ve been forced (by my Chambers) to admit that it is probably a reasonable substitute” (PITE, March 5, 2007, posted in “Usage”).
19. “[...] I listen to the BBC news and I frequently hear the word “headquarters” pronounced as “headcorters”, “Quebec” pronounced as “Kebec” and the word “one” pronounced with the “o” as ih “hot”. When I lived in England 32 years ago I never seemed to hear these pronunciations and they bother me now” (PITE, December 25, 2004, posted in “Misc”).
20. “[...] Others: first we had “contact,” and then “to contact.” Not good. Then we had monstrosities like “to channelize,” “to compartmentalize,” and other –izes, which are all obvious rubbish. “Enormity” lost its trenchant meaning and became a silly, needless synonym for “huge size.” The hideous trend continued with “to critique,” a stinker if ever there was one [...] (PITE, September 22, 2006, posted in “Usage”).

The letters with complaints about language change expressed negative attitudes. However, interestingly, two letters that were not categorized as complaints expressed a positive attitude to language change. In one of the letters the writer focused on a new word for an “animation technique” used in the movie “A Scanner Darkly”. The word is *rotoscoping*, and the writer, the SPOGG owner/moderator, expressed a clearly positive attitude. However, in one of the complaints about language change, SPOGG’s moderator expressed a negative attitude towards the new words *spyware*, *ringtones*, and *drama queens*. This suggests that welcoming new words is a matter of taste. In the other letter expressing positive views the topic is English spelling:

21. “The American Literacy Council objects – and has for a century—to the way we spell words. English isn’t phonetic, and although the kooky spellings sometimes help illuminate the meaning of words (particularly those from Latin), they make it tough for children and immigrants. SPOGG could not agree more.” (SPOGG, July 5, 2006)

The letters expressing negative attitudes towards language change have recurring themes: people starting to assign new meanings to words, words moving between word classes or words being used in different ways compared to earlier senses. This apparently annoys a number of people enough for letters of complaints to be written.

Hypothesis 2: People mostly complain about written English.

Table 3:

	Number of complaints	%
Total	389	100%
Written	228	59%
Spoken	52	13%
Undetermined	109	28%

Table 3 shows the total number of complaints as divided into different categories. These categories represent complaints about written and spoken language, as well as fuzzy cases and letters where neither written nor spoken language was specified, i.e. undetermined cases.

The following are examples of complaints about written and spoken language as well as undetermined cases:

Complaints about written language:

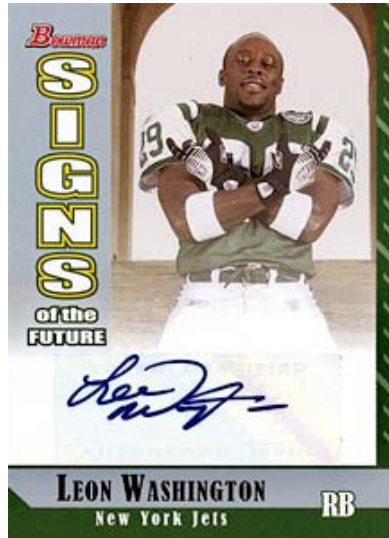
22. “Surely They Jest [sic]



[...] While we absolutely love the maledicta graphic, we are appalled at the spelling on the sign [...]. More to the point, though: Note the spelling of gesture.” (SPOGG, June 9, 2007)

23. “**Those Poor, Bulimic Football Players** [.] From Fox Sports[...]: *News: Leon Washington’s Topps Bowman rookie card was released recently and came out looking like he was **throwing up his middle finger**. Say it with us: Ewwww! Just as one must be careful when using a hand gesture to give a shout-out to*

one's homies, one must also choose verbs carefully when writing. "Sticking up" or "extending" would have worked better here [...]" (SPOGG, November 16, 2006).



24. “**New Edition is a Band** [.] A **new addition** is what Britney Spears added to her family. Unfortunately, points out SPOGG scout Ashleigh W., this is not how US Magazine spelled it: *The couple have spent the last month preparing for the **new edition** to their family. They recently finished painting the new nursery in neutral hues fit for a boy or a girl*” (SPOGG, September 21, 2006).

25. **Don’t ...Stop... Thinking about TomMorrow?**



(SPOGG, June 4, 2007)

Complaints about spoken language:

26. “**Over exaggeration.** Is it correct to say “over exaggerate”? or is exaggeration by nature already over emphasizing? Surely you either exaggerate or you don’t? It just drives me mad when people say this all the time!” (PITE, March 29, 2006, posted in “Expressions”)
27. **Is it Sunday or sunduh?** My wife and I have this ongoing battle over the word sundae. She always pronounces it sunDUH while I say it’s SunDAY because

when they were first made, one could only get the ice-cream treat on Sunday[...]" (PITE, November 12, 2004, posted in "Misc").

Undetermined cases:

28. **"There is no such a thing as...** I was under the impression that this is wrong, that you do not say, "no such a thing", that the proper way is "no such thing as." But, I recently came across a few instances of this used by professional writers with the article 'a'. Does this mean you could technically have the article?" (PITE, April 2, 2004, posted in "Expressions")
29. **"most unique [.]** Is it correct to describe something as "most unique"? It seems to me that "most" is redundant though it does add emphasis akin to expressions such as "very pregnant" and "very dead". (PITE, September 27, 2005, posted in "Expressions")

Hypotheses 3: People mostly complain about grammar.

Table 4:

Category	Number of complaints	% of total
Grammar	150	38%
Spelling	45	11%
Punctuation	66	17%
Pronunciation	10	3%
Usage	108	28%
Other	10	3%
Total	389	100%

Table 4 shows the division of complaints into the categories of grammar, spelling, punctuation, pronunciation, usage and other.

The following are examples of complaints about grammar, spelling, punctuation, pronunciation and usage. The category labelled as “Other” represents letters with various types of complaints:

Grammar:

30. “**Misplaced Modifier Alert** [.] This isn’t the worst we’ve seen but it’s still pretty grisly for a daily newspaper: *A Boy Scout troop found the body of a man missing since April while on a weekend canoe trip on the Shookumchuck River near Centralia, police in the southwest Washington town said. Who was on the float trip? The Boy Scout troop? Or the dead man? If it was the latter, we’d say that was probably the trip of a lifetime... except for that part about being dead. It would have been better to write the sentence this way: A Boy Scout troop on a weekend canoe trip found the body of a man missing since April in the Shookumchuck River near Centralia, police in the southwest Washington town said.*” (SPOGG, July 2, 2007)
31. “**Grammar for spammers, part 2**[.] This arrived in our inbox today from one Barton Ladner (ariel@080city.com) *Its true because we have a great number of different dr@gs! Pain relief, love life enhancement, depression suppress,*

weight loss and much more! Our store is VERIFIED BY BBB and APPROVED BY VISA! Oh Barton. It's true, because we have a great number of different drugs: pain relievers, love-life enhancers, depression suppressants, weight-loss aids and much more! Our store is verified by the Better Business Bureau and approved by VISA. Somehow, Barton, we don't really believe you on those last two points. Could it be because you're not only a spammer, you're an abuser of grammar?" (SPOGG, April 26, 2006)

32. **"Grammar rehab[.]** Oops: "Richie Sambora has entered an undisclosed treatment facility in Los Angeles," the rep said in a statement. "He asks that you respect **he** and his family's privacy at this time." Respect he privacy? Alas, it should be "respect his and his family's privacy at this time." Uch. Shouldn't paid spokespeople get the grammar right?" (SPOGG, June 7, 2007)
33. **"In An Octopus's Garden...with a Dictionary[.]** Dear SPOGG, I was in the library in the children's section, and noticed a book containing the non-word "octopuses" in the title. I brought it to the attention of the librarian. She looked up the plural of the word octopus in the Webster's dictionary. It listed octopuses along with the correct form of the word, which is octopi. Are we getting so lax with the teaching of proper grammar [sic] that we are including the improper forms in the dictionary because they are used commonly? Momx4at35 [...]" (SPOGG, June 1, 2006).
34. **"We'll drink to that [...]** Dear Mr. Crawford: We are writing on behalf of SPOGG, The Society for the Promotion of Good Grammar. Our members have discussed the Bud Light campaign your company developed urging carbohydrate-conscious customers to "choose on taste." As much as we enjoy a frosty beverage, we do not enjoy the language your campaign employs. One does not choose on something. One might choose based on a factor. Or one might choose a beer for its taste. "Choose on" sounds positively uneducated. It's reminiscent of the phrase, "she was huggin' on me." The horror! This sort of thing does not leave us inclined to choose Bud Light [...]" (SPOGG, March 30, 2006).

Spelling:

35. **"At Least the Word Didn't End in a Z[.]** At work, a new sign went up on the coffee machine saying: "Please use the correct muggs [sic]! Mauve muggs [sic]"

for coffee, grey muggs [sic] for hot water.” I was extremely tempted to cross out the end of the sentence to make it, “Please use the correct spelling of ‘mugs’!” [...]” (SPOGG, July 7, 2007)

36. **“Don’t Drink and Shave[.]** This just in from SPOGG scout K. Bryant: *CNN’s politics page listed these story highlights today:*

- *John Edwards’ campaign paid \$800 for two haircuts at a Beverly Hills saloon*
- *Former senator’s campaign also paid for spa visits in Iowa and New Hampshire*
- *Spokesperson for North Carolina Democrat declined to comment on reports*

I just hope the person who cut the senator’s hair at the saloon wasn’t intoxicated. We’ve seen that haircut. There was definitely drinking involved” (SPOGG, April 17, 2007).

37. **“The Klan goes Korporate [sic][.]** People claiming to be members of the Ku Klux Klan have been leaving business cards in Indianapolis neighborhoods. On their fronts, the cards say: We are watching over you while you sleep. The backs say: YOU’VE BEEN VISITED BY THE **KLK** KLUX KLAN. Oops. Someone needs to get a clue. It’s Ku Klux Klan. Idiots!” (SPOGG, July 3, 2007).

38. **“From the Pet Peeves Files [.]** American Dreamz? Oh, pleaz.



Surely there has to be a better way of communicating the hilarity of your movie than by abusing Zs [...]” (SPOGG, April 24, 2006).

39. “Yes, Virginia, That Is a Spelling Error[.] [...]”



Not that we’d pick nits at the NIT, but it’s VirgInIa. Sheesh!” (SPOGG, March 30, 2007)

Punctuation:

40.



“[...]We’re speechless, but panting in anticipation of the letter we must send” (SPOGG, April 11, 2007).

41. “**DC Comics Trafficking in Teen Girls?** Karen B. sends in this gem of an error from CNN: *Castellucci has just released her first graphic novel, “The Plain Janes,” published by MINX, a new imprint aimed at teenage girls owned by DC Comics.* It’s a fine example of the comma’s power to do good –or evil. Without the comma, this sentence makes it look as though the MINX imprint is created specifically for those poor teenage girls owned by DC Comics [...]” (SPOGG, June 6, 2007).

42. **“A Little Something We Hate [.]** Never mind that the owner of this Philly sandwich shop is acting like a jerk and offending anyone who might be visiting from a country that doesn’t speak English [...]. What *really* has us clawing our eyes out are the unnecessary quotation marks around “Speak English”” (SPOGG, June 12, 2006).



43. **“We love REM a Little Less Today [.]** While reading about apostrophes, we came across this Peter Buck quote explaining the title of the band’s 1986 album, “Lifes [sic] Rich Pageant”: “*We all hate apostrophes. Michel insisted and I agree that there’s never been a good rock album that’s had an apostrophe in the title.*” It’s an odd thing to encounter the day after the 40th anniversary of Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band, a nicely apostrophed collection of songs that still brightens our day when we play them. In any case, please excuse us while we go weep softly in the corner...” (SPOGG, June 2, 2007).

Pronunciation:

44. **“Sherbet vs Sherbert[.]** *Dear SPOGG: I was appalled to find that the word sherbet, according to my dictionary, may also be pronounced sherbert! What do you think?* SPOGG thinks you would enjoy The Big Book of Beastly Mispronunciations. You might be surprised at the correct pronunciation of spice cumin. We know we were surprised to read that “ask” was pronounced “ax” in the good old days. In any case, it’s a very fun read” (SPOGG, August 8, 2006).

45. “*Pirates* [the movie “Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man’s Chest”] is of interest to SPOGG, not only because of Johnny Depp, whom we’ve loved since “21 Jump Street,” but also because of the pronunciation of Caribbean. [...] We heard our local NPR critic say, “cuh-RIB-be-an.” And yet, we say “care-ub-BE-an,” and have ever since we first visited Disneyland and its fantastic ride in 1976. So which is correct? The talking dictionary at Encarta says we are, though lists as a secondary pronunciation the one our NPR guy used. [...] Our policy is to go with the first pronunciation listed, so we are doing a small superiority dance in the privacy of our own home [...] (SPOGG, July 9, 2006).

In addition to these two examples of complaints about pronunciation, examples 26 and 27 (page 60-61) are also relevant for the present category.

The penultimate category, usage, includes all complaints about how the language is used: misused words, formal versus informal language, differences between national varieties of English (BrE. vs AmE. etc.) and other value judgements on language in general.

Usage:

46. “**The double “to”**[.] It comes up now and then and really looks crazy if you don’t work around it in some way. “Home Depot is the store I go to to buy screws” [...]” (PITE, September 24, 2005, posted in “Grammar”).
47. “**Inconceivable?** [...] *Carole Radziwill joins Cooper at one of his favorite [sic] restaurants to celebrate the recent publication of his memoir, *Dispatches From the Edge*, and discuss his *barometric* rise.* Barometric? A barometer is a device used to measure air pressure. No matter how hard we tried, we couldn’t gauge her meaning. Was she saying he owed his stardom to hot air? Or to high-pressure situations? [...]” (SPOGG, June 15, 2006).
48. “**Still, We’d rather Eat Ribs**



This is what happens when you go for cleverness over clarity. Not that we don't have a good sense of humor, but this was just....hammy" (SPOGG, April 16, 2007).

49. **“Read Our Lips – Or Not[.]** A friend forwarded SPOGG this e-mail his sister-in-law sent regarding the contents of her womb: “Well, yesterday was my ‘what’s it going to be’ ultrasound. And after much anxiety and anticipation we are going to wait no longer to find out. The baby was in a position where the **gentiles** were not able to be seen at all...” It’s “genitals,” ma’am. *Genitals*. Or genitalia. Your choice[.]” (SPOGG, June 28, 2006)
50. **“troops vs soldiers[.]** Listening to the news, I am wondering why there was a change of usage for troops and soldiers. Since the US involvement in Iraq, we are now sending “10,000 troops” over there, rather than 10,000 soldiers. [...]” (PITE, March 13, 2007, posted in “Usage”)
51. **“Sister Company[.]** Why sister company? Why not “brother company”? (PITE, May 8, 2003, posted in “Expressions”)
52. **“Cruisin’ for Confusion?** Tom Cruise and Paramount Pictures have split up. Here’s what Viacom honcho Sumner Redstone had to say about it. “*It’s nothing to do with his acting ability, he’s a terrific actor. But we don’t think that someone who effectuates creative suicide and costs the company revenue should be on the lot.*” SPOGG had to look up “effectuate.” Frankly, it sounded made up. But it’s not. It means “to accomplish.” To us, however, this word choice sounds affected. To put it opaquely, Redstone has effectuated an affectation. It’s not that we don’t like the occasional \$25 word. We do. We really do, especially when it means exactly what one is trying to say, when no other word comes close. But when there is a perfectly good poor man’s alternative that means the same thing, why not use it? “Committed” would have done nicely here [...]” (SPOGG, August 24, 2006).

The last category, *other*, includes letters of complaints where a number of linguistic issues are addressed. I chose to put these letters in a category of their own, instead of counting one letter into various of the other categories which would become confusing. The letters in this category are quite long. The following is one example:

Other:

53. **“Fox Sports, Did You Take Your Pills? From Fox Sports:** “Kelly Jennings started 41 games at Miami and **instantly** impacts the Seattle defense as a nickel back **instantly**. And it wouldn’t shock me if he started at *some point soon*. And with Bryce Fisher and Grant Wistrom *not getting any younger*, Daryl Trapp from Virginia Tech was *a very cerebral selection* at the end of round 2.”

Exhale. What can we say about this crazy little bit of writing? Did the author overdose on Red Vines and Mountain Dew? Or did he maybe see a cheerleader flash some nipple? He’s clearly excited beyond reason, and it shows in his prose. 1) Only one *instantly* is necessary; 2) At some point soon? *Soon* says the same thing in one-quarter the word-count. 3) *Not getting any younger*: That whoop-whoop sound you hear is our cliché [sic] alarm, ringing. 4) *A very cerebral selection*: Is this a tortured way of saying, “a smart pick”? 5) Should be *round two*. Write out numbers one through nine” (SPOGG, June 3, 2006).

In chapter 6 I have presented the results concerning hypotheses 1, 2 and 3, as well as examples of the various categories of language complaints that I have investigated. Table 5 gives an overview of all the results:

Table 5

Hypothesis 1: People complain about language change			Hypothesis 2: People mostly complain about written English			Hypothesis 3: People mostly complain about grammar		
Total number of complaints	389	100%	Total number of complaints	389	100%	Total number of complaints	389	100%
						Grammar	150	38%
Complaints concerning language change	25	6%	Complaints about written language	228	59%	Spelling	45	11%
Other complaints	366	94%	Complaints about spoken language	52	13%	Punctuation	66	17%
			Undetermined cases	109	28%	Pronunciation	10	3%
						Usage	108	28%
						Other	10	3%

Table 5 shows the results concerning hypotheses 1, 2 and 3.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

In the introduction to the second part of my thesis (page 48) I presented the research questions and hypotheses. The research questions worked as guidelines through the process, while the hypotheses were to be tested through careful analysis of the 827 collected letters. Research questions 2-4 were directly related to hypotheses 1-3 (see page 48), while research question number one, “Are people concerned with correctness in the English language?” stood on its own as a guideline as to what the focus of the research should be. There was obviously no need to do any focused research on this question. The mere existence of blogs on the Internet, where people write to complain about language makes it clear that people are very concerned about correctness. In spite of this not being strictly necessary, I was still curious to find out to which degree people care about correctness. Out of the 827 letters, correctness was more or less explicitly specified (through statements about something being “correct”, “incorrect”, “right” or “wrong”) in 366 letters i.e. 56%. Hence, we may claim that the concern about correctness is very wide. Who would care to write a letter about language in a blog if they were not concerned about correctness? After all, even the most neutral letters were concerned to some extent with a right or wrong or a good or bad usage of English.

Hypothesis 1: People complain about language change.

The notion of language change in the discipline of linguistics is a technical one. For an occurrence in language to be labelled a language change it takes careful research, often during many years, in order to obtain trustworthy results that suggest an actual language change (see e.g. Chambers 2003).

With language change being a technical notion, most lay people are not very well informed about it. I conclude that the complaints that were interpreted as relevant for hypothesis 1 (“People complain about language change”) may not actually be about the notion of language change in strictly linguistic terms, but about minor changes that people believe they are observing, for example, how words take on new meanings as is the case of examples number 17 and 18, how words shift between word-classes as illustrated in example 16, and, finally how the pronunciation of words may change, as shown in example 19 (all examples on page 57). Whether these complaints concern actual language change (in the technical linguistic sense) is not important for this thesis. What is important is that these people who complain express negative feelings towards what they perceive as a language change.

Only 25 letters (6,4%) out of 389 expressed negative attitudes to language change. Considering these results in the light of hypothesis number one, it is clear that hypothesis 1:

“People complain about language change”

may be seen as falsified. Some people do complain about language change, but lay people’s concern about language change is extremely low, compared to other types of complaint.

Hypothesis 2: People mostly complain about written English.

In the first part of this thesis the relationship between spoken and written language was elaborated (page 14-15). Most importantly, it should be emphasized that written and spoken language are very different modes of expression: whereas spoken language is natural to human beings exposed to social interaction with other human beings, written language is a result of a complex learning process.

When it comes to people’s attitudes towards correctness in written and spoken language, my data show that written language is definitely more often a target of complaint than is spoken language. A reason for this was already mentioned in the theoretical part of the thesis. Written language is potentially eternal, while spoken language is brief (see e.g. page 33). Of course, with new technology, we are able to record spoken language in order to analyze it closely, but many times we are unprepared for both recording and analysing when an interesting linguistic situation occurs in spoken language. Such a situation may be a conversation between friends, eavesdropping on other people’s conversations or listening to spoken language on television or radio. People may hear other people use language in a particular (non-standard) way and make immediate comments. However, such comments on spoken language seldom reach discussions like the ones found in blogs like SPOGG and PITE.

Written language, on the contrary, is easily accessible for scrutiny and analysis. Written language is everywhere, as is spoken language, but written language is significantly more permanent than spoken. Also, a linguistic analysis of written language requires less preparation than does an analysis of spoken language. Without recorded evidence, it is difficult to render the exact spoken words of another person. With written language on the other hand, we are able to refer to the source, accurately quote the words in question and comment on them. Few people will doubt the origin of the quote if a reliable source is mentioned. Consequently, it appears simpler to target written language since there will hardly ever be any discussion about what was actually written, unlike what one may expect in a critique of spoken language.

In the research concerning hypothesis 2 (“People mostly complain about written English”) I had clear expectations as to what results would emerge. As I have mentioned above, written language is easier to evaluate than spoken language due to the relatively permanent nature that spoken language lacks. We have an almost unlimited access to written material around us in our daily life, as is evident from the types of complaints found among the collected data. The people complaining have detected linguistic problem areas, for example, in newspapers and magazines, on the Internet, and on street signs or commercial posters such as in example 22 (page 59). People generally have easy access to written material and this was the reason why I expected people to mostly complain about written language, which was a correct expectation. Out of the 389 letters of complaint, more than half of them, 228 letters or, 59 %, explicitly concerned written language (see table 3 on page 59).

When it comes to spoken language the complaints were, as expected, fewer. Only 52 letters out of 389 complaints concerned spoken language; this equals 13 % (see table 3 on page 59).

In this part of the study I also considered a number of fuzzy cases, complaints that were clearly complaints, but where it was impossible to decide whether these were complaints about written or spoken language. Example number 28 (page 61) illustrates the problem. The verb ‘say’ may indicate both a spoken and a written language act. Example 26 (page 60) however, is very clear and I interpret the ‘say’ to indicate spoken language, due to the comment “It just drives me mad when people say this all the time” (PITE; March 29, 2006, posted in “Expressions”). The mentioned example 28 (page 61) is very fuzzy for a number of reasons: the complainer, after first having employed ‘say’, changes the verb to ‘use’ which makes the issue of written or spoken language very difficult to determine. The confusion is complete when the writer adds “professional *writers*” (italics added) as a possible subject to the verbs ‘say’ and ‘use’. There is no way to justify placing letters of this type in a specified category; they were finally categorized as *undetermined*, along with letters with no reference to written or spoken language at all, as explained below.

The “Undetermined” category contains all the letters where there was no detectable distinction of either written or spoken language, as well as the fuzzy cases referred to above. Interestingly, this category scores higher than the ‘Spoken’ category: out of 389 complaints, 109 letters or 28% did not specify written or spoken language. The ‘Undetermined’ category has almost twice as many complaints as the ‘Spoken’ category. Most probably the ‘Undetermined’ category includes some complaints where the writer has had spoken language

in mind. However, the messages are expressed in such an ambiguous way that it would not be fair to categorize the complaint as a complaint on spoken language. As I will claim below, some people may want to complain about spoken language but find it difficult to express their complaints in writing.

Given that more than half of the letters concerned written language (59%) I conclude that hypothesis 2

“People mostly complain about written language”

can be seen as corroborated. People, as expected, do complain mostly about written language, probably due to the easy access to written language as compared to spoken.

Hypothesis 3: People mostly complain about grammar.

In hypothesis 3 (“People mostly complain about grammar”), the goal was to find which of the following components of the English language (grammar, spelling, punctuation, pronunciation or usage) people complain about the most. My data show that grammar had the highest percentage of complaints, 150 letters out of 389 equalled 38% (see table 4 on page 62).

45 out of 389 complaints were about spelling, i.e. 11%, and 66 letters out of 389 concerned punctuation, i.e. 17%. When it came to pronunciation the number of letters was quite low, only 10 letters out of 389, which equalled 3%, and, finally, 108 letters were classified as complaints about usage, i.e. 28%. The ‘Other’ category is referred to in the previous chapter, and will not be given any attention in this chapter. The ‘Other’ category included 10 letters out of 389, i.e. 3%.

Rather unexpectedly, the complaints about spelling were few. Perhaps this indicates that spelling is not an important area of concern in the English language. That may also tie up with Crystal’s observations about spelling, mentioned in chapter 3 (see page 25), namely that the English spelling has been rather stable during the last 200 years (Crystal 2006b).

It is quite natural that the category of pronunciation does not obtain a very high percentage of complaints, since, as we recall, hypothesis 2 (“People mostly complain about written English”) was corroborated. People do complain mostly about written English and in written English pronunciation is obviously not an issue. One reason why people do not complain very much about pronunciation may be that it is rather difficult, if possible at all, to refer to specific aspects of pronunciation in writing. In order to do this successfully, there is a need for phonetic transcription in order to obtain accuracy. Very few lay people are familiar with this tool used for rendering speech in writing. Regardless of phonetic transcription, quite

successful efforts are made at complaining about pronunciation, without using sophisticated tools, as illustrated in example 19 (page 57).

Hypothesis 3

“People mostly complain about grammar”

can be seen as corroborated, people do complain mostly about grammar, although the complaints about grammar do not represent a very large majority with mere 38%. Still grammar is well ahead of the categories ‘Usage’ with 28%, and ‘Punctuation’, with 17%.

A qualitative analysis

An important part of my analysis is a quantitative one. A quantitative analysis involves obtaining results through counting data from various categories, as mentioned above (page 49). However, it is also of significance to analyse the data in some detail, in order to possibly uncover interesting linguistic features behind the statistics of in the quantitative analysis. In the present collection of data, letters of complaint about the English language in Internet blogs, I have found some recurring issues.

The category of punctuation which emerged in connection with hypothesis 3 (“People mostly complain about grammar”) is interesting, since, as many as 1/3 (22 letters) of the 66 letters concerning complaints about punctuation were complaints concerning misuse of the apostrophe. Example 40 (page 65) illustrates that the correct usage of the apostrophe is a difficult issue not only to lay people, but also to supposed professionals within the marketing industry. The misuse of the apostrophe is by some people seen as such a significant problem within the English language that associations have been founded in order to protect the apostrophe, for example, “The Apostrophe Protection Society” (<http://www.apostrophe.fsnet.co.uk/>).

Another issue that seems to annoy a number of people enough to post complaints in blogs is particular stylistic choices intended to give special effects to a text. Examples include deliberate wrong spelling (as in example 38 on page 64), redundant quotation marks used for emphasis (as in example 42 on page 66), wordplay which confuses the message (as in example 48 page 67) and finally the use of a sophisticated term which does not mean what the writer thinks it means (as in example 47 on page 67 and example 52 on page 68) which adds a rather odd effect to the text instead of an intellectual one, as the writer most probably intended.

The users of PITE seem to be interested in the names used in English for, for example, countries, nationalities and languages, as well as foreign loan words. The following examples may illustrate this interest and show that people are of different opinions:

54. **“Tsunami** Why do English speakers use the Japanese word “Tsunami”, when there is a perfectly usable word “tidal wave”? Not just English speakers, even Germans, Italians, and French use “Tsunami”. Does Tsunami happen most commonly in Japan? Personally, I don’t remember any Tsunami incidents when I was living in Japan. Also, why do some people pronounce it “Sunami” when it starts with a “T”?” (PITE, January 9, 2005, posted in “Etymology”).
55. **“Wiener Coffee** At a dinner last night, my friend at the table put a scoop of whipped cream on his cup of coffee. I then asked, “That’s called Wiener Coffee, right?” Everyone laughed, but I wasn’t joking. As funny as “wiener” may sound, “Wien” is the proper name for “Vienna”, and “Wiener” the proper adjective for “Viennese”. In fact the word “wiener” to mean a type of sausage came from *wienerwurst*, “Viennese Sausage”. Then someone else at the table said that the word “India” is never used among Indians. The same goes for “Japan” too. The proper name is “Nihon”. It seems that every non-English speaking country has an alternative name that has nothing to do with the original. Why is this? Why are English speakers so compelled to ignore the original and invent their own? (Or, perhaps, this has nothing to do with English.) The reason why I knew about “Wiener Coffee” is because in Japan, they honor the original names of most countries” (PITE, July 18, 2004, posted in “Misc”).

Fox (2004) makes an interesting observation about this issue in relation to social class in Great Britain. She states:

“While mispronunciations are generally seen as lower-class indicators, and this includes mispronunciation of foreign words and names, attempts at overly *foreign* pronunciation of frequently used foreign expressions and place-names are a different matter. Trying to do a throaty French ‘r’ in ‘*en route*’, for example, or saying ‘*Barthelona*’ with a lispy Spanish ‘c’, or telling everyone that you are going to Firenze rather than Florence –even if you pronounce them correctly –is affected and pretentious, which almost invariably means lower-middle or middle-middle class. The upper-middle, upper and working classes usually do not feel the need to show off in this way (2004:75).

The last issue I would like to address when it comes to a qualitative analysis of the present data is possible feelings of linguistic inferiority as a consequence of the complaint tradition. I strongly believe that lay language users exposed to complaints about language are very likely to develop a lower confidence in their own abilities to use language. My data also show this; in many of the letters of complaint the writers explicitly express a dubious attitude towards their own knowledge about language. The following statements may illustrate this attitude:

- “These seem completely wrong to me, but were written by a very grammatically-correct person. I am therefore confused” (PITE, August 4, 2004, posted in “Grammar”).
- “I need your help. I am so confused” (PITE, APRIL 20, 2005, posted in “Grammar”).
- “Please correct me” (SPOGG, May 25, 2006).
- “I doubt I am correct” (PITE, February, 13, 2004, posted in “Mechanics/Punctuations”).
- “What do you experts say?” (PITE, January 7, 2006, posted in “Grammar”).
- “Am I making sense? (no)” (PITE, May 4, 2005, posted in “Usage”).
- “Two of them are professional writers, so I can’t argue much [...]” (PITE, September 13, 2006, posted in “Book reviews” (?)).
- “I do not know what to think! Give me your intellectual input [...]” (PITE, April 23, 2006, posted in “Grammar”).

I perceive such attitudes towards one’s own capacities as very serious, and matters are made worse when, for example, SPOGG’s owner and moderator Martha Brockebrough declares, as already mentioned above, “for those who use the dictionary as a permission slip: a non-standard word (think “irregardless”) is the verbal equivalent of wearing your underwear as a hat. You can get it over your head (hey, eye holes!). But it looks pretty silly” (SPOGG, June 7, 2006). One can only wonder what such a statement does for the self-esteem of non-standard English speakers.

Hopefully, the Internet as a channel for the complaint tradition is not as influential as other media such as radio, TV and newspapers, a claim I will develop in some detail below. Perhaps language complaints in the future will to an increasing extent be found within the confines of Internet blogs. If this is the case, we may hope for a greater confidence among

language users since the complaints about the English language in blogs are of an in-group character and less visible to people with a less than average interest in language.

Similar areas of research

In the first part of this thesis, I gave a review of theory concerning the linguistic complaint tradition with both a historical and a modern approach. In the present section I will compare the results of my own research with related areas of research on the linguistic complaint tradition, as found in the theoretical part of this thesis.

Hypothesis 1 (“People complain about language change”) may be seen in connection to one of the linguistic facts presented by Lippi-Green (2004): “All spoken language changes over time” (2004:10). My results show that only 6 % of the complaints in this study concerned language change. With a rather low percentage of complaints concerning language change, we may suggest that the linguistic fact about language change presented by Lippi-Green is accepted by a substantial number of people. I find that people do not complain about language change to any significant degree. People may not like new trends that they observe in the English language but very few see it as rewarding to complain about such new trends. Perhaps, due to common knowledge about the difference between Old English and Modern English, most people agree that languages are bound to change over time. I find that Battistella (2005) illustrates this point in an excellent way (page 9). In my opinion, a comparison of old and modern literature helps people to achieve a realistic perspective when it comes to the changing nature of language.

When it comes to hypothesis 2 (“People mostly complain about written English”) I once again would like to emphasize the very different learning processes involved in spoken and written language respectively. A person growing up under normal circumstances, socializing with parents, siblings and friends, will in a natural way learn to speak a native variety or language, also referred to as a mother tongue. The learning process of written language is different and involves careful instruction and practice (see page 16). The degree to which people succeed in writing depends on a number of factors, for example, talent, the amount of training, the quality of training and so on. What is important is that people’s skills in writing vary and this variation provides a starting point for evaluation and complaints. For example, the Swann-report (1985) referred to on page 16, explicitly states that in the teaching of English, written English is of greater importance than spoken. If this is a common view, it is not surprising that most complaints in the present study concern written English. In addition

we must take into consideration that written language is more attainable, many people find it easier to complain about written language than about spoken (see e.g. page 73).

Hypothesis 3 (“People mostly complain about grammar”) could be seen as corroborated since most of the complaints in the data (38%) (see table 4 on page 62) concerned grammar. Examining the results concerning hypothesis 3 in relation to theory from the first part of this thesis, I am able to make a number of interesting observations.

The first observation concerns grammar. Whereas debates over spelling to a large degree settled down about 200 years ago (Crystal 2006b), both theory from the first part of this thesis and my own results show that grammar is still as important issue of complaint in the twenty first century. In chapter 4 (see page 38-43), I investigated the numerous efforts made by the British government to agree on a national curriculum for the teaching of English in British schools. The teaching of grammar in British schools, or the lack of such, was but one important issue in the debates taking place in the last decades of the twentieth century.

In chapter 3 of this thesis (see page 31), I refer to Crystal (2006b) and Battistella (2005) who both emphasize the importance of grammar as a marker of social class. This especially became salient with the industrial revolution (Battistella 2005), but a few of my examples suggest that grammar still plays an important role in marking social class in modern society. Example 34 (page 63) in which a grammatical error is reported by SPOGG to sound “uneducated” to some degree illustrates this attitude.

Another important observation I have made concerns spelling. In my research I found that 11% of the complaints concerned spelling. The rather low percentage suggests that spelling is not a major issue when it comes to complaints about language in modern times. As already mentioned in my discussion (page 73), the low percentage of complaints about spelling may be seen in connection to Crystal’s (2006b) claim that English spelling has been rather stable since Johnson’s dictionary came out in 1755. Spelling in Modern English varies with e.g. British and American English but we may still claim that spelling rules are rather stable. How new technology such as the Internet and mobile phones with chatrooms and texts messages will affect English spelling in the future is still uncertain, but e.g. Crystal (2006b:169) suggests:

“We are being presented with spelling variation on a world scale, with no easy way of deciding which variant belongs where. And the technology itself adds further variants, such as dropping accents (*cliche*, *cafe*) and promoting the use of new forms (as in text messaging). [...] On one hand, the Internet is increasing the amount of variation. On the other, by exposing us

all to the same variation, it is making us familiar with it, and eventually new standards could emerge. Certain spellings will very likely come to be preferred in due course”.

In relation to hypotheses 3 (“People mostly complain about grammar”), I also found that people do not complain about pronunciation to a large extent, only 3 % of the complaints considered pronunciation. Above (e.g. page 73) I have suggested that one reason for this may be that people find it hard to express complaints about spoken language in writing. We may also consider Mugglestone’s (1997) claim (page 33) that historically, complaints and debates about pronunciation have been few compared to debates over spelling and grammar, even in the eighteenth century “with its habitual prescriptive zeal” (1997:22). Finally, another reason why few people complain about pronunciation may be, according to Crystal (2006b), that regional accents have been accepted to an increasing degree, at least in Great Britain, throughout the last decades. Fox (2004), however, disagrees:

“We are frequently told that regional accents have become much more acceptable nowadays[...] and that a person with, say, a Yorkshire, Scouse, Geordie or West Country accent is no longer looked down upon as automatically lower class[...] I am not convinced. We may like a regional accent, and even find it delightful, melodious and charming, while still recognising it as clearly working class” (2004:75).

The attitude in the United States also appears to be negative when it comes to regional accents, Lippi-Green (2004) provides a number of examples and concludes:

“people are judged on the basis of language form rather than language content, every day. Without hesitation or contemplation, workers are turned away, children are corrected, people are made to feel small and unimportant in public settings. The process of language subordination is so deeply rooted, so well established, that we do not see it for what it is” (2004:241).

The conclusion we may draw from these statements by Crystal (2006b), Fox (2004) and Lippi-Green (2004) is that attitudes towards pronunciation may be very different in Great Britain compared to the United States.

Considering my results in relation to relevant theory about the complaint tradition I find that my results fit into a pattern similar to previous research. I find that my results are reliable since previous research provide support, as discussed in the present section.

Further research

I strongly believe that the Internet will become increasingly important as a channel for complaints about language. I also believe that widespread research on various aspects of language in relation to the Internet is to be expected in the years to come, as also mentioned above. The Internet is particularly interesting due to the extensive freedom of expression, with a high degree of acceptability when it comes to which type of material a person may post. As Lippi-Green (2004) correctly points out, language is one area on the basis of which people are allowed to criticize and even discriminate quite unrestrictedly and, as my data in this study have shown, Internet blogs are actively employed for the purpose of complaining about language.

I believe my own study can provide a good starting point for a larger linguistic project, where more blogs may be studied, with a larger sample of data. I think it would be very interesting to carry out research analysing online complaints about various languages, and possibly compare the results in order to find out whether the complaint tradition has a strong position in a variety of languages.

Interestingly, in this study I found that some areas of complaint were repeated on a number of occasions, in both blogs that were involved in the study (see the section “A qualitative analysis” on page 74). Especially I find the issue of linguistic inferiority interesting. I believe that if the complaint tradition is making people feel insecure about their own way of speaking or writing, something is very wrong. Lippi-Green (2004) compares discrimination on linguistic grounds to discrimination on physical, ethnical or religious grounds. The latter is forbidden by law in most countries while the former is considered legitimate. It would be both interesting and useful to find out if there is indeed widespread feeling of unease related to most people’s own capacities in using language, and further to investigate this feeling of insecurity in relation to the linguistic complaint tradition. As mentioned above (page 79), there may be a significant difference in attitudes towards pronunciation in Great Britain and the United States. It would be interesting to find out more about such attitudes, for example, attitudes towards regional accents, but also towards minor aspects of the English language, such as the examples number 54 and 55 related to the usage and pronunciation of foreign loan words above (wiener coffee and tsunami, see page 75). In my present data, very few people complain about pronunciation. In order to suggest that widespread discrimination on the basis of pronunciation exists I would need to employ other methods of research than the present, such as interviews or subjective reaction tests (see e.g. Chambers 2003). Chambers claims:

“The fact that people taking subjective reaction tests typically downgrade a speaker’s ability, character, and career potential solely on the basis of a taped speech sample that includes non-standard features indicates that linguistic diversity invokes prejudices and, it follows, underlies some social inequities” (ibid. 229). I strongly believe that ultimately, such prejudices and negative attitudes lead to discrimination and feelings of linguistic inferiority among non-standard speakers.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The most important goal of my project has been to demonstrate that in the English context the linguistic complaint tradition is still very much alive in the twenty first century. Language users are influenced by the complaint tradition in spite of linguists claiming that we are moving towards an increasingly higher level of linguistic individuality and tolerance. I believe that the results of my research on language complaints merely show a very small part of reality when it comes to the complaint tradition in present day English. With the emergence of the Internet the complaint tradition has found a new and quite efficient channel, where anyone may state their opinions about language.

I think it is interesting to investigate the difference in accessibility of language complaints in blogs as compared to, for example, newspapers. By accessibility I mean both the access that language complaints have to the public eye, and vice versa. When it comes to complaints in newspapers, many people who write letters of complaints may feel frustrated because their letters are repeatedly rejected by the newspaper. Their complaints will never achieve the attention of the newspapers' readers. This is where blogs come in useful. In personal blogs, people may write and post almost exactly what they want and a blog may in fact be anonymously registered. There will be no editors refusing the letter; in a blog all complaints are posted and the writer is in control of all posted material¹⁰. But how influential is a blog compared to a newspaper?

At the same time as the Internet and blogs provide for a new and modern channel for complaints, the effect that blogs have upon ordinary people is debatable. In this thesis I have deliberately searched for blogs with a critical approach to language, but I doubt that ordinary language users search for this type of information on the Internet. I support my argument with Crystal (2006a), who suggests that in 2003 there were between one million and three million blogs on the Internet. However, Crystal (2006a:246) states that “nobody reads the vast majority of items that are ‘out there’ – except possibly the occasional blogosphere-travelling linguist”. In view of this fact, one may claim that the Internet is widely used, but still is a weaker channel for the complaint tradition, as opposed to newspapers, television and radio. Since e.g. newspapers are widely read, language complaints found in newspapers contribute to a higher degree of linguistic inferiority than do blogs about language. If this is true, I may conclude that the complaint tradition is alive, but within the confines of the Internet it is less

¹⁰ Exceptions stated in chapter 5 (page 50).

influential and dangerous than in other media. In Internet blogs, people who complain about language complain among themselves (in-group complaints), while in newspapers, television and radio complaints are received by a greater number of people, people who would not necessarily be interested in language or give their own or other people's language much thought in the first place. Language complaints in media like radio, television and newspapers finally tend to be perceived as more serious, due to the filtering process¹¹ that the blogs do not go through. This makes language complaints in media like radio, television and newspapers much more influential.

¹¹ i.e. the information should have some degree of common public interest.

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Online resources:

- SPOGG, the society for the promotion of good grammar: <http://spogg.org/>
- Pain in the English: www.painintheenglish.com
- Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page
- Britannica Online: www.britannica.com

- The Web site www.blogger.com , a Web site where people can create their own blogs.
- Accent reduction courses: www.lessaccent.com
- “The Apostrophe Protection Society”: <http://www.apostrophe.fsnet.co.uk/>