
[86] Questions, hesitations and comments: Attitudes to 'correct' and 'incorrect' language use in a 19th-century language advice publication

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France has long been considered a society in which standard language ideology, that is to say 'a bias toward an abstract, idealized homogeneous language, which is imposed and maintained by dominant institutions' (Lippi Green, 1997: 64), reigns supreme. Prescriptivism, 'a readiness to condemn non-standard uses of the language' (Lodge, 1993: 3), has also been characterised as a particularly 'French' trait. This study investigates the presence of prescriptivism and standard language ideology in the linguistic discussions of the 'lay' readers and the 'expert' editor of a late 19th-century Q+A format, language publication.

*Le Courrier de Vaugelas*¹ (1868-1881) was a bimonthly publication under the editorship of Éman Martin, a former French as a Foreign language teacher. The publication has a dual purpose; it is at once educational, instructing readers on 'correct' language use and a form of entertainment. The bulk of the subscription-based publication's comprised questions from readers, from in France and abroad, concerning their hesitations on specific points of the French language, to which Martin, from his position of 'expert', provided an answer. These were printed alongside other content related to language and correctness such as short biographies of grammarians, lists of recent grammatical publications and a short grammar correction exercise.

This paper considers only the Q+A section of the publication and will look specifically at Martin's responses to his readers to answer the following questions. Firstly, are certain areas of the language subject to more/less prescriptive/descriptive discourses than others? Initial findings suggest that prescriptive and descriptive approaches to language are often found side by side in Martin's publication and that different areas of the language are treated in differing ways, with, for instance, variation in inflectional morphology viewed as less acceptable than in questions of derivational morphology. Secondly, how does the editor create and maintain authority in his publication? The use of Vaugelas' name in the publication's title already suggests a reliance of the editor on external forms of authority; this paper will look closely at his responses to see the extent to which this tendency continues.

References

- Lippi-Green, Rosina. 1997. *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States* (London: Routledge).
- Lodge, Raymond A. 1993. *French, from Dialect to Standard* (London: Routledge).