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I. Historical Prescriptivism and Purism

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Language norm and language reality.
Effectiveness and limits of prescriptivism in
New High German

1. Some real written German

This paper is concerned with grammatical features in contemporary German that purists would regard as ‘bad language’. Consider the following examples from newspapers, magazines, literary works and the internet:

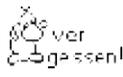
- (1) **Keine Macht für Niemand**
[‘No power to **nobody**’]
(headline of a book review of Ulrich Beck’s book *Macht und Gegenmacht im globalen Zeitalter*,
URL¹: http://www.changex.de/d_a00817.html, quoting the title of a 1972 album by the German rock group *Ton Steine Scherben*)

- (2) Ich wähle **Doris**’ [!] **ihren Mann seine Partei**
[‘I vote for Doris’ husband’s party’
(literally: ‘I vote for **Doris her husband his party**’)]
(Slogan from the SPD election campaign 2002)

- (3) **kauft hab** ichs wegen Turn The Tide – aber die anderen Tracks sind auch ganz ok Kuhhirt
[‘I bought it because of the track “Turn the Tide” ...’
(literally: ‘**Ø-bought** have I-it because-of *turn the tide*...’, Standard German *ge*-prefix on past participle missing)]
(Private internet review of the CD *Clear Vision*,
URL: <http://www.medienkonverter.de/kritik.php4?KritikNr=198>)

1 All internet sites were accessed in February 2004.

(4)

tu
mich nicht  **tu mich nicht vergessen**

['do me_{ACC} not **forget**' instead of Standard German: 'forget me not!']
(ready-made text message offered by T-Mobile,
URL: <http://b2b.ucpag.com/t-mobile-at/pm/177/17.html>)

(5) zurück über das penser joch; tankstellenautomaten getestet (der um 10.000 ITL 5,81 l diesel hergibt & sonst nur 50.000 ITL-scheine **nehmen tät** ...).

['... tested a petrol pump ... which would only take 50,000 Italian lira notes'
(non-standard **nehmen**_{INF} + **do**_{SUBJ-II})]
(Private homepage, URL: <http://www.comodo.priv.at/cgi-bin/journal/journal.cgi?folder=archaeologie&next=8>)

(6) Es war Abend, der rote Glanz auf der Mauer **war am Verlöschen**.

['It was dusk, and the red shine on the wall **was fading away**.'
(non-standard **sein**_{FIN} + **am** + **VERB**_{INF} for progressive aspect)]
(Elias Canetti: *Die Stimmen von Marrakesch*. München & Wien 2002, p. 7)

(7) Zum Kommentar von S. D. „Trittin vor der Tür“... wäre zu ergänzen, daß diese von Trittin in wenigen Jahren herangezogene Lobby ständig **am Wachsen ist**.

['... that this lobby ... **is constantly growing**.'
(non-standard **sein**_{FIN} + **am** + **VERB**_{INF} for progressive aspect)]
(letter to the editor, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 27.08.2003, p. 8)

(8) Dasselbe in Grün: Erik Zabel **besser wie** Lance Armstrong

['... Erik Zabel better than Lance Armstrong'
(**comparative** + non-standard **wie-particle** instead of *als*)]
(newspaper headline from *Frankfurter Neue Presse*, quoted in *Der Spiegel*,
06.08.2001, p. 186)

(9) **Teurer wie** ein Schulbuch

['More expensive than a textbook'
(**comparative** + non-standard **wie-particle** instead of *als*)]
(headline from *Hessisch-Niedersächsische Allgemeine*, quoted in *Der Spiegel*,
17.06.2002, p. 210)

- (10) Ein Quartierplan wirft **wegen dem** Verkehr hohe Wellen
 [‘District plan creates a stir **because of the**_{DAT} traffic’
 (non-standard dative instead of genitive after the preposition *wegen*)]
 (headline from *Volksstimme Sissach*, 21.09.2000, p. 3)
- (11) Abmahnung **wegen dem** Begriff „Telekom“
 [‘A note of caution **because of the**_{DAT} term “Telekom”’
 (non-standard dative instead of genitive after the preposition *wegen*)]
 (headline from the Internet Magazine *ZDNet*, 22.08.2003,
 URL: <http://news.zdnet.de/story/0,,t110-s2138753,00.html>)
- (12) Sechzig Jahre. „**Da** kann der Schröder sich eine Scheibe **von** abschneiden.“
 [‘Sixty years. “Schröder can take a leaf from this book.” ...’
 (literally: ‘**There** can the Schröder himself a slice **from** of-cut’)]
 (*Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, 28.06.2002, p. 36, on the diamond wedding
 anniversary of former chancellor Helmut and Loki Schmidt)
- (13) „**Da** darf man gar nicht **drüber** nachdenken“
 [‘You don’t want to think about it.’
 (literally: ‘**There** must one not **there-over** about-think’)]
 (headline from *Osnabrücker Zeitung*, 03.06.2003, on the consequences of
 fowl pest for farmers)
- (14) „Aber jemandem dann den Lebensstandard weg zu nehmen, aus Geiz oder
 weil man sagt, das Geld ist nicht vorhanden, **da** halte ich nichts **davon** [...]“
 [‘... I don’t think very much of this’
 (literally: ‘**There** think I nothing **there-of**’)]
 (Dorothee Mantel, MP [CSU], in an interview on *Deutschlandfunk*,
 07.08.2003, <http://www.dradio.de/cgi-bin/es/neu-interview/3640.html>)

In these examples, the phrases highlighted in bold print have one thing in common: they appear in standard German texts, but according to normative grammar books, they are not standard German. Some grammarians would dismiss examples like these with the comment that people do make mistakes and linguistic errors do happen. However, in the cases presented here (except examples 6 and 7) we are confronted with grammatical features that have been considered ‘incorrect’ in written High German² for at least two hundred years.

2 In this paper, I will use “written High German” (*hochdeutsche Schriftsprache*) to refer to the high variety of German which was established as a written form in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, particularly as a language of literature (Blackall 1959), whereas “standard German” (*Standarddeutsch/deutsche Standardsprache*) will exclusively refer to the standard

When eighteenth- and nineteenth-century grammarians strove to ban them from what they considered ‘good’ and ‘correct’ German, these features clearly were in use – otherwise nobody would have bothered to declare them ‘incorrect’. The interesting thing, however, is that they are still widely employed in informal spoken German and – as we can see – sometimes also in written German, in spite of the prescriptive work of eminent grammarians like Johann Christoph Gottsched, Johann Christoph Adelung, Karl Ferdinand Becker and their followers. There is, however, one important difference between examples (1)-(5) and examples (6)-(14): The ‘deviations’ in the first group are used in a humorous way or to mark colloquial language use, whereas the ‘mistakes’ in the second group were probably not produced intentionally.

In this paper, I will be concerned with the question of how and why in some cases language regulation has led to the almost complete disappearance of certain grammatical features from written High German, i. e. why in some cases it *has* had an effect on language use, whereas in other cases features that have been declared ‘incorrect’ for two and a half centuries seem to emerge in contemporary standard German, suggesting that prescriptivism in the German-speaking communities may have had little or no effect at all on language use.

After an outline of some of the main ideas and motivations behind prescriptivism that are relevant in this context, I will briefly address the impact of traditional data selection and data purification on language historiography and then identify the methodology and the text sources of the present study. The main part of the paper will be devoted to a discussion of grammatical features which have disappeared from High German – possibly due to the influence of prescriptivism – and examples of features which are banned from High German but which have resurfaced in it or rather, as I will attempt to prove, never actually disappeared from it.

2. Prescriptivism – ideas and motivations

In the history of prescriptivism, at least three different motivational strands can be identified, which will be illustrated with examples from the history of New High German:

1. The most important and certainly most legitimate idea behind language regulation is the *standardization*³ of a national language. Its motivation may be characterised as rationalist, as it firstly aims at facilitating communication

variety (mainly written, but also as a spoken form) which developed not earlier than the twentieth century (cf. section 4 of this paper).

3 For different aspects of standardization processes in the Germanic languages cf. Linn & McLelland (2002).

between the members of a national community which is split up into various dialect groups, and secondly at making this variety fit for use in various domains such as education, administration, jurisdiction, literature and so on. This was certainly one of the main ideas behind the work of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century grammarians in Germany who tried to establish German in domains which had previously been dominated by Latin and French.

2. A second factor is *purism*, “the manifestation of a desire on the part of a speech community (or some section of it) to preserve a language from, or to rid it of, putative foreign elements or other elements held to be undesirable (including those originating in dialects, sociolects and styles of the same language)” (Thomas 1991: 12). As has been pointed out frequently, purism often goes hand in hand with nationalist ideologies. “It may be directed at all linguistic levels”, as George Thomas wrote (*loc. cit.*), but primarily affects the lexicon. – A well-known and remarkable example of successful language purism in late nineteenth-century Germany is the introduction of ‘Germanised’ technical terms in the areas of post and rail, when *Couvert*, *Correspondenzkarte*, *Coupé*, *Passagierbillet* and *Perron* became *Briefumschlag*, *Postkarte*, *Abteil*, *Fahrschein* and *Bahnsteig* (‘envelope, postcard, compartment, ticket, platform’, cf. von Polenz 1999: 296). This ‘change from above’ can be directly linked to late nineteenth-century francophobic and nationalist movements in Germany. Nineteenth-century purism with its aim to purify German from ‘foreign’ elements is markedly different from the movements in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which involved weeding out archaisms and provincialisms (von Polenz 1994: 199ff.).

3. A third motivation for language regulation might be termed *segregational*, as it results in the separation of those ‘who know’ from those who never have the chance to gain full competence in the high variety – and probably never need or desire to master it. Particularly the conservative factions of the educated bourgeoisie (*Bildungsbürger*), who created and upheld the standard language ideology in Germany (cf. Durrell 2000), were certainly not interested in sharing their newly achieved social power with the masses. In establishing an ideal of correctness and connecting ‘correct’ speech and writing with cognitive abilities, language regulation has served as a language barrier to put members of the lower and lower middle classes ‘in their place’. – In late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germany, the enforced codification of grammar and style was aimed at written German and based on ‘official’ language and the language of ‘the best writers’ (von Polenz 1994: 199ff.). Nineteenth-century school grammars, textbooks and also guides to letter writing (*Briefsteller*) can be divided into two groups: those which were directed at students of grammar-school level and educated writers, aimed at guiding those people to master and perfect the written language (e. g. Becker 1831), and those which catered for primary-school children and people with elementary

education to give them basic instruction in reading and writing and helping them to formulate simple letters (e. g. Bohm/Steinert 1851). Mass literacy was undoubtedly a major achievement in the nineteenth-century German-speaking states. But the high variety which was a prerequisite to climb the social ladder clearly remained a domain of the upper and upper middle classes – with the exception of the old nobility, who often did not care very much for linguistic norms and correctness (cf. von Polenz 1994: 209ff.). The sociolinguistic situation is described in a nutshell in a scene from Theodor Fontane's novel *Irrungen, Wirrungen*, where a young nobleman receives a letter from his mistress, a girl from the lower classes:

Dann durchlas er den Brief noch einmal. An zwei, drei Stellen konnte er sich nicht versagen, ein Strichelchen mit dem silbernen Crayon zu machen, aber nicht aus Schulmeisterei, sondern aus eitel Freude. „Wie gut sie schreibt! Kalligraphisch gewiß und orthographisch beinah ... Stiehl statt Stiel ... Ja, warum nicht? Stiehl war eigentlich ein gefürchteter Schulrat, aber, Gott sei Dank, ich bin keiner. Und ‚empfehlen‘. Soll ich wegen f und h mit ihr zürnen? Großer Gott, wer kann ‚empfehlen‘ richtig schreiben? Die ganz jungen Komtessen nicht immer und die ganz alten nie.“

[“Then he read again through the letter. At two or three points, he could not help underlining with his silver pencil, but not in a schoolmaster's manner but for pure joy. “How good her writing is. Certainly in calligraphic respect, and orthographically it is almost right ... *Stiehl* instead of *Stiel* ... Well, why not? *Stiehl* was actually a dreaded Inspector of Education, but I am not, thank God. And *empfehlen*. Should I be angry with her because she confuses *f* and *h*? Good Lord, who can possibly spell *empfehlen* correctly? Certainly, the young countesses not always, and the old ones never.”] (Theodor Fontane: *Irrungen, Wirrungen*. Ch. 6)

The “dreaded Inspector of Education”, Ferdinand Stiehl, was an influential Secretary in the Prussian Ministry of Education who was responsible for one of the most reactionary decrees in the aftermath of the failed 1848 revolution. The so-called “Stiehlsche Regulative” were a setback in national education as they virtually restricted written language instruction in primary schools to calligraphy, orthography and the drawing up of basic business letters (cf. Fertig 1979: 25). Meanwhile, grammar instruction in higher education contributed to an alienation of written High German, the high variety, from everyday language, as nineteenth-century (high) school grammars in Germany sometimes insisted on rules that no longer applied to everyday language. Examples from German grammar are the strict verbal bracket or elaborated inflectional paradigms, particularly with the genitive and the subjunctive. Otto Behaghel, a leading linguist of that time, noticed, however, that the genitive as well as the

subjunctive as a productive means of inflection had by and large disappeared from everyday spoken German already by the beginning of the New High German period, “während es in der Schriftsprache blüht und gedeiht, gehätschelt von vergangenheitsfreudigen Sprachlehrern“ [‘while it blossoms and flourishes in written language, pampered by language teachers who indulge in the past’] (Behaghel 1900: 219).⁴

3. The impact of data selection and data purification on language historiography – the German case

Remarks on developments in everyday language like Behaghel’s comments on the genitive and the subjunctive are scarce in standard grammars of the time, as grammars as well as traditional studies in historical grammar have focussed on written language. Moreover, their data comes primarily from printed texts, such as fiction (particularly novels), newspapers, scientific and academic texts, encyclopaedias etc. – sometimes also letters and autobiographical texts from artists, politicians, the nobility and other prominent writers. These texts, however, represent the language use of well-educated, experienced writers or even language specialists only. As for the nineteenth century, it has to be remembered that these people accounted for less than 5% of the population.

Furthermore, texts written by such authors, particularly eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature, were usually not edited in their original but in a purified version, so that grammatical and orthographical variants in the works of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Friedrich Schiller, the nineteenth-century ‘poetic realists’, etc. were smoothed out. This editorial practice has not changed very much even today. Texts resulting from such practice seem, of course, to confirm the commonly held view that German grammar has not changed since the second half of the eighteenth century (Admoni 1990: 219f.) – or even worse: they support the view that the German language reached its peak at the time of the classics and has been in constant decline ever since. From this perspective, ‘mistakes’ such as in examples (1) to (14) are considered as the result of language corruption and decay.

Traditional textbooks on the history of German grammar, which mostly follow a teleological approach to language history, have done very little to change this view. In fact, they have rather reinforced it by basing their historical outline on analyses either of printed literary texts or ‘pure’ dialects,

4 It is largely the excessive use of such forms and constructions in school grammars and literary works which foreign learners of German mocked, such as Mark Twain in his famous essay on “The awful German language”.

and they have frequently discarded linguistic mongrels such as colloquial or everyday language. In other words: language historians and grammarians have condoned the suppression of substantial evidence in the history of modern languages.

4. Text sources and method of the present study within the framework of a 'language history from below'

It is a much easier task to uncover historical language norms than historical language reality. To assess norms, it suffices to study historical sources of prescriptive work. To learn about the full range of actual language use, however, it is imperative to find 'uncensored' texts from a wide variety of text types from all social classes and all regions. To a certain extent, this methodological path has been taken by Historical Sociolinguistics. Many German studies in the context of Historical Sociolinguistics, however, have more or less adopted the teleological view in which language variation is measured against a supposed standard of the time. In Elspaß (2002), it was denied that such a standard existed for nineteenth-century German, as the variety that in linguistics has traditionally been regarded as *the* standard was known and accessible only to a small elite. To the vast majority of people, some of the prescriptive norms of the 'standard' variety were most probably *not even known*. Instead, these people relied very much on regional norms of usage, which they could even have learned in school – from primary-school teachers who did not know better themselves.

In Elspaß (2003), I elaborated on this argument and pleaded for a drastic and fundamental change of perspective in historical linguistics, exemplified in the language history of New High German. In a 'language history from below' approach, it is necessary to come down from the *bel étage* of traditional historical linguistics and view language use and language change from the basement, or – to use a different metaphor – to change from a bird's to a worm's eye view. From the perspective of the majority of people who lived, spoke and also wrote texts without any knowledge of the work of 'classical' authors or, in fact, hardly any other books, the history of language use appears to be much more complex than grammars and textbooks have presented so far. From this point of view, the history of a language has sometimes taken completely different routes from the history of its literary language.

How can the language used by the broad mass of the population be unearthed? In historical linguistics, it has appeared to be difficult to exemplify a variationist approach to language change with data other than those from modern dialect studies (cf. Milroy 1992: 45ff.). In recent years, however, written documents, in particular private letters by semi-literate writers

(Schneider 2001: 75ff.), have come into focus and have proved to represent the most reliable source of ordinary people's use of written language in modern history. Whenever we get the chance to get hold of such texts, we should seize it and make those texts available for linguistic analysis.

In my research on everyday language of 'ordinary people', I have concentrated on the private correspondence of nineteenth-century farmers, artisans, soldiers, housemaids, etc. – people who had received elementary education only and for whom writing was not a daily task. Two of the rare occasions when people from the lower and lower middle classes had reason to write private letters were war and migration. From within the context of mass emigration to the USA in the nineteenth century, when six million people from Germany alone left for the New World, I have assembled 648 letters by writers from all German speaking countries and regions. 60 of these letters were written by people (mostly men) with secondary or higher education, and 588 letters by writers – men and women – with primary education only. Figure 1 is a rather schematic map of the German-speaking areas and the regional distribution of the letter-writers' home areas. It shows the number of writers per traditional dialect area.

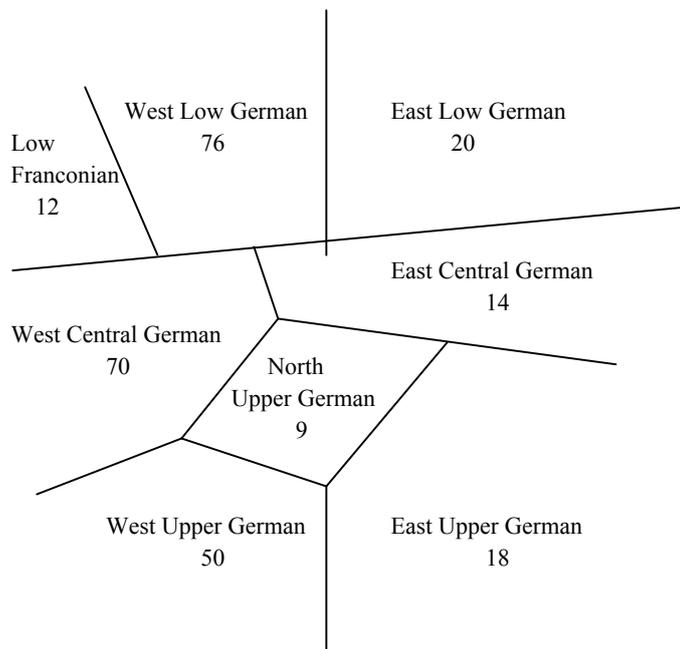


Figure 1: Regional distribution of 19th century letter writers' hometowns (German dialect areas)

In the present analysis, two different groups of text sources will be used: Firstly, text sources of prescriptive work are referred to, such as grammars,

particularly school grammars, dictionaries, treatises and similar texts on linguistic matters, but also fictional texts in which linguistic weaknesses and shibboleths of people from certain social classes or different German regions are exposed. Secondly, to measure the *effectiveness* of this prescriptive work, the actual language use in the letter corpus and in data from present-day colloquial German will be analysed.

The results of the comparison between language norms and language reality will be assessed in the following manner: if certain features have fully or virtually disappeared from standard or colloquial German, this may well be attributed to the effectiveness of prescriptivism. On the other hand, if certain grammatical features and patterns which were and still are considered 'incorrect' are still widely used in today's colloquial German (and from there gradually sneak into the written standard), this clearly demonstrates the limited effect of prescriptive grammatical rules on language use in these cases. To put it more positively, this use may be regarded as an indicator of the hidden but far-reaching influence of non-standard norms of usage.

5. Effectiveness of prescriptive work

In this section, examples of grammatical features will be presented which have disappeared from the standard variety of German, but which have survived in substandard varieties.

5.1 Double negatives

Double negatives are well known in Germanic, but also in Romance languages and in Ancient Greek. It is one of the popular language myths that double negatives are illogical (Cheshire 1998). The belief that a double negative is wrong "is perhaps the most widely accepted of all popular convictions about 'correctness'" (Aitchison 2001: 12). In early German grammars, however, double negation was presented as a "legitimate, sometimes even positive [...] rule of German" (Langer 2001: 167). Influenced by rationalist thinking, late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Grammarians considered double negatives as ungrammatical and succeeded in creating the myth that such constructions are illogical (ibid., 171f.). The author Heinrich August Schötensack (1856: 557), for example, claimed that New High German had adopted the "law" in Latin grammar that a double negative makes a positive, i. e. an affirmative statement. It seems ironic then, that West Germanic languages like English, Dutch and German have banned the double negative from their standard varieties, whereas it is fully integrated into Romance languages, which are somewhat closer to Latin.

According to standard textbooks, double negation had virtually vanished from written German by the beginning of the eighteenth century (Admoni 1990: 187). So why did nineteenth-century grammarians like Schötensack bother to pronounce a ban on double negatives when they were supposed to be non-existent? Most probably because they still existed and were still in frequent use. Wladimir Admoni, one of the leading experts on the historical syntax of German, provides us with a brief but revealing comment on double negatives in nineteenth-century German: “Im modal-affirmativen Bereich des Satzes kommt die doppelte Negation nur bei der Wiedergabe der größeren Umgangssprache vor.” (‘In modal-affirmative contexts, double negation only occurs in the representation of crude colloquial language.’ *ibid.*, p. 225.) In that the use of double negatives in colloquial language does not seem to matter, we are confronted here with the elitist view that non-standard varieties (other than dialects) do not have a legitimate place in the history of language and language change (cf. Milroy 1999: 30f.). However, in such colloquial language and in certain substandard varieties of German – as in English (Cheshire 1998) and Dutch (Haegemann 2002) – double negatives never ceased to exist. It is noteworthy that even Schiller, Goethe and some nineteenth-century writers employed double negatives repeatedly in their works, as they seem to have appreciated the stylistic nuances that the use of double negatives can create (Paul 1920: 334). In informal nineteenth-century German letters, they were frequently used – though exclusively by writers with primary education only and, as figure 2 shows, particularly by writers from the south of Germany.

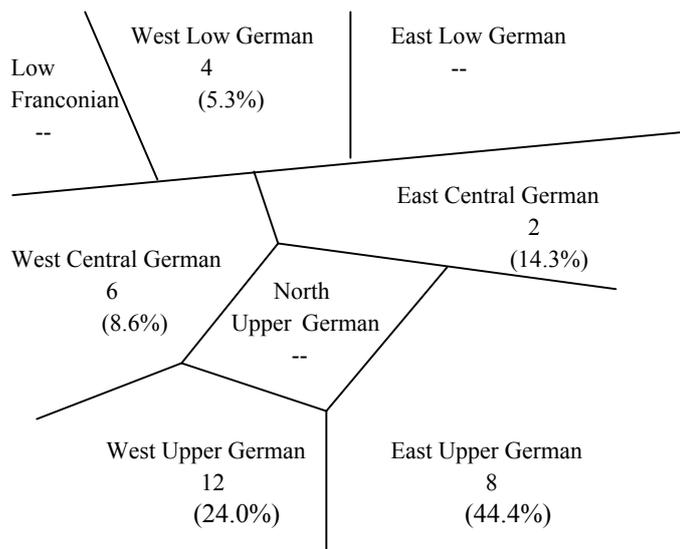


Figure 2: Number of 19th century letter writers using double negatives

In present-day German dialects and colloquial language, again chiefly in the south,⁵ double negatives are still widely used, whereas in standard German they only appear occasionally for specific stylistic effects, as in example (1) (*Keine Macht für Niemand*). Thus, the prescriptivists' work seems to have been successful in banishing this grammatical construction from the standard variety; it has, however, never caused double negatives to vanish from actual language use altogether.

5.2 Past participle without *ge*-prefix

The *ge*-prefix became a compulsory word-formation morpheme in written German no earlier than the eighteenth century (von Polenz 1994: 261). The only indigenous stem/root verb without *ge*-prefix is *werden* in verbal complexes like *ich bin bestohlen worden* ('I was robbed').

Other than that, only verbs with inseparable prefixes and verbs ending in *-ieren* in German (unlike Dutch!) are without *ge*-prefix.⁶ Up to the late eighteenth century, participles without the *ge*-prefix from frequently used verbs like *kommen*, *finden*, *gehen*, *essen*, *bringen*, etc. appear even in printed texts. Hoffmann (1988: 179) has shown that until the mid eighteenth century, grammarians merely proposed using the *ge*-prefix uniformly for indigenous verbs. The most influential grammarian of the late eighteenth century, Johann Christoph Adelung (1781: 274), however, declared forms without *ge*-prefix "pöbelhaft" and "widerwärtig" ('vulgar' and 'disgusting'). In line with Adelung's view, nineteenth-century grammars treated these forms as incorrect.

In nineteenth-century letters, once again an interesting regional distribution of such forms emerges: writers from the North and the South of Germany use forms without *ge*-prefix more frequently than writers from the Central German dialect areas. Forms without prefix in the North can be directly attributed to interference from West Low German dialects which do not have past participle prefixes at all. An illustrative example of the linguistic struggle for the correct form is the following excerpt from a letter by a writer from Westphalia (15):

5 A similar regional pattern appears in the Dutch language area: most of the double negative (or polynegative) dialects can be found in the south, in particular in the dialects of West Flanders (Haegemann 2002).

6 In Early New High German, even verbs in *-ieren* could have the *ge*-prefix. Albert Ölinger in his *Vnderricht der Hoch Teutschen Sprach* from 1574 writes that with these verbs as with verbs beginning with *g-/k* „augmentum additur vel omittitur [...] *Passieren/gepassiert* vel *passiert*, *Kommen/gekommen* vel *kommen*“ (cited in Hoffmann 1988: 178).

- (15) Euren Brif haben wir erhalten u dar aus gesehen das ihr Krankheiten mit die Kinder ⁸**habt** haben was uns alle recht leid ist. Nun Lieben Freunde viel besonders kan ich euch diesmal nicht schreiben Fiederike ist uns hier krank geworden und mit 4 Tagen hat der Tod sie von unser Seite gerissen u ihre Krankheit ist die Kolra **wesen gewesen**
 ('that the children were ill ... she had suffered from cholera' – literally: "... that you have had illness with the children ... her disease has the cholera been")
 [Gerd Hinrich Friemann, West Low German dialect area, Nov. 1866]

Writers from Upper German dialect areas, however, dropped the *ge*-prefix only in the group of frequently used verbs mentioned above. They still do so in colloquial speech, as Eichhoff in his atlas of urban colloquial speech showed (Eichhoff 2000: 4-74: (*ge-*)*kaufi*), or in colloquial writing, as can be seen on private homepages and in discussion groups on the internet (example 3). It appears that people in the North have abandoned participles without *ge*-prefix altogether because the colloquial language in the North has gradually moved closer to the standard and non-prefix forms were increasingly identified as dialect markers. In the South of Germany and in Austria, however, where there is no such clear-cut division between standard varieties, regiolects and dialects, these forms seem to be perfectly acceptable in colloquial language.

5.3 The old *tun*-construction – and a note on the new *am*-construction

In German, the verb *tun* 'do' can be employed as a lexical verb as well as an auxiliary. With the exception of verb topicalization (*Regnen tut es nie*. 'Rain it never does.'), phrases with auxiliary *tun* are considered as not correct in standard German (Duden 2001: 835). Langer (2001) has conclusively shown how the *tun*-construction gradually disappeared from written German in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries due to an almost systematic stigmatisation by leading grammarians and poetologists of that time. Gottsched declared its use as "altväterlich" and "lächerlich" ('old-fashioned', 'ridiculous') and ascribed it to the lower classes (ibid., p.206). Customary belief has it that constructions with auxiliary *tun* had disappeared by the end of the eighteenth century except for vernacular texts from the Upper German region (von Polenz 1994: 263). Figure 3, however, shows that in nineteenth-century letters, it was still very much in use all over the German speaking countries: in 70 out of 588 letters from writers with primary education, some form of auxiliary *tun* was employed.

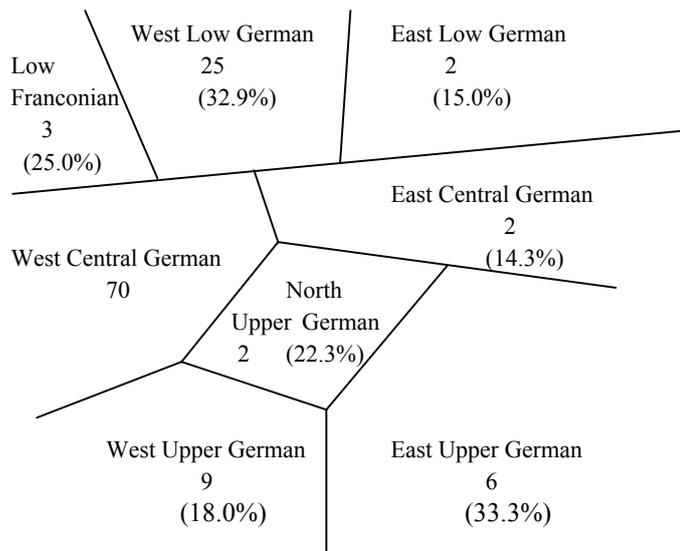


Figure 3: Number of 19th century letter writers using the *tun*-construction

The *tun*-construction is still used today, but mostly considered as non-standard (dialect, ‘lower class German’ or baby talk). In standard German texts it is used only humorously (cf. example 4). In the south, however, particularly in Austria (von Polenz 1994: 263), some forms of auxiliary *tun* seem to be accepted in colloquial standard German (cf. example 5).

With the stigmatisation of the *tun*-construction, a particular grammatical means to express aspect had disappeared from written German, particularly the habitual aspect, as in examples (16) and (17), and the progressive aspect, as in (18) and (19):

- (16) er hat 40 Dolar das Monat lohn und Kost er **thut** Schaf **hüten** für einen Man
 (‘... he **tends** sheep ...’)
 [Katharina Gamsjäger, East Upper German dialect area, 31.07.1887]
- (17) sie brauchten den Doctor der **that** mehrere Tage 2 mal den Tag ihn **besuchen**
 (‘they needed a doctor; he **came to see** him twice a day for several days’)
 [Bernd Farwick, West Low German dialect area, 03.1867]
- (18) jezt **tun** wir **Treschen** aber ganz anders wie dort
 (‘now we **are (at) threshing** the grain ...’)
 [Josef Schabl, East Upper German dialect area, 13.08.1922]

- (19) die Aussichten sind das Anmerica **sich** wieder **empor heben thut**
 ('... that America **will be recovering** again ...')
 [Heinrich Lohmann, West Low German dialect area, 19.12.1879]

While periphrastic *tun* was successfully suppressed in written German, another construction has – only recently – made its way up to colloquial standard German, namely the *am*+INF+*sein*-construction (cf. examples 5 and 6) which practically allows one to express *both* aspects (Reimann 1999: 97). In nineteenth-century texts, relatively few examples can be found (examples 20 and 21):

- (20) *Donnerstag 9 Jul: ist Gerd Schulte Wieking aus Gildehaus so unvermutet zu Tode gekommen er **war** im einen neüegegrabenen Bierkeller **am Arbeiten** und eine~~n~~ alter Steinere Wand fiel um und traf ihm zu Tode*
 ('... he **was working** in a recently dug-out bierkeller when ...')
 [Bernd Farwick, West Low German dialect area, 12.07.1868]

- (21) die Arbeit ist hir rar auf die Zechen kann man jetz noch keine Arbeith krigen wir **sint** jetz auf der Eisenbahn **am Arbeithen**
 ('... we now **work** on the railway')
 [Matthias Dorgathen, Low Franconian dialect area, 07.05.1881]

The *am*-construction is presumably somewhat too 'young' to have attracted the attention of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century grammarians.⁷ In the twentieth century, it was frequently pointed out as 'bad German' by schoolteachers in the west of Germany (including my own), but this may have come too late to prevent it from becoming very popular at the end of the last century (Ebert 1996). In the nineteenth century, the *am*-construction was clearly restricted to texts from the West of Germany; nowadays, it is commonly used in most German-speaking regions (Rödel 2003).⁸ What we have here, then, is an interesting example of a grammatical form which originated in dialect and was

7 In particular, it is missing in an essay by the teacher Joseph Müller (1838), in which frequent mistakes by students in the Rhenish region are exposed. The popular term "Rheinische Verlaufsform" ('Rhenish progressive form') points to the widely held view that the *am*-construction spread out from this region (cf. *aan het doen zijn*, which is s t a n d a r d Dutch!).

8 Ebert (1996: 60) illustrated the rapid diffusion of the *am*-construction with a statement of one of her informants: "A middle-aged man from Swabia [in the Southwest of Germany, S. E.] remembers that *am* was not known in his village when he was a boy, and that it became a fashion when he was a teenager."

diffused in colloquial German to fill a gap which was caused by the elimination of another form from the grammatical system.

6. Limits of prescriptive work

I will now turn to a second group of grammatical features in which prescriptive work had little or no effect on everyday language. The first two case studies (particles after the comparative and prepositions with the genitive) have been presented in Elspaß (2002), so that their discussion will be kept relatively short. The third phenomenon (split pronominal adverbs) will be considered in more detail.

6.1 Particles after comparative: *als*, *wie* and *als wie*

The use of *wie* or *als wie* instead of *als* after the comparative is a frequently made ‘mistake’ in colloquial standard German. As can be seen in examples (8) and (9), it not only slips into informal speech and writing, but sometimes even into newspaper headlines. Since Johann Christoph Adelung’s “Deutsche Sprachlehre” (1781: 479) the prescriptivists’ rule is: to mark difference, an adjective in the comparative form plus the particle *als* ‘than’ is to be used (in formal language also *denn*), to mark agreement, the adjective is in the positive form, followed by the particle *wie* ‘as ... as’ (in formal language also *als*). The grammarians of the nineteenth century strove for a clear iconic distribution, i.e. one conjunction was to stand for one grammatical form, thus *als* after comparative and *wie* as the standard unmarked form after positive (although *als* was permitted in certain stylistic contexts).

In the nineteenth-century letters, only educated and experienced writers comply with this rule, whereas in nearly 40% of the instances in which writers with primary education use a particle after comparative, the ‘incorrect’ forms *wie* and *als wie* appear (table 1).

writers with ...	<i>als</i>		<i>wie</i>		<i>als wie</i>		<i>denn</i>	
... secondary education	39	90.7%	4	9.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
... primary education	347	59.6%	182	31.3%	49	8.4%	4	0.7%

Table 1. Use of comparison particles in 19th century letters

In a recently conducted internet survey (for details cf. Elspaß 2005), about 1,500 informants from over 300 towns in Germany, Austria and the German-speaking areas of Switzerland were asked which particle people in their cities and towns would normally use in a phrase like *Mein Bruder ist größer _____ ich*. ('My brother is taller than me.'). The data clearly show that people are quite aware of a widespread use of *wie* – or 'worse': *als wie*. The regional distribution in 2002 (figure 4) suggests that the use of *wie* is concentrated in the Central and Upper German dialect areas, whereas the data from nineteenth-century letters (Elspaß 2002, 58) show a preference for *wie* in the North.

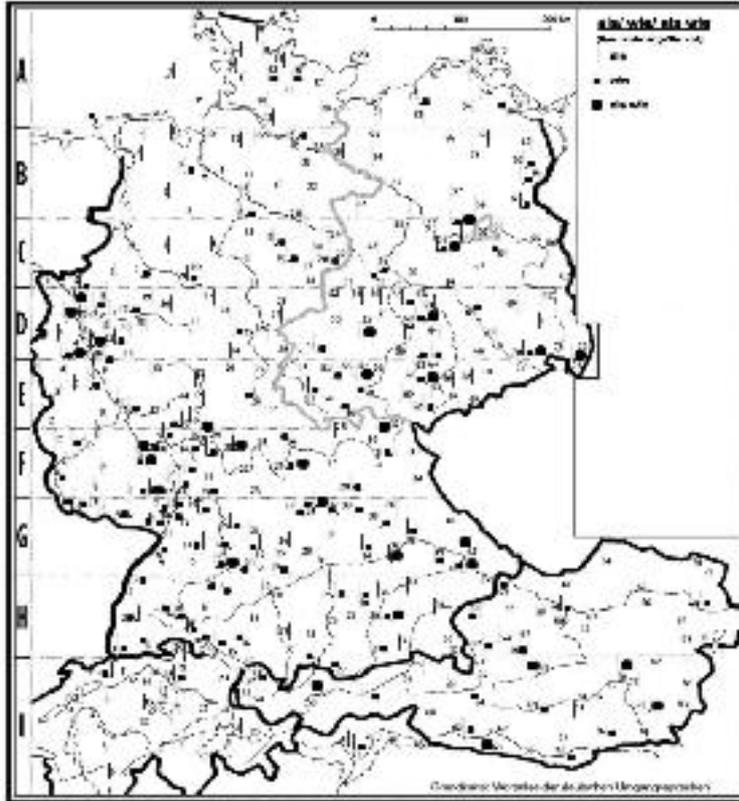


Fig. 4: Use of particle after comparative in colloquial standard German (internet survey 2002)⁹

9 Where there are two variants reported which are both used equally frequently, they appear separated by a comma (x,y). If two variants are not used equally, they are separated by a dot (x.y), and the variant to the left is more frequent.

6.2 Prepositions with the genitive

The next feature in this group is the prescribed use of the genitive after ‘old’ prepositions, like *dank*, *statt/anstatt*, *trotz*, *während*, *wegen*, and ‘new’ prepositions, like *hinsichtlich*, *jenseits*, *oberhalb*, *ungeachtet* etc. In nineteenth-century letters, the 230 contexts in which such prepositions were used render only 104 instances where the grammatical case can be clearly identified. Again, educated and experienced writers predominantly comply with the school grammar norms, whereas semi-educated writers use the ‘incorrect’ dative, sometimes even the accusative, in 83.9% of all documented instances (table 2).

writers with ...	genitive		dative or accusative		(case not clear or preposition followed by <i>von</i>)
... secondary education	13	81.3%	3	18.7%	(28)
... primary education	14	16.1%	74	83.9%	(98)

Table 2. Use of grammatical case after ‘prepositions with genitive’ in 19th century letters.

The most prominent and most frequently used preposition with the genitive is *wegen*. In the nineteenth-century letters, it accounts for more than two thirds (71 = 68.3%) of all instances. *Wegen* is a particularly blatant example of the discrepancy between prescriptive language norm and language reality. From Adelung (1781: 349) to the modern Duden (1998: 392), grammars have insisted on the genitive after *wegen*, although the widespread use of the dative is known (Duden 2001: 928). Again, our recent survey shows that this ‘bad’ habit is still widespread in colloquial standard German: the vast majority of informants reported that the dative is either the usual preposition after *wegen* or is used as frequently as the genitive.

6.3 Split pronominal adverbs and similar constructions

My last example is the case of split pronominal adverbs and related constructions:

- (22) „**Da** kann der Schröder sich eine Scheibe **von** abschneiden.“
 [instead of standard:] **Davon** kann Schröder sich eine Scheibe abschneiden.

In the construction illustrated in example 12, the pronominal (usually *da-*, but also *wo-* and *hier-*) and the prepositional element of the adverb are separated in such a way that at least one other part of the sentence is moved in between. In most of these cases, the PRO element is moved to the beginning of the sentence. A similar – and also non-standard – type is a construction in which the pro-element seems to be ‘doubled’:

(23) „**Da** darf man gar nicht **drüber** nachdenken“
[instead of standard:] **Darüber** darf man gar nicht nachdenken

(24) „**da** halte ich nichts **davon**“
[instead of standard:] **davon** halte ich nichts

According to grammarians like Eisenberg (1999: 195), the ‘double PRO’-construction is confined to cases in which the preposition begins with a vowel (example 13) so that the vowel in the second pro element *da-* is usually dropped (cliticisation). ‘Double PRO’-constructions in which the preposition begins with a consonant, however, are also widespread (example 14); sometimes the first pronominal element is immediately followed by a ‘full’ pronominal adverb (*da davon halte ich nichts*).

In two of the more popular monographs about linguistic tendencies in modern German (Zimmer 1986: 39, and Glück/Sauer 1997: 63), it is claimed that the split pronominal adverb is becoming more widespread in spoken German, sometimes even in written language. What these authors fail to see is that this is not a new phenomenon of sloppy or substandard language use in contemporary German. The fact that we find both constructions in dialects and in other Germanic languages is a good indicator of their antiquity. In Dutch, for example, constructions like (22) and (23) are not only commonplace but *standard*:

(25) Hij had **er** toch **aan** gedacht. (Breindl 1989: 142)
Er hat **da** doch (**dr**)an gedacht.
[‘He did remember it after all.’]

(26) **Daar** hadden we niet meer **op** gerekend. (Haeseryn 1989: 14)
Da hatten wir nicht mehr **mit** gerechnet.
[‘We weren’t expecting it.’]

Split pronominal adverbs are well established in historical German and other Germanic languages. Paul (III 1919: 157ff.), Behaghel (1932: 237, 249) and Dal (1966: 89) give plenty of examples ranging from the Germanic languages up to nineteenth-century literature. It appears that the split pronominal adverb is

the older variant and the joint version the younger one. As late as in Early New High German, the split variant is the unmarked form. Goethe, Georg Büchner, E. T. A. Hoffmann and other writers from the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century use it occasionally in direct speech in their literary works. The ‘poetic realists’ and other nineteenth-century novelists, however, clearly prefer the non-split pronominal adverb. And thus, according to the standard textbooks of historical German syntax which are based on the language of literature, the split pronominal adverb disappears from nineteenth-century German altogether – only to magically reappear at the end of the twentieth century?

In fact, it had never disappeared. Again, the real problem is not the actual language that people used but the ‘descriptive gap’ in traditional historical syntax, and this is directly related to the text sources which grammarians have focussed on so far. In spite of the general trend to stigmatize the split adverbs as errors, people continued to use them in informal German. In nineteenth-century letters, they are very common in letters of semi-educated writers, whereas all but one educated writer use the ‘correct’ merged pronominal adverbs.

Even the specific regional distribution of split pronominal adverbs and similar constructions in the dialects (Fleischer 2002a,b) has survived in modern colloquial German: The ‘split’ variant is traditionally restricted to the North and Northwest, whereas the ‘double PRO’-constructions are used in the East Central German area and the southern German-speaking regions (Upper German; cf. example 14 from an interview with a Bavarian MP). This pattern is apparent in Helmut Protze’s (1997: 271f.) survey of urban colloquial speech in the former GDR: here the ‘double PRO’-construction was noticeable in the southern regions of Thuringia and Saxony. In another internet survey conducted in 2003, we asked for the distribution of the split pronominal adverb and its variants in all German speaking countries. Our new map (figure 5) confirms the notion of the North-South divide.¹⁰

It may be almost unnecessary to say that the split pronominal adverb and its variants have also been a popular target of prescriptivists. The stigmatization of split pronominal adverbs can be traced back to the farce *Der Witzling* (1750) by Luise Adelgunde Gottsched, wife and collaborator of Johann Christoph Gottsched, in which she employed such constructions to characterise the linguistic deficiencies of a comic character from the North (cf. von Polenz 1994: 221). Johann Christoph Fröbing (1796: 113f.), a teacher from the North

10 The only difference to the distribution in the traditional dialects and in the nineteenth century letters is that in twentyfirst-century German, the ‘double PRO’-construction in cases where the preposition begins with a vowel (*da habe ich keine Lust auf*), has mostly disappeared from Northern colloquial speech.

(probably Neustadt near Bremen), regarded split pronominal adverbs as one of the most common language errors made by Northerners. Two other Northerners by birth, Johann Christoph Adelung (1782: 189) and Karl Philipp Moritz (1794: 83), declared both the split variant and the ‘double PRO’ variant as incorrect. According to the Duden, split pronominal adverbs are still non-standard in modern German (Duden 2001: 695).

7. Discussion

What makes the difference between the first and the second group of features? Why are *wie* and *als wie* after comparative, *wegen* with dative and the split pronominal adverbs (and their variants) so stubbornly used by people in colloquial German, although they know from school that these grammatical forms are incorrect? Three factors have to be considered:

One possible factor for the unremitting use of these grammatical features is the fact that they were never restricted to certain regions, so that they never had the stigma of ‘provincialisms’. Whereas the grammatical features of the first group became more and more confined to substandard varieties or colloquial language in the South, the features of the second group have proven to be popular in the colloquial standard of all German-speaking regions.

Another explanation may be that the features of the second group are both too convenient and/or too useful to be given up – probably even more so than the features of the first group:

- There is no communicative need to distinguish between *als* and *wie* (or *als wie*) as there is no semantic or pragmatic difference between these particles.¹¹ The positive is sufficiently marked by *so* and the comparative by the *-er*-morpheme (*so schön als/wie/als wie du; schöner als/wie/als wie du*). Thus, the ‘correct’ particle is just an additional, not an indispensable marker.
- The use of *wegen* and other ‘old’ prepositions with the dative (or even accusative) is in line with the well-known tendency in German to give up the genitive case as a prepositional case altogether. A formal distinction between the genitive and the dative after these prepositions does not contribute to more semantic or pragmatic clarity.¹²

11 “Ein innerlich begründeter Unterschied zwischen *als* und *wie* ist nicht vorhanden.” (Behaghel 1927: 205)

12 This does not, of course, apply to so called “Wechselpräpositionen” (*in, auf, an* etc.), which can take the dative or the accusative. The genitive as a prepositional case remains relatively

- The practicality of split pronominal adverbs can be explained as follows (cf. Behaghel 1932: 249): The PRO element *da-* is anaphoric and topical, therefore tends to stand at the beginning of a sentence; *wo-* is a question word which *must* stand at the beginning. Prepositional adverbs are often compulsory parts of the verb in that they introduce complementary prepositional phrases (*abschneiden von*, *nachdenken über*, *halten von*, *denken an*, *rechnen mit*, etc.). In verb second sentences, they tend to appear at the end, following the verb. Thus, to split the pronominal adverb or to use the ‘double PRO’ construction¹³ makes it easier to plan and process the sentence, particularly in spoken language.

A third factor is the intensity of the stigmatization of grammatical features. Whereas the features of the second group have basically and simply been declared ‘incorrect’, the features of the first group have received more explicit negative characterizations such as ‘crude’, ‘vulgar’, ‘disgusting’, ‘old-fashioned’, ‘ridiculous’, etc. Among the features discussed in this paper, the *tun*-construction has probably received most attention by prescriptivists: cohorts of schoolteachers have spent much effort and time in devising petty sanctions aimed at deterring schoolchildren from using it in their language.

8. Conclusion

Hundsnerscher (1998: 767) noted in a recent handbook article that the overall influence of prescriptivism on language change, particularly grammatical change, in German is not yet fully clear. In the present study, I have proposed a methodological approach to measure the effectiveness and the limits of prescriptivism and applied this approach to examples from the history of New High German. Data from different features were presented which all have a long tradition in German grammar and which have all been declared ‘incorrect’ in the course of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century prescriptive work. None of these features, however, had ever disappeared altogether from actual language use. The effectiveness of prescriptive norms advocated by grammarians, poetologists and generations of schoolteachers, particularly secondary-school

unaffected only with ‘new’ prepositions like *bezüglich*, *hinsichtlich*, *betrefts* etc. which are mainly used in very formal registers (von Polenz 1999: 346).

13 The ‘double pro’ construction, which is the younger of the two variants, can actually be seen not only as a compromise, but also as the optimal form: it leaves anaphoric *da-* and question-*wo-* at the beginning, and at the same time leaves the pronominal adverb untouched.

teachers,¹⁴ was then measured against the reality of language use in nineteenth- and twentyfirst-century colloquial German.

The results may be summarized as follows:

- Prescriptivist grammars have been effective, insofar as they managed to eliminate certain grammatical features from the *standard* variety, such as double negatives, past participles without the *ge-* prefix or periphrastic *tun*, which have survived in substandard varieties of German or colloquial language in the South only.
- Prescriptivism has had only a limited effect on the use of other features, like the use of particles after comparative, the case after ‘prepositions with the genitive’ or the use of pronominal adverbs. Here, variants that have been declared ‘incorrect’ for more than two hundred years, are gradually surfacing in print and electronic media texts. Contrary to the belief of linguistic critics and purists, the emergence of these variants is certainly *not* due to the influence of bad spoken German, to the decline of the German language or to some obscure new variety which some authors call ‘Netspeak’. These variants may not have been visible in the literary language or the language of the print media, but they have never disappeared from informal High German – particularly in spoken language, but also in handwritten texts.
- Three possible factors were identified as contributing to the effectiveness or non-effectiveness of prescriptivism: the regional distribution of a certain feature, its functionality and the intensity of its stigmatization.

In the light of results from empirical studies of ‘real’ language employed by the wide majority of its speakers and writers, prescribed linguistic norms sometimes seem to be followed by relatively few users of that language only. It appears “that standard languages are not ‘normal’ states of affairs, and that variability is normal and primary” (Milroy 1992: 210). Such findings cause a serious problem for the teleological notion in language historiography and for the standard language ideology in particular. The traditional picture of the rise of standard languages and their dominant role in recent centuries, fostered by a static ‘view from above’ of language history and propagated by generations of teachers and handbook writers, may prove to be incomplete – if not fundamentally flawed.

14 As for the nineteenth century, in particular, it cannot be taken for granted that primary-school teachers had mastered or even knew most grammatical norms of written German (cf. Elspaß 2002).

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