

A Diachronic Study of the Positive Influences of Prescriptive Grammar

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Shin, Sungkyun (2019). A diachronic study of the positive influences of prescriptive grammar. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 27(2) 131–147. Prescriptive grammar has been influencing English, especially Present–Day English (PE), for the worse and for the better. For the worse, in some instances, it has gone against accepted usage. However, prescriptive grammar influenced English, especially PE, for the better, in that it has helped establish standard and formal language to express authority, sincerity, and certainty, for a language requires many varieties of registers and dialects. As an example, there is the language of sermons, where serious issues are addressed, such as death, eternal life, authority, and majesty. The registers of government policy announcements and court verdicts also require “prescriptive” expressions. This is not a matter of ideology or social hierarchy, as some misguided linguists charge. Prescriptive grammar just provides standardization, contributing significantly to marking distinctions between dialects and registers.

Key words: diachronic, prescriptive, descriptive, register, dialect

I. Introduction

In the following conservative English appearing in the New International Version of the Bible (NIV), subjective and objective *who* and *whom* are clearly distinguished according to the rules of prescriptive grammar:¹⁾

(1) Isaiah 6: 5. “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the

1) Prescriptive grammar requires *who* as the subject of a sentence and *whom* as the object of a verb or preposition.

King, the LORD Almighty.” 6. Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.” 8. Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”

In a colloquial dialogue or informal style, no distinction is made and *who* is preferred regardless of its grammatical function as follows:

(2) Who are you waiting for?

The same is true of difference between colloquial *it's me* and the prescriptive expression *It is I*, as in the following NIV Bible:

(3) Matthew 14:22–27 (NIV) “22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. 23. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, 24 and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. 25 Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. 26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear. 27 But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

In this passage, the expression *It is I* is used instead of the colloquial *It's me*. These prescriptive expressions indicate that in some registers there is a strong tendency or force requiring prescriptive expressions despite a general tendency toward colloquial expression.²⁾

In this paper I will show the origin of prescriptive grammar, the changes of the English language it has affected, and its positive influences on PE, especially between colloquial and conservative English.

2) There are many varieties of language, particularly registers and dialects, as described by Algeo and Butcher (2014: 12) “A register is the variety of a language used for a particular purpose. The dialects we speak help to define who we are. They tell those who hear us where we come from, our social or ethnic identification, and other such intimate facts about us.”

2. Prescriptive Grammar and Its Influences

2.1. The Origin of Prescriptive Grammar

When English novelist Captain Frederick Marryat visited the United States in 1837–1838, according to Algeo and Butcher (2014: 11), he thought it is “remarkable how very debased the language has become in a short period in America.” He also added that “if their lower classes are more intelligible than ours, it is equally true that the higher classes do not speak the language so purely or so classically as it is spoken among the well-educated English.” The Captain’s judgement is based on the assumption that the English language had reached a stage of perfection at the time English pioneers first settled in America and had therefore steadily declined, not knowing that in many respects British English had changed, as in the vowel in ‘ask words,’³⁾ e.g., *ask*, *after*, *dance*, *glass*, *path*, and the loss of *r* except when a vowel follows it (as in *bird* and *burr* in contrast with *very* and *crass*). Marryat’s position is that any divergence from his speech was “debased”: “My speech is pure; thine, wherein it differs from mine, is corrupt,” an attitude typical of prescriptive grammar.

A notion widely held by prescriptive grammar concerning language change, according to Algeo and Butcher (2014: 11), Baugh and Cable (2012: 256–258), Dinneen (1967: 157–158), Cole (2003), Armstrong and Mackenzie (2015), Hall (1960), Pullum (2004), and Tiekens-Boon van Ostade (2011), is that there are “ideal forms of languages, thought of as ‘pure,’” and that existing current languages represent worsened forms of earlier ideal ones. Thus, the Greek spoken today is supposed to be a corrupted form of Classical Greek rather than simply a changed form. Those who admire Latin literature suppose that “a stage of perfection had been reached in Classical Latin” and that every subsequent change in Latin was an irreparable degradation. Concerning English, according to Dinneen (1967: 157–158), Dryden (1631–1700)⁴⁾ felt that the “purity of the English tongue” began with

3) ‘ask words’ are those words in which *a* is pronounced /æ/ or /a/ like *ask*, *after*, *dance*, *glass*, *path*, which is a common term in the history of English.

4) John Dryden (1631–1700) was “an English poet, literary critic, translator, and playwright who was made England’s first Poet Laureate in 1668. He is seen as dominating the literary life of Restoration England to such a point that the period came to be known in literary circles as the Age of Dryden. Walter Scott called him

Chaucer, and he doubted that it had been going downhill as much as others suspected. Swift's (1667–1745) opinion was that English had begun to be a refined tongue with the beginning of Elizabeth's reign (1533–1603) and had ceased to be so "with the great rebellion in '42," with which Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) agreed; in his *Dictionary* he stated: "I have studiously endeavored to collect examples from the writers before the Restoration (1660),⁵⁾ whose works I regard as the wells of English undefiled, as the pure source of genuine diction."

The purist and prescriptive attitude predominant in seventeenth and eighteenth-century England was the manifestation of an attitude of prescriptive grammarians toward language; these grammarians believe in "an absolute and unwavering standard of 'correctness.'" The "rules" supposed to govern English usage originated in England. Modern notions of "correctness" are based on the notion, prominent in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, that language starts from a pure state and "hence was perfect in its beginnings but is constantly in danger" of degradation and decay unless it is diligently protected by those people who are able to get themselves accepted as authorities, such as lexicographers and grammarians.

As Latin was considered as having achieved much of its original "perfection," when English grammars came to be written they were based on Latin grammar, even down to the terminology. According to Algeo and Butcher (2014: 171–174), Baugh and Cable (2012: 269–277), Dinneen (1967: 159–166), and Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2011; 2016), the most influential of the eighteenth-century advocates of prescriptive grammar was Robert Lowth (1710–1787), who "aimed at bringing English into a Latin-like state of perfection." Lowth, in the preface to his *Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762), agreed with Jonathan Swift's (1667–1745) charge made in his *Proposal* (1712), that "our language is extremely imperfect," "that it offends against every part of grammar," and that most of the "best authors of our age" commit "many gross improprieties, which ought to be discarded." Lowth was able to find many serious blunders in the works of our most eminent writers; his footnotes are filled with them. Like many prescriptive grammarians of

'Glorious John.'" (Wikipedia 2-6-2019)

5) The Restoration of the English monarchy "took place in the Stuart period. It began in 1660 when the English, Scottish and Irish monarchies were all restored under King Charles II. The term Restoration is used to describe both the actual event by which the monarchy was restored, and the period of several years afterwards in which a new political settlement was established. (Wikipedia 2-6-2019)

his time, he believed in universal grammar and believed that English was “easily reducible to a System of rules.” Among many other achievements, he formulated the rules for *shall* and *will* that had been suggested by John Wallis (1616–1703) in his *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae* (1653).

Lindley Murray (1745–1826), an American Quaker who moved to England and became a writer and grammarian and one of the most prominent of the late eighteenth-century grammarians, was motivated by a wish to improve the study of the native tongue, as opposed to Latin, and by his religious assurance, which “predisposed him to regard linguistic matters in terms of right and wrong.” Another of the grammarians who proclaimed rules for language influenced by their age was Joseph Priestley (1733–1804), who wrote *Rudiments of English Grammar* (1761). He recognized the superior force of usage like George Campbell (1719–1796), who in his *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776) called language “purely a species of fashion.” Priestly also agreed with Campbell’s conviction that language needs to be controled in some way other than by custom. Both had recourse to the principle of analogy to settle questions of divided usage, being children of the Age of Reason,⁶⁾ though admitting that it was not always possible to do so.

The precepts of prescriptive grammarians like Bishop Lowth and Lindley Murray were largely based on reason and logic, for they were convinced that the laws of language were based on the natural order, which was of course “reasonable.” As an example, eighteenth-century grammarians rejected the double negative construction for emphasis for the reason stated by Lowth (1762), that “two Negatives in English destroy one another, or are equivalent to an Affirmative,” just as they do in mathematics.⁷⁾ Nowadays, some grammar books of English usage and schoolroom grammars continue to preserve the

6) “The Age of Reason or Age of Enlightenment was an intellectual and philosophical movement that dominated the world of ideas in Europe during the 18th century. The Age of Reason: Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology is also a work by English and American political activist Thomas Paine, arguing for the philosophical position of deism. It follows in the tradition of eighteenth-century British deism, and challenges institutionalized religion and the legitimacy of the Bible. It was published in three parts in 1794, 1795, and 1807.” (Wikipedia 2–6–2019).

7) According to Algeo and Butcher (2014: 174), many people of earlier times produced sentences with two or even more negatives, as many today still do: “Chaucer has four in “Forwhy to tellen nas [ne was] nat his entente / To nevere no man” (Troilus and Criseyde) and four in his description of the Knight in the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales: “He nevere yet no vileynye ne sayde / In al his lyf unto no maner wight.”

tradition of *Short Introduction to English Grammar* by Bishop Lowth.⁸⁾ Thus, the main task of grammar is to make the “proper” choice between *shall* and *will*, *different from* and *different than*, *who* and *whom*, and *between* and *among*, as well as the avoidance of terminal prepositions, *It’s me*, and *ain’t*.

2.2. The Prescriptivist vs. Descriptivist Debate over Pronoun Case Forms

In the usage of earlier times, according to Baugh and Cable (2012: 273–277), Algeo and Butcher (2014: 183–185),⁹⁾ and Shin (2018), around the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a prescriptive attitude toward language arose. After a coordinating conjunction, for example, the nominative form tends to occur invariably, whether the pronoun is object of a preposition or verb or the second element of a compound subject. Wyld (1870–1945), a notable English lexicographer and philologist, provides an example of “with you and I” from a letter of Sir John Suckling’s letter, as well as Shakespeare’s example, “all debts are cleerd betweene you and I” (*Merchant of Venice*). Prescriptive grammar urges the subjective form after *as* and *than* in such sentences as “Is she as tall as me?” (*Antony and Cleopatra*).¹⁰⁾ The essential question for grammarians is whether *as* and *than* are to be considered as prepositions, which would be followed by the objective form, or as subordinating conjunctions, after which the choice of case form should be determined by its function in a clause, as in “I love him better than she (loves him)” or “I love him better than (I love) her.” Present-day prescriptivists opt for the second analysis.

In early Modern English (ENE), according to Algeo and Butcher (2014: 183–184) and Baugh and Cable (2012: 273–277), the nominative and objective forms of the personal pronouns, like *I* and *me* tend to occur more or less indifferently after the verb *be*. In *Twelfth Night*, for example, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, who is yet a gentleman, though a

8) Refer to Tieken-Boon van Ostade’s (2016) remark that “The Age of Prescriptivism is NOW.”

9) I adopt this section on pronoun case forms from Algeo and Butcher (2014: 183–185) and Baugh and Cable (2012: 273–277) with slight modifications.

10) According to Algeo and Butcher (2014: 183), Boswell, who wrote in a period when men of strong minds and characters were attempting to “regularize” the English language, “shows no particular pattern of consistency in this construction. In the entry in his London Journal for June 5, 1763, he writes “I was much stronger than her,” but elsewhere uses the nominative form in the same construction.” See Baugh and Cable (2012: 273–277).

fool, uses both forms within a few lines: “That’s mee I warrant you....I knew ’twas I.” The generally nonsystematic state of things is also exemplified by Shakespeare’s indiscriminate use of other pronouns: “Here’s them” (*Pericles*); “you are she” (*Twelfth Night*); “And damn’d be him, that first cries hold, enough” (*Macbeth*); “you are not he” (*Love’s Labour’s Lost*); “I am not thee” (Timon of Athens).

Today also *be* may be followed by objective personal pronouns, and there are many speakers of standard English who say “It’s me” depending on context, despite the prescriptive grammatical rule that “the verb *to be* can never take an object.” However, there is a further rule. If *am* occurs in a following relative clause, “It is I” would be usual, as in “It is I who am responsible,” though “It is me” occurs before other relative clauses, as in “It’s me who’s responsible” and “It is me that he’s hunting.” The prescriptive requirements of *me* after forms of *be* apply also to *him*, *her*, *us*, and *them*.

The “proper” choice between *whom* and *who*, whether relative or interrogative, frequently has been a main concern from about 1500. The interrogative pronoun appearing before the verb, tended in ENE to be invariably *who*, as it still does in unselfconscious speech as a result of the fixed word order SVO. According to Algeo and Butcher (2014: 184), Otto Jespersen (*Modern English Grammar* 7: 242) furnishes citations of interrogative *who* as an object before the verb from Ben Jonson, Goldsmith, Greene, Marlowe, the old *Spectator* of Addison and Steele, and Sheridan, with later examples from Mrs. Humphry Ward, Shaw, and Thackeray. Alexander Schmidt’s *Lexicon of Shakespeare* cites fifteen quotations for interrogative *who* in this construction, though, as Jespersen (*Modern English Grammar* 7: 242) adds, “Most modern editors and reprinters add the *-m* everywhere in accordance with the rules of ‘orthodox’ grammar.”

Relative *who* as the object of a preposition or verb is also common. According to Algeo and Butcher (2014: 184–185), Schmidt cites a dozen instances from Shakespeare, followed by “etc.,” and Jespersen cites a few other authors. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) reports that *whom* as an object is “no longer current in natural colloquial speech.” There are, however, a great many examples of *whom* for the subjective, especially as a relative that may be mistaken as the object of the main-clause verb, as in Matthew 16:13 “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” Shakespeare freely uses objective *whom* as in “Whom in constancie you thinke stands so safe” (*Cymbeline*) and “Young Ferdinand (whom they suppose is droun’d)” (*The Tempest*). However, Shakespeare, who is representative of ENE, uses such constructions alongside others with the “prescriptive” form of the construction, e.g., “I should do Brutus wrong, and Cassius wrong: who (you all

know) are Honourable men” (*Julius Caesar*). We observe the “incorrect” use of *whom* very frequently during the whole Modern English (NE) period. Jespersen, whose *Modern English Grammar* (3: 198–9) is a storehouse of illustrative material with many examples from Chaucer to PE, and Sir Ernest Gowers cites instances from Lord David Cecil, E. M. Forster, Somerset Maugham, and *The Times*, all of which might be assumed to be standard English.

2.3. British and American Prescriptive vs. Descriptive Grammar

According to Baugh and Cable (2012: 273–281), Dinneen (1967: 151–174), and Algeo and Butcher (2014: 204–205),¹¹⁾ since less attention is paid to pronunciation as a characteristic of social status in America than in Britain, grammatical “correctness” receives accordingly greater attention in America based on such matters as the “proper” position of *only* and other shibboleths. It seems for some people to be practically a moral responsibility to follow “good” grammar in choosing forms of personal pronouns and *who* strictly by the proper case; shunning *like* as a conjunction; referring to *everyone*, *everybody*, *nobody*, *no one*, *someone*, and *somebody* with singular *he* or *she*, and avoiding *can* to ask for or give permission. Counter-examples to these prescriptive rules of usage are frequently found. For example, according to Algeo and Butcher (2014: 204–205), “Who are you with?” (that is, “What newspaper do you work for?”), asked Queen Elizabeth II of various newspapermen at a reception given for her by the press in Washington, DC. For the permission *can*, in the novel *The Cambridge Murders*, a titled academic writes to a young acquaintance, “Babs dear, can I see you for a few moments, please?” *Like* has been used as a conjunction in self-assured, cultivated English since the early sixteenth century—as in a comment by an English critic, Clive Barnes: “These Russians dance like the Italians sing and the Spaniards fight bulls.” The choice of case for pronouns is governed by principles quite different from those of prescriptive grammar; King George VI was observed by Winston Churchill as saying that “it would not be right for either you or I to be where we planned to be on D-Day,” and Somerset Maugham was also observed by an American reviewer to have written “a good deal older than me.” The use of *they*, *them*, and *their* with a singular antecedent has long been standard English; specimens of this usage are found in Jane Austen, Thomas De Quincey, Lord Dunsany, Cardinal Newman, Samuel Butler, and others. The OED furnishes a citation of

11) I adopt this section with slight changes from Algeo and Butcher (2014:204–205).

Lord Chesterfield, who may be taken as a model of noble eighteenth-century usage, as having written, “If a person is born of a gloomy temper... they cannot help it.”

2.4. Prescriptive Correctness vs. Descriptive Acceptability

The concept of an absolute standard of linguistic prescriptive correctness is widespread among the common and the educated. Those who adhere to this notion become greatly concerned over such matters as the “incorrect” position of *only*, prepositions at the ends of sentences, and split infinitives. There is a division between prescriptive grammarians like Robert Lowth (1710–1787), who wrote one of the most influential English grammars of the eighteenth century (*A Short Introduction to English Grammar*, 1762), and was commended by one of his admirers for showing “the grammatic inaccuracies that have escaped the pens of our most distinguished writers,” as mentioned above, and descriptive grammarians, who maintain that standards must be based on the usage of speakers and writers of a generally recognized educated class—quite a different thing from the mandates of “authorities” who are guided by their own principles rather than by the actual usage of educated and accomplished speakers and writers.

To talk about prescriptive “correctness” in language implies that there is some absolute standard by which words and grammar can be judged as either “correct” or “incorrect.” Instead, many students of usage today prefer to talk about descriptive acceptability based on the standards by which users of a language will judge an expression as acceptable or unacceptable. An acceptable expression is one that people do not disapprove of, indeed do not even notice unless it is called to their attention.

Acceptability, according to Algeo and Butcher (2014: 12–13) and Baugh and Cable (2012: 277–281), is a matter of degree, not absolute; “one expression may be more or less acceptable than another.” “If I were you” may be regarded more acceptable than “If I was you,” but both are considerably more acceptable than “If we was you.” Likewise, most Americans pronounce *lieutenant* as [lutənənt] and regard any other pronunciation as unacceptable. On the other hand, many Britons pronounce it as [leftənənt] and find the American pronunciation less acceptable. Acceptability pertains to the convention of language use in contrast with prescriptive correctness.

2.5. The Positive Influences of Prescriptive Grammar

As mentioned above, I observed the subjective and objective *who* and *whom* are distinctly used according to the rules of prescriptive grammar in conservative language like that of the Bible:

- (4) (=1)) Isaiah 6: 5. “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.” 6. Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.” 8. Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”

Here, *Whom shall I send?* and *who will go for us?* follow the rule of prescriptive grammar.

It is the same with the difference between colloquial *it's me* and prescriptive *It is I* as in the following NIV version:

- (5) “Isaiah 52: 6. Therefore my people will know my name; therefore in that day they will know that it is I who foretold it. Yes, it is I.” 7. How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!”

In this Bible passage, the expression *It is I* is used instead of the colloquial *It's me*. If we change “it is I who foretold it. Yes, it is I” to “it's me who foretold it. Yes, it's me,” the majesty and authority of the Almighty God simply disappear and the words sound trivial, unimportant, superficial, and even ridiculous and flippant. These prescriptive expressions indicate that in some registers there is a strong force requiring prescriptive expressions despite a general tendency toward colloquial expression. In standard language or conservative language in which good manners and authority are required, prescriptive expressions are necessary.

As another example, consider the following Bible passages:

- (6) a. “Galatians 1:10 Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men,

- I would not be a servant of Christ.”
- b. “Galatians 4:14 Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself.”
 - c. Exodus 33:5 For the Lord had said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites, ‘You are a stiff-necked people. If I were to go with you even for a moment, I might destroy you. Now take off your ornaments and I will decide what to do with you.’”

In these passages, the prescriptive expression *I were ...* is used instead of the colloquial expression *I was...* If the colloquial expression is used, the seriousness and authority of the speaker (the Almighty God) decreases.¹²⁾ Indeed, if we examine the Bible, we will observe no example of *if I was* in the Four Gospels of the conservative NIV.

I also have checked the usage in NIV, written in typical conservative PE, of *who* vs *whom*. Prescriptive grammar requires *who* as the subject of a sentence and *whom* as the object of a verb or preposition. In the *Gospel of John*, fifteen examples of *whom* are found, all of which are objects of either a verb or a preposition. However, no example of *who* as an object of a verb or preposition is found:

- (7) a. John 8:54 Jesus replied, “If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me.”
- b. John 17:3 Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

Who is used only as the subject of a sentence:

- (8) “John 1:12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—”

Prescriptive grammar also distinguishes *as* and *like* as discussed above, whereby the

12) Concerning the difference between *will* and *shall*, the conservative Bible seems to follow the prescriptive rule as follows: “For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: “If a man will not work, he shall not eat.” II Thessalonians 3: 10. NIV.”

former is a conjunction followed by a clause with a subject and a verb and the latter is a preposition followed by a noun or pronoun:

- (9) a. He went to Columbia University, as his father had before him.
b. She's a talented speaker, as most of her family are.
- (10) a. I've been working like a dog all summer.
b. None of my sisters are much like me.
c. She looks just like her father.

Like may be used as a conjunction, but this usage is regarded as informal, colloquial, or spoken English style:

- (11) a. It looks like it's going to storm.
b. Nobody loves him like I do.

This is very common in American English, but is not considered correct according to prescriptive grammar. In the following passage written by a respected American personality, *like* as a conjunction is used:

- (12) "When I came ashore and entered the Naval War College in the fall of 1991, it felt like a struggle of historic significance finally had been won. The Berlin Wall had fallen, and the Soviet Union was on the verge of collapse."¹³⁾

However, in contrast to colloquial American style, not a single example of *like* used as a conjunction is observed in the conservative Four Gospels of NIV.

Besides this kind of conservative style in the Bible, we can find similar conservative or prescriptive styles in other fields. According to the research of Lewis (2011), there are also popular expressions which educated native speakers regard as "bad English," "incorrect grammar," "vulgar," or "illiterate," which are rarely if ever used by educated speakers of

13) James Stavridis, "Democracy Isn't Perfect, But It Will Still Prevail." Time. (July 12, 2018). American Admiral Stavridis (Ret.) was the 16th Supreme Allied Commander of NATO and is an Operating Executive at The Carlyle Group.

current educated usage. However, in the colloquial or slang language in which intimacy, fellowship and comradeship matter, non-prescriptive forms are preferred, even encouraged. According to Lewis (2011: 143–147), based on a questionnaire survey of a number of dictionary editors, authors, and professors of English, only expressions (13b) and (13f) are regarded as wrong. Not only does the use of (13b) or (13f) violate a valid and useful grammatical principle, but, more important, it is rarely heard in educated speech. The meaning of the sentence is equally clear no matter which form of the pronoun is employed, of course, but the use of (13b) and (13f), the less popular choice, may stigmatize the speaker as uneducated according to Lewis (2011).

(13) TEST YOURSELF (adopted from Lewis 2011: 147)

- a. Let's not walk any further right now.
- b. Some people admit that their principle goal in life is to become wealthy.
- c. What a nice thing to say!
- d. He's pretty sick today.
- e. I feel awfully sick.
- f. Are you going to invite Doris and I to your party?

According to Lewis (2011: 147), in (13b), *principle* is a noun rather than an adjective (which is *principal*), so the preferred expression is *principal goal*. In (13f), the transitive verb *invite* is supposed to be followed by an objective form *me* rather than *I*.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

Prescriptive grammar, based on claims of universal grammar, logic, reason, analogy, etymology, and authority, has influenced English, especially PE, for the worse and for the better, as observed by Tiekens-Boon van Ostade's (2016) remark that "The Age of prescriptivism is NOW." For the worse, it has stood against accepted usage, for example, Robert Lowth's (1672) promulgation of the rules for *shall* and *will* formulated by John Wallis' *Grammatica Linguae Anglicanae* (1653), which are not generally obeyed nowadays. That is why so many linguists, especially descriptive linguists, harshly criticize prescriptive

grammar. Dinneen (1967: 169) shows his opposition by stating that “The linguist concludes, therefore, that questions of grammatical correctness can be settled only by data intrinsic to each language and not by rules derived from Latin and Greek. While literary or logical models have their own excellence, utterances of other types must be judged on their own uses and merits and not as though they were distortions of a logical proposition or literary declarative sentences. Such sentences depart from the norms for these other two not because of ignorance or carelessness but because of the exigencies of style.” Dineen (1967: 170) also points out the weakness of prescriptive grammar thus: “It is normative, basing its rules frequently on illogical grounds; it is internally inconsistent and eternally inadequate as a description of actual language in use.” Baugh and Cable (2012: 269) also point out its weaknesses as follows: “Their greatest weakness was, of course, their failure, except in one or two conspicuous cases, to recognize the importance of usage as the sole arbiter in linguistic matters,” and “At the root of all their mistakes was their ignorance of the processes of linguistic change.” Armstrong and Mackenzie (2015), agreeing with Cole (2003) and Pullum (2004), criticize “the modern prescriptive approach to language appeals to a hierarchical view of society, and hence of language” and as being “in conflict with the more recent ideology of equality” (equalitarianism).¹⁴⁾

However, prescriptive grammar has influenced English, especially PE, for the better, in that it has helped establish standardization to express authority, sincerity, and certainty,¹⁵⁾ for a language requires many varieties of registers and dialects. As an example, there is a sermon language where serious issues are addressed, such as death, eternal life, authority, and majesty. In this register, the expressions “Take courage! It is I. Do not be afraid” and “it is I who foretold it. Yes, it is I” are definitely required. If, instead of these expressions, “It’s me. Don’t be afraid.” and “it’s me who foretold it. Yes, it’s me” are used, they might sound unserious, even trivial, unimportant, superficial, ridiculous and lacking authority, dignity, and majesty. The registers of government policy announcements and court verdicts also require “prescriptive” expressions.

14) Baugh and Cable (2012: 238–248) also discuss the problems of prescriptive grammar, especially concerning its efforts to “standardize, refine, and fix the English language.”

15) Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2019) admits that prescriptivism is playing now a role in standardizing English: “Results from a survey conducted to try and assess the effects of prescriptivism in the eyes of the general public showed that currently a form of anti-prescriptivism is developing, though this does not actually seem to herald the end of English standardisation as such.”

As mentioned above, Lewis (2011: 147) also points out that there are popular expressions which educated native speakers regard as “bad English,” “incorrect grammar,” “vulgar,” or “illiterate,” which are rarely if ever used by educated speakers of current educated usage. His survey shows that there is an educated style, by which some controversial and popular expressions are considered as educated or uneducated. Regarding this matter, prescriptive grammar codifies the measures by which the distinctions of formal vs. informal, standard vs. nonstandard, and educated vs. uneducated are made. However, in colloquial or slang language in which intimacy, fellowship and comradeship are emphasized, non-prescriptive forms are preferred and even encouraged. Popular expressions, even “vulgar” ones, may be highly valued depending on whether they improve comradeship, fellowship, and intimacy, which are more natural in some situations. A highly respected personality usually employs standard formal language in dealing with official business. However, when making contact with his/her close friends and relatives, he/she is willing to switch to colloquial, informal, non-standard, and even “vulgar” language. This is not a matter of ideology or social hierarchy in classless PE, as some misguided linguists criticize. Prescriptive grammar simply provides standardization to make distinctions among many varieties of registers and dialects.

A language exists in many varieties. For example, there are many dialects, varieties of a language characteristic of and associated with a particular social level or place. There are also many registers, language varieties used in a particular context or for a certain purpose:¹⁶⁾ court language, government language, restaurant-menu language, e-mail and instant-messaging language. Everyone employs several registers and dialects depending on the situation, and the more varied the situations in which we talk and write, the more registers and dialects we use. The dialects we speak help to define our identity. They tell our listeners where we come from, our ethnic or social identification, and other such intimate facts about us. The registers we use reflect the situations in which we are communicating. They indicate where and to whom we are speaking or writing about what subject, via what medium, and for what purpose. Prescriptive grammar constitutes a significant factor making distinctions between dialects and registers by providing standardization.

16) English Oxford Living Dictionaries defines register as follows: “A variety of a language or a level of usage, as determined by degree of formality and choice of vocabulary, pronunciation, and syntax, according to the communicative purpose, social context, and standing of the user.”

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