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An Introduction to Linguistic Purism

1. Introduction

Purism is an aspect of linguistic study which appeals not only to the scholar but also to the layperson. Somehow, ordinary speakers with many different mother tongues and with no formal training in linguistics (a group referred to as folk by Niedzielski & Preston 2000, a term which we will adopt in this book) share certain beliefs about what language is, how it develops or should develop, whether it has good or bad qualities, etc. But not only that: there is the recurrent phenomenon that speakers of a language agree that the state of their language is in decline, that it contains too many words from informal varieties, that it is threatened by modernising and foreign influences: in short, that it was better in the olden days and that nowadays something needs to be done to restore it to its former glory. It is surely significant that the opening pages of Crystal’s *Encyclopedia of Language* (1997: 2) are devoted a discussion of the interest shown by laypeople in language, a topic which is part of linguistic purism. Language is distinguished from other academic disciplines such as astronomy, Roman mythology, or physics because all speakers consider themselves to be experts in the field of language. In addition, linguistic skills are highly valued in society and linguistic behaviour is a very public affair (ibid.) – hence there are many reasons and opportunities to form, reaffirm and argue about views on language, much more so than for example in the field of Roman mythology cited above.

Professional linguists have often ignored the study of folk attitudes to language, dismissing them, perhaps rightly, as ill-conceived and fundamentally flawed due to a lack of understanding of how language works (cf. Milroy & Milroy 1999: 2-9). Whilst the increased general interest in the interaction between language and society since the 1960s has led some scholars to the phenomenon of linguistic purism as a prominent instance of folk linguistics, so far comparatively little work has actually been carried out in this field. Recently, scholars such as Cameron (1995) and Milroy & Milroy (1999) have called for more academic research into attitudes towards language and have
urged academic linguists to take folk evaluation more seriously rather than to dismiss it as being unworthy of their interest as has tended to be the case.

As regards the specific issue of purism, there is as yet only one monograph which aims to provide some theoretical underpinning (Thomas 1991), although there are several collections of articles which either focus on purism or contribute to our understanding of it by presenting important research in related fields, for example the process of standardisation or the historiography of language. Amongst some recent works in the field of Germanic linguistics, we can cite the conference proceedings by Brincat et al. 2003 and Linn & McLelland 2002, the collection of articles on individual languages found in van der Sijs 1999, Deumert & Vandenbussche 2003, and Bex & Watts 1999 and the monographs by Jones 1995 and Niedzielski & Preston 2000.

The present volume contains a selection of papers given at a conference at the University of Bristol in April 2003. The conference was entitled Linguistic Purism in the Germanic Languages and by restricting it to Germanic¹ we hoped to retain a certain thematic focus, rather than have a much greater number of languages which would then have made comparisons between findings difficult. However, it became very clear very quickly that despite the fact that the conference was organised around a common theme, the topic of linguistic purism covers a very wide range of issues. Whilst in its very essence purism is about the desire to keep a language pure (cf. Thomas’s (1991) definition below), it can also affect folk-linguistic attitudes in general (cf. Niedzielski’s and Evans et al.’s contributions), the relationship between standard and non-standard varieties, preserving older varieties and rejecting younger ones, the role of language in nationalist ideology (cf. the papers in the section on Purism and Nation as well as Leyhausen’s and Milroy’s contributions) and the very concept that a new, borrowed word can be alien to a language (cf. Reichmann’s contribution).

We felt that this resultant range of topics was a very positive outcome of the conference. Scholars with a similar general interest, namely linguistic purism, had to engage with the complexity of the field, and cross-fertilisation took place both across languages and subject specialisms. In this publication, we hope to achieve the same for our reader: to show, on the one hand, the diversity of the topics covered and, on the other hand, to point out the roten Faden, the continuous thread that gives cohesion to all the contributions.

¹ For purism in respect to non-Germanic Languages cf for example van der Sijs 1999 and Brincat et al. 2003. In this volume we have included one article on a non-Germanic language (Boughton, on French) for the sake of comparison.
In this introduction, we will firstly review some of the most prominent definitions of linguistic purism before discussing the views regarding the benefits and disadvantages of purism for a language. Finally, we will briefly introduce all the contributions.

2. What is purism?

General definitions of the concept will always be rather vague but, before discussing our topic in more depth, it seems sensible to see what the agreed common ground is as regards linguistic purism. Larry Trask restricts his definition of purism to foreign influences, highlighting in particular puristic activity towards words, though not excluding other features:

 purism The belief that words (and other linguistic features) of foreign origin are a kind of contamination sullying the purity of a language. [...] (Trask (1999: 254))

By contrast, George Thomas’s definition does not restrict itself to foreign elements but includes varieties such as dialects and particular styles of a language:

[purist activity is] “a desire on the part of the speech community [...] to preserve a language form, or rid it of, putative foreign elements or elements held to be undesirable elements (including those originating in dialects, sociolects and styles of the same language). It may be directed at all linguistic levels but primarily the lexicon. Above all, purism is an aspect of the codification, cultivation and planning of standard languages.” (Thomas (1991: 12))

Importantly, purism is concerned not only with the removal of (unwanted) linguistic features but also with the preservation of desirable elements. Here we note the importance of the subjective evaluation of elements of a language by (influential) members or groups of the speech community: who is to say what is desirable or unwanted? Purism does not occur automatically at any particular stage in the development of a language, but is rather triggered by folk-linguistic perceptions, for example that the language is going into decline or is being corrupted. How this is caused is still unclear (but cf. the timing of purism below). The second important claim in Thomas’s definition is that purism is not solely directed at foreign influences, but also at indigenous forms, for example dialectal features. Presumably this is only possible once a prestige variety has been agreed upon in a given speech community, but even then the actual selection and de-selection of acceptable and unacceptable features is a process which varies from language to language, the mechanisms
of which are not yet clear. In particular, we need to know more about how stigmatized features are selected – and who has the power to select them. David Crystal’s definition (1997: 316) follows similar lines to Thomas’s. He defines purism as a “school of thought” which sees a linguistic variety as being in need of protection from external pressures. Such pressures are not just foreign ones but could also be influences from varieties like dialects or colloquial speech. Thus, again, purism refers to keeping a language pure, but, contrary to lay perceptions of purism, impure elements are not simply foreign loan words but also features from non-prestigious varieties, and therefore one would expect the existence of linguistic purism to presuppose the existence of a prestige language variety.

Finally, van der Sijts’s definition (1999: 11) refers rather generally to the ‘language-making’ (sprakmakende) section of the speech community which has the power to decide which linguistic features are considered undesirable (ongewenst). Purism, according to her, is deliberate resistance to such elements. Hence, she makes no specific reference to foreign or indigenous words but simply refers to them as undesirable.

Overall, we can say that the three definitions above largely agree on what purism is: an (influential) part of the speech community voices objections to the presence of particular linguistic features and aims to remove them from their language. Academic linguists have a problem with this since no language is a precisely defined entity with a unique history and a closed set of linguistic features. Hence any attempt to purify a language must be ill-conceived since no language has ever been pure in the first place. Nonetheless, the phenomenon of linguistic purism does exist and our study of this phenomenon can help us understand the role of language in society – an aim certainly worth pursuing.

3. Purism and standardisation

We saw above that purism not only attacks foreign elements but also non-prestigious indigenous ones. By implication, this means that a purist will have an awareness of a prestige variety of his/her language: this brings us to the topic of purism and standardisation. Van der Sijts (1999: 11) argues that purism only affects languages which are standardised or are in the process of standardisation since, before one can remove elements from a linguistic norm, one has to have a linguistic norm.

But, as the studies in Brincat et al. (2003) show, purism can occur even where there is no standard and codified norm:
“[W]e especially disagree with [van der Sijs’] emphasis on the interdependence of the rise of puristic tendencies and the creation of a standardised language norm. Thus purism is depicted as a predominantly conscious process triggered by the agents of official language policy. […] however] purism need not be connected with conscious standardisation, and it should not be separated from a broader concept of ‘pure language’. […] purism is an issue that can come up in societies where literacy is heavily restricted and institutions which could organise purist movements are largely missing.” (Boeder et al. 2003: viii)

For Boeder et al. (2003: x), purism can take place in languages which are not standardised and where speakers are illiterate: they might still be aware of a prestige or stigmatised form of their language despite the fact that such a form might not be formally codified or agreed. Thus purism is not restricted to standard languages in the “modern, technical sense” (loc. cit.) but rather can be found in all those linguistic varieties where language evaluation occurs. Which variety or feature is favoured or stigmatised is arbitrary in the linguistic sense – famously, polynegationfootnote2 is a “normal” grammatical feature in medieval German, Dutch and English, as well as in modern languages such as Low German, but also, importantly, in the standard varieties of Italian and French, whereas it is seen as illogical and bad (by folk linguists) in standard English, German and Dutch. Despite the fact that the stigma of polynegation in West Germanic standard languages may seem justified on grounds of propositional logic, the purists involved in its stigmatisation during the seventeenth and eighteenth century felt there to be no inconsistency with the grammaticality of polynegation in the equally prestigious French or Ancient Greek.footnote3 Hence we must carefully distinguish between a purist’s “official” reason for stigmatising a particular word or grammatical construction on the grounds that it is illogical or alien to the indigenous language, and her / his “hidden” motivation, namely a general fear of foreign (cultural) elements or a concern that one’s advanced culture might be in danger of decline due to the rise of the lower classes. Whether such a foreign invasion or general cultural decline is actually taking

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footnote2 The realisation of negation by more than one negatively-marked morpheme, for example Low German:
De Hund hett em ni nich höört. (Lindow et al. 1998: 285)
the dog has him never not heard
“The dog never heard him”

footnote3 Langer 2001 contains an account of the stigmatisation of polynegation in German in the eighteenth century. It demonstrates that prescriptive grammarians were very well aware of the fact that, whilst their stigma of polynegation followed the pattern of Latin (a prestigious and ancient language), it nonetheless contradicted the grammar of Ancient Greek (also a prestigious and ancient language).
place is irrelevant – what matters is whether such things are perceived to be happening by influential members of society who will then use emotive factors and symbolic values to represent their concerns.

We find these triggers for linguistic purism in Germany both in the seventeenth and eighteenth century in the resistance towards Gallicisms and again, since the 1950s, in the concern that American English will replace German as the main means of communication even in Germany, hence creating insurmountable linguistic barriers between Germans – despite the fact that the grammar of German is not affected by the source languages and the fact that German, like all other languages, is a product of language contact (cf. Reichmann’s contribution in this volume on the usefulness of the concept Fremdwort). The purists’ fear of foreign influence is thus linked to a more general fear of losing national or regional cultural identities. We can see this in this volume in the contributions by Stevenson, who explores the use of language to create East German identity, and Mattheier, who sketches a history of the changing status of German dialects from being seen as peasants’ language to their current perception as symbols of local pride and identity.

Van der Sijs (1999: 11) mentions another important socio-political use of language purism: to support the formation of a national or cultural identity. This can be seen in many instances, for example the current debate in Low German circles as to whether the language should be protected from High German influences, or the case of Flemish in the nineteenth century, where one camp of purists preferred a Flemish cleansed from French words to distinguish themselves from the French, whereas another camp felt that French (and regional) features were integral to the Flemish character and could be usefully employed to distinguish the language from that of their northern neighbours in the Netherlands (cf. Vandenburgssche et al. in this volume).

Importantly, the prestige or stigma of a language is never absolute but is judged in relation to another language, be that a dialect, a foreign language or even the language of a particular individual, famed for his or her rhetorical ability (or lack thereof). “Famous” individuals who are often named by folk

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4 All foreign words have grammatical gender, often a German plural, all adjectives have German endings, all verbs are formed according to German patterns of morphology: for example Die coolen Typen haben die flashende Bilddatei downgeloadet.

and cf. an authentic example from a German hiphop band

Wir sind die Coolsten, nie am losen, weil wir rulen, wenn wir Cruisen. (Massive Töne, MT3, 2002)

Foreign influences on German grammar are much more limited and oft-cited examples such as the increasing use of {-s} for plural or in 1992 instead of 1992 or im Jahre 1992 simply exploit patterns which are already present in the grammatical system of German.
linguists as the creators or protectors of a particular standard language include
the translator Martin Luther and the national poets Friedrich Schiller for
German (cf. Ziegler’s contribution), Pentsjo Slavejkov for Bulgarian
(Moskova 1999), William Shakespeare for English, and Klaus Groth for Low
German, the linguist and author Ivar Aarsen for Norwegian (Jahr 2003), the
lexicographers Azkue for Basque (Jansen 1999) and Samuel Johnson for
English, to name but a few. Often, too, particular institutions are, or are seen to
be, the preservers of a prestige variety, for example the Fruchtbringende
Gesellschaft in seventeenth century Germany, the Académie Française in
France, the Accademia della Crusca in Italy, but also, the BBC in the United
Kingdom. However, for many other languages, it is not individuals or
institutions who have symbolic linguistic status but rather particular
geographical areas (Tuscany, Hanover, Île de France, Oxford) or cultural
artefacts for example the Welsh translation of the Bible (cf. Löffler 2003).

5. Purism and prescriptivism

Purism and prescriptivism are closely related concepts since any attempt to
purify a language will be a form of prescribing what the correct or better form
of a language is. Whilst the term prescriptivism is more general than purism
the two are often used interchangeably when applied to the folk-linguistic
activity of defining and striving for a better variety of a particular language.
There are two strands to the academic’s rejection of prescriptivism: on the one
hand, it is considered to be ill-conceived in principle to apply such emotive
terms as good, bad, rational, elegant etc. to language. Linguists aim to
understand, explain and describe language, they do not evaluate it – in the
same way that zoologists will not classify and compare different species with
regard to their ugliness or friendliness (Milroy & Milroy 1999: 5). This does
not mean that linguists do not distinguish between the levels of appropriateness
of certain varieties for particular contexts. In particular, academic linguists do
accept the usefulness of having a standard language, i.e. a prestige variety for
particular domains, for example in national communication (but cf. Trudgill
(1975) who argued against the need for an English standard pronunciation in
any context). However, and this is the second main objection to prescriptivism,
linguists reject the arbitrariness of how prestige and stigmatised forms are
selected. This is spelled out in very clear terms in Trask’s definition of
prescriptivism, aimed at the trainee academic linguist:

prescriptivism The imposition of arbitrary norms upon a language, often in
defiance of normal usage. [...] Prescriptivism consists of the attempts, by teachers
and writers, to settle [...] disagreements [about which forms should be part of a
standard language] by insisting upon the use of those particular forms and usages which they personally prefer by condemning those others which they personally dislike. [...] [T]he problem is that many prescriptivists go too far, and try to condemn usages which are in fact perfectly normal even for educated speakers [...]. (Trask 2004: 246)

The crucial notions in this definition are clearly the term *arbitrary* norms and *personal* like and dislike of a particular form. It is not the “best” forms which are selected but rather those forms which are used by the “best” group of speakers, i.e. the educated upper and middle classes. Here we see how prescriptivism and standardisation are closely intertwined, since the latter crucially involves a stage where features are *selected* from the whole range of linguistic forms. This selection process is never neutral in that any form could qualify to become a standard feature, but rather, selection will favour only those forms which are considered to be part of “good usage” (cf. Vaugelas’s concept of *bon usage* in seventeenth-century France), i.e. language that is used by educated or prestigious speakers. The selection process is followed by the codification of a prestige language variety⁵ in normative grammars, dictionaries and style guides and thus grammarians often occupy an important role in the petrification of norms: in German, the editors of the *Duden-Grammatik* have normative power due to the prestige of the *Duden* as a guardian of good German even though the editors may not wish to be prescriptive.⁶ When the most recent edition of the orthographical *Duden* (2000), seen by most German as *the* dictionary which includes all and only German words, included a substantial increase of Anglicisms – chosen because they occurred with a sufficient frequency in authentic German texts – there was an outcry amongst folk linguists, suggesting that the Duden’s editors had somehow corrupted the German language. A similar reaction occurred in 1961, when the editors of the Webster’s Third International Dictionary had removed “all traces of value-judgment from their work and refuse[d] to label particular usages (such as *ain’t*) as ‘colloquial’ and others as ‘slang’” (Milroy & Milroy 1999: 4). In both cases we can make the interesting observation that, on the one hand, “linguistic folk” are happy to accept the existence of a particular grammar or dictionary (written by real *people* and not somehow God-given!) as the sole reference or instantiation of a standard or prestige language, but that on the other hand, the editors are challenged or considered to be unfit for their

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⁶ Wermke argues that whilst the Duden aims as providing guidance towards the use of norms inherent in language use (*sprachimmanente Gebrauchsnormen*), it does not strive for a strict and prescriptive setting of norms (Wermke 1998: 16).
tasks when this grammar or dictionary deviates too much from what linguistic folk expects to be standard. The contradiction is thus: linguistic folk turn to a standard dictionary to find out what standard is, but when they find things that they do not consider to be standard they reject the dictionary – hence the question is, why do they ever turn to the dictionary rather than trust their own judgement in the first place? This contradiction is of course resolved when we realise that linguistic folk consider such items as English or German or Dutch to be things that exist in the real world as singular, clearly defined entities and which existed in a pure and uncorrupted form at some stage in history: despite the fact that those who should know, namely academic linguists whose job it is to know about language, fundamentally disagree with this.

Apart from the question of the initiation and instantiation of linguistic prescription, another interesting but as yet rather under-researched topic is the transmission of linguistic norms, i.e. how does a language user acquire knowledge about what forms are standard and hence acceptable in formal discourse and which forms are not. Prescriptive grammarians who set or codify the norms for the standard or prestige language often did not have a lot of contact with “normal” language users and prescriptive grammars and style-guides are usually books that can be found on the shelves of every household but are rarely taken down and read. One particular group of speakers are often cited as norm transmitters: school teachers. But as Cameron (1995) pointed out, this is simply assumed in the academic literature – very few studies have actually been conducted to see to what extent the teachers’ perception of norms corresponds to what the grammars prescribe. Davies (1999) shows, based on her study of secondary school teachers of German in South-western Germany, that school teachers are often more lenient in their expectations than is currently assumed. More than 50% of her informants reported that they would not insist on the use of Standard German in the classroom, and when they were asked to identify grammatical errors in a set of 20 example sentences, none of the “mistakes” were found by all teachers and hence the teachers would not penalise certain deviations from the language norm as prescribed in normative grammars such as the Duden-Grammatik.

In current research-in-progress, Davies & Langer (forth) found that the opposite is also true: the use of wo “where” as a relative pronoun for temporal adverbs has been considered to be standard by normative style guides and grammars (for example Duden Richtiges und Gutes Deutsch, 2001) since the

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7 Cf. Schraeder 1987 and Davies 1999 on the use of normative dictionaries by school teachers in determining (un-)acceptable forms of German.

8 [...] besonders die letzten Stunden, wo es feinen Regen im Winde trieb
"especially the last hours, where fine rain was driven in the wind"
(J.W. Goethe, as cited in Paul 2002: 1179)
nineteenth century but school teachers more or less uniformly reject the construction as ungrammatical. Here the teachers are more prescriptive than the prescriptive grammars! Thus it seems important not to simply note that languages are standardised by means of a selection of forms and their codification in grammars but also by the transmission of such norms to language users.

6. The timing of purism

In the publisher’s announcement for van der Sijs (1999), we read that

Iedere taal bezit woorden die uit een andere taal zijn geleend. Wanneer hun aantal te groot wordt, treedt een mechanisme in werking om hun invloed te temperen: taalzuivering of purisme. [from publisher’s announcement for van der Sijs 1999]
[every language contains words which were borrowed from another. Whenever their number becomes too high, a mechanism sets in to reduce their influence to an acceptable degree: language-cleansing or purism]

Thus we hear that the instantiation of purist activities is a mechanism triggered if certain conditions are satisfied: it would be quite remarkable if that were true, but neither van der Sijs (1999) herself nor for example Boeder et al. (2003) agree. Boeder et al. aimed to address this very issue of “whether puristic tendencies were determined by or went along with certain constellations in grammar or lexicon” (2003: ix) in their book; however, despite the findings of their publication “[r]esearch on purism is simply not yet prepared for an evaluation of the subject at hand.” (ibid.). What is crucial is not the quantifiably measurable degree of influence but the subjective perception of the speakers (van der Sijs 1999: 23), and which language is considered to have a worrying influence is determined by extra-linguistic factors: when Turkish speakers objected strongly to French and other western influences, they turned towards Arabic/Persian loanwords as being part of their true heritage. On the other hand, when Bulgarians objected to Turkish dominance, they had no problem with and even endorsed western loan words as showing educatedness (van der Sijs 1999: 24). Similarly, the debate in German is aimed at removing the influence of American English, despite the fact that most foreign loanwords come from Latin and Greek: the use of the latter, however, is evaluated particularly highly as demonstrating a classical education. In this book we will not address the question of whether we can abstract a model of triggers for purist activity since we feel that research into the subject has not advanced enough yet. However, we are also rather sceptical to what extent
such a model can ever be developed: the data and scenarios presented in van der Sijs (1999), Brincat et al. (2003) and this volume include so many different factors and rest crucially on the notion of folk-linguistic ‘perception’ by ‘influential’ members of a language community with perception and influential both being highly subjective notions. Thus we will have to be satisfied for the moment with presenting case studies covering a range of languages, periods and topics.

7. Purism: good or bad?

So far we have shown how linguists view purism as a generally futile endeavour, based on a naïve and ultimately ill-conceived notion of what language is, how it develops and, crucially, how it first emerges: whilst purists often see the birth of a language as the emergence of a unique (and therefore pure) form, uncorrupted by outside influence, linguists believe that individual languages⁹ are the product of language contact and that there is no such thing as a pure language.

However, some of the articles in Brincat et al. (2003) as well as in Linn & McLelland (2002) and Deumert & Vandenbussche (2003) which discuss minor(ity)¹⁰ languages argue that purism and other standardising activities serve a useful purpose when applied to minor and regional languages. Given that these are rarely codified in the sense of Einar Haugen’s four steps of standardisation¹¹ and that most speakers are bilingual, often using the dominant language for public purposes (at work, school, etc.), the lack of agreement over one prestige variety may facilitate the decline of minor languages, since for example it makes the use of the language in writing or broadcasting difficult. Lößfler (2003: 63f.) reports that purist tendencies have been part of the cultivation of a Welsh standard since medieval times for the simple reason that the language used by the bards could be understood at the courts throughout Wales. The case of Low German, a regional language in Northern Germany, is interesting in this context, too. Despite the fact that there is no codified norm of Low German,¹² the use of Low German in broadcasting

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⁹ Let’s assume for the sake of convenience that individual languages do exist.
¹⁰ Both minor and minority languages are used in the secondary literature. For our purposes, the distinction is not important.
¹¹ Selection, Codification, Implementation, and Elaboration.
¹² Note that the recent Niederdeutsche Grammatik (1998) does aim to provide guidance in the use of Low German and hence may act as a standardising factor in the use of Low German in public discourse. However, whilst there is a clear “default” use of a particular variety of Low German, namely North Low Saxon (NLS; Nordniedersächsisch), in the choice of example
is standardised by the fact that the radio and TV station – situated in Bremen, geographically more or less in the centre of the Low German-speaking area – which receives manuscripts for broadcasting, discretely checks the language for particularly salient regional features (D. Stellmacher, p.c.): this is in no way in order to erase “undesirable” elements along the lines of the types of purism referred to above. But, nonetheless, it is a type of linguistic purism which, given the popularity of the station’s programmes, will no doubt cause some levelling of Low German diversity, and it is worth investigating whether Radio Bremen removes not only ‘strange’ regional words which would not be understood elsewhere, but also High German words in order to preserve the Low-Germanness of the language.\footnote{However, further research is required to find out to what extent standardising tendencies can be witnessed in the use of Low German in public discourse (Haugen’s step of implementation).} Thus purism could serve to counterbalance the current process of the levelling of linguistic diversity (Boeder et al. 2003: vii), and the creation of a prestige variety or Leitvarietät of a minor or regional language might well help it to survive. On the other hand, however, having a prestige variety will often lead to the suppression and eventual stigmatisation of local features which in itself can accelerate the decline of the language, as shown for example by the elimination of regional features in the attempt to create a standard Welsh (Jones 1998).

However, given what we know about language and linguistic development, we feel that the academic linguist might be compromising his or her position as an observer and describer of languages.\footnote{Note, of course, that the notion of academic linguists as ‘neutral’ observers in the description of language is severely challenged by the contributions of Leyhausen and Milroy in this volume.} Whilst nobody would wish for a language to die, the only people to stop such a trend are not linguists but parents who decide which language to use with their children and whether to send their children to a monolingual or bilingual school.

After these more general remarks on purism we will conclude this introduction by briefly presenting the papers contained in this book.

The first group of papers deals with the relationship between Historical Prescriptivism and Purism.

The starting point of Elspaß’s contribution is the obvious fact that prescriptivism and purism have not always been successful and forms that have been stigmatised by grammarians, in some cases for centuries, seem to be re-appearing, even in writing. By examining letters written by German immigrants to the US in the nineteenth century, Elspaß shows that these forms...
never died out in informal written German, even if they were almost completely eradicated from the formal written standard.

Vandenbussche, Willeimyns, De Groof & Vanhecke’s paper discusses the debate for and against an integrationist (i.e. with reference to Dutch) and a particularist approach to the standardisation of Flemish in nineteenth century Flanders. The battle was won by the integrationists, which meant that the variety that was codified was the northern one, which was regarded as ‘purer’ since it was freer of French and dialectal influences.

Lange examines a period – the seventeenth century – which has always been considered crucial for the emergence of a standard German variety, but she shows that the grammarians working at this time were not as prescriptive or as influential as has been assumed in histories of German. They may well have subscribed to the notion that a standard variety was desirable but they did not contribute much to the actual codification of specific rules.

Scharloth picks up on two types of purism described by Thomas (1991) and, on the basis of an analysis of discourse on language and culture in eighteenth century-Germany he shows how the notion of standardising German by conserving a particular state of the language and defending it from foreign intrusions was contested for a while by those who argued that, rather than tinkering with a corrupt variety, a completely new variety should replace the current one.

Geers investigates different types of linguistic purism. In her study of English and German, she sheds light on the similarities and differences of linguistic purism in the two languages, based on evidence from the sixteenth, seventeenth and nineteenth century.

In the second section, Nationhood and Purism, the paper focuses on the links between nationhood or nation-building and -maintenance and purism.

In the case of Switzerland, Rash describes how important dialects are in the construction of Swiss identity for the German-speaking Swiss (who form the vast majority of the population). They symbolise values like democracy seen as essential to Swissness. This has been a major motivation for purist activities vis à vis French, also demonstrating that purism is not restricted to standard varieties.

Ziegler presents a study of a particular contribution to nation-building in nineteenth century-Germany and demonstrates how civic festivities were used to create a national cultural identity. References to the language of Friedrich Schiller, the German national poet from the eighteenth century, and equating it with standard German were central to these particular festivities, although we find little information about any specific usages. His status was however enhanced by the fact that he seems to have come along at the right moment to save German from overwhelming French influence.
In van den Berg’s contribution we see how attitudes toward what is ‘pure’ Afrikaans have (not surprisingly) vacillated as the socio-political situation has changed. A study of dictionaries and wordlists shows how attitudes have shifted from total opposition to English loan-words, to a matter-of-fact acceptance of them as part of Afrikaans.

Horner’s paper, too, shows how attitudes towards linguistic varieties are influenced by socio-political events, in this case World War 2, but also more recent immigration to Luxembourg. Negative attitudes towards German and the wish to distance Letzebuergesch from it by stressing its status as a language rather than a dialect of German can be instrumentalised in order to withstand French pressure, too. Processes of external (directed at other languages) and internal purism (standardisation) are described.

The third section, *Modern Society and Purism*, is devoted to papers which examine the role of purism in contemporary society. Stein’s paper examines how a particular ideology of language - the fixed-code theory - has implications for practice, for example amongst lawyers or language teachers. In the latter case he shows how the ideology of standard and purism (which are linked to the fixed-code notion) means that British English is still privileged in German universities and ‘mixed’ varieties are discriminated against.

Hohenhaus deals with purism in a new domain of linguist usage - computer-mediated communication. This is not a domain without norms, but the traditional notion of purism is often turned upside down here and we find a reverse purism with stress on being innovative and creative.

Stevenson introduces the notion of sociolinguistic purism. This is linked to the notion that west German speech norms are set up as norms with eastern features being seen as exotic deviations. As Stevenson points out, the linguistic differences (often minimal), are clearly being used to represent social differences, and alleged difficulties of comprehension (usually on the part of westerners) have to be interpreted as, in reality, expressions of a social rather than a linguistic divide.

In the fourth section, the authors deal more explicitly with *Folk Linguistics and Purism*.

Evans et al. describe an investigation into attitudes towards different varieties of English. Despite what Stein says about German university departments of English, it seems that, in general, there is a perception that British English is becoming less popular than US English. However, Evans et al. show that this is not the case, since informants from a range of other English-speaking countries perceived US English quite negatively.

Niedzielski’s paper discusses certain theoretical and methodological issues which have to be confronted by researchers into language attitudes, for
example how do speakers conceptualise the standard form of their language? It seems that there will be differences of perception between secure and insecure speakers, with the latter often being more accurate in their judgements of their own usage.

Mattheier’s contribution deals with an area which he feels has been marginalised in many histories of the German language, namely the changing place of non-standard regional dialects in the linguistic value system of German-speakers since the Middle Ages. We see that dialects may have been stigmatised as the language of farmers and peasants, but there is also evidence of its positive evaluation in identity formation and as a symbol of the in-group. Boughton’s article is the only one focusing on a non-Germanic language, namely French. Her data, collected in the northern French cities of Nancy and Rennes, show that in folk linguistic perceptions, there continues to be deep reverence for the standard language and the preservation of its ‘correctness.

The final section, Linguists and Purism, demonstrates how even linguists, who like to think of themselves as objective recorder of facts, have not been free of ideological influences, specifically purism.

Leyhausen examines a selection of histories of German to show how the presentation of the topic of borrowing or language contact often reveals an underlying (conscious or otherwise) nationalist agenda. The link between nation and national language appears to be still relatively strong.

Milroy’s contribution shows that a certain bias is not restricted to writers of histories of German, but is also evident in histories of English. He describes two kinds of purism: sanitary purism, which is retrospective and erases alleged impurities from the record, and genetic purism, which is concerned to construct a glorious and ancient heritage for the present-day standard variety.

The final paper, by Reichmann, addresses the usefulness of the term Fremdwort in the description of lexical semantics. Instead of classifying instances of lexical borrowing as foreign influence, they should be seen more neutrally a products of mutual language contact. Reichmann argues for a more holistic approach to the languages of Europe, one that will stress what they have in common and the way in which they (i.e. their speakers) have been open to each other for centuries.

8. References


