

STYLES OF CODIFICATION*

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I have proposed this subtopic for discussion because I consider it of great significance for an understanding of language standardization processes.

The importance of codification as a general phenomenon is currently being recognized in language planning theory; it plays a prominent part in the theoretical positions of both Haugen (1966) and Fishman (1974.13-9), not to mention Prague School (cf. Jedlička 1974.52-69) and other theorists. Styles of codification, on the other hand, is an issue not much discussed in the literature: in preparing the present statement, I had difficulty finding references to the question of styles of codification, which suggests to me that perhaps these styles are the kinds of deeply rooted cultural phenomena that are taken for granted by the members of their respective cultures without need for specific further mention.

I suggest that the codification of a standard language tends to be conducted in different organizational and administrative styles ranging along a continuum from a highly structured style which I call 'academy-governed' to an almost totally unstructured style which I call the 'free enterprise' style of codification.¹

¹ In earlier work, I used a related distinction, namely, one between kinds of 'decision makers in language planning' (Garvin 1981.25-7): more specifically, I suggested 'that it may be possible to identify, at least tentatively, two basic categories of decision-makers in language planning: those that arise spontaneously and informally from within a speech community, and those that are formally appointed by some constituted authority within or above the speech community. Among the first category of decision-makers I would place those national and cultural leaders in a speech community that take an interest in language development and spontaneously assume a directing role in their communities' language affairs. Illustrations of this type of leadership can be found among the so-called 'lesser nationalities' of Central Europe of the early 19th century; ...Official decision makers in language planning are represented by such institutions as academies, ministries of education or other governmental organizations' (25-6).

I would now say that this distinction is also a sliding-scale phenomenon: one can think of *semi-official* decision-makers (such as the highly respected German *Duden* publishing house which is viewed as a decision-maker in matters of language correctness without having an official government connection; see Gessinger and Glück 1983.213).

The academy-governed end of the continuum is characterized by the fact that the codification of the standard language is carried out by an Academy or some other generally recognized official (or quasi-official) institution (such as a government agency or nongovernmental cultural institution – an example of the latter are the 'motherchests' of the Czechs, Slovaks or Southern Slavs of the 19th century). It is a situation in which the enforcement of the norms of correctness is based on a uniform official interpretation of what is good language and good usage.

Havránek (1963.101) characterizes some of the tasks of an Academy as follows: 'It is therefore not accidental that in the present period both in the Soviet Union and in the People's Democratic countries all the Academies of these countries publish basic dictionaries of contemporary language. It is not accidental that the agencies of the Academies have published or are preparing major grammars devoted to the description and analysis of their particular contemporary standard languages.'

The 'free enterprise' end of the continuum, on the other hand, is characterized by a situation in which there is no single nationwide official agency entrusted with the codification and promulgation of correct language; in such a case, the establishment and promulgation of the rules of good language and good usage, as well as their enforcement, is a matter – at least to some extent – of 'free enterprise'; that is, these rules are created and promulgated by private organizations such as commercial dictionaries, publishing companies or editorial boards, and they are enforced by a locally or regionally controlled school system.

The prototypical example of an academy-governed situation is the classical period of the *Académie française*; since then, the original authority of the Academy has become greatly attenuated by the rise of such other authorities as Larousse and Robert (for details, see Wolf 1983). Current examples of speech communities at the academy-governed end of the continuum are a number of the 'lesser nationalities' of the European continent, and the speech communities of the socialist countries.

The prototypical example of a speech community at the free enterprise end of the continuum is American English.

An interesting example of a speech community located towards the middle of the continuum is present-day German, as described recently by Gessinger and Glück (1983).

Since the situation at the free enterprise end of the continuum is much less clearcut than in other styles of codification, it will now be given special attention, using the American English prototype to illustrate it.

One of the interesting consequences of a free enterprise style of codification seems to be a degree of indeterminacy in regard to norms of correctness and good usage. Research by Gallardo (1978) has suggested that in the American English speech community there is a conspicuous divergence between the desire for correct usage and the relative lack of uniformity of the guidance provided by the available reference works.

Thus, a strong awareness of the desirability of correctness in the use of English contrasts with the absence of a single official prescriptive norm to provide uniform answers to specific questions of correctness. In fact, there are several unofficial norms reflected in the different answers to particular questions given by different normative reference works (dictionaries, grammars, style manuals). The difference is most evident in matters of subtle orthographic and/or stylistic decisions.

To illustrate the codification problem, three areas of divergence have been selected: spelling, word boundaries and hyphenation.² Differences in spelling and word boundaries are illustrated by examples drawn from the following four dictionaries: *Webster's Third* (Gove 1961, abbrev. W3), *Funk & Wagnall's Desk Dictionary* (Funk & Wagnall 1977, abbrev. FW), *American College Dictionary* (Barhart 1961, abbrev. ACD), *World Book Dictionary* (Barnhart 1969, abbrev. WBD).³ Differences in hyphenation are illustrated by statements drawn from three composition-and-style manuals: Bernstein (1965), Copperund (1970), Perrin (1965).

SPELLING. Differences here concern primarily the different orders of preference given by dictionaries to alternate spellings of a given word.

Thus, FW prefers *esthetic* to *aesthetic*, while W3, ACD and WBD prefer *aesthetic*. The pertinent dictionary entries and relevant portions of the corresponding dictionary definitions read as follows.

Under the entry *aesthetic*, FW has the definition 'see *esthetic*': under the entry *esthetic*, the definition contains the notation 'also spelled *aesthetic*'.

W3 has, in place of a single entry *aesthetic*, a double entry *aesthetic* or *esthetic*; the entry *esthetic* has as its definition the notation 'var. (= variant) of *aesthetic*'.

ACD has, in place of a single entry *aesthetic*, a double entry '*aesthetic* also *esthetic*'; the entry *esthetic* has as its definition '*aesthetic*'.

WBD treats these alternate spellings in the same manner.

Another example is *Faroese/Faeroese* (the adjective pertaining to the Faroe Islands in the North Atlantic), where W3 prefers *faeroese* (note that W3 never uses capital letters in its entries; hence the lower case), while the remaining dictionaries prefer *Faroese*. The pertinent dictionary entries and relevant portions of dictionary definitions read as follows:

W3 has, in place of a single dictionary entry *faeroese*, a double entry *faeroese* or *faroesse*; the entry *faroesse* has as its definition the notation 'var. (=variant) of *faeroese*'.

FW, ACD and WBD have as entries only *Faroese* and do not mention the possibility of alternate spellings.

WORD BOUNDARIES. The question illustrated here is whether noun

² Divergences in dictionary definitions will not be illustrated here since these are obvious and well known consequences of the copyright each dictionary company holds protecting the wording of the definitions it has published.

³ For an extensive discussion of spelling differences between various American dictionaries, see Deighton 1972.

compounds should be written separately as two words; hyphenated; or, as a third possibility, written together as one word.

Thus, ACD writes *fire power* as two words; while W3, FW and WBD write *firepower* as one word. WBD hyphenates entries like *fan-jet* and *fire-good*; while the same compounds are not found as entries in either W3, FW, or ACD, no comparable compounds found as entries in these dictionaries are hyphenated.

HYPHENATION. The statements about hyphenation given by the composition-and-style manuals for compound modifiers are quoted below:⁴

Bernstein (1965.366) simply states that 'hyphenating a compound adjective is optional'; thus he accepts both *fire control system* and *fire-control system* as equally correct.

Copperud (1970.133-4) gives the following rule: '2.Compound Modifiers. These should be joined by a hyphen as necessary to assist understanding: *snow covered hills*, an *odd looking man*, *dark brown cloth*, and *power driven saw* do not require the hyphen, though its use would be strictly correct. Such combinations as *strong-navy agitation*, *small-animal hospital*, and *old-time clock* require the hyphen for clarity'.

Finally, Perrin (1965.644) says that 'Usage is divided on hyphenating noun phrases when used as modifiers, as in *seventeenth century philosophers*. Formal writers would usually write *seventeenth-century*. General writers, *seventeenth century*.'

The Bernstein manual, while mentioning hyphenation, does not give a real rule. Copperud and Perrin, on the other hand, both give rules, but based on different criteria: for Copperud, it is understanding/clarity; for Perrin, it is degrees of formality.

The absence of uniform principles of codification affects the use of English in all communicative situations in which the observance of standards of correctness is expected, including (most particularly) formal written uses of language. It contributes to a certain malaise with the use of language, one of the symptoms of which is the on-going concern with the 'condition of the English language' in the United States (for a very recent manifestation of this, see Michaels and Ricks 1979).

Lack of uniformity in codification also constitutes an impediment to the educational processes of imparting and enhancing the skills required for written communication. This is particularly true at the secondary levels where students and teachers start to explore the nuances of stylistic expression. These levels are therefore most strongly affected by the inconsistencies of prescriptive doctrine.

* This paper was written for presentation at the US/USSR Colloquium on 'Literary languages in contemporary society' in Moscow in May 1985. This colloquium never materialized because the Soviet Government denied a visa to Joshua Fishman, as a result of which the American delegation refused participation.

A Czech version of this paper is about to be published in *Acta Universitatis Palackianae Olomucensis - Philologica*.

⁴ The best known composition-and-style manual, Strunk's *The Elements of Style* (for the latest edition, see Strunk 1979), does not discuss hyphenation.

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