There are rules, and there are rules: what should we teach about language?

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Session Outline

1. Rules …and rules

   - two types of rule: top-down and bottom-up

   - what *is* grammar (and what isn't)?

   - what's wrong with prescriptivism?

   - the role of dictionaries and grammar books

   - who is right about language: Humpty Dumpty or Juliet?

2. What should we teach about language?

   - which came first: language or grammar?

   - why language changes

   - how language changes

   - what if English isn't your first language?

   - reconciling prescriptive and descriptive approaches

   - conclusions: learn, discover, enjoy

References

Apart from the published books, these are all available on the Web (just Google them).

A series of blog posts on this subject (various authors) is available at:
www.macmillandictionaryblog.com/tag/prescriptivism

Prescriptive linguists: language going to the dogs?

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Strunk, William. 1918. *The Elements of Style*

Orwell, George. 1946. "Politics and the English Language"

Humphrys, John. 2007. "How texting is wrecking our language", *Daily Mail* 24 September 2007

Heffer, Simon. 2010. *Strictly English: the correct way to write … and why it matters*

Gwynne, N.M. 2013. *Gwynne's Grammar*

Heffer, Simon. 2014. "The Pedant's Revolt". Daily Mail 3rd May 2014

What descriptive linguists say

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Marks, Jonathan. 2010 "Netting, texting, impacting and sheeting through the centuries: more about verbing and nouning". Macmillan Dictionary Blog, 6 September 2010.

Soanes, Catherine. 2012. "Faceoff: *he, he or she, he/she, s/he* versus *they*". Oxford Dictionaries Language Matters Blog, 6 June 2012 (blog.oxforddictionaries.com)

Owen, Jonathon. "12 Mistakes nearly everyone writing about grammar mistakes makes". Huffington Post Blog. 20 November 2013. (huffingtonpost.com/jonathon-owen)

Ritchie, Harry. 2014. "The Bad Grammar Awards are prize stupidity". The Guardian Books Blog. 30 April 2014. (http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2014)

Corpora and corpus-querying tools

COCA: Corpus of Contemporary American English: 450-million-word corpus, with powerful querying tools: http://corpus.byu.edu/coca/ (free)

Sketch Engine: corpus and software package, with corpora for over 50 languages. The de facto standard for lexicography: www.sketchengine.co.uk (paid-for, 30-day free trial)

Kilgarriff 2014. Adam Kilgarriff. "How to teach which words go together: Corpora in English Language Teaching". British Council Blog. 12 March 2014. (blog.britishcouncil.org)

The role of dictionaries and grammars

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Sweet 1891. Henry Sweet. *A new English grammar. Part I: introduction, phonology, accidence.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.