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**Christian J. Faltis**  
(Editors)

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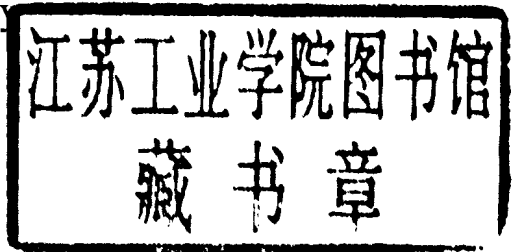
# Languages in School and Society

Policy and Pedagogy

*Edited by*

Mary E. McGroarty

Christian J. Faltis



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# Languages in School and Society

*Contributions to the Sociology of Language*

58

*Editor*

Joshua A. Fishman

Mouton de Gruyter  
Berlin · New York

To Robert L. Politzer  
with respect and affection  
from his colleagues and students

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**Part I**  
**Language issues in wider contexts**



# Introduction

The papers in this section examine macrosociolinguistic concerns, concerns that shape the contexts for language use. Joseph Greenberg offers a provocative look at the historical tension between prescriptivism and descriptivism in grammatical theory and shows that the widely held rejection of prescriptivism on the part of linguists is a relatively modern development. Joshua Fishman, Frank Solano, and Grant McConnell present a method for quantifying linguistic homogeneity within countries. Using a method developed to permit continuous rather than dichotomous classification of variables, their approach allows more precise cross-national comparisons that inform the understanding of the relationships (and lack thereof) between linguistic heterogeneity, political turmoil, and economic development around the world.

The next two chapters are based on case studies of sociolinguistic questions related to French which illustrate more general trends in the treatment of macrosociolinguistic issues. André Martinet discusses the methodological problem of determination of the relative importance of synchronic versus diachronic influences on phonetic changes which contribute to identification of dialect boundaries in continental French. Sandra Schecter's chapter discusses the historical developments which have replaced religious with secular regulation of language in the language policy of Quebec. Together, these papers give evidence of the larger social and intellectual factors that have affected the global milieu of language use and language learning.



# The logical bases of linguistic prescriptivism: A parallel between Classical grammarians and Moslem legal theorists

*Joseph H. Greenberg*

All linguistics except that in the Western tradition during approximately the last one hundred and fifty years has been prescriptivist. Even now in popular belief and in the Third World prescriptivism is virtually taken for granted, and values and attitudes associated with it must be taken into account by socio linguists in their researches.

It has thus been almost everywhere and in all periods in which human beings have made language an object of conscious study that the setting of standards of correctness and incorrectness, the choice of forms of speech for standardization and other normative judgements are integral parts of the task of the linguist. The question then becomes, not so much why linguistics has generally been prescriptive, but how the notion that it was solely descriptive arose in Western tradition.

The *grammaire générale* that was dominant in Europe before the rise of historical linguistics was clearly prescriptive. However, it was inherent in the nature of the historical linguistics that developed into the dominant force in the course of the nineteenth century that scientific linguistics should be purely descriptive rather than normative. For if language is in a constant process of change, norms become relative to a particular historical stage of a language. What was correct in an earlier period is not correct now and what is correct today will not be at some future stage.

It is of interest in regard to the central topic of the present study, a comparison of the principles by which grammatical rules are justified with those that have arisen in jurisprudence to validate legal norms, that Karl von Savigny, the founder of the historical school of law in the early nineteenth century, had among his pupils Jakob Grimm, one of the founders of comparative linguistics. Savigny was strongly influenced by his student's ideas about the organic nature of linguistic change (von Savigny 1831:24-31).

I have not investigated this problem in detail, but it appears that this connection between the historical approach to language and the question of descriptivism versus prescriptivism did not become fully explicit until the Neogrammarian period of the 1870's. In particular, it arose in connection with the problem of analogical change which was often called "false analogy". In a lengthy footnote (1876: 317-20), Brugmann noted that many linguists resisted the notion of analogical explanation in older languages like Classical Greek and Sanskrit because they regard analogy as something pathological and degenerative. Hence the name "false analogy" is unfortunate because it suggests that the grammarian has the duty of prescribing in what ways a language should change whereas he should simply accept the phenomena which present themselves. He asks whether we can suppose that the Hindus of Vedic times or the Homeric Greeks resisted the tendency to create new forms analogically and thus differed from modern speakers. In fact some of these earlier formations were in their own time "false analogies."

Brugmann thus comes down on the side of what has been called the principle of uniformitarianism, a term introduced by Lyell into nineteenth century geology. According to this principle, we have no right to assume that processes of change in earlier periods not subject to direct observation were any different in kind from what we observe now.

This anti-prescriptivist view was inherited by structuralism and was particularly emphasized in American structuralism which often called itself descriptive linguistics. Esper, in a strongly anti-generativist work on the subject of analogy (1973: xxx ) declares himself astounded by the acceptance by many linguists of what in his view is a form of prescriptive grammar. The issue, to my knowledge, is hardly discussed by generativists and they would no doubt say that they were descriptive and not prescriptive.

There is, however, an interesting lapse in Chomsky (1965:13), when he says that in the right-branching "This is the cat that caught the rat that stole the cheese", the intonational breaks are put in the wrong places, that is, after "cat" and "rat" rather than where the main brackets appear in his syntactic analysis and which reflect the constituent structures.

We shall see that Brugmann and, in this case at least, Chomsky have chosen differently among a small set of basic criteria whenever the problem of justifying a rule, whether linguistic or legal, arises.



To advocate, in Hall's well-known phrase to leave your language alone is just as much a choice as not to.

The present study, which is of a preliminary nature, developed out of my observation that, in what is the most explicit theory of the justification of legal norms of which I am aware, the doctrine of the "roots of jurisprudence" in Moslem canon law, the principles can be equated without serious difficulty with the chief criteria for linguistic correctness developed though in a far less systematic way by classical grammarians. Similar principles, as might be expected, are found in other systems of law in discussions of linguistic norms in other grammatical traditions; occasional reference will be made to them in the course of the discussion. In particular since certain Arab grammarians were well aware of the parallel between grammar and jurisprudence, and sought in conscious imitation of law to elaborate a doctrine of "roots of grammar", there will be a brief discussion of this aspect of Arabic grammatical theory.

I shall first consider Moslem canon law, the *sharī'ah* as it is called. Orthodox Islam is a law-centered religion. Jurisprudence, as in Judaism, covers a far wider range than our civil, criminal and administrative law. It embraces the details of religious ritual and numerous other matters pertaining to human conduct.

Within Sunnite Islam, there developed four standard schools, whose distribution at present is largely geographical and whose substantive differences are relatively minor. Mohammed died in 623; by approximately 900 "the gates of independent interpretation (*ijtihād*) were closed", although some modernists have sought to reopen them.

The doctrine of the four roots of jurisprudence is basically due to Al-Shāfi'ī (767-820), the founder of one of the standard four schools of jurisprudence. The four roots are Koran, Tradition (*Ḥadīth*), Consensus (*Ijmā'*) and Analogy (*Qiyās*).

Two schools, the Malikite and the Hanafite precede the *Shafī'ite*. During this earlier period the basic distinction was between *ʿilm* 'knowledge' and *ra'y* 'opinion'. The former was based on Koran and Tradition. These were authoritative where they sufficed. Malik also used the notion of Consensus. Since he lived in Medina where the Prophet spent his last years, he had access to those who know him in his lifetime and it was the agreement of these "Companions of the Prophet" which underlay Malik's notion of consensus. Where these sources were inadequate, Malik used his own personal views, that is to say "opinion". This last source was used in a rather free