Norm-blindness and its effects on utterer-centred practice

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The title of this article is unashamedly polemical and, to a certain extent, the same holds true of its content. The claim to be made here is not, of course, that what we might want to call the French community of English-language linguists is unaware of the notion of a linguistic norm, or unable to perceive it as such. Such a claim would be patently absurd. What this article will seek to highlight, however, is that there is an insufficient degree of account taken, in the work of many linguists working in English studies in France, of variety in English and, in particularly, differences between standard and nonstandard Englishes. Claims of this nature, of course, have been made many times in the literature before, and in that sense this article is modestly falling into a historiographical tradition of seeking to show that all too often, mainstream linguistics tends to regard linguistic variety more as a potentially interesting but ultimately subsidiary phenomenon than as the keystone around which all linguistic reflection should be based. Labov (1972, 274 et seq.) and Milroy (1999), to cite only the most illustrious, have often been critical of a generative tradition based, as is well known, on the mystical ideal of the homogenous speech community. Milroy (1999, 7) has also underlined to what extent something which may initially appear to be an epistemological perfectly defendable scientific idealisation in fact is greatly indebted to what he has called the ideology of the standard.[1]

I would like to make similar remarks here, turning the spotlight not on generative grammar or any of the other schools of thought to have emerged from what we might loosely want to call Anglo-American traditions, but onto the set of analytical practices which have been greatly popularised in the last few decades in the teaching of English grammar in French universities and which, while certainly differing in a number of substantial respects, can all nevertheless be grouped together under the heading of French schools of English linguistics (Ballier 1997) in as much as they base their explanatory principles, or supposedly explanatory power, on notions such as mental operations and associated semantic invariants. In what follows, I shall use the term utterer-centred theories or practices as an umbrella term. What I shall be seeking to demonstrate here, firstly on the basis of a number of specific examples and subsequently a more wide-ranging discussion, is that practitioners of utterer-centred linguistics underestimate or fail even to acknowledge the role that normative or prescriptive grammar has, whether we like it or not, both on speakers and on their own intellectual practice.

I. When we analyse as if prescription did not exist, or had no effect

a. WILL/SHALL

Some of the data used in this section, and the thinking behind them, were adumbrated in Walker 2002, to which the reader is referred for more extensive discussion. The reason for including this issue briefly here is that it is such a clear exemplar of the central point being made that it would be remiss of me to omit it.

In Adamczewski and Gabilan (1996, 93), in a brief discussion as to why the abbreviated form 'LL must be regarded as a reduction of WILL rather than SHALL, the authors take the following example:

> *I'll be seventeen next month.*

About which they make the following comment:

> ***Outre le fait que SHALL est tout à fait impossible ici**, cet énoncé est un bon exemple du rôle de WILL. Pourquoi? On fait bien plus ici que parler de l'avenir: "avoir 17 ans le mois prochain" est dans la logique des choses, compte tenu de ma date de naissance.*[2]

The comment is, of course, perfectly erroneous. There is nothing ill-formed about the string *I shall be 17 next month*, as the authors could easily have ascertained by either enquiring of native speaker intuition or conducting a very brief and entirely informal corpus search[3]. Not only is this form relatively commonly attested, but interestingly and, for the authors, presumably rather unfortunately it is sometimes used as an example in grammar books:

> *I shall be 21 next month*. (Chalker and Flavell, 1984, 121)
>
> *I shall be twenty years old in 1989 and I shan't be at school then* (Chapman, 1964, 83)

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[1] See also Milroy and Gordon (2003, 4)

[2] The emphasis is mine.

[3] Walker 2002 provides a whole series of examples of strings of the form *I shall be x years old next x* taken both from the British National Corpus and from the Internet in 2002. A more recent Internet search, conducted on May 24, 2010, turned up

I shall be eighteen next May (Narayanaswamy, 1995, 83)[4]

and most tellingly, in perhaps the best known and most widely used reference grammar book of English in the French language, Berland-Deléine (1997, § 297), where we read:

> *Par exemple, dans I shall be 25 next week, 'shall' est moins un modal exprimant le caractère inéluctable de l'action qu'un auxiliaire du futur; il est évident que dans She will be 25 next week, 'will' n'exprime en rien une notion de volonté*

All of the above authors have therefore used and commented on examples which are entirely analogous to the one which Adamczewski, apparently by fiat, declares to be impossible.[5]

As we read Adamczewski, it is perfectly clear how these pronouncements as to the acceptability or otherwise of certain grammatical forms originate. Adamczewski develops a theory of modality based around the central notions of congruence and non-congruence, and proposes that the difference between WILL and SHALL should be seen thus:

> *A la différence de* shall, will *signale grammaticalement que le sujet et le groupe verbal sont faits l'un pour l'autre, soit parce que le sujet est favorable à cette union, soit parce que la situation s'y prête.* (Adamczewski, 1993, 92)

Theoretically then, *I shall be 17 next month* is impossible, because the process of ageing is by nature ineluctable, inherent to the individual and therefore "congruent". The trouble is that we need to let facts into the equation at some point, and once we do, we find that they get in the way of theory-building. The question is why does the theory, in spite of its elegance and concision, and the fact that it does seem to explain many of the differences found between *will* and *shall*, come up short against the examples given? There are two possibilities, it seems to me: first, something is intrinsically wrong with the theory, which needs to be tweaked and readjusted.

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no fewer than 1,300 hits for the string *I shall be 21 next…*. While many of these hits may be discounted, of course, as being written by non-natives or as being repeated quotation forms, it is hard not to be impressed by this figure.

[4] That this particular example, which was chosen to illustrate the following point, comes from a grammar of English published in India and aimed essentially at the Indian market, is of little import. First of all, to have excluded it from an article, the central focus of which is to claim that what we mean by English should not be restricted to contemporary literary British English, would have been entirely incongruous. Secondly, a theory which seeks to explain grammatical phenomena on the basis of underlying "operations" should in principle be relatively comfortable with dialect or variation. The fact that it quite clearly is not, as I shall argue below, is one of its most fatal weaknesses.

[5] This example is not isolated, even in the same book. On page 151, we learn that for similar reasons, a string such as *I shall come at nine o'clock* is impossible as a response to an invitation. For more details, refer to Walker 2002

Second, there are extralinguistic factors at play, which the theory is unable to account for. My contention is that it is the second of these two reasons we need to focus on.

In this case, the long tradition, stretching back to the early 18th century, of prescriptions on the use of *will* and *shall* an surely not be swept under the carpet entirely. Simply put, traditional prescriptive grammar has it that *shall* is used with the first person pronouns in order to predict future, for which purpose the auxiliary *will* is used for the second and third persons, and that these positions are reversed for threats and promises and so on.[6] Whatever the origin of this rule[7], it has been extraordinarily influential over the last 250 years, and the fact that generations of English-speaking schoolchildren have been exposed to the rule and that it is a staple of books such as Fowler's King's English necessarily means that it has had some kind of influence on the language people actually produce and on their grammaticality judgements. After all, if this were not the case, one might wonder what the point of any kind of grammatical education might be. As Quirk et al. (213-214) note:

> *A strong teaching tradition, especially in British English has upheld the use of "shall" as the correct form, in preference to "will", with a first person subject in formal style.*

The result is a certain form of confusion for English speakers, uncertain in many situations of whether to use the form which comes possibly most "naturally" to them, i.e. *will*, but dimly aware that they "should" be using *shall*. In this light, all ex cathedra pronouncements on the possibility of or impossibility of given forms are almost doomed to fly in the face of fact.[8]

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[6] An indication of the prevalence of this rule is that the string "I *shall* drown, no one *will* save me!" returns an astonishing 6500 hits on Google (search conducted May 24, 2010). This is taken from the well known illustration of the law, whereby "I *shall* drown, no one *will* save me!" is the cry of a desperate swimmer, predicting her own imminent death, whereas "I *will* drown, no one *shall* save me!" is the cry of a suicidal swimmer, determined that nobody shall prevent her from achieving her end.

[7] There is a certain consensus, established by Fries 1925, that we owe the rule to William Ward, in his 1765 *An Essay on English Grammar.* Taubitz 1978 pushes the origin back further, however, to James White's *The English Verb*, published in 1761.

[8] A similar conundrum for Adamczewski would be posed by Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, as pointed out by Andrew Elfenbein in a post to Linguist List (http://www.linguistlist.org/issues/14/14-1400.html), in which he wonders why Mary Shelly "shuttles" back and forth between "I shall be with you on your wedding-night" and "I ill be with you on your wedding-night", each of which appears twice, all referring to precisely the same utterance-event.

b. if it were / if it was

This second example also illustrates the extent to which prescriptive and pedagogic tradition have influenced speech patterns, rendering attempts to resolve certain details within the broadly utterer-centred framework inoperative. In a recent article on the alternation between *was* and *were* in the English hypothetical preterit, Françoise Lachaux (2002) introduces the concept of "métamodalisation" to attempt to broach the question, among others, of whether (2002, 66) "est-il possible de dégager une valeur fondamentale et de relier les valeurs contextuelles...à un invariant abstrait, formel...qui prennent en compte l'existence du choix du locuteur...".

The easiest way of answering the question is to say - probably not. Language use here is liable to be so muddied by the waters of prescription as to be almost entirely uninterpretable. This rather bald statement needs some fleshing out, however.

For Lachaux, *were* is seen as in some sense going back over or readdressing an already stated or presupposed hypothesis, which initial hypothesis (inchoative hypothesis, in the author's terms) is likely to be or have been expressed with *was*. It is worth looking at the first example in some detail, both to illustrate this idea, and to see immediately that it does not get over the first hurdle. We are given a quote (p.66) from a short story by Henry James, entitled Daisy Miller:

> *"We've got a bigger place than this", said Randolph." It's all gold on the walls."*
> *Mrs. Miller turned uneasily in her chair. I told you if I were to bring you, you would say somethin!" she murmured.*

The use of *were* is explained here as follows (66): "*were* est l'élément relateur d'une hypothèse formulée a posteriori. Il y a eu validation effective de la relation sujet/prédicat "I/bring you", and *were* signale de double travail opérationnel de ligature."

To emphasise this point, Lachaux adopts a similar ploy to Adamczewski, namely the creation of a counter-example which is then discounted as incoherent: "L'hypothèse-prédiction étant **déjà** validée au moment dénonciation, le recours à *was*, qui signalerait une mise en place inchoative, ne serait pas cohérent, l'écart entre projet et validation se trouvant ici dépassé, caduc."[9] However, as we saw in the case of *will* above, a hypothesis can often happily function in a vacuum, provided that the only attempts to test it are made by its own proponents, using straw man counter-examples which are then deemed to be insufficient to refute the hypothesis, which is thus pronounced proven. Unfortunately, once again, the facts say otherwise.

Henry James was a tireless reviewer of his own work, and towards the end of his career went back over a number of his earlier publications for the monumental *New York Edition* (1907-1909), bringing this early work more into line with what is sometimes referred to as his "late manner". Françoise Lachaux does not unfortunately inform the reader which edition of the work she was using when writing her article, but what is certain is that it was an original edition. What is interesting to note, in light of the discussion on *was* vs. *were*, is that the New York edition version of Daisy Miller reads slightly differently to the edition given by Lachaux, to wit (differences in bold type):

> *"We've got a bigger place than this", Randolph* **hereupon broke out."** *It's all gold on the walls." Mrs. Miller,* ***more of a fatalist apparently than ever****, turned uneasily in her chair. "I told you* ***if I was to bring you****, you would say somethin' !" she murmured.*

Crucially, it is James himself who made this change from *were* to *was,* a form that Lachaux feels would be incoherent, which would seem to suggest that if there is an incoherency involved here, it is not in the grammatical form, but in the approach to the grammatical form.[10]

Later in the same article (p.70), we move to a discussion of *if I were you*, in an example from Agatha Christie's *The Mystery of the Blue Train*[11], which is explained in much the same framework. We learn that *if I was you* is sometimes found in familiar speech, but are told that this would mark "une mise en place inchoative d'hypothèse, sans implication énonciative particulière". But this surely cannot be. Are we really to believe that when speaking in a familiar style, the utterer is more likely only to have inchoative formulations of hypotheses than she is to reinvest them with specific enunciative implications, however we are to interpret that? Familiarity of style breeds increased inchoation? The facts of the matter would seem in fact to be considerably simpler. *If I was* is different from *if I were*, not because of some mystical difference in the position the utterer adopts with respect to the nature of the hypothesis at issue, but because the latter form has long been a focus of prescription, to the effect that it is stylistically preferable. Anathema as the idea may be to some, that certain linguistic phenomena may be resistant to explanation within a given framework, the fact remains that extralinguistic factors play a part. The oft-quoted notion that *If I were you* is of a loftier style than *If I was you* has led to the

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[9] The emphasis is original

[10] I should like to thank Evelyne Labbé, personal communication, for her help in understanding the differences in Henry James' editions. More on this can be found in chapter 3 of *The Cambridge Companion to Henry James*, ed. J. Freedman, written by Philip Horne.

[11] It cannot pass without comment that this book is over 80 years old (first published in 1928), that *Daisy Miller* dates back to 1878 and that other sources in the article include P.G Wodehouse's *Piccadilly Jim* (1917) and Virginia Woolf's *Kew Garden* (1919). That a discussion of a grammatical point that is transparently a vestige of a subjunctive that has been fossilised due to prescriptive pressure should be based on literary works from the best part of a century ago is surely a fatal flaw. See below for further discussion on the use of literary examples.

former perhaps overstaying its welcome in the language, and lingering long after most other hypothetical subjunctives have made their excuses and left.

Last of all, in the conclusion, we come back to an attempt to distinguish *If I was you* and *If I were you* in utterer-centred terms. The passage is worth quoting at some length (78):

> [La métamodalisation] est probablement la raison pour laquelle on trouve la forme *were* dans les énoncés du type "if I ***were*** you": l'énonciateur construit une "identification" de situation avec le co-énonciateur [...] par laquelle il dépasse l'inadéquation au réel. Le recours à la forme *was*, que l'on rencontre parfois en langage familier, accompagne une hypothèse première, que l'énonciateur formule sans se préoccuper de convaincre son co-énonciateur [...] En langage oral, un énoncé tel que : "if I **was** in Australia right now" sera prononcé d'un seul tenant, alors qu'avec l'énoncé "if I **were** in Australia right now", le locuteur marquera une pause sur *were*, élément clé de cette opération supplémentaire greffée sur une hypothèse préexistante.

Once again, the desire to see everything through theoretical lenses leads to at least two incoherencies and ultimately a rather over elaborate attempt to handle something which is, at bottom, rather simple. First of all, we are being asked to accept that a speaker, by adopting a familiar style, is less concerned to convince his conversational partner. In sum, familiarity breeds indifference! Second, in order for the data to be fitted into the pre-existing theoretical framework, spurious remarks about intonation are adduced which are neither backed up by any kind of empirical data, nor consistent with the native speaker intuition of this author, who sees no reason at all to mark any kind of pause on *were*. *If I was you* and *if I were you*, to cut a long story short, are a stylistically distinguished minimal pair, reinforced by prescriptive tradition, which are not amenable to differentiation under the terms of utterer-centred theory.[12]

II - When English is taken to mean contemporary written literary British English

Footnote 11 above points to the second area where linguists unwittingly operate on the basis of shared assumptions, crafted over time by the ideology of the standard. All too often, what is given to us as an analysis of the grammar of English is in fact on the analysis of one highly restricted form of English, i.e. contemporary written literary British English. References to other forms of the language, when they exist, are almost invariably *en passant* and dispensed with as swiftly as possible.

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[12] As a slightly trivial aside, pop singer Beyoncé released a single in 2008 entitled *If I Were A Boy*, yet a visit to the artist's MySpace site on May 26th 2010 showed that 3 fans had written to express admiration for *If I Were A Boy* and 3 others to say how much they liked *If I Was A Boy*

Sometimes, these shared assumptions are difficult to detect, seen only in the use of a stray adverb. For instance, in a chapter on "Congruence", and in a discussion on the opposition between *will* and *shall*, decidedly a theme that brings out the worst in us all, Lapaire and Rotgé (1993, 109) write: "Il convient de préciser en outré que cette opposition ne fonctionne que dans les variétés d'anglais où SHALL et WILL peuvent effectivement alterner (à la première personne). En anglais américain SHALL ne s'emploie pratiquement plus en tant que "pure future". **Même** en anglais britannique son existence est menacée"[13]. Leaving aside the issue of what happens to the theory of congruence, if only a minority of the speakers of English actually alternate between the two available forms, one is struck by the apparently harmless reference to "even British English". While it was certainly not the intention of the authors, it is not impossible here to see British English (and this should in fact more accurately be English English, given the decline of the *shall* future in the Scottish and Irish varieties) as the last bastion for the WILL/SHALL distinction. If "even British English" is threatened, then what hope is left?

On at least one other occasion in this same work, we see the shadows of prescriptivism lurking in the doorway. In the very useful glossary provided by the authors at the end of the book, on page 382, we see an entry which reads as follows: "anglais standard (ou correct, normé) = *standard English*; anglais non-standard (ou incorrect) = *substandard English, a non-standard variety of English"*. It is a genuine shame that the term "correct" should have been allowed to stand alongside "standard", thus giving credence to the idea that for the authors, the terms might be synonymous, and the footnote that accompanies the term "substandard", claiming that it is a politically correct term, however that is to be interpreted, does nothing to allay the disappointment we feel in seeing the decidedly unsynonymous terms of substandard and non-standard standing side by side.

Lapaire and Rotgé deserve much credit, however, for introducing a whole chapter on the diachronic and dialectal variety of English into their book, as many other colleagues are less successful in handling these challenges, and prefer either to ignore them completely, or brush them off as insignificant. Bouscaren 1991, for instance, makes absolutely no mention of what variety of English forms the basis of her analyses, taking it as read that English means standard English. The same is true of Garnier et al. (2002). In another work, Bouscaren 1987, there is a single mention of a form of English that is not British, on page 68: "l'utilisation "épistémique" de ***have to*** est fréquente en anglais américain où on peut remarquer une tendance à rester dans le "factuel", ce qui

[13] C'est moi qui souligne.

explique qu'on le préfère à ***must***".[14] We are left to infer, therefore, that the rest of the book is either about non-American (British?) English or about some form of mythical overarching non-territorialised form of English.

Garnier et al. (2002) also occasionally seem unsure of how to handle variation, and sometimes give the impression that they would prefer that it did not exist. For instance, in a discussion about the *génitif de mesure* (2002, 46), and the unattestability of forms such as "*a ten minutes' silence", we read: "Certes, certains locuteurs utilisent "a five miles' walk, a ten minutes' break", mais l'anglais contemporain préfère *a five-minute walk, a ten-minute break"*. There is no attempt to explain who the "certains locuteurs" are, nor why this diachronic change, if indeed it is one, may have occurred. At least, there is no attempt to approach it from within the prevailing theory.[15]

An author who is somewhat more forthcoming about grammatical variation, namely syntactic differences between British and American English, is Jean-Clause Souesme, particularly in his 1992 grammar (Souesme, 1992), but this work is interesting to discuss here as it exemplifies another aspect of the influence that standard English has on our grammatical analytical practices, namely an over dependence on literary sources. In a section of the grammar devoted to the present perfect (81 *et seq*.), Souesme discusses some cases where the present perfect is used alongside a temporal adverbial proverbial, such as his example from the OED: "the cold wind last night has frozen the pipes"[16], and claims: "On comprend mieux maintenant pourquoi en anglais contemporain, britannique or américain., il devient de plus en plus fréquent de rencontrer des énoncés au *present perfect* en présence d'un repère temporal spécifique comme *ago*." Leaving aside the fact that we have to take the author on his word that such examples are indeed on the increase, because no statistical data is produced to back this up, what is of interest here is that the above statement is followed by three literary examples, from American (Saul Bellow), South African (André Brink) and Dominican (Jean Rhys) authors, followed by "Cet emploi du

[14] At the risk of becoming repetitive, we see here again how analysis runs up against the wall of variation. Who, or what, has a tendency to be more factual? Is it Americans? All Americans? Is it American English, as Bouscaren et al seem to imply, and if so, what does it mean for a language to be "more factual"? What for that matter does it mean for a person to be more factual?

[15] We might add that there is a problem of formulation. We are led to believe that the focal point for grammatical explanations is utterer choice, but here we read that it is the language itself which prefers a given form. This seems on the face of it to be entirely contradictory. If speakers drive the grammar, though operations, then how can they be the helpless victims of language drift? And if they are, how can we use an appeal to their mental operations to explain this same thing? One must not lose sight, of course, of the fact that this book is a manual for a practical application, viz. the preparation of students for a particular kind of examination, which goes some way to explaining why there is little in the way of theorising here.

[16] Despite all my best efforts, it has not proved possible to locate this example in the on-line version of the OED. It may have been helpful to provide a more thorough sourcing of the quotation. Another methodological problem is that Souesme often refers to native speaker intuition, such as in his comment on the same page that **last night the cold wind has frozen the pipes* "est d'emblée rejeté par les anglophones". While not wholly disagreeing with this statement, as it ties in with my own intuition, the literature on the differences between grammatical judgements on the part of different speakers is sufficiently vast is wanted for us to want to be slightly more circumspect.

present perfect et *ago* n’est pas une évolution récente de l’anglais: des exemples attestés de cette nature figurent dans les œuvres littéraires d'auteurs prestigieux. Cependant, on en rencontre de plus en plus actuellement, aussi bien à l’écrit qu’à l’oral, en anglais britannique comme en en anglais américain". Again, there is nothing to back this claim up. But more importantly, if I want to know what syntactic changes are occurring in English, and what has occurred in the recent past, one of the last places I would choose to look would be in the language of prestigious writers, whatever or whoever they might be. This approach works for style guides, Le Grevisse and language mavens, but it surely cannot be reasonably adduced for linguistic analysis. After all, it is not impossible to claim that one of the reasons for the prestigiousness of such authors is precisely their use of language, a potentially slightly unusual use of language, and that therefore having recourse to them to back up arguments related to diachronic, and indeed synchronic, variation, is a highly dubious exercise. Literary texts may justifiably be used to provide occasional, and ultimately trivial, exemplification of given observations, but taking them as the main sources can do little, save reinforce the illusion that the only English worth studying is that which we find in 20th-century novels.

III. When non-standard forms which are nevertheless extremely common are simply not picked up

The final strand in the argument which seeks to demonstrate the effect that prescription has on our linguistic analysis, whether we like it or not, is that there are certain extremely common grammatical forms which are simply not given the attention they deserve in the utterer-centred literature for reasons which I surmise to be associated with the fact that they stand somewhere on the cusp between standard and nonstandard forms. One example of this might be the increasing use of the quantifier *less* with countable nouns, or perhaps as Christian Mair suggests (2002, 150), the disappearance of the stigma attached to such a usage, which in fact has a long history. This usage can be illustrated, naturally and characteristically, with an extract from a contemporary novel:

> *People staring at me, the same.* ***Fewer people*** *staring at me, that's different. The place is bigger with* ***less people****; that's different.* (Vitamin Wow, James Frayne, 2002)

I have yet to see treatment of this issue in the utter-centred literature, though of course I'm very happy to be corrected on this.

Another potential gap in the literature concerns the development of auxiliary-like uses of certain lexical words, particularly *want, got* and *go* (*we gotta get out of this place, you wanna take the second left, I gonna come back some* *day*). Given the central role that modality plays in utterer-centred theory, this is a little surprising. However, I should like to focus on a third example of a prevalent modern phenomenon which has escaped the attention of linguists, for reasons which might be attributable to standardising pressure, namely the use of the present perfect as a narrative tense. Once again, this has been rehearsed in previous research, and I will therefore not be paying much attention to the phenomenon itself, other than to illustrate it, but rather to the lack of treatment it has received.

As was noted above in the discussion of Souesme's *Grammaire anglaise en contexte*, it is a well-known fact that the Present Perfect is not entirely incompatible with definite past time reference, as seen in the following example:

> The epidemic of highly pathogenic avian influenza caused by H5N1, which began in mid-December 2003 in the Republic of Korea and is now being seen in other Asian countries, is therefore of particular public health concern. H5N1 variants demonstrated a capacity to directly infect humans in 1997, and **have done so again in Viet Nam in January 2004.**
>
> WHO Avian Influenza fact sheet http://www.who.int/csr/don/2004_01_15/en/

However, it would appear that there has been considerably less coverage of the narrative perfect phenomenon[17], despite its prevalence. The phenomenon can be exemplified with the following verbatim taken from a newspaper report on a horse race:

> It was tacky ground out there and she just got exhausted," said Davies. "On the run-in she was heading left towards the parade ring so I pulled my stick through to give her a smack on the left side, and **she has then gone** the other way, and I lost my balance.
>
> http://www.guardian.co.uk/sport/2009/jan/15/topless-totesuper7-pangbourne-gambling-racing

The important thing to note here is the alternation between the preterit and the present perfect within the narration of the same event. This phenomenon does seem to be particularly prevalent in sports reporting, but can be seen and heard in many other situations as well. It is to be found in folk songs, such as *John Barleycorn*, which uses the preterit exclusively until the words in bold type below:

> His colour sicken'd more and more,
> He faded into age;
> And then his enemies began
> To show their deadly rage.
> **They've taen a weapon**, long and sharp,
> And cut him by the knee;
> They ty'd him fast upon a cart,
> Like a rogue for forgerie.[18]

It can be heard in work by British comedienne Catherine Tate. In one series of sketches, she plays the role of Sam, a young woman who recounts events of the most stunning banality to her husband Paul, as if they were exceptional exploits, whereupon Paul collapses into hysterical laughter. The following is a typical example:

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[17] Rastall (1999, 81) claims not to have seen it mentioned in any of the grammars he has consulted.
[18] This version can be found at http://ingeb.org/songs/johnbarl.html

> An absolutely mental day-to-day, you'll never believe it. Lunchtime, right, Elaine said to me "what do you fancy?" And I said I was thinking about a jacket potato and she said "I've half a mind to go to Prêt à Manger" and I said "why don't I walk down with you 'cos it's on the same way." In the end we've ended up sharing a jacket potato, cottage cheese and a salad so it's all worked out quite well. We've gone back to work, we've got in the lift, next thing I know, the lift's stopped, the doors have opened, she's walked out, I've followed her out, I've taken one look around me - I'm only on the fifth floor ain't I? I'm only on the fifth floor in human resources instead of the third floor in personnel [...] we have gone into uncontrollable hysterics. She said "what you doin' up here", I said "you know what I've done, doncha? I've only gone and followed you". She said to me "you're a lunatic!"[19]

Another indication of the new-found acceptability of this form is that, as in the example given above, and in my informal corpus of over 150 sporting articles taken from the Guardian, it is recorded verbatim in interviews. Yet despite the extensive coverage that the auxiliary *have* has received in utterer-centred literature, its narrative use is entirely absent. There may be a number of perfectly valid reasons for this. Perhaps it is an extremely recent development which has quite simply not yet been picked up on. If this were the case, my criticisms would certainly be unjustified. Secondly, it is not unreasonable to believe that many linguists have better things to do with their lives than watch endless interviews with sports personalities or read the back pages of the press. The desire to know whether the player was indeed onside as he scored the goal is not given to everyone, and the fact that the narrative preterit does seem to be particularly prevalent in the sporting register may be a good reason, if slightly less valid than the first set out above, for its absence from the literature.

But a doubt remains. I am unable to completely shake off the idea that this absence, and the other gaps referred to above, is the result of something more symptomatic, a more generalised reluctance to deal with any grammatical forms which appear to deviate from standard English. Given that it is a common practice to take grammatical examples from contemporary novels, with a smattering of other attestations from the quality press, along with a handful of examples created for the occasion and therefore necessarily influenced by an intuition that can be little else other than normative, we have to suspect that the narrative perfect has paid the price for being nonstandard in origin.

Thus far, it may appear that I have deliberately been targeting a particular tradition of linguistic analysis, and so the time has come to redress the balance somewhat. The power of the standard can be seen in the work of many English-speaking linguists as they seek to account for alternations between the present perfect and the preterit. Quirk attributes the occasional use of the present perfect with definite past-time adverbials to ‘performance errors’, (Quirk et al. 1985, 195, n. a), a fine way of dispensing with a troublesome phenomenon,

[19] http://www.catherinetateshow.co.uk/media/videos/CTS-Paul-and-Sam.wmv

and Huddlestone (1984, 159, n.8) indicates that: "I will regard them [present perfect forms with temporal adverbs] as sufficiently rare and questionable to be ignored under a reasonable idealisation of the data.". The key word here, of course, is "questionable", but at least he set his stall out clearly.[20]

Conclusion

It is time to turn to more general considerations and to reflect on why variation seems to be so little taken account of in utterer-centred practise. Even a thinker like Culioli (2002, 144), in a discussion on the 'operator' *peut-être'*, says: "Prenons, par exemple, l'énoncé 'Forcément qu'il est venu' : c'est un peu douteux, c'est très populaire". It is very hard to know exactly what Culioli meant here by "douteux", but it is also extremely difficult to rid oneself of the impression that in some sense the example is less worthy of consideration, or less amenable to explanation, precisely because it is popular and nonstandard. For a thinker who was justly proud of his desire to take every example into account, irrespective of its origin, this is a somewhat surprising and, it has to be said, untypical example.

So why is it that the variation in language is such a weak point for utterer-centred approaches? Is it because many of its practitioners are of necessity both linguists and teachers of English? This is undoubtedly the case and we all know how difficult it is to teach scholarly, normative grammar in the morning and linguistic grammatical theory in the afternoon, but it surely does no harm to reflect on the influence that our own teaching practice may have, probably must have, on the attitudes that we adopt towards the language when it comes to analysing it.

There may also be a case for claiming that there is a certain institutional weakness of variation studies in France, possibly due to a strong normative tradition in the country, the history of which needs no further presentation here. These two points - the influence of pedagogical practice and a long-standing normative tradition - are obviously intertwined to a great extent.

I would not like the reader to go away with the impression that I believe that French linguists are particularly prey to the influence of the standard. They most assuredly are not. Huddlestone and Quirk were cited above, and I also alluded to the work of James Milroy, who has written extensively on the influence of standard

[20] It would be wrong to bring this section to a close without turning back to Adamczewski, who declares (1993, 122): "un énoncé comme 'I have seen it in Paris last winter' est tout simplement agrammatical, une interdiction d'une logique parfaite, un adverbe avec référence au passé ne peut s'appliquer à une trace d'opération portant la marque du présent." Once again, as

English on the practices of Anglo-American linguists. To further allay the suspicion that my sole targets are French colleagues, I would like to conclude by quoting comments by the linguist Andrew Pawley, in an article about grammatical gender in the Australian English and, to a slightly lesser extent, New Zealand English, whereby a large number of nouns are often referred to using the pronouns *he* or *she*, e.g. (Pawley 2002, 117):

> *There's a tree up here died for no apparent reason. 'e was healthy, 'n there 'e is, dead!*

Pawley says (2002, 136):

> *The pervasiveness of grammatical animation in informal English speech has not been widely noticed by English grammarians until recently […]. The normative tradition influences one's perceptions of languages, what one notices and remembers […] I have been surprised by the lack of awareness by some Australian and New Zealand linguists of a pattern of usage that is heard all around them. The most reasonable conclusion is that these linguists' perceptions of English usage patterns are strongly influenced by their knowledge of normative patterns. The persistence of this blind spot has been aided by the rarity of careful studies of natural spoken discourse until fairly recent times."*

However, quoting an Australian colleague does not entirely dispense with the possibility that there is a Gallic specificity at play here, if we follow Enfield (2002, 9), who sees syntax and its study as a cultural symbol, and Pennycook, who claims that "grammar is a very particular cultural form" (Pennycook 1994, cited by Enfield 2002, 11). This is a question which I leave open, but which I believe offers some fascinating perspectives. To return to the central point, and it is one I have made before (see in particular Walker 2004), and one I will continue to make wherever possible, I believe that it is extremely important for linguists working in the utterer-centred tradition to tackle these issues head on. This requires proper theorisation of what variation means for an approach, one of whose central tenets is the "invariant", a recognition of the centrality of variation to language in general and an acceptance of the influence of a normative tradition from which no one can escape. I have attempted to say here that the difficulty faced by utterer-centred theory is structural, that *énonciation* does not have, or does not yet have (and therein lies the rub) sufficient capacity within it to explain variation without falling into circularity. The prospect of variation forming part of the approach was opened up by one of its founders: Culioli, in his discussions with Fau (2002, 121) speaks of "la possibilité de prendre en compte la variation transidividuelle". But so long as dialectical variation and extra linguistic influences such as prescriptive traditions are not admitted in to the framework and confronted, utterer-centred practice will remain just that: a

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we have seen, this is an incorrect statement, and it is difficult to know, but interesting to speculate, whether it is theoretical necessity or the influence of the standard which leads to such remarks.

clever analytical tool, a "practice" as I have repeatedly said in the foregoing, much more than an overarching explanatory theory.

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