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The construction of authority in 20th-century language columns in France

Abstract, This study examines a sample of language columns produced by six different authors in France during three key periods of the 20th century to determine how these authors construct the authority necessary to pronounce on language usage and impose particular language ideologies (drawing on Wilson (1983) and Cooper (1989)/Bermel (2007) for the conceptualization of authority). It shows that, contrary to what might be expected for what is often believed to be a genre that is a bastion of lay standard language ideology and prescriptivism, the authors of language columns are not uniformly prescriptive but can be seen to be display approaches that vary from prescriptive to descriptive. There are – also contrary to expectation – no clear tendencies over time, despite changes in the status of French in public consciousness over the period examined. However, all columnists are united in the belief that it is 'usage' which is the source of language rules rather than language rules which affect usage, although they differ in their understanding of such usage. Furthermore, the means by which columnists create the authority necessary to make credible language judgments and their view of the role played by usage in the creation of language rules both correlate with their language ideological approach, with clear similarities to be seen between those who take a more prescriptive, and those who take a more descriptive, stance.

1. Introduction

There exists in France since the early 20th century a tradition of *chroniques de langage*, or language columns, newspaper articles about language produced regularly by a single author, generally by language professionals such as journalists, literary authors or educators, and more rarely by professional linguists (Remysen 2005, 270-71). Although the content of such columns can vary, all deal with questions of language, frequently responding to questions from readers about the validity of particular usages and providing advice on the 'correct' and 'incorrect' use of the French language. All therefore reflect particular linguistic ideologies, that is, beliefs about language or about the relationship between language and society, which are used to justify or rationalize particular language uses (Silverstein 1979, 193). For many authors of language columns, these language beliefs can include the notion that 'language homogeneity' is 'a natural

state' (Kroskrity 2000, 26) and that one particular form of language, the 'standard' language, is superior to others.

In the present study, I examine a sample of language columns from France during the 20th century produced by a number of different authors to determine how they construct the authority necessary to pronounce on language usage and impose particular language ideologies. The very existence of language columns suggests a need on the part of the readers of these columns for authority in questions of language. Much of the material in the columns is in response to reader questions about the legitimacy of particular usages. Readers appear to reject the idea of variation in language and want advice as to the one 'correct' way of speaking. This is by no means uncommon in lay attitudes towards language. For example, in a discussion of the Czech spelling reforms of the early 20th century, Bermel (2007, 234) notes a 'desire for authority' amongst the general public, where 'the idea of variation was simply rejected and people looked for a source of linguistic security'. In order to provide a similar 'linguistic security', language columnists use various strategies to create and maintain linguistic authority.

The question of how authority is created has been dealt with in various ways in the literature. Following Patrick Wilson's influential notion of 'cognitive authority' (1983), people who 'know what they are talking about' are cognitive authorities (Wilson 1983, 13). Authority is not held solely by an individual but 'is a relationship involving at least two people. No one can be an authority all by himself [sic]; there has to be someone else for whom he is an authority' (ibid.) Cognitive authority is also 'relative to a sphere of interest', that is, someone may speak with authority on some questions, but have none at all on other questions. However, it is not only individuals who are seen as having cognitive authority, 'we recognize it as well in books, instruments, organizations and institutions' (Wilson 1983, 81). One of the important points about cognitive authority is

its relationship to credibility, an 'author's influence on us is thought proper because he is thought credible, worthy of belief' (Wilson 1983, 14) and the same is true of texts, organizations and so on.

Bermel, in a discussion of language planning (2007, 19, following Cooper 1989, 85), suggests that 'authority rests on the legitimacy of the arbiter', which can be either *rational* (based on law), *charismatic* (based on a valued personal characteristic of the arbiter) or *traditional* (based on the worth of the tradition the arbiter upholds). Rational legitimacy 'is hierarchical and cascades down through layers of institutions by established channels', whereas charismatic legitimacy 'is independent, and accrues to groups by virtue of the excellent of their ideas' (Bermel 2007, 233). Traditional legitimacy may come from the use of 'established institutions' to institute language reforms (Bermel 2007, 20).

McLelland (2001, 10), in a discussion of Linn's 1998 work on a stylistics of standardization, points out that 'we may identify recurring, indeed universal issues preoccupying those who seek to describe and codify their language', and notes (2001, 23-26) that authors who describe and/or codify their language make use of at least three competing 'authorities' – their own voice; the 'authority' of the language itself, which involves personifying the language, allowing it 'to speak for itself in its likes and dislikes'; and the voice of Grammar, that is, 'grammar in the abstract, but most perfectly applied to and illustrated by Latin and Greek'. The authority of the individual has, however, an important influence on these other types of authority, there is 'a remarkable consistency between the decisions the authors make about the language on one hand, and the metalanguage and organization principles they use to present the results of those decisions on the other hand' (McLelland 2001, 34).

The six language columnists in the current study make use of all of these types of authority, whether consciously or not. For example, language columnists are all language

professionals of some sort. They therefore all hold some sort of demonstrable language competence and can be seen as 'cognitive' authorities. Their status as columnists in reputable newspapers gives them credibility – validation by an external, reputable source. They also all use additional strategies in their work to bolster this authority. One important means by which they do so is by referencing books and institutions who can also be seen to be cognitive authorities, invoking referential authority. This referential authority could equally well be framed as one of Cooper's (1989, 85) types of legitimacy, namely 'rational' or 'traditional'. Rational legitimacy 'cascade[s] down' through the use of dictionaries and grammars, particularly those used in the educational sphere (an established channel for language information). Traditional legitimacy comes from reference to established and highly-regarded institutions such as the *Académie française* (French Academy) and literary works that belong to the very strong French literary tradition. The authors also show the types of authority outlined by McLelland (2001, 23-26), using alternately their own voice, the voice of the language and the voice of 'Grammar'.

This article analyses how such authority or legitimacy is created by examining references made to dictionaries, grammars and literary works. Although the results show no clear trends over time or across the political affiliation of the newspapers used in the sample, they demonstrate that individual authors are not uniformly prescriptive – as may be expected – but can be seen to display approaches that vary from broadly prescriptive to broadly descriptive. Prescriptivism can be defined as the recommendation or condemnation of certain language usages that frequently arises during the process of standardization.[1] It is particularly associated with codification, which explicitly lays down

[1] See Haugen (1972) and his model of standardization based on four stages, selection, elaboration, codification and acceptance.

rules about usage. It is difficult to label certain usages as 'correct' without implicitly rejecting other usages. As Milroy and Milroy (2012, 1) put it, prescription 'requires that in language usage, as in other matters, things shall be done in the "right" way'. If there is a right way, there must also be a wrong way. Descriptivism, on the other hand, attempts to describe language use in an objective manner, without using any value judgments. However, it is not always simple in practice to clearly divide these two concepts. Firstly, a descriptive passage may well be interpreted as prescriptive, particularly if it appears somewhere where a reader expects to receive advice on language usage, for example, in a grammar or, indeed, in a language column. Secondly, it is not necessarily the case that individual authors are wholly prescriptive or descriptive. An individual author may display both prescriptivism and descriptivism to different degrees, depending on the topic of discussion. Indeed, as Ayres-Bennett (2016, 110-12) points out, one of the most well-known 17th-century French *Remarqueurs*, Vaugelas, famous for his prescriptive stance towards the French language, was not necessarily that prescriptive in reality – much of his work had an open attitude towards variation. She argues that it might be better to consider description and prescription as belonging to a continuum or to a cline rather than as discrete categories, and that the approach of individual authors can therefore be seen as being more or less prescriptive (Ayres-Bennett 2016, 104). In general, it could be argued that an approach that tends towards the prescriptive end of such a continuum aligns broadly with a strong ideology of the standard (see Lippi-Green 1997; Milroy 2001), where one particular standard form of language is seen as superior to others, and an approach that tends towards the descriptive end of the continuum aligns broadly with an openness towards language diversity or variation.

While much work has been done on grammarians of the French language in France (see Ayres-Bennett 1987, 1991; Trudeau 1992; Combaz 2000; Caron 2004; Siouffi 2010;

Ayres-Bennett and Seijido 2011), very little has to date been published on language columns in France (see, however, Osthus 2006, 2016), a genre of metalinguistic commentary on language that has much in common with the texts produced by the earlier *Remarqueurs* and later grammarians. Ayres-Bennett (2004, 28) notes that,

> In the 20th century, language columns are perhaps the main heirs to the 17th-century observations on the French language; they start from the same premise, that is, doubts about usage, and display the same normative tendencies.
>
> (Au XX^{e} siècle les chroniques linguistiques sont peut-être les principales héritières des remarques du XVII^{e} siècle, elles ont le même point de départ, à savoir l'usage douteux, et présentent les mêmes tendances normatives.)[2]

This study seeks to fill this gap. The results of the study highlight three key points. Firstly, while it is very clear that language authorities are cited by authors to create their own authority, there is a noticeable distinction between those authors who cite earlier authorities (e.g. 17th-century grammarians and early modern literary works) and those who cite later authorities (19th-20th century works) in their approach towards prescriptivism. Secondly, the question of 'usage' comes up in the work of all six authors, but the underlying meaning they associate with this term varies from the 'bon' (good) usage associated with particular authors (specifically those of the early modern period) to the common usage of ordinary French speakers. However, the authors all reflect the belief that it is usage which feeds into language rules, and not language rules that affect usage. Thirdly, while there is no obvious trend across time, there are some clear differences that can be associated with the ideological approach of individual columnists, in particular, those authors taking a more prescriptive approach and those taking a more descriptive approach, that is, those adhering to a strong ideology of the standard and those who accept diversity in language.

[2] All English translations mine, unless otherwise stated.

Section 2 introduces the texts used in the study and their authors. Section 3 shows that the construction of authority in these texts is achieved by invoking the expertise of external reference works, such as grammars and dictionaries and literary works. It also considers to what extent reference to particular works or 'language authorities' corresponds to particular language ideological views and examines the purpose for which the various authors are calling upon language authorities or creating their own authority.

The study is based on a sample of 300 texts from a new corpus of language columns from the French press during the 20th century (FranChro), currently under development. This corpus includes the authors Aristide (Maurice Chapelan, 1906-1992), Jacques Cellard (1920-2004), Marcel Cohen (1884-1974), Albert Dauzat (1877-1955), René Georgin (1888-1978), Lancelot (Abel Hermant, 1862-1950), Victor Snell (1874-1931) and André Thérive (1891-1967), amongst others, who produced columns in newspapers such as *Le Figaro*, *L'Humanité*, *Libération*, *Le Monde*, *L'Œuvre* and *Le Temps*.

2. Sources

The sample of texts taken for the present study includes texts from the language columns produced by the following authors, Victor Snell, 'La grammaire en zig-zag', *L'Œuvre* (1929-30); Lancelot (a pseudonym for Abel Hermant), 'Défense de la langue française', *Le Temps* (1933-35); André Thérive (a pseudonym for Roger Puthoste), 'Clinique du langage', *Carrefour* (1953-55); Marcel Cohen, 'Regards sur la langue française', *Les Etoiles* (1945-46) and *L'Humanité* (1961-64); Jacques Cellard, 'La vie du langage', *Le Monde* (1972-74); and Pierre Bourgeade, 'La vie des mots', *Le Figaro Magazine* (1987-89).[3] The sample therefore includes texts from three key periods of

[3] Note that the articles for Cohen's 1940 column, and for Bourgeade and Cellard's columns have been taken from printed collections of their language columns. All other articles are taken directly from the relevant newspaper.

change in the status of the French language both in France and internationally, the inter-war period (1920s-1930s), when French retained the privileged status as international language of high prestige that it had enjoyed for centuries; the immediate post-World War II period (1940s-1960s), when France underwent a significant decrease in political and economic power, transitioning from a relatively dominant to a relatively minor role in the global arena; and a period later in the 20th century (1970s-1980s), when France's minor role was cemented while the power and influence of the USA in international political, economic and cultural affairs continued to increase. These changes led to a corresponding and ongoing deterioration in the position of the French language as an international, prestigious and elite language, as English instead began to take on these functions (Oakes 2001, 154). However, in spite of these cultural and political changes, the analysis of the sample of articles used in the present study did not reveal any notable changes in the ideological approach of columnists over time.

50 articles were taken from each language column, giving a corpus of 300 articles. The articles are not all of equal length, varying between an average of 400 to 1400 words per article, 500 words per article (Snell, 1920s), 1700 (Lancelot, 1930s), 500 (Thérive, 1950s), 1400 (Cohen, 1940/60s), 1300 (Cellard 1970s) and 400 (Bourgeade 1980s) (giving a corpus of roughly 290,000 words). For each time period, therefore, there is an even mix of longer and shorter articles. The language columns were published in a variety of newspapers, all of which were intended to reach a serious audience, rather than being of a purely entertaining nature. Political alignment of these papers varied from the centre-right (*Le Figaro Magazine, Carrefour*), through the centre (*Le Temps*) and centre-left (*Le Monde, L'Œuvre*) to the strongly left (*L'Humanité*). In each period, therefore, the two columns appear in papers that are of different alignment, as shown in Table 2.1 below. However, the political alignment of the newspaper in which a column is published is not

further considered here, as it plays no significant role in the attitudes displayed by the column's author, at least in this sample. The most that could be said is that columnists publishing in left or centre-left publications *tend* to be more descriptive and less prescriptive than those publishing in centre or centre-right publications. This does not mean that the latter are all highly prescriptive, however.

Columnist	Date of sample	Name of column	Newspaper	Political leaning of newspaper
Victor SNELL (1874-1931)	1929-30	*La grammaire en zig-zag*	*L'Œuvre*	Centre-left
LANCELOT [Abel HERMANT] (1862-1950)	1933-35	*Défense de la langue française*	*Le Temps*	Centre
André THÉRIVE (1891-1967)	1953-55	*Clinique du langage*	*Carrefour*	Centre-right
Marcel COHEN (1884-1974)	1945-46, 1961-64	*Regards sur la langue française*	*Les Etoiles, L'Humanité*	Strongly left
Jacques CELLARD (1920-2004)	1972-74	*La vie du langage*	*Le Monde*	Centre-left
Pierre BOURGEADE (1927-2009)	1987-89	*La vie des mots*	*Le Figaro Magazine*	Centre-right

Table 2.1 Overview of language columnists

The authors in the sample have different backgrounds, training and professions. They can all be seen to have some sort of language 'competence' (see Remysen 2005). However, only two (Cohen, 1940s/60s and Cellard, 1970s) could be said to be professional linguists; although the others are authors and journalists and therefore use language as part of their craft, they have no formal linguistic training. Victor Snell (b. 1874, d. 1931) was a Swiss lawyer turned journalist, who moved to France in his early twenties and later wrote for a number of publications aligned with the left (at the time), including *L'Humanité*, *L'Œuvre* and the *Canard enchaîne* (a French satirical journal),

becoming editor-in-chief of the latter in 1921 (Douglas 2002, 14). Abel Hermant (Lancelot, b. 1862, d. 1950) was a French novelist, essayist and journalist, and was well known for his purism.[4] He was one of the very few members of the *Académie française* to later be ejected for 'collaboration' during the war, although this was well after the period of his language columns.[5] André Thérive (Roger Puthoste, b. 1891, d. 1967) was an author, literary critic and journalist (Larousse 2002, 1225). Cohen (b. 1884, d. 1974) was a linguist who worked not only on the French language but also Semitic and Ethiopian languages. He was a professor at the *École pratique des Hautes études*[6] and the *École nationale des langues orientales*[7] (Leslau 1988, 1). He was also a well-known member of the communist party. Cellard (b. 1920, d. 2004) was a journalist, author and linguist (mainly lexicographer), who published several linguistic works, including, for example, the *Dictionnaire du français non conventionnel* (Cellard and Rey 1980) and *L'Histoire de mots* (1986). Bourgeade (b. 1927, d. 2009), was a prolific author and playwright (Larousse 2002, 175), a journalist and a literary critic. All six authors are male; women language columnists do not appear to exist for this period, and this appears therefore to be an exclusively male genre.

3. Creation of authority

One of the main ways in which language columnists construct their authority is by invoking the expertise of external references. To determine how they use such references to create authority, all references made by authors in the sample of texts were analysed.

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[4] La Cyber-Gazette du pays royannais, 'Biography of Abel Hermant,' <http,//www.c-royan.com/les-gens-d-ici/personnalites/entry-56-hermant-abel.html> [accessed 27 March 2018]

[5] Académie française, 'Les Immortels, Abel Hermant' <http,//www.academie-francaise.fr/les-immortels/abel-hermant> [accessed 27 March 2018]

[6] A higher education establishment established in the Sorbonne in 1868, where research is undertaken in Life and Earth Sciences, Historical and Philological Sciences, and Religious Sciences, EPHE <https,//www.ephe.fr/en/school/ephe> [accessed 13 April 2018].

[7] Now the *Institut nationale des langues et civilisations orientales*, founded in 1669 for the teaching of languages and civilisation studies, INALCO <http,//www.inalco.fr/> [accessed 13 April 2018].

Firstly, the type of reference was analysed, that is the types of work the authors refer to, dictionaries, grammars, scholarly linguistic works, literature. Secondly, the frequency of individual references was examined to determine whether some types of work or individual authors were referenced more often than others. Thirdly, the purpose of the individual references was determined, for example, whether references were being used to reinforce an argument/justify a particular usage or to act as an illustration/aid an explanation. However, because examination of the raw numbers of references did not reveal any clear trends, they are not discussed here. Instead a qualitative analysis of the particular works referred to (for example, the individual dictionaries named by authors) and the purpose of referring to such works is provided.

Naturally, the authority of dictionaries and grammars rests on different grounds to that invoked by literary works. These may be most easily explained in terms of Cooper's (1989) 'rational' and 'traditional' legitimacy. Grammars and dictionaries rely on rational legitimacy because they can be seen to be linked to the established authority of the education system. Literature, on the other hand, is more strongly related to traditional legitimacy, because it invokes the very long and prestigious French literary tradition, which is seen as an important part of the cultural heritage of France. Reference to grammars and dictionaries shows a technical knowledge of language and frequently involves descriptions of rules, but reference to literature can be seen more as an example of good practice rather than being based on any sort of rule. It also showcases a more general, cultural knowledge that has a different kind of value to the knowledge of rules.

3.1. References to 'external' authorities

All of the authors in the sample of articles examined refer to dictionaries, grammars, scholarly linguistic works and literary works in their articles – the purpose of these allusions is discussed in section 3.2. The authors had a number of dictionaries at their

disposal, which varied somewhat over time. In the 1920s and 1930s, commonly used general dictionaries included Emile Littré's *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (known as *le Littré* 'the Littré'), first published in 1863 and followed by a definitive edition in 1877, and various editions of the Larousse, including *Le Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle* (1866-1876) and *Le Nouveau Larousse illustré* (1897-1904). The Larousse dictionaries are more encyclopaedic, their aim is to popularize knowledge, and their examples are taken from common usage rather than literature; the Littré on the other hand aims to reflect contemporary usage, but to do so, relies very heavily on literary quotes (not always contemporary) (see Matoré 1968).[8] The dictionary of the *Académie française* (in its 7th edition from 1878, the 8th edition appeared from 1932-1935 and the 9th edition is still not completed today) was also relatively commonly used at this time. An explicit aim of this dictionary was to defend 'good usage', 'There is [...] good and bad usage [...] some speak and write well, others speak and write badly [...] The *Académie* deals with good usage' ('Il y a [...] un bon et un mauvais usage [...] Les uns parlent et écrivent bien, les autres écrivent et parlent mal [...] C'est [...] au bon usage que s'arrête l'Académie') (1878, v).[9] However, this 'usage' is not necessarily only current. 'Usage [...] as it is understood by the *Académie*, encompasses the three great centuries that had such a strong influence on our literature, the seventeenth, the eighteenth and our own' ('L'usage [...] tel que le comprend l'Académie, embrasse les trois grands siècles qui ont marqué notre littérature d'une si forte empreinte, le dix-septième, le dix-huitième et le nôtre') (1878, x).[10]

[8] Le Littré <https,//www.littre.org/> [accessed 29/03/18]
[9] Gallica, 'Dictionnaire de l'Académie française', 1878 (septième édition), <http,//gallica.bnf.fr/ark,/12148/bpt6k504096/f6.image> [accessed 29/03/2018]
[10] ibid.

Later common dictionaries include various editions of the Larousse and the Robert. The 1960s saw some interesting developments in the world of dictionaries, with the emergence of the new linguistic discipline of lexicology and the introduction of new technology, which transformed the sector and led to the creation of the *Trésor de la Langue Française des XIXe et XXe siècles*, published in 16 volumes between 1971 and 1994.[11] Other relatively successful dictionaries include the *Dictionnaire encyclopédique Quillet* (1934), the *Dictionnaire Quillet de la langue française* (1946) and the *Hachette Dictionnaire de la langue française* (1980). These later dictionaries rely less on quotations from classical authors than Littré, who 'wanted to base current usage on older usages' ('voulait asseoir l'usage présent sur les emplois anciens') (Matoré 1968, 126), and who therefore include many examples from earlier authors, 'Littré, purist by taste and classical by nature, made little reference to any texts later than 1830' ('Littré, purist de goût et classique de tempérament, ne mentionnait guère de textes postérieurs à 1830') (ibid.).

Examining the particular dictionaries referred to by the columnists reveals some interesting points. Firstly, all authors refer to the Littré and to one or more editions of the Larousse. This is unsurprising, as these two dictionaries are the most well known by the general public (Matoré 1968, 118). However, the earlier language columnists (Snell, 1920s and Lancelot, 1930s) make far more references to Littré than the later columnists. Although this may be expected given that the Littré was already relatively dated by the mid-20th century, these two earlier language columnists also make more references to the *Académie* dictionary than the later columnists, and they make far *fewer* references to any edition of the Larousse. Given the more democratic nature of the Larousse, aimed at

[11] Ministère de la Culture, 'Le Trésor de la langue française', <http,//www2.culture.gouv.fr/culture/celebrations/dictionnaires/partie1.php?nav=2_7&tex=2_7_c&part=2> [accessed 19/03/18]

popularising knowledge and therefore at a broader and less educated audience (Matoré 1968, 127), it is interesting that Snell (1920s) and Lancelot (1930s) choose not to refer to this. At the time they were writing, the Larousse had been available for a long time and was reputable and as well-known by the general public as the Littré (Matoré 1968, 118). A reliance on Littré and the *Académie* suggests a certain attitude on the part of these authors, a wish to maintain a language that was seen to have reached its perfection in the 17th and 18th centuries. Littré is well known for the numerous quotes from classical authors he uses to illustrate his dictionary entries, and the *Académie* refers to the 'solid past' ('passé solide') of the French language and states (*Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 1878, ix-x),

> A word is not dead because we don't use it anymore, if it lives on in the works of authors such as Molière, La Fontaine, Pascal, in the letters of an author such as Madame de Sévigné, or in the memoirs of authors such as Saint-Simon, Montesquieu, J.-J. Rousseau, even Voltaire himself ...
>
> (Un mot n'est pas mort parce que nous ne l'employons plus, s'il vit dans les œuvres d'un Molière, d'un La Fontaine, d'un Pascal, dans les lettres d'une madame de Sévigné, ou dans les mémoires d'un Saint-Simon, Montesquieu, J.-J. Rousseau, Voltaire lui-même...)

Later authors who do refer to the *Académie* dictionary often do so only to find fault or disagree with it. For example, Bourgeade (1980s) criticizes the *Académie* for not reflecting the actual state of the language. Specifically, with regard to the use of the imperfect subjunctive, he states, 'Could the *Académie* not, once and for all, agree with common usage and confirm that the imperfect subjunctive is dead' ('L'Académie ne pourrait-elle, une fois pour toutes, donner raison à l'usage et constater la mort de l'imparfait du subjonctif') (Bourgeade 1991, 22).

The later columnists – Cohen (1940s/60s), Thérive (1950s), Cellard (1970s), Bourgeade (1980s) – are much more likely to refer to an edition of the Larousse. This may of course be because the Larousse has seen several new editions over the 20th century, which is not the case for Littré or the *Académie* dictionary which may be seen as

dated by this period. The later columnists are also more likely to refer to a very broad range of dictionaries, whereas Snell (1920s) and Lancelot (1930s) stick to a few favoured works. Works referred to by later columnists range from references to other general dictionaries such as the Robert; Hatzfeld, Thomas and Darmesteters *Dictionnaire general* (1889); and Quillet's *Dictionnaire encyclopédique* (1934) and *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (1946), to more specialised dictionaries, such as the Littré *Dictionnaire de médicine, de chirurgie, de pharmacie*. Finally, Cohen (1940s/60s) and Cellard (1970s) are more likely than other columnists to refer to etymological dictionaries. They generally do so when discussing the history of a given term to show how its meaning has changed over time, often to explain a current usage.

References to grammars and linguistic works are broad in chronological scope, ranging from the 17th to the 20th century. However, the earlier columnists (Snell, 1920s and Lancelot, 1930s) mainly refer to the work of the French *Remarqueurs*, a group of 17th-century grammarians, the most famous of whom is Vaugelas, who arguably began the long prescriptive tradition in France (see Ayres-Bennett 2006), whereas Cohen (1940s/60s), Bourgeade (1980s) and Cellard (1970s) only very rarely refer to these, if at all, and Thérive (1950s) does so only occasionally. Of the other works referred to, the range is very broad. Grevisse's *Le Bon Usage* is referred to relatively frequently by the four later columnists, as are works by linguists including Ferdinand Brunot and Charles Bruneau. Both Cohen (1940s/60s) and Cellard (1970s) refer to further scholarly linguistic works, such as research carried out by André Martinet and Aurélien Sauvageot. They do so to illustrate and exemplify discussions about various French language usages.

Finally, there is a very broad range of literary works referred to by most of the authors, ranging from the early modern period (16th-18th century) through to the modern period (19th-20th century). The earlier columnists, Snell (1920s) and Lancelot (1930s), are far

more likely than later columnists to refer to early modern French authors, whereas the later columnists (post World War II) are more likely to refer to modern French authors. This may be related to a post-World War II cultural shift that sees modern culture as being as valid as earlier models. However, Thérive (1950s) does not fit the pattern, as he also makes a high number of references to early modern authors. Authors from the early modern period in particular carry heavy cultural weight in France. It may be that a strong reliance on such authors to exemplify a point or support an argument reflects a belief that the language used by these authors was superior to later forms.

3.2. Purpose of references

Although all of the authors use references, they do so in different ways and for different purposes, and this means that they construct their authority in different ways. In some cases, references are used to reinforce an argument (for or against a particular usage, for example) or to justify a particular point. In others, they serve as an illustration or aid an explanation. All authors also refer in one way or another to the primacy of 'usage' in making judgments about language, reflecting a belief that it is *usage* which dictates what rule givers state as rules and not the other way around. However, what they understand by such usage differs, from an idealised 'good' usage such as that exemplified in the authors of the early modern period (so widely quoted by Littré) to 'common' usage, the language spoken by 'ordinary' speakers. On the whole, prescriptive intent correlates with the use of references to justify particular usages and a narrow view of 'bon' usage, and descriptive intent correlates with the use of references to illustrate or explain a point and a broad view of 'common' usage. Cellard (1970s) and Cohen (1940s/60s) use references to illustrate or aid explanations, whereas Lancelot (1930s) uses them to reinforce arguments that promote the use of 'le bon usage'. Snell (1920s), Thérive (1950s) and

Bourgeade (1980s) use references for both purposes, to varying degrees. Each columnists' reasons for referring to the various sources are examined in turn below.

3.2.1. *Snell (1920s), towards prescriptivism*

Snell (1920s) uses references for both descriptive and prescriptive purposes, although he takes a more prescriptive approach in general. He frequently refers to all three types of reference to reinforce the point he is making. For example, he regularly cites Littré for this purpose, as when he says, 'In point of fact, *Fortuné* should not be used to mean "rich". Littré, citing Nodier, says that it is an error' ('En effet, *Fortuné* ne doit pas être employé pour riche. Littré, citant Nodier, dit que c'est une faute') (*L'Œuvre*, 26 February 1929) and 'the form *ne pas... que* is an error, a "major" error, according to Littré' ('la forme *ne pas... que* est une faute, une « grosse » faute selon Littré') (*L'Œuvre*, 21 May 1929). Snell also frequently refers to both grammarians and literary works to reinforce an argument for or against a particular usage (that is, to argue for 'good' usage and against 'bad' usage). For example, when discussing the use of the verb *falloir* 'have to, must', he says (incidentally when criticising Abel Hermant, that is, Lancelot) 'Vaugelas is very clear on this point, but... Mr. Abel Hermant did not read Vaugelas!' ('Vaugelas est très net sur ce point, mais... M. Abel Hermant n'avait pas lu Vaugelas !') (*L'Œuvre*, 26 February 1929). He also argues (*L'Œuvre*, 23 April 1929) that the fact that a particular expression is not found in Bossuet is proof that it is incorrect, '"How beautiful it is!" is obviously impossible in an elevated style. You won't see this figure of speech in a piece by Bossuet... Definite impropriety' ('« Ce que c'est beau ! » est évidemment impossible dans le style soutenu. On ne voit pas ce trope dans un morceau de Bossuet... Incorrection certaine').

Snell is not always resolutely prescriptive, however. When discussing the use of *ce que* (*L'Œuvre*, 19 March 1929), Snell notes Vaugelas' commendation of its use, but also

states that an alternative is equally valid, 'Vaugelas commends *ce que* as being "quite French and having unparalleled grace". That said, it is perfectly fine to prefer, "Une lectrice s'étonne *que* les auteurs..." which is [...] also clear.' ('Vaugelas [...] recommande *ce que* comme « bien français et ayant une grâce non pareille ». Cela dit, il est parfaitement licite de préférer, « Une lectrice s'étonne *que* les auteurs... » qui est [...] aussi clair.') He also frequently refers to usage, sometimes juxtaposing 'bon' usage with the more general usage of the wider population. For example, he states (*L'Œuvre*, 14 mai 1929), 'The rule is definite, *ne pas... que* is a major error, a barbarism. Usage, on the other hand, tends clearly towards accepting it' ('La doctrine est formelle, *ne pas... que* est une grosse faute, un barbarisme. L'usage, au contraire, tend nettement à le faire admettre'). For Snell, *l'usage* is clearly at fault here. However, he is not uniformly negative towards 'common' usage, in fact he can sometimes describe it in a neutral manner without displaying a negative value judgement as, for example, when he says (*L'Œuvre*, 17 septembre 1929), '*Au point de vue de...* in the sense of "from the point of view of" is in such common usage now that it is used – I have done so myself – without noticing the words which make it up' ('*Au point de vue de...* dans le sens de « sous le rapport de » est d'usage si fréquent qu'on l'emploie — c'est ce qui m'est arrivé — sans prendre garde aux mots dont elle est formée.') In general, however, Snell uses literary references to justify one particular usage over another, and he makes his attitude towards those whom he considers the arbiters of 'correct' usage clear when he says (*L'Œuvre*, 25 February 1930), 'Racine, La Fontaine, Hugo are always right' ('Racine, La Fontaine, Hugo ont toujours raison').

3.2.2. *Lancelot (1930s), defender of 'le bon usage'*

Lancelot uses references in nearly all cases to impose one particular form of French (*le bon usage* 'good usage'). He clearly views particular sources as authorities on this

form of French. For example, he frequently advises readers to refer to Littré, as when he says 'I think I have already dealt with this little matter, besides, all you need to do is to open your Littré' ('je crois bien avoir déjà traité cette petite question, et il suffit d'ailleurs d'ouvrir son Littré'). (*Le Temps*, 25 October 1935) and 'all I had to do to find these two examples was to open my Littré, which anyone can do' ('pour trouver ces deux exemples je n'ai eu que la peine d'ouvrir mon Littré, c'est ce que tout le monde peut faire') (*Le Temps*, 29 November 1934), thereby implying that Littré is the main arbiter for all speakers (although Larousse was equally widely known at the time, see Matoré 1968, 118). He refers to Vaugelas to reinforce the idea that certain terms are 'wrong' and others 'right', as when he says that '*orthographe* [spelling] is an ill-formed noun, Vaugelas made the same complaint' ('*orthographe* est un nom mal fait, Vaugelas s'en plaignait déjà') (*Le Temps*, 26 October 1933), or argues that the form *remplir* 'to fill a glass' is not an 'error' ('faute') because 'Vaugelas, Vaugelas himself' ('Vaugelas, Vaugelas lui-même') used this expression (*Le Temps*, 11 April 1935). Vaugelas, according to Lancelot at least, is an authority with whom one cannot disagree. So too are the early modern authors, to whom Lancelot frequently refers to justify a particular usage or condemn another (e.g. Corneille, La Fontaine, Molière, Racine and Voltaire). In fact he explicitly states that the true authorities on the French language are 'classical' French authors, arguing that the Littré dictionary can be seen as authoritative precisely because it bases its examples on excerpts from 'les classiques' (*Le Temps*, 25 April 1935),

> Examples from dictionaries are of two kinds, either they are taken from classical authors, they are quotations, or they are invented in the manner of the Berlitz school.[12] Only the former, of which the Littré contains an incomparable stock, are credible examples; the others have no authority [...]
>
> (Les exemples de dictionnaires sont de deux sortes, ou bien ils sont tirés des classiques, ce sont des citations, ou bien ils sont fabriqués à la manière de l'école Berlitz. Les premiers seuls, dont le

[12] Berlitz is a language school (for the teaching of second languages) founded in 1878 <https,//www.berlitz.co.uk/ > [accessed 30/03/2018]

> Littré contient un incomparable magasin, sont des exemples témoins ; les autres n'ont point d'autorité [...])

Lancelot is stating explicitly here that the main or 'real' authority in questions of language is established good custom. That is, usage (albeit, good usage) is the authority, rather than the rules given by rule makers. However, in saying this, he is drawing upon traditional legitimacy as opposed to rational legitimacy (Cooper 1989), by referring to literary sources rather than grammars or dictionaries. It is interesting that he uses the example of Berlitz here, as the method of teaching in Berlitz (second) language schools is not in fact based on learning grammar from a book but instead aims to teach the language intuitively through speaking.[13] However, he may be critical of the fact that they focus on everyday spoken language, as opposed to 'bon usage'. It is rare that Lancelot uses references for any other purpose than a purely prescriptive one. On the whole, the main purpose of the references he uses is to impose certain usages and condemn others.

3.2.3. *Cohen (1940s/60s), the explainer and illustrator*

Cohen refers to dictionaries as a source of examples to illustrate a point he is making or to aid an explanation, not to defend a particular usage as 'correct'. In general, he uses references to highlight the development of a term or construction (for example, changes in its meaning over the centuries) or to point readers towards works where they can find out more about a particular topic. He explicitly states that dictionaries are not necessarily the best arbiters of usage, 'It is true that *réemploi* [reuse] is not to be found in dictionaries. But who would claim that our dictionaries are complete and up-to-date records of usage?' ('Il est vrai que *réemploi* ne se trouve pas dans les dictionnaires. Mais qui prétendra que nos dictionnaires sont complets et à jour de l'usage ?') (Cohen 1950, 47), and points out that they do not reflect the reality of language use, noting that 'Our vocabulary contains

[13] Berlitz method, <https,//www.berlitz.co.uk/berlitz-method> [accessed 30/03/2018]

many recent words which cannot be found in dictionaries' ('Notre vocabulaire a nombre de mots récents qu'on ne trouve pas dans les dictionnaires') (Cohen 1950, 27). As with Lancelot, this reflects a belief that usage is the main arbiter in language questions, and that it is usage which dictates language rules, and not rules which dictate usage. However, he does not mean by usage the same thing that Lancelot does. For him, usage is not 'le bon usage' reflected in early modern literature but rather something constantly changing that is found in the mouths of speakers. He is therefore drawing upon rational legitimacy as opposed to traditional legitimacy here (in the sense of Cooper 1989).

Cohen also frequently refers to quite specialised linguistic works, generally scholarly works, in order to inform discussions about particular current usages. For example, in a discussion of the pronunciation of the suffix *-isme* (*L'Humanité*, 05 November 1962), he refers to several academic works on French pronunciation (e.g. Martinon 1913, Durand 1947, Kammans 1956, Nyrop 1963), and in an article on subordinate clauses (*L'Humanité*, 10 December 1962) he refers to a work on French syntax (Le Bidois and Le Bidois 1938). He uses literary references in a similar manner, for example, referring to an example from Bossuet to illustrate the impersonal use of the verb *rester* (*L'Humanité*, 23 April 1962). His approach is overwhelmingly descriptive. While the works he refers to confirm his status as a linguist and, therefore, as someone who has the authority to talk about language, this is not why he refers to them. They are merely tools to enable him to exemplify or illustrate discussions on various linguistic points.

3.2.4. *Thérive (1950s), dictionaries describe, grammars prescribe*

Where Thérive makes references to dictionaries, this tends to be for descriptive purposes. For example, in a discussion of the expression *faire suisse* 'to eat or drink alone' and similar expressions such as *boire en Suisse* 'drink alone', he simply notes that 'The "Larousse" still mentions them, they have completely passed out of usage' ('Le

« Larousse » les mentionne encore, elles sont entièrement passées d'usage') (*Carrefour*, 21 January 1953), and in a later article he notes that the term *circonstanciel* 'appeared to still be new to Littré' ('semblait encore néologique à Littré') (*Carrefour*, 09 March 1955) without passing a value judgement about either usage. However, references to grammatical and linguistic works tend to be associated with some form of prescriptivism. For example, in an article discussing subject inversion (*Carrefour*, 14 January 1953), he refers readers to Robert Le Bidois' work on subject inversion, noting that in this, Le Bidois denounces 'the unfortunate symptoms of an illness that he calls, with the best intentions, *inversity*' ('les fâcheux symptômes d'une maladie qu'il appelle, en tout bien tout honneur, l'*inversité*.') He clearly agrees with Le Bidois that this is an 'illness', stating that 'French loathes such inversions' ('le français a horreur de ces inversions') (incidentally making use of the 'authority' of the language itself, as outlined by McLelland (2001, 23-26), by personifying it and allowing it 'to speak for itself in its likes and dislikes').

Thérive refers to literary works or authors for both descriptive and prescriptive purposes. He often uses such references to illustrate a point or act as an example, as when he quotes Rabelais to show an example of an earlier meaning of the term *lanterne* 'lantern' (*Carrefour*, 10 December 1952) or La Bruyère to illustrate a particular use of the possessive, 'the possessive is used to recall impersonal objects, La Bruyère writes *"I approach a small town, a river bathes its walls"*' ('on emploi le possessif pour rappeler des objets impersonnels, *« j'approche d'une petite ville, une rivière baigne ses murs »*, écrit La Bruyère') (Carrefour, 19 November 1952). He also uses them to justify particular usages, however. For example, in response to a reader questioning a particular use of the relative pronoun *dont* 'whose, of which' (where *de quoi* 'of which' could also be used) (*Carrefour*, 11 February 1953), he states that it is 'more than correct. Elegant. Classical.

Very seventeenth century!' ('plus que correct. Elégant. Classique. Très dix-septième siècle !') and gives a similar example from *Le Misanthrope* (Molière). The fact that he explicitly references the 17th century highlights his acknowledgement that language from this period is viewed as superior in some way. When he refers to usage, it is often with the meaning of 'common' usage, but this does not mean that he always agrees that such usage is best. For example, when referring to the term *Américains* to name citizens of the USA, he judges this as incorrect, 'By Jove! *Américains*... its usage is established, even though it is clearly incorrect' ('Parbleu! Américains... L'usage est établi, bien que l'impropriété du terme soit évident') (*Carrefour*, 26 November 1952).

3.2.5. *Cellard (1970s), Languages change*

Cellard often refers to dictionaries in order to show that they are not necessarily the arbiters of usage, and that language does not need to be noted in them to be acceptable. He makes this point very clearly when he says (1979, 3),

> Indeed, it is not because a particular adjective appears in a particular dictionary that *Le Monde* (or any other newspaper or journalist) is authorized to use it; it is because the press and the radio use it that the adjective will, sooner or later, appear in the dictionary.
>
> (Ce n'est pas, en effet, parce que tel ou tel adjectif figure dans tel ou tel dictionnaire que *Le Monde* (ou tout autre journal ou journaliste) s'autorise à l'employer ; c'est parce que la presse et la radio l'emploient que l'adjectif figurera un jour ou l'autre au dictionnaire.)

He frequently refers to grammatical and linguistic works to reinforce his argument that languages change over time and that these changes do not necessarily have to be included in dictionaries or grammatical works for them to be valid. For example, he refers to many different grammatical works (Rat 1970; Thomas 1956; Cohen 1950; Pichon 1942; Matoré 1963; Brunot et Bruneau 1964) in order to explicitly back up his point that language change happens, new words are adopted (for example, *émotionner* 'to upset') and that, in general, there is room for these in French (1979, 12-14). He also uses references to literature to argue that it is 'l'usage' which is paramount in determining language change. For example, he refers to La Fontaine and La Bruyère (1979, 1) to make the point that

even if they liked or disliked a usage, this did not cause either its death or its continued use,

> Just as the regrets of the good La Fontaine were not enough to revive *engeigner* 'to dupe' or even to earn it a remission, the death sentence passed by La Bruyère on *chaleureux* 'warm', *fructueux* 'fruitful' or *mensonger* 'false, deceitful' did not prevent these good servants from leading honorable careers.
>
> (Pas plus que les regrets du bon La Fontaine n'ont pu ressusciter *engeigner* ni même lui procurer quelque rémission, l'arrêt de mort porté par La Bruyère contre chaleureux, fructueux ou mensonger n'a empêché ces bons serviteurs de poursuivre une carrière honorable.)

Cellard is also a proponent of the idea that usage dictates what rule-givers state as rules, and not the other way round. Indeed, he explicitly states that 'Usage creates the rule, not the reverse' ('L'usage engendre la règle, non l'invers') (1979, 7), and that 'it is not the rule that makes the language but the language that makes the rules' ('ce n'est pas la règle qui fait la langue mais la langue qui fait les règles') (1979, 24). As with Cohen (1940s/60s), his view of usage is not the written 'bon' usage found in authors of the early modern period, but the current language spoken in France.

3.2.6. *Bourgeade (1980s), towards descriptivism*

Bourgeade uses references mainly for descriptive purposes, but also occasionally with prescriptive intent. He generally refers to dictionaries during discussions of the meaning of words without always adding a value judgment about 'correctness' (although he occasionally does do this). He also sometimes criticizes certain dictionaries and notes that they cannot influence the actual usage of a language, although perhaps somewhat less frequently and less forcefully than Cohen and Cellard. However, he is somewhat contradictory on the point of usage trumping dictionary entries, as he freely admits (1991, 28),

> I admit that I am contradicting myself completely. A month ago I requested that we stop using the imperfect subjunctive because of usage; today I am asking that we continue to avoid saying *débuter une conférence* 'begin a conference' in spite of usage, and in spite of the *Petit Larousse*, whose editors I respectfully ask to revisit the inclusion (in error, perhaps?) of this uncouth solecism, even if it is just for a while.

> (Je reconnais que je suis en pleine contradiction. Il y a un mois, je demandais que l'on abandonnât l'imparfait du subjonctif en raison de l'usage ; aujourd'hui, je demande qu'on continue à ne pas dire *débuter une conférence* malgré l'usage, et malgré le *Petit Larousse* dont je supplie respectueusement les rédacteurs de revenir, ne fût-ce que pour un temps, sur la consécration accordée (par erreur, peut-être ?) à ce solécisme grossier.)

Bourgeade makes very few references to grammatical or linguistic works but, when he does, it can be to oppose a strongly prescriptive position. For example, in an article on the imperfect subjunctive (1991, 22-23), he refers to Ferdinand Brunot in order to refute a particular rule outlined in the *Académie* dictionary. He refers to Brunot as a 'famous philologist, professor of the history of language at the faculty of arts in Paris' ('célèbre philologue, professeur d'histoire de la langue à la faculté des lettres de Paris') (explicitly acknowledging his expertise in language matters, and highlighting his authority) and makes the point very clearly that use of the imperfect subjunctive has changed over time, and that the *Académie* should acknowledge this. In terms of references to literature, Bourgeade rarely uses these to justify a particular usage, but rather as part of a description or explanation. On one occasion he clearly points out that not all of the French language can be accessed through classical authors or indeed within France (Bourgeade 1991, 151),

> As to terms that come from the French-speaking world, from the African *camembérer* (to have smelly feet) to the Belgian *fourcher* (to enjoy some free time) to the Canadian *flanc-mou* (lazy person) to the Swiss *cuisette* (sports shorts), they are as unexpected as they are delightful. They would not be found in Pascal, or Racine, or even in Mallarmé, we must therefore discover them in the Hachette.
>
> (Quant aux mots de la Francophonie, de l'africain *camembérer* (sentir des pieds) au belge *fourcher* (jouir d'un temps libre) du canadien *flanc-mou* (personne parasseuse) au suisse *cuisette* (culotte de sport), ils sont aussi inattendus que délicieux. On ne les trouvera ni dans Pascal, ni dans Racine, ni même dans Mallarmé, il nous faut donc les découvrir dans *le Hachette*.)

Overall, although Bourgeade can show prescriptive intent on occasion in his use of references, he takes a more descriptive approach on the whole. His attitude to usage is less clear than with earlier authors; he sees usage in terms of 'good' and 'bad', but also acknowledges that it can change over time and that it is not limited to France or to a particular period of classical literature.

3.2.7. *Purpose of references, differences between columnists*

The language columnists cannot be seen to reflect a single ideology, rather they represent a wide range of positions both on the prescriptive-descriptive continuum and in terms of how they create authority. There is no clear demarcation here across time. The pre-war columnists, Snell (1920s) and Lancelot (1930s), are very clearly using references to all types of work with mainly prescriptive intent, as means of imposing 'good' usage, but this is also largely the case for Thérive (1950s) and, much more occasionally, for Bourgeade (1980s). There is, however, a clear divide between those columnists who are using references on the whole to justify or impose particular usages and discourage others – Snell (1920s), Lancelot (1930s), Thérive (1950s) – and those who are using references on the whole to aid an explanation or illustrate a point (without value judgement) – Cohen (1940s/60s), Cellard (1970s) and Bourgeade (1980s). The former assign a clear authority to the Littré and *Académie* dictionaries and to the French early modern authors, referring to them frequently and seeing them as the final arbiter in questions of 'correctness' or acceptability. The latter are generally much more likely to question the absolute authority of these works, and to view them more as aids in the description of particular terms or expressions. They are also more likely to refer to a much broader range of works. This is therefore not so much a trend over time, but shows that competing language ideologies exist alongside each other in the 20th century, possibly to a greater extent that is apparent in early centuries. The ideological approach of the columnists can vary from an approach that adheres strongly to standard language ideology and, therefore, to the notion that there is one, 'correct' form of language, to an approach that values diversity in language and is more open to acknowledging language change.

What is common to all authors is the notion that it is not the rules laid out by rule makers (in grammars and dictionaries) that influences usage, but usage that dictates what

language rules actually are. However, ‘usage’ means different things for different authors. For Cohen (1940s/60s) and Cellard (1970s) it can be understood to refer to ‘the French spoken everyday’, rather than to a highly formal or written form of French. But for Lancelot (1930s), it is used in the sense of *le bon usage* ‘good usage’ and in this case it actually refers either to the French spoken by a small elite section of society or, more specifically, to the written French produced by the highly regarded French authors of the early modern period. For Snell (1920s), Thérive (1950s) and Bourgeade (1980s) it can mean both. Whatever the stance of the individual columnists, referring to usage is a means of constructing authority. Referring to ‘good’ usage constructs authority directly, by indicating to the reader that only this ‘good’ form is correct or proper and also that the author has the expertise to differentiate such ‘correct’ from ‘incorrect’ forms. Referring to common usage could work to align the author with his readers, reassuring them that they still speak ‘properly’ even though their language may not always align with the usages recommended in grammar books or dictionaries.

4. Conclusions

The study has shown that, contrary to what might be expected for what is often believed to be a genre that is a bastion of prescriptivism, language columnists in the 20th century in France cannot be seen as a unified group reflecting a single language ideology. Rather, they reflect a range of positions both on the prescriptive-descriptive continuum and in terms of how they create authority. There are also, contrary to expectation, no clear tendencies over time, despite changes in the status of French in public consciousness over the period examined. Snell (1920s) tends towards prescriptivism but sometimes takes a descriptive stance. Lancelot (1930s) is a clear and staunch defender of ‘le bon usage’. Cohen (1940s/1960s) uses his column to explain and illustrate various points about

language and takes a clearly descriptive approach. Thérive (1950s) varies in approach, using references to dictionaries to describe points of usage but using references to grammars to prescribe usage. Cellard (1970s) takes a broadly descriptive approach, acknowledging that languages changes. Bourgeade (1980s) tends towards descriptivism but can occasionally take a prescriptive approach. In spite of these differences between individual columnists, three clear points have emerged from the study about how the authority necessary to make credible language judgments is created, how this correlates to the ideological approach of individual columnists, and the role played by usage in the creation of language rules.

Firstly, whatever the purpose of the reference, whether prescriptive or descriptive, one of the outcomes of its inclusion is nearly always the construction of authority. Knowledge of, and access to, the works referred to, indicates expertise (be this literary or linguistic) and this, in itself, is a form of cognitive authority (as outlined by Wilson 1983). Language columnists also frequently refer to such works only to disagree with them or to highlight what they consider to be errors or gaps. This again serves to confer authority on them as columnists. Readers understand these works to be arbiters of usage, therefore the very fact of disagreeing with them gives the disagreeing party their own authority. The authority created is both rational (references to dictionaries, grammars and linguistic works) and traditional (references to highly regarded literary works and to the *Remarqueurs*) (Bermel 2007/Cooper 1989).

Secondly, the authority thus conferred can been created using traditional or rational means and it can be explicit or implicit. Both of these correlate with prescriptive and descriptive approaches. Traditional means of creating authority include references to highly regarded literary or grammatical works from earlier centuries, whereas rational means include references to contemporary dictionaries and grammars, particularly those

used in the educational sphere. Authority is explicit where a work is referred to in order to explicitly highlight a usage as 'correct' or 'incorrect'. It is implicit where a work is referred to in order to illustrate an example or to aid an explanation; the language columnist is not making the reference to show that a usage is correct but the very inclusion of the reference itself confers authority, as just noted. In the present sample of language columns, Snell (1920s) and Lancelot (1930s) are the most likely to construct authority explicitly and to do so using traditional means, for example, referring to works such as the Littré dictionary, the 17th-century *Remarqueurs* and early modern French authors such as Racine and Molière. Cohen (1940s/60s) and Cellard (1970s) are the most likely to construct authority implicitly and to do so using rational means, for example, referring to a range of grammatical and scholarly linguistic works from a broad, mainly modern, time period. Thérive (1950s) and Bourgeade (1980s) fall somewhere between the two, with Thérive's attitude closer to that of Snell and Lancelot and Bourgeade's to Cohen and Cellard. Where authority is constructed explicitly using traditional means, this is indicative of a prescriptive or a purist attitude, which sees change to the language as negative. Where authority is constructed implicitly using rational means, this is indicative of a more descriptive attitude which sees change to the language as normal and necessary.

Thirdly, all of the language columnists display a belief that it is not the rules laid out by rule makers (in grammars and dictionaries) that influence usage, but usage that dictates language rules. However, 'usage' means different things for different authors. For those who take a more descriptive approach (Cohen, 1940s/60s; Cellard, 1970s) it refers to 'the French spoken everyday', for those who take a more prescriptive approach (Lancelot, 1930s) it refers to very particular form of 'good' French which they are competent to discern. Some authors (Snell, 1930s; Thérive, 1950s; Bourgeade, 1980s) fall somewhere between these two positions in their understanding of the term. We can see then that while

individual authors differ in how they create authority and in their ideological stance, there are nonetheless clear similarities between authors who display a more prescriptive approach and those who display a more descriptive approach.

This preliminary study has provided a useful insight into the means by which authority is created by language columns and what this reveals about the language ideological approaches of individual authors. Future work will examine in more detail the topics discussed in these columns (for example, syntax, phonology, etymology) to determine whether these also correlate with ideological approaches. A study of the metalanguage and discourse styles used by columnists will also provide useful insights into how certain types of discourse correspond to particular language ideological views and may reveal trends across time that relate to changes in the political, cultural and economic status of France. For example, common metaphors of defence (against illness, against mixing, or metaphors of war or colonisation) may be more common in periods of the decline of French political or economic power. Analysis of a broader time period may reveal trends across time that are not apparent in a more restricted time frame. Finally, a comparative study of language columns from other French-speaking areas such as Quebec or Belgium may reveal insights into how the discourse in language columns is influenced by the cultural, economic and political sphere in which it is produced.

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