

Similarities and differences between prescriptive and descriptive grammars essay



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Grammar contributes to the meaningful linkage between words and phrases, making sense of a language semantically in a socially agreed framework. To achieve this, rules and principles are laid down to produce a uniform structure of a language usage. Concerning about social acceptability, different theories have been employed to result in different types of grammatical description (O'Halloran, Coffin 2005).

Meanwhile, as language is in a constant state of flux in terms of phonetics, morphology, semantic, syntax, etc (Yule, 2006). Controversial attitudes towards the emotive language evolve, and hence, bringing out two contrasting views – traditional and modern, which correspondingly lead to Prescriptive and Descriptive Grammar. This essay serves to outline the comparison between Prescriptive and Descriptive grammars with detailed explanations about their origins and purposes as well as elaborate examples illustrated by the choice of English Language, the lingua franca, to point out their respective approach to English grammar. Rules of Prescriptive grammar are regulatory. They are based on norms derived from a particular model of grammar approved by influential grammarians (Yule, 2006). Correctness and purity are emphasized whereas change is forbidden. They are most used in formal written language. Conversely, rules of Descriptive Grammar are constitutive.

They are based on observations of the authentic language used by the speakers to generalize how it is comprehensively used (McArthur, 1998). Changes are welcome to maintain public acceptability toward the language varieties, without passing any judgments on them. In the study of linguistics, these two terms have been known opposing by definitions and therefore, <https://assignbuster.com/similarities-and-differences-between-prescriptive-and-descriptive-grammars-essay/>

prescriptive rules are never the descriptive ones, vice versa. This is because of the social context which guides the language used. For instance, although it becomes increasingly common that the verb 'graduate' can be used without 'from' in colloquial: 'I graduated British university' is expressed instead of the standard usage of 'I graduated from British university', the former type is not socially approved by school papers or business documents as it is considered informal or incorrect by prescriptivists. Therefore, being prescriptive, the occurring variants in language cannot be equally treated acceptable, which means that it can never be descriptive. In other words, no similarities exist between prescriptive and descriptive grammars, except that both of them belong to types of grammar, with each having rules to govern the language to mean and function in individual ways. Prescriptivism begins from the 18th century where the favored variety of language has an inherently higher value than others, and that it should be imposed on the whole speech community. The system of unchanging forms of Latin and Greek language is adopted as the model for English language, so prescriptive rules are introduced to English grammar accordingly to ensure the absolute correct usage of it (O'Halloran, Coffin, 2005).

In the example of the preposition after 'different', the Latin form, 'different from' is advocated as a Standard English without objections (Crystal, 2003). On the other hand, Descriptivism is put forward by modern USA and Europe grammarians who recognize the changing nature of a language and hence language rules can be flexible, especially to English, which has become a universal language nowadays after years of evolution. If a certain usage of the language is used one way by the majority, a new rule is established. '

Different to' and 'different than' are popular expressions in British English and American English respectively (Hornby, 1997). In this way, descriptive grammar helps to describe the phenomenon and derive the corresponding rules or patterns. . A further example is in the use of the past subjunctive after if. Prescriptivists insist the use of ' If I were you'.

Yet, in real case, the majority of the population use was in their spoken language. It is difficult to for descriptivists to claim that they are wrong because the use of both ' were' and ' was' convey the similar probable meaning. The last example is about ending sentences with prepositions. A prescriptive rule states that a preposition should not be used to end a sentence but to keep together with its object (Bryson, 1987): From whom did you receive this present? However, this statement, according to descriptive grammar, can be made more natural and easily understandable if the preposition is placed in the end: Whom did you receive this present from? In conclusion, it is the distinctive differences between Prescriptive and Descriptive Grammars that make both of them are complementary to each other. While the use of prescriptive grammars helps preserve a culture, the use of descriptive grammar encourages language creativity through informal words in daily lives, freeing from the extreme influence from formal written language in the educational system (Yule, 2006). What ultimately matters is whether mutual acceptability exists between speakers and listeners using respective grammatical approach. References: Bryson, B. (1987).

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