

Outline the difference  
between a  
prescriptive and  
descriptive approach  
to language...



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Grammar is the underlying structure of language and is a socially agreed framework; it is needed as it allows groups of words to be linked together in ways that make sense. If there was no grammar, language would be a meaningless jumble. “ Grammar is the sum of the conventions of Standard English”.

This is written in the prescriptive approach and suggests that rules are essential. Some of the non-standard features include taboo language (swearing), slang, dialect features, spoken features and language seen as rude. In class we did an exercise to show the importance of grammar. We were told to write any word on a piece of paper and pass it on throughout the difference members in the class.

The results came out as followed: Metal through jacket atmosphere no overprotect magic. This list of words made no semantical sense as it did not include any conjunctions or prepositions. It made no grammatical sense. We then repeated the experiment but this time was instructed to insert a verb, adjective or a noun in a particular order that we were told. The sentence came out like this: The microwave sang discreetly and the blue elephant urinated. This sentence was structured and made grammatical sense even though it dose not make sense semantically.

This experiment shows that grammar gives a structure or an order in which to put words together. This is important so that the sentence makes sense. The prescriptive approach is easier to understand - there is always one right answer; the descriptive approach may offer several possible answers, each appropriate in one or another context. Prescriptive approach: - this type of

approach indicates whether an extract of language is grammatically correct. This variety of language has an inherently higher value than others, and that this ought to be imposed on the whole speech community.

The rules for the prescriptive approach originally come from the Latin and Greek language. These languages have an unchanging form and are now models for other languages, like English. This rule is used because Latin and Greek are 'dead languages' but English is not. E. .

you should say or write 'It is I' and not 'It is me', because the verb 'be' is followed by the nominative case in Latin, not the accusative in English. Some of the prescriptive rules of English are: Don't split infinitives, don't use double negation, don't end a sentence with a preposition, and don't use who in place of whom. Descriptive approach: – this approach describes in full detail precisely how language features are used in an extract of language. This gives the understanding that all varieties are equal. Most modern linguists prefer this approach to language as they do not want to prescribe what language should look like but to describe what language is, how it is recognised and used for interaction. They want to find the rules or patterns that people use to form words and sentences.

As a language student, I must always use the descriptive approach when analysing language features. Some of the descriptive rules of English are: the subject precedes the verb, the object follows the verb, auxiliary verbs precede the subject in questions and form the plural of a noun by adding '-s' ...

while our language is yet living and variable... words are hourly shifting their relations..

. ” this is a quote from Samuel Johnson. He implied that because ‘ slang’ words were ever-changing, they were never entered into the dictionary as it would almost at once, be out of date; this is because new slang words are being created all the time. The rules for the prescriptive approach were originally adopted into English from Latin and from mathematics. Speech patterns imposed by speakers with high social prestige also gave an influence.

Descriptive rules may come from saying what ‘ makes sense? ‘ Also saying what is easily understandable. It may just be the way that English, French, Swahili and other languages work. I prefer descriptive grammar as it is not a personal choice to follow it - it is automatic. It also does not require explicit teaching for you to understand, as it is a natural way of speaking for me. Using this approach to language, I analysis an extract by saying does it make sense? Also I do not speak as I would write unlike the prescriptive approach advises.