today

- descriptive and prescriptive grammar
- “standard english”
- grammaticality

remember

- hw1 due tonight on Moodle
- supplemental reading posted to website
Grammar

The set of *unconscious* rules, intuitively known, that govern the sounds, words and sentences in one’s language.
Grammar

The set of **unconscious** rules, intuitively known, that govern the sounds, words and sentences in one’s language.

What is the nature of these rules?
descriptive and prescriptive approaches

descriptive grammar
Describes rules that govern what people actually do and say.

prescriptive grammar
Prescribes rules governing what people *should/shouldn’t* say.

http://youtu.be/Bbqkjch0ww8
prescriptive rules

- “don’t end a sentence with a preposition”
- “don’t split infinitives”
- “don’t use double negatives”
- “it’s pronounced [nuk.li.jər], not [nuk.jə.lər]”
descriptive and prescriptive rules

Example

“Which class did you enroll in?”

prescriptive rule
Don’t end a sentence with a preposition. The example above is bad.

descriptive rule
Sentences can end in prepositions. The sentence above is natural English.
descriptive and prescriptive rules

Example
“\textit{I can’t get no satisfaction.}”

prescriptive rule
Don’t use double negatives. This should be: “\textit{I can’t get any satisfaction}”.

descriptive rule
Negatives can be marked by one or more negative words.
descriptive and prescriptive rules

Example
“...to boldly go where no one has gone before.”

prescriptive rule
Don’t split infinitives. This should be: “to go boldly”.

descriptive rule
In English, adverbs can appear between the infinitival marker “to” and the verb.
descriptive and prescriptive rules

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prescriptive rules

▶ are unnatural
▶ must be taught
▶ often reflect value judgments (related to social issues such as gender, class, ethnicity)

descriptive rules
descriptive and prescriptive rules

prescriptive rules

- are unnatural
- must be taught
- often reflect value judgments (related to social issues such as gender, class, ethnicity)

descriptive rules

- are natural
- are known intuitively
- make no value judgments (related to social issues such as gender, class, ethnicity)
prescriptive rules are unnatural

apply a prescriptive rule to “fix” the following

▶ “Where are you from?”
prescriptive rules are unnatural

apply a prescriptive rule to “fix” the following

► “Where are you from?”
  ► ??From where are you?
prescriptive rules are unnatural

apply a prescriptive rule to “fix” the following

▶ “Where are you from?”
  ▶ ??From where are you?
▶ “The landlord threatened to more than double her rent”.
prescriptive rules are unnatural

apply a prescriptive rule to “fix” the following

- “Where are you from?”
  - ??From where are you?
- “The landlord threatened to more than double her rent”.
  - ...threatened more than to double her rent.
prescriptive rules are unnatural

apply a prescriptive rule to “fix” the following

▶ “Where are you from?”
  ▶ ??From where are you?

▶ “The landlord threatened to more than double her rent”.
  ▶ ...threatened more than to double her rent.
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prescriptive rules are arbitrary

double negatives occur in many languages

- Spanish
  
  él no sabe nada
  
  he not know nothing
  
  He doesn’t know anything. [spa]

- Russian
  
  Он ничего не знает
  
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- **Even in English:**

  "He never yet no villainy not said
  In all his life to no kind of creature.
  (Chaucer, 1400)"
Many prescriptive rules can be traced back to *A Short Introduction to English* by Bishop Robert Lowth (1762). Some of Lowth’s dictates:

- don’t use ‘who’ for a direct object
- don’t end sentences with a preposition
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Some of Lowth’s dictates:

▶ don’t use ‘who’ for a direct object
▶ don’t end sentences with a preposition

*This is an Idiom which our language is strongly inclined to; it prevails in common conversation, and suits very well with the familiar style in writing; but the placing of the Preposition before the Relative is more graceful, as well as more perspicuous; and agrees much better with the solemn and elevated Style.*

*A Short Introduction to English, pp. 129 – 128*
Prescriptive rules reflect value judgments

Because they are taught in schools, prescriptive rules become associated with being:

- educated
- correct
- proper
- standard
Definition

“Standard English” is often considered that variety of English which is

➤ taught in schools
➤ considered by many to be correct (from a prescriptive standpoint)
➤ generally used by politicians, in the media, in writing
➤ carries a level of prestige
Nonstandard English

Definition
“Nonstandard English” is any variety which is not perceived as standard. Ie, perceived as

- substandard
- incorrect
- improper
- ungrammatical

Example

- “I seen some men in suits knocking on your door.”
- “He hurt hisself on the playground.”
- “She’s the one that gave me them books.”
Grammaticality

What does it mean for a sentence to be grammatical or “grammatically correct”?

Descriptively
A grammatical sentence is one that is possible for us to say. It is consistent with our mental grammar. It “sounds” right to native ears.

Prescriptively
A grammatical sentence is one that is consistent with the expectations of some arbitrary authority (e.g. grammar books, teachers, etc).
Grammaticality

Grammatical or ungrammatical?

- “I would not have thought that Beth was capable of such a thing.”
  - descriptively:
  - prescriptively:

- “Jack knows who done it but he ain’t talking.”
  - descriptively:
  - prescriptively:

- “Store to the walked yesterday mother my.”
  - descriptively:
  - prescriptively:
Grammaticality

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Grammaticality in this class

We will use the linguist’s concept of a descriptive grammar for this class.

...the interacting unconcious rules of syntax, morphology, phonology, and semantics that speakers know and use to speak their language.

–Lobeck p. 11