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# The Ideology of Spoken English in English Grammaticography

## Abstract

*It is widely and uncontroversially believed that English grammaticography has almost exclusively focused on written language, ignoring the distinctive features of spoken English. Even when spoken language features have been described, an ideological view of spoken English has led grammarians to place more emphasis on written language norms. This paper aims to illustrate the findings of a grammaticographical investigation into the grammar of spoken English as conceived of and presented in a restricted corpus of Italian grammars of English authored by academics and published between the second half of the 19th and the mid-20th centuries. The textual and paratextual materials in the grammars were analysed in order to ascertain whether the presentation of traditional ‘prescriptive’ rules accounts for less formal and spoken usage, what—if any—phenomena of spoken grammar are dealt with and whether evaluative terms are used with regard to spoken English. The results of the analysis show that the authors of the Italian grammar books were able to push the boundaries of pedagogical grammaticography, placing an increasingly greater emphasis on the role of spoken usage in the description of the English language.*

**Keywords:** *spoken grammar, history of English language teaching, teaching of spoken English, English grammaticography, teaching English as a second/foreign language*

## 1. Introduction

“Spoken grammar has, in many respects, come of age” (Carter and McCarthy 2017, 2). In a state-of-the-art article published in the journal *Applied Linguistics* in 2017, Carter and McCarthy reviewed the great strides made in the last thirty years in the description of spoken English grammar and the design of pedagogical approaches and materials targeting this aspect of English and claimed that spoken grammar had finally shed its Cinderella status. Much still needs to be done, however, as we seem to be still wedded to a type of metalanguage “inherited from writing” (Carter and McCarthy 2017, 2). The ideological (Errington 2001) view of spoken English as inferior in that less refined than written English, illogical in its workings, if not downright ungrammatical, seems to have been largely abandoned in both more scholarly

and pedagogical grammaticography—although it does persist to different degrees among latter-day prescriptivists (Beal 2018; Curzan 2014). In this contribution, I will focus mainly on pedagogical grammaticography aimed at non-native (Italian) learners of English. I will attempt to shed some light on how spoken English and its grammar were conceived of and represented in grammar books authored by academics working in Italian higher education between the second half of the 19th and the mid-20th centuries.

The present study builds on previous work (Nava 2019) which has pointed to a more “innovative and forward-looking stance” (Nava 2019, 141) of Italian grammaticography in its representation of English as an academic subject than traditionally assumed. The paper is organized as follows. In the first part, I will review key concepts related to the ideology of spoken English and its association with the ideology of standardization. In the second part, after touching on selected aspects of the representation of spoken English in the history of English grammaticography, I will illustrate the findings of a grammaticographical investigation I have carried out into spoken English as represented in a restricted sample of two grammar books of English published in Italy in the second half of the 19th century and roughly one century later.

## **2. Spoken English as an ideological construct**

Errington’s (2001, 110) well-known definition of language ideologies as “the situated, partial, and interested character of conceptions and uses of language” is arguably an apposite starting point for a review of the ways spoken English has been conceived of in the history of English and its grammaticography. Finegan (1998)’s chapter on the history of English grammar and usage in *The Cambridge History of the English Language* provides convincing evidence that the representation (or lack thereof) of spoken English in grammaticography, for most of its history, has been the result of an ideological view of its nature and uses. In a nutshell, this ideology, which dawned in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and became more established in the following century, assumed that spoken English was somehow subservient to the written code as it lacked “the precision (“perspicuity”) that characterizes the latter mode of communication. This shortcoming stems from the fact that the “severer laws of grammar” (Priestley 1761, 45-46, quoted in Finegan 1998) are relaxed in spoken communication. The more enlightened among the grammarians did acknowledge actual language use as the “supreme authority,” and pointed to the need to refer to the “custom of speaking” (Campbell 1776, 140-141, quoted in Finegan 1998). However, such “custom” was identified with the usage of the most prominent and respected authors, hardly representative of ordinary language use. While at its peak in the 18th and 19th centuries, that

ideology was to hamper the development of sound descriptions of spoken English grammar into most of the 20th century.

As convincingly argued by Milroy and Milroy (1999) and J. Milroy (1999), the ideology of spoken English is closely associated with an important process that was also at its height in the 18th and 19th centuries—the process of standardization. This process is in itself another instance of how a language-related phenomenon has been conceived of and represented ideologically. As is well-known, the implementation of a standard language unfolds through several stages, perhaps the most important of which is the stage of codification, usually involving the writing of grammar books and dictionaries. In the case of English, it was the written language that became the target of codification. The status of written standard English was enhanced by the increasingly widespread diffusion of education, which looked to formal written language norms as the model of correctness. Several aspects can be mentioned with regard to what Milroy and Milroy (1999) call the ideology of standardization. Firstly, the outcome of the process of standardization comes to be viewed as “a set of abstract norms to which actual usage may conform to a greater or lesser extent” (Milroy and Milroy 1999, 19). These norms are held to be immutable and admit—or rather prescribe—only one correct option, thus inhibiting “linguistic change and variability” (Milroy 1999, 26) and perpetuating the myth of a uniform, standardized variety. Alternative ways of expression are viewed as wrong or at least inappropriate. Departure from the ‘laws of language’ are deemed illegitimate, and those who are guilty of this transgression worthy of sanction. On this view, the only legitimate norms are those of formal written English. Disregarding the fact that language use is affected by the situational context, the norms of formal written English are imposed on informal spoken communication. In addition, the notions of acceptability and grammaticality are conflated: rather than being simply judged less acceptable in more formal contexts, informal language use is branded as downright ungrammatical (Cheshire 1999). As pointed out by Milroy and Milroy (1999, 51),

One reason why the norms of colloquial English grammar have not been so successfully standardised is that they have not in the past been so fully described as the norms of written English have been: for this reason it has not been possible to codify them to the same extent.

Finegan (1998, 575) singles out the turn of the 20th century, with the advent of the science of phonetics, as the time when spoken English started to be viewed differently: “While Britain excelled in the scientific aspects of phonetic description, American scholars such as Brander Matthews eloquently argued the case for speech over writing as the norm.” As technological developments made increasingly possible the recording of spoken data (Carter and McCarthy

2017; McCarthy 1998), calls for a reappraisal of spoken language in language studies became more frequent. In a 1943 article, for example, Dykema acknowledged that “what little we know of the grammar of spoken English is based on unsystematic impressions of what we hear and on the unsubstantiated assumption that the grammar of the spoken language must be essentially that of the written” (Dykema 1943, 43) and argued that “our knowledge of that grammar must be based on a complete and consistent description of every aspect and variety of the spoken language” (Dykema 1943, 48). Nevertheless, linguists were slow in taking up the challenge. The 20th century saw great progress being made in the description of the rule-governed nature of non-standard dialects; however, as Carter (1999, 163) points out, “such accounts have not always taken full cognizance of standard spoken grammar.” Indeed, as late as the 1960s, Gurrey (1961, 139, quoted in Hudson and Walmsley 2005) remarked that “we do not know for certain what forms and structures we actually do use in our daily lives.” As mentioned in the quotation that opens this paper, it was not until the first decade of the 21st century that, with the wider availability of increasingly larger spoken corpora and the development of ever more sophisticated analytical tools (Leech 2000), spoken grammar truly ‘came of age’ (Carter and McCarthy 2017).

### 3. Spoken English in English grammaticography

This section of the paper zooms in on English grammaticography and attempts to answer the following questions with regard to its conceptualization and representation of spoken English: 1. Does the presentation of traditional ‘prescriptive’ rules (e.g. pied piping vs. stranding of prepositions; subjective vs. objective case of personal pronouns after *be*) in English grammaticography account for less formal and spoken usage? 2. What—if any—phenomena of spoken grammar (e.g. ellipsis) are dealt with? 3. What kinds of evaluative terms are used with regard to spoken English? The investigation will focus on pedagogical grammars authored by academics working in Italian higher education. Before I illustrate the findings of this investigation, however, I will provide a brief review of the representation of spoken English in a sample of key texts in the history of English grammaticography which are among the sources mentioned by the Italian grammars of English targeted in the study: Murray (1795), Sweet (1892; 1898), Jespersen (1909; 1949) and Palmer (1924).

Murray’s *English Grammar*, published when prescriptivism was at its height, is mentioned as a key source in the introduction to the first edition of Cann’s *Grammatica Teorico Pratica della Lingua Inglese* (cf. below). The book is divided into four parts, with the first (orthography) providing clear evidence of how the written code was held by the author to underlie the oral one:

“Grammar treats, first, of the form and sound of the letters, the combination of letters into syllables, and syllables into words” (Murray 1795, 11). This hierarchy underpins the author’s definition of a standard variety of a language: “The practice of the best and most correct writers, or a great majority of them, corroborated by general usage, forms, during its continuance, the standard of language” (Murray 1795, 111). According to Murray, norms should be rooted in written usage (“best and most correct writers,” not speakers). “General usage” (arguably including spoken English) should be referred to in order to seek confirmation (e.g. to single out archaisms). The grammarian is tasked with illustrating standard English norms and helping resolve issues of contested usage, relying on such principles as “derivation, analogy and propriety” (Murray 1795, 112). While some grammatical features associated with more “familiar” spoken usage are described and (more or less grudgingly) approved of, Murray is adamant in his condemnation of other constructions. For example, the grammarian is not averse to the stranding of prepositions provided its use is limited to “common conversation,” where it “prevails,” and “the familiar style in writing” (Murray 1795, 123). However, the principles of derivation, analogy and propriety are appealed to to condemn spoken usage when it comes to constructions such as *It’s me*: “The verb *to be*, through all its variations, has the same case after it, as that which next precedes it” (Murray 1795, 123), a statement which rules out alternative options.

Moving ahead in time over a century, Sweet’s two-part grammar claims that it aims to reverse the trend which had been prominent in previous grammars (“ignoring the distinction between the literary and spoken language”) and to assign “proper importance” to the oral code (Sweet 1892, x). The grammarian’s job is no longer to take a stand in matters of contested usage:

I confine myself to the statement and explanation of facts, without attempting to settle the relative correctness of divergent usages. If an ‘ungrammatical’ expression such as *it is me* is in general use among educated people, I accept it as such, simply adding that it is avoided in the literary language. (Sweet 1892, xi)

Sweet deals in a similar open-minded fashion with another old chestnut, the use of the objective form of a personal pronoun after *than* (*He’s smarter than me/them*), arguing for its legitimacy on the basis of analogy with attested occurrences in the canon of English literature. Among spoken language features, mention is also made of ‘tags’ dislocated after a clause (right dislocations or ‘tails’: *He’s quite a comic the fellow*, Carter and McCarthy 1995). However, those constructions are judged to be the result of “careless speech,” a view which persisted into most of the 20th century (McCarthy 1998; Carter and McCarthy 1995):

In careless speech it often happens that a speaker finishes a sentence grammatically, and then adds one or more words as an after-thought, to complete the meaning or define it more clearly. (Sweet 1898, 5)

As regards Jespersen's seven-volume *A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles*, it is impossible in this brief review to do justice to such a wide-ranging and influential masterpiece, which was also mentioned as a source in Chinol's *Grammatica dell'Inglese Moderno* (cf. below). I will limit myself to touching on some features of Jespersen's work which point to a growing acceptance of spoken English as a legitimate target of grammaticography. It should first be pointed out that Jespersen (1927, vi) provides what is perhaps the most insightful definition of the role of the modern grammarian of English:

I may remind British and American readers that it is not my business to tell them what is correct or pure English, but only to register and, if possible, to explain the actual facts of English usage in various periods.

An example of Jespersen's descriptive and explicative approach is the way he presents the uses of personal pronouns after *than*. Jespersen concedes that his list of attested occurrences may lead the reader to conclude that "the feeling for the correct use of the cases is here easily obscured" (Jespersen 1949, 231). Nevertheless, he reminds us that "natural use" is the ultimate arbiter, irrespective of the "artificial" restrictions grammarians attempt to impose on it:

The construction with the obl. case is now so universal as to be considered the normal one. Nevertheless many grammarians reject this natural use of the obl. case; and the nominatives in some, at least, of the above examples have certainly been called forth by an artificial reaction against the natural tendencies of the language. (Jespersen 1949, 236)

This approach also underlies the author's treatment of spoken language, which leads him to unmask, where he sees fit, the contradictions previous commentators embodied. For example, on the use of contact clauses (relative clauses with no overt relative markers), he comments that "Samuel Johnson called the omission of the relative "a colloquial barbarism" (though there are examples in his letters)" (Jespersen 1927, 136). Among spoken grammar features, Jespersen devotes the most attention to ellipsis. He may not go as far as to single out a category of situational ellipsis,<sup>1</sup> and *does* sometimes associate ellipsis with lack of precision ("middle part

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<sup>1</sup> Unlike in anaphoric and cataphoric ellipsis, in situational ellipsis "the interpretation may depend on knowledge of a precise extralinguistic context" (Quirk et al. 1985, 895) and involves "taking response into account, which invariably shows that, for the hearer, nothing is 'omitted'"

left out [...] chiefly due to rapid and slovenly pronunciation,” Jespersen 1949, 117) but he certainly seems to have developed an appreciation of the role played by the extralinguistic context in spoken grammar:

Next, we have answers, which are complete in themselves, but cannot be understood except from the context or whole situation, e.g. Yes I Certainly I By all means I No I Not on any account (Jespersen 1949, 127)

Another source mentioned in English grammars aimed at Italian learners is Palmer’s (1924) *A Grammar of Spoken English*. Harold Palmer, named by Hudson and Walmsley (2005, 596) among the “most prominent” British linguists of the generation following Sweet, is nonetheless perhaps better known for his work in language teaching methodology. Palmer’s grammar has a more pedagogical slant than Sweet’s and Jespersen’s works and is undoubtedly extremely innovative in its presentation of all examples in “phonetic spelling” (i.e. IPA transcription, Palmer 1924, xxxi) and in “its willingness to depart from single-sentence examples and to admit what we would now call [...] exchanges and whole utterances” (McCarthy 1998, 18), often featuring ellipsis (Carter and McCarthy 2017).

In the introductory chapter, Palmer makes an important remark about the use that was often made by commentators on language issues of the terms ‘spoken’ and ‘written’ English. ‘Spoken English’ was usually taken as synonymous with ‘colloquial English’ and ‘written English’ as equivalent to ‘classical’ or ‘literary’ English. Palmer (1924, xxxi) points out that ‘spoken English’ also describes the type of English used in “writing letters to intimate friends.” By the same token, ‘written English’ can also be heard in the speech “of public speakers and orators, or possibly in formal conversation (more especially between strangers).”

Palmer’s concern with language variation leads him to remark on the differences in usage not only between speech and writing but also between men and women. In his presentation of the much discussed use of the subjective vs. the objective forms of pronouns after the verb *be* (*It’s I* vs. *It’s me*), Palmer (1924, 44) follows an approach that he consistently applies in cases of contested usage: he starts his presentation from the most widely used option in ordinary usage. In this particular case, he points out that “whatever the classical or established usage may or may not be,” the objective form of the pronoun after *be* is used “in the normal and spontaneous speech of everyday life, especially between friends and in the conversation of men-folk.” On the other hand, the option with the subjective form only occurs “in careful and deliberate speech,

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from the utterance and nothing needs to be ‘retrieved’” (Cather and McCarthy 2017, 5; cf. also Carter and McCarthy 1995).

especially between strangers and women folk, when one is on one's guard against possible criticism." Current grammarians may not agree with Palmer's portrayal of "men-folk's" usage as more spontaneous (or innovative) and "women folk's" as more guarded (or conservative) but his attempt at a sociolinguistic analysis of a language issue that had been the target of prescriptive injunctions since the 18th century certainly deserves some praise. As in all other cases of divided usage, Palmer is ultimately concerned with the predicament of the "unfortunate student," who, "whichever form he (sic) uses, will be corrected and warned against that particular form."

### **3.1 *Spoken English in Italian grammars of English***

A more thorough analysis of the conception and representation of spoken English and its grammar in English grammaticography has been conducted on a restricted corpus of two grammars authored by academics working in Italian higher education and published in the second half of the 19th century and approximately one century later: Cann's *Grammatica Teorico-Pratica della Lingua Inglese* and Chinol's *Grammatica dell'Inglese Moderno*. Both books were published in several editions along a number of years; they enjoyed considerable commercial success and were also reviewed (positively) outside Italy. It could thus be argued that they provide important insights into how English as an academic discipline was conceived of in Italy in the 19th and the best part of the 20th centuries. Although written by academics, these grammars were not aimed exclusively at an audience of university students; when explicit mention is made of possible addressees, those are assumed to be secondary school students, who represented a larger group than students of the fledgling university courses in Foreign Languages and Literatures (Nava 2018; Pellandra 2007).

The textual (including the exercises) and the paratextual materials making up Cann's and Chinol's books have been scrutinised in order to identify 1. whether less formal and spoken usage is accounted for when dealing with those aspects of English grammar associated with the prescriptive tradition, 2. whether features of spoken grammar are at all mentioned and 3. if any evaluation is done of spoken English, whether it is expressed in positive or negative terms.

#### **3.1.1 *Cann's Grammatica Teorico Pratica della Lingua Inglese***

For the purposes of this study, I have drawn upon the seventh edition (1883) of Cann's *Grammatica Teorico Pratica della Lingua Inglese*, although reference has also been made to the prefaces to the first three editions. In the preface to the very first edition, mention is made of spoken English with regard to the overarching aims pursued by the author:



Ardisco di offrire al Pubblico un metodo per lo studio della lingua inglese, che spero sia per riuscire facile, celere e sicuro agli studiosi; sicché questi possano nel minor tempo possibile leggere correntemente ed intendere con facilità i migliori scrittori inglesi, come pure comprendere gli idiotismi della lingua parlata e parlarla speditamente. Ho preso a base del mio corso la grammatica di Murray, senza omettere le recenti modificazioni nella parte grammaticale derivate dall'uso. (Cann 1872, 5)<sup>2</sup>

While reading 'high' literature is still viewed as the most important reason for studying a foreign language, the author points out that the method featured in his book will also enable students to understand the distinctive features of spoken English and speak this language fluently. The above extract also shows that Cann explicitly acknowledges his debt to Murray's grammar (cf. above), although this acknowledgement gets omitted in the prefaces to the subsequent editions. The fact that the book proved to be such a commercial hit may have made it unnecessary for the author to establish his credentials by referring to previous grammarians of repute. Not unlike what Murray had stated with reference to the development of a standard variety (cf. above), Cann also displays some awareness of the fact that languages change over time as a result of usage ("uso"). This arguably necessitates a change in the way English is described in the latter half of the 19th century compared to the description provided by Murray nearly a century before. Cann's grammar is organized into two main parts (Nava 2019) made up of several lessons, preceded by a brief overview of pronunciation rules ("regole di pronuncia"). Each lesson features explanations, examples, sentences to translate out of and into English and a reading passage. In addition to the main lessons, the second part includes extra translation passages ("composizioni"), readings and poems, composition topics and a brief syntax section. A dictionary and a list of "frasi idiomatiche" (not only idioms, but also spoken formulae, e.g. "fatemi il piacere, vi prego, di grazia, if you please, please, pray" and constructions that do not have a direct, word for word equivalent in Italian, e.g. "Egli è nato a Cratfield, He is a native of Cratfield") are provided at the back of the book.

Like 18th and 19th century English grammaticography aimed at native speakers, Cann's grammar features several rules associated with the prescriptive tradition, usually without any reference to their possible variation (e.g. spoken and/or informal usage):

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<sup>2</sup> I dare to offer the public a method for the study of the English language, which I hope will prove to be easy, quick and reliable for students, so that they might in the shortest time possible be able to fluently read and easily understand the best English writers and understand idiotisms in the spoken language and speak it fluently. I based my book on Murray's grammar without disregarding the most recent changes in grammar stemming from usage.

I pronomi che seguono le comparazioni si mettono in inglese al nominativo.  
 Voi avete meno denaro di *me*. You have less money than *I* (sottointeso, *have*)  
 Voi avete tanto inchiostro quanto *noi*. You have as much ink as *we*. (Cann 1883, 131)<sup>3</sup>

The above extract focuses on the form of pronouns after comparative *than* and *as*. Following Murray, Cann relies on logic to provide a justification for his rule (the nominative form is logically required as the pronouns actually function as subjects of clauses whose predicates are ellipted). The alternative form with the objective pronoun is not even acknowledged—perhaps because the intended audience is made up of non-native speaking learners who the author did not want to instil erroneous language habits into.

Another prescriptive rule included in Cann's grammar concerns the use of the auxiliaries *will* and *shall* in the future. Following a topos in Late Modern English grammaticography (Anderwald 2016) divergent usage among non-English Anglophone speakers is mentioned, albeit arguably with the implication for Cann's Italian audience that errors should not be imitated:

Nei temi susseguenti darò molti esempi di questo *shall* e *will* che, insieme con la pratica, spero potranno appianare le difficoltà del tempo futuro, nel quale, ha detto uno scrittore inglese, “i forestieri, ed anche gli *Scozzesi*, gl'*Irlandesi* e gli *Americani* sbagliano così di sovente, mentre un ragazzo di dieci anni educato in Inghilterra non sbaglierebbe mai. (Cann 1883, 240)<sup>4</sup>

A relaxation of the prescriptive norms is only envisaged with regard to the use of stranded prepositions:

Nella lingua parlata si mettono spesse volte le preposizioni *of*, *to*, *from* dopo il verbo che segue i pronomi, e qualche volta, non si traduce in inglese il pronome relativo, quando ciò non produca ambiguità, p. e.:

The gentleman *whom* I speak *to* (*oppure semplicemente*)

Il signore *al quale* parlo

The gentleman I speak *to* (*oppure*)

The gentleman *to whom* I speak (Cann 1883, 49)<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Pronouns following comparisons are placed in the nominative case in English. [...] (implied, *have*).

<sup>4</sup> In the following translations I shall give many examples of this *shall* and *will* which, along with practice, I hope will help you to overcome difficulties in using the future tense. This tense, as an English writer said, “is so often used incorrectly by foreigners, and also by the *Scots*, the *Irish* and the *Americans*, while a ten-year old boy educated in England would never use it incorrectly.”

<sup>5</sup> In the spoken language the prepositions *of*, *to*, *from* are oftentimes placed after the verb following the pronouns. Sometimes the relative pronoun is not translated in English, when this does not create ambiguity, e.g. [...] (or simply) [...] (or).

Cann again follows Murray here but refrains from passing judgement, apart from alerting readers to the possible ambiguity that may occur as a result of omitting the relative pronoun. It would have been reasonable to expect the author to first present the alternative that most closely mirrors the Italian construction. However, the first option provided is the one with a stranded preposition. The exercises also feature examples of the three options:

7. The man whom I write to, works in the country. [...] 10. They write to the gentleman of whom you speak, and who comes from the country. (Cann 1883, 49)

The two sentences from one of the translation sections of the book shown above are arguably meant to illustrate a more informal/spoken usage in the first sentence, also signalled by the lexical item *man*, compared to the more formal and elaborate second sentence, which features the more polite *gentleman*.

With regard to the features of spoken English grammar dealt with in Cann's book, I shall spend a few words on two aspects in particular—ellipsis and abbreviations. The phenomenon of ellipsis is mentioned but its presentation is limited to cases of textual ellipsis (where the ellipited parts can be retrieved by the cotext, cf. Quirk et al. 1985), and, as typical of Cann's grammaticographical approach (Nava 2019), the explanations highlight differences between Italian and English:

In una frase dove sono molti nomi di seguito basta mettere l'articolo definito avanti al primo soltanto. Esempio: Il padre, la madre e il fratello sono ammalati. *The father, mother and brother, are ill.* (Cann 1883, 15)<sup>6</sup>

In the sixth lesson of the second part, Cann provides a list of “abbreviations” (Cann 1883, 329) which mostly includes contracted forms of auxiliaries (*hadn't, mayn't*) but also poetic forms (*e'er, o'er*) and initialisms (*M. P.*). The list comes with an explanation about the style of English in which abbreviations recur (“nello stile familiare scritto e parlato”<sup>7</sup>) and a warning to the reader as to when to avoid their use (“nello stile più sostenuto ogni abbreviazione dev'essere evitata, quantunque nella poesia si trovino spesso,” Cann 1883, 329<sup>8</sup>). The author adds a metadiscursive comment about his choice to include this aspect of spoken grammar. This may

<sup>6</sup> In a sentence where there are many nouns following one another it is enough to place the definite article before the first noun. Example [...].

<sup>7</sup> In the spoken and written colloquial style.

<sup>8</sup> In a more formal style, abbreviations should be avoided, though they can often be found in poetry.

have been done to forestall criticism about devoting part of his grammar to what was still viewed as an inelegant (cf. below) usage:

Ho voluto dare una lista così lunga delle nostre abbreviazioni, perché so che il loro uso fra gl'Inglese spesso volte impedisce al forestiere di intenderle. (Cann 1883, 300)<sup>9</sup>

As the extract shows, Cann relies on pedagogical reasons (abbreviations may cause comprehension problems to non-native speakers) to justify his inclusion of this spoken grammar feature in his grammar.

Let us now move to the third issue in our investigation. Does Cann evaluate in any way spoken English and its grammar? As was mentioned above, the author is aware that the practical needs of a language learner are not restricted to the traditional remit of a grammar book. Apart from abbreviations, he thus includes lists of formulaic expressions and idioms, not only in the appendix of his book (cf. above) but also in the lessons themselves. The readers' language learning needs are also referred to in order to justify why the author has dealt with the *have got* construction:

Il dire *I have got* invece di dire *I have* è veramente un errore, ma è un errore consacrato dall'uso poiché tutti gl'Inglese di tutte le classi lo dicono, che è ben importante che lo studente intenda bene questo modo di dire, e prenda pratica dell'uso variato di questo verbo, anche se non vuole servirsene come un riempitivo. Molte grammatiche non fanno parola di questo verbo, altre ne parlano appena, *io invece pregherei lo studente a mettere maggior attenzione all'uso di questo verbo che a qualunque altro, perché gl'Inglese lo hanno sempre sul labbro* (emphasis in the original). (Cann 1883, 308)<sup>10</sup>

According to Cann, while *have got* is a mistake, and thus should not be even mentioned in a grammar book, in spoken usage this construction and more in general the verb *get* in the wide range of meanings and constructions it enters into are very frequently used (“*gl'Inglese lo hanno sempre sul labbro*”) by English people of different social backgrounds. The author thus seems to suggest that, however ‘mistaken’ and coarse spoken English usage may be, it is in this domain that major comprehension problems may surface for non-native speakers. He thus—more or

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<sup>9</sup> I wanted to provide a long list of our abbreviations because I know that the way they are used by English speakers often prevents foreigners from understanding them.

<sup>10</sup> To say *I have got* instead of *I have* is indeed a mistake, but it is a mistake sanctioned by use as all English speakers from all social classes say it. It is thus very important that students understand this expression and become familiar with the various uses of this verb even if they do not want to use it as a filler. Many grammars do not deal with this verb, others hardly mention it. *I would, however, urge students to pay more attention to the use of this verb rather than any other verb as English speakers are constantly using it.*

less grudgingly—urges readers to pay attention to lexical items and grammatical constructions that commonly recur in speech.

A contrast appears to be implicitly established by Cann between spoken English (whose learning for the non-native student is a necessary evil) and powerful and elegant communication. Spoken English is usually associated with colloquial usage (“stile familiare”), but familiarity may breed, if not contempt, emasculated expression:

Date il libro a mio figlio	Give my son the book
	Give the book to my son
Il primo modo è più usato nel parlato familiare; quando vogliamo però esprimere con più energia, con più enfasi il dativo, si usa il secondo modo. (Cann 1883, 91) <sup>11</sup>	

Elegance, a concept that was commonly drawn upon by 18th and 19th century English grammaticography and hinted at both social and linguistic refinement (Finegan 1998), is achieved according to Cann by choosing the less common usage. Given the contrastive approach taken in the book, what is elegant is sometimes deemed to be the construction that more markedly differs from an Italian counterpart:

Spesso volte allorché in italiano per rapporti di parentela, d'impiego, d'amicizia, ecc. ci serviamo del genitivo, gl'Inglese usano elegantemente il dativo.	
Quel signore è il medico <i>della</i> regina.	That gentleman is physician <i>to</i> the Queen.
(Cann 1883, 251) <sup>12</sup>	

### 3.1.2 Chinol's *Grammatica dell'Inglese Moderno*

Published in its first edition (1964) nearly a century after Cann's grammar, and following in the footsteps of Palmer (and, to a lesser extent, Sweet and Jespersen), Chinol's *Grammatica dell'Inglese Moderno* set itself the ambitious aim of contributing to an overhaul of, if not grammaticographical practice, at least the more traditional ways of teaching and learning foreign languages in Italy. One of the main shortcomings associated with the traditional method was indeed its lack of attention to spoken language:

È convinzione ormai largamente diffusa e certamente giustificata che si debba in qualche modo por fine al metodo tradizionale di uno studio grammaticale che sostanzialmente ignora

<sup>11</sup> [...] The first construction is more common in colloquial speech; when we want to express the dative more energetically, with more emphasis, we use the second construction.

<sup>12</sup> Oftentimes, where in Italian we use the genitive to express a family, work or friendly relationship, in English they elegantly use the dative [...].

l'uso della lingua parlata e che si esaurisce in un continuo raffronto fra la grammatica della lingua madre e della lingua straniera. (Chinol 1966, 5)<sup>13</sup>

To counter the practice of viewing English grammar through the lens of Italian, and to provide samples of contemporary English usage, the author includes structural patterns or “frasi chiave” in each chapter of his book, some of which feature complete communicative exchanges (e.g. “You can do it, can't you? Yes, I think I can,” Chinol 1966, 258). These are meant to lead students to experience “uso vivo della lingua,”<sup>14</sup> by working on them “pensando e parlando in inglese, non in Italiano” (Chinol 1966, 5).<sup>15</sup>

The book opens with an introductory chapter on the IPA system which highlights the need for special phonetic symbols to represent the sounds of English (“una lingua può essere parlata o scritta: nel primo caso le parole si esprimono mediante suoni; nel secondo, mediante segni grafici o visivi, che sono le lettere dell'alfabeto,” Chinol 1966, 9<sup>16</sup>). Forty chapters follow, each consisting of “frasi chiave,” grammatical explanations, “new words,” structural exercises and translations out of English (but not into English). The appendices are devoted to the uses of prepositions, verbs and prepositions (similarities and differences with Italian), irregular verbs and elements of English phonetics.

When it comes to the presentation of the canonical prescriptive rules, Chinol adopts two grammaticographical approaches. The first one is to present the traditional rule first and add a ‘disclaimer’ about the more common spoken alternative(s), often in a footnote. This is how the future is presented. The traditional injunction about using *shall* in the first persons and *will* in the second and third persons in the “futuro predicente”<sup>17</sup> (and the other way round in the “futuro volitivo”<sup>18</sup>) is accompanied by the following footnoted remark:

In Iscozia, in Irlanda e quasi ovunque negli Stati Uniti, il futuro si forma usando l'ausiliare *will* per tutte le persone. Una forte tendenza in tal senso si va sempre più affermando anche

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<sup>13</sup> It is by now commonly and justifiably believed that we should somehow put a stop to the traditional grammar-based method which mostly ignores the use of the spoken language and largely consists of a constant comparison between the native language and the foreign language grammar.

<sup>14</sup> Use of the living language.

<sup>15</sup> Thinking and speaking in English, not in Italian.

<sup>16</sup> A language can be spoken or written: in the former case, words are expressed through sounds; in the latter, through graphic or visual signs, those being the letters of the alphabet.

<sup>17</sup> Predictive future.

<sup>18</sup> Volitional future.

in Inghilterra. Quindi, in caso di dubbio, si farà bene ad usare *will*. (Chinol 1966, 129)<sup>19</sup>

Variation is no longer presented as a mistake that students need to be cautioned against but as a trend that has been increasingly spreading to England. The author goes so far as to counsel the reader to ignore the prescriptive rule and adopt the simpler, less confusing transatlantic/non-English norm.

A similar approach is followed in the presentation of the use of personal pronouns after *than/as*—again an issue for which the prescriptive tradition had provided a ‘foolproof’ rule:

I due termini di paragone vanno nello stesso caso, cioè entrambi al nominativo o entrambi all’ accusativo:

He’s more intelligent than she (is)

He works harder than she (does)

I verbi dati tra parentesi si possono omettere e vengono spesso omessi. (Chinol 1966, 150)<sup>20</sup>

The traditional rule establishes that a difference in form is associated with a difference in meaning when it comes to choosing between the subjective and the objective forms of personal pronouns after *than/as*. As this rule is arguably based on logic, that is probably why grammarians have been so loath to depart from it. Indeed, Chinol’s disclaimer about the more common spoken usage appears to concern the use of *me/I* only:

Si noti tuttavia il comunissimo:

He’s younger than me                      He’s older than me

Qui l’uso del nominativo (*he’s younger than I, he’s older than I*) è considerato letterario e non si sente quasi mai nella lingua parlata. (Chinol 1966, 150)<sup>21</sup>

The reader is presented with the alternatives *He’s younger than me/He’s older than me* as apparent exceptions which nonetheless do not seem to detract from the overall validity of the prescriptive rule.

The second approach followed by Chinol in his presentation of rules from the prescriptive canon is more in keeping with what Palmer did in his grammar (cf. above). An instance of this

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<sup>19</sup> In Scotland, Ireland, and almost anywhere in the United States, the future is made up of the auxiliary *will* used for all the persons of the verb. This trend is also increasingly catching on in England. Hence, when in doubt, it is best to use *will*.

<sup>20</sup> The two elements of the comparison are to be placed in the same case, either both in the nominative case or both in the accusative case. [...] The verbs in brackets can and often are omitted.

<sup>21</sup> Please note the extremely common usage [...] Here the use of the nominative case [...] is considered to be literary and is hardly ever heard in the spoken language.

approach is the presentation of the use of personal pronouns after *be*. Chinol starts from the spoken alternative, and the prescriptive version is mentioned as a disfavoured option:

Nell'inglese parlato si usano comunemente i pronomi personali all'accusativo anche dopo il verbo *to be*, nella forma impersonale con *it*. (Chinol 1966, 69)

Le forme *it's I, he, she, we, they* sono sentite come libresche e pedanti. (Chinol 1966, 70)<sup>22</sup>

As also shown by the above review of major English grammaticographical sources, the prescriptive rule that mandated the use of the nominative form of personal pronouns after *be* appeared to have been largely rejected by grammarians by the beginning of the 20th century. The presentation of the phenomenon of stranded prepositions vs. pied piping, another major prescriptive issue, is carried out through a combination of the two grammaticographical approaches mentioned above. The topic is first introduced in the chapter that deals with relative pronouns. In this first presentation, it is the traditional pied piping version, the one which more closely mirrors the Italian construction, that is featured as the first option in the “frasi chiave.” This construction is perhaps meant to be viewed as the input for a possible transformation whose outcome is the version with a stranded preposition:

The man to whom she is engaged is a well-known journalist

The man she is engaged to is a well-known journalist. (Chinol 1966, 202)

A disclaimer about spoken usage follows:

Nella lingua parlata, spesso anche in quella scritta, si pospone però di solito la preposizione al verbo e si omette il pronome relativo. (Chinol 1966, 202-203)<sup>23</sup>

When this issue is mentioned again, however, this time in a chapter about interrogative pronouns, it is assumed that the reader has become familiar with the more typically English construction. It is the stranded preposition version that is featured in the “frasi chiave”:

Who is he talking to?

Who is she in love with?

Who is that book by? (Chinol 1966, 224)

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<sup>22</sup> In spoken English personal pronouns are also commonly placed in the accusative after the verb *to be*, in the impersonal form with *it*.

The forms *it's I, he, she, we, they* are viewed as bookish and pedantic.

<sup>23</sup> In the spoken language, and often in the written language too, the preposition is usually placed after the verb and the relative pronoun is omitted.



Not only is the prescriptive rule disfavoured, but the reader is also cautioned against the use of *whom* as an interrogative pronoun, which is said to go against current usage (“lingua viva di ogni giorno”<sup>24</sup>). The author adds a note with an intertextual reference to Jespersen to back his warning up:

Osserva a tale proposito lo Jespersen: “Così è da almeno tre secoli, come mostrano innumerevoli esempi in Shakespeare e altri drammaturghi elisabettiani.” (Chinol 1966, 213)<sup>25</sup>

With regard to the presentation of spoken grammar, Chinol includes in the very first chapter of his book what is perhaps its most representative feature—contracted forms of auxiliaries. Question tags are dealt with in chapter 5 and the treatment of this topic is not limited to formal issues (as is the case in Cann’s grammar) but an explanation is also provided as to the pragmatics of these constructions:

L’uso di tali domande retoriche è frequentissimo nella conversazione inglese. È spesso un modo di parlare evitando i toni troppo assertivi e facendo partecipare l’interlocutore a ciò che si sta dicendo, invitandolo a un dialogo. (Chinol 1966, 48)<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, not unlike what was done by Cann nearly a century before, the presentation of ellipsis still covers only the phenomenon of textual ellipsis, again highlighting a contrastive difference between Italian and English:

Poiché gli articoli inglesi sono invariabili, si potrà ometterne la ripetizione davanti a sostantivi che siano fra loro collegati. Lo stesso vale per gli aggettivi possessivi. (Chinol 1966, 318)<sup>27</sup>

The final aspect of this analysis of Chinol’s grammar concerns whether the grammarian evaluates spoken English and its usage. The author appears to set up a contrast not between spoken and written English but between colloquial style and literary English. In other words, heeding Palmer’s advice, Chinol points to usage which is characteristic of “lingua parlata e [...]”

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<sup>24</sup> Living, everyday language.

<sup>25</sup> In this regard Jespersen remarks: “This has been the case for at least three centuries, as shown by countless examples in Shakespeare and other Elizabethan playwrights.”

<sup>26</sup> The use of these rhetorical questions is extremely frequent in conversational English. They are often used to avoid sounding too assertive and to make the listener feel included in what we are saying, prompting a dialogue.

<sup>27</sup> As English articles are invariable, we can avoid repeating them before nouns that are connected. The same goes for possessive adjectives.

quella scritta che ne arieggi i modi” (Chinol 1966, 15)<sup>28</sup> and usage that may be encountered “nell’inglese letterario e nel linguaggio parlato molto formale” (Chinol 1966, 213).<sup>29</sup> The latter is sometimes evaluated negatively (bookish and pedant) and in cases of contested usage readers are advised, as was seen above, to opt for the less formal alternative. In spite of this reorientation of usage advice towards spoken non-literary English, a belief about the supposed ungrammaticality of spoken English persists, as is shown in the following remark about the use of the objective instead of the genitive form of pronouns with gerunds:

Tale costruzione vien giudicata, come infatti è, grammaticalmente scorretta, tuttavia si usa spesso nella lingua parlata. (Chinol 1966, 183)<sup>30</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper has sought to investigate how spoken English and its grammar, for a long time viewed in ideological terms, have been represented in English grammaticography. Scholars of historical English linguistics have argued that the ideological view of spoken English as somehow inferior to written, literary English and not worthy of scholarly attention is closely connected to the ideology of standardization, which has also engendered the myth of language uniformity. It has taken several centuries for English grammaticography (and applied linguistics) to depart from a jaundiced view of spoken usage. That reappraisal has been made possible not only by technological developments, which have made the collection and analysis of spoken English data faster and easier but, more importantly, by a changed view of the role of the grammarian—no longer an arbiter in cases of contested usage but a ‘recorder’ and ‘analyst’ of language phenomena.

The main focus of the grammaticographical investigation presented in this study has been a restricted corpus of two grammars of English written by academics working in Italian higher education and published in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and approximately one century later. While both grammars are aimed at a local Italian audience of English as a foreign language learners, they mention key texts of international English grammaticography as their main sources. If they reproduce many of the conceptualizations of English grammar phenomena featured in those grammaticographical models, they also adapt their grammaticographical approach to suit the needs of their Italian addressees. The assumption underlying this changed

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<sup>28</sup> Spoken and [...] written language that mimics spoken language.

<sup>29</sup> In the literary and very formal spoken language.

<sup>30</sup> This construction is judged to be, and it actually is, grammatically incorrect. However, it is often used in the spoken language.

approach is that non-native learners of English need to become acquainted not only with formal written norms but also with less formal spoken usage, if only to be able to understand (if not to reproduce) such usage.

Cann's grammar, the earlier of the two books in the sample, still largely presents the main grammatical issues associated with the prescriptive canon along the same lines as the English grammaticographical tradition, flagging the more formal written usage and silencing (if not actually proscribing) the more informal spoken variants. Nevertheless, when Cann feels unshackled from the constraints of the prescriptive tradition, he introduces aspects of spoken grammar (such as a list of "abbreviations"). While contravening the principle of elegance that was said to underpin the most 'proper' English usage, those features met the practical language learning needs of his audience.

Chinol's grammar, published almost a century later than Cann's, shows evidence of a more marked departure from the ideology of spoken English. It is more formal, 'bookish' English that is sometimes evaluated in negative terms by Chinol. Readers are often counselled to model their usage on less formal spoken norms or non-English (e.g. American) usage if felt to be 'simpler' than the English usage norms. It is also true, however, that the burden of the prescriptive tradition is still sometimes felt in this more recent grammar. In several cases pride of place is given to the prescriptive norms while the spoken alternatives are presented as 'disclaimers' in footnotes or less prominent positions of the text.

Both Cann and Chinol were scholars who were fully conversant with the English grammaticographical tradition, the debates about spoken and written usage and the role of the grammarian. As academics, they understood that their works needed to appeal to the international 'discourse community' of fellow grammarians of English. They were nevertheless also teachers who appreciated the practical language learning needs of their addressees, who included, besides university students of English language and literature, secondary school students in technical institutes. In their capacities as both scholars and pedagogues, they were arguably able to push the boundaries of grammaticography, placing an increasingly greater emphasis on the role of spoken usage in the description of the English language.

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