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# From the Académie to reality TV: Analysing the presence of prescriptivism in contemporary France

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## Résumé

Linguistic prescriptivism, or 'verbal hygiene' (Cameron 2012), is a feature of our everyday lives, whether we are conscious of it or not. France is considered to be a highly prescriptivist society (Lodge 1993), with the statements of its language academy, the Académie française, regularly making international news. However, prescriptivism is also to be found in a myriad of everyday contexts, including television, popular fiction, graffiti and politics (for example, Minister Stéphane Séjourné's grammar is frequently criticised online). This is not a new phenomenon. For over five centuries, prescriptivists have instructed French-speakers on how to use their language 'correctly'. However, although there is a rich tradition of diachronic research into French prescriptivism (for just two examples see Ayres-Bennett and Sejjido 2011; and Caron 2004), we know much less about how and where prescriptivism occurs in contemporary French popular culture, the extent to which it is found, and its topics and tropes. Using purpose-built and pre-existing, multi-genre, digital corpora of extracts from popular culture, my project addresses this gap and explores how and how far prescriptivism permeates our everyday lives through popular culture.

In this paper, I will explore some of the forms of French popular culture in which prescriptivism is found and identify and analyse the creators of these outputs. I will show that, far beyond being limited to style guides, grammars and dictionaries, prescriptivism has a strong presence across multiple contemporary French popular culture outputs, including, for example, reality television shows. Given that linguistic prescriptivism has been linked to political conservatism and can be instrumentalised as a form of discrimination, it is important to understand how and why prescriptivist ideas appear and spread in popular culture. Ascertaining who is creating these outputs and the forms which they take contributes to this understanding.

## References

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**Mots-Clés:** prescriptivism, popular culture, language policy, standard language, contemporary France