

The alien and I or me and the alien?

Does grammar matter? by Andreea S. Calude

https://www.ted.com/talks/andreea_s_calude_does_grammar_matter?language=en#t-256916

Prescriptivism vs. Descriptivism. A very common debate that is seen in various forms of study and life philosophy. In linguistics it takes the form of:

Classic example – have you ever heard that you cannot end a sentence in a preposition? Here are some points you could bring up in response to that “rule.”

- Is that a rule? From where? Who decided? When? Why is one person the expert on all the English language... furthermore, why are British men from the 1700s in charge of how all people of all races and backgrounds speak in the year 2020? Were not people able to speak and write efficiently before British men in the 1700s?
- Fun fact, the ‘you cannot end a sentence in a preposition’ rule comes from written Latin, it really is not even a rule in English writing! Who decided a prescriptive rule in Latin would then also need to apply to English?

Here is a better example to wrestle with, a very American example – Black English. Black English surprisingly has origins in certain regions of Great Britain and Ireland. Even though it can be referred to as ebonics, street talk, urban talk, jive, or in even pejorative terms. It is a very specific thing, black English.

Is it a problem to speak in Black English? Sorry to throw another video at you, but this is worth listening to:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-X3PfmTXaE>

The Professor here hits at something very important. For most people in the world, they learn a way of speaking on their mothers/fathers’ knee that is different from the formal language around them. What do you call the restroom at your house? Do you say – ‘Excuse me, I need to go to the lavatory.’ No! Of course not! What do the signs in the big airports sometimes say – “Lavatory.” The English of formal or “big” settings is much different than the on-the-ground usage.

Thanks for the linguistics lesson Kevin, but what about this is relevant to our faith?

Thanks for asking! This directly connects in Christianity to the idea of Creedal vs. Confessional. Creeds are something that are prescriptive – each word must be believed as letter of the law. If you do not agree with part of a creed you are not part of that community. Confessionals are descriptive – over time bodies of churches get together and write a confession about what they believe and how they find God at work among them at that time. They accurately reflect the on-the-ground faith of the people at that place and time. As Presbyterians we are a Confessional Church, meaning we do not write creeds or

instruct them as a rite of passage into our congregation. Of course, there is a place for creeds in our church at FPC, in worship we often recite the Apostles Creed because it reaffirms the basics of our faith. We would not change those basic concepts, even a couple of thousands years after they were written! On the whole, though, we are a confessional church.

Core Questions:

1. Christianity has been and continues to be evolving – what things should we make sure do not change and what things are okay to change (even if it makes us uncomfortable)?
2. As Presbyterians we are ‘reformed and always reforming.’ We are also Confessional instead of Creedal. What kinds of Presbyterian USA Confessions do you find interesting or speak to you? If you could advise the PCUSA to create a new confession, what you include in it?

This week think of something you feel would fall into your Faith Statement or personal Confession of Faith. Do you think in 10 years it will be the same? Why or why not? Also pray that God would continue to work in you and develop your faith as you grow.