Language Myths (the myth addressed + the authors regard on this myth)

1. The Meanings of Words Should Not be Allowed to Vary or Change

_The Myth addressed:_ Languages change all the time in the usage and meaning of words. Although some people would say that this is a negative thing, language change cannot be halted. A misuse ceases to be a misuse when everybody does it (ex: disinterested/uninterested).

_The authors regard:_ The author does not see the changes in meaning and usage of words as a negative thing. He thinks that it is normal and people will continue to change it in order to be able to express themselves differently. As long as people understand each other (even if some words are misused, the meaning becomes relevant with the help of the context) he sees no problem with this.

2. Some Languages are Just Not Good Enough

_The Myth addressed:_ Languages spoken in the world today vary in the use to which they are put. Some people consider that there are languages which are just not good enough, not flexible or wide enough cannot cover all subjects. The truth is actually minority languages are constructing vocabulary out of existing resources within the languages.

_The authors regard:_ The author believes that any language cannot be good enough. In the past French, Italian and others were considered not good enough but ended up being official languages. He believes that it depends on the people how the language evolves because of what they need it for. Perhaps if history would have been different, English might not have been good enough.

3. The Media are Ruining English

_The Myth addressed:_ There seems to be a firm belief that the English language is always going downwards and that the main people to blame for is the media (journalists, press, TV). „Dirty fingernails fallacy“ states that journalists use language sloppily.

_The authors regard:_ The language and terms keep changing – the media is not responsible for the change but merely reflects the current usage. The media are therefore linguistic mirrors and so is the radio for that matter. Changes are always occurring and are not caused by someone specific they just happen.

4. French is a Logical Language
The Myth addressed: The French believe their language is very clear and logical and that is why it has been used by so many people. Many people (linguists too) have praised the structure of the French language saying it is closer to the natural line of thought.

The authors regard: „Ma sacree toux“ vs. „Massacrez tout!“ The author states that in languages there are not necessarily differences in clarity and logic BUT in the abilities of different users of the language to handle it effectively. He thinks that because of events and facts of a country people associate these with the language itself (Italian-musical language, Spanish –romantic language, German- guttural language). One of the reasons this idea of logic and clarity of the language was pushed on the French people because it also has the capacity to generate national solidarity.

5. English Spelling is Kattastroffik
The Myth addressed: If you know how an English word is pronounced and roughly what it means, you should be able to write it down without much trouble. English spelling has preserved a continuous record of cultural activity by borrowing foreign spelling conventions along with the borrowed words.

The authors regard:

6. Women Talk Too Much
The Myth addressed: There is a widespread belief that women talk more than man some actually view this as irritating and noisy. This does not actually reflect the reality and evidence shows that actually men talk much more in discussions. Men talk more in public because they perceive it as an enhancement of their status and men are much more concerned with that than women are.

The authors regard: It actually depends of the social context if women talk more than men or not. It appears that men generally talk more in public where persuasive and informative talk is highly valued and women are more likely to contribute in private, informal interactions. It some cases the silent participants can be the powerful players.

7. Some languages are Harder than Others
The Myth addressed: Many people belief that some languages are harder to learn than others. It is quite obvious that for some speakers such as German it is easier to learn Dutch or for Czech it’s easier to learn Polish. It is hard to explain exactly and to what extent some languages are harder.

The authors regard: The thing that takes us most of the time when learning a language is its vocabulary. He thinks it is possible to speak of easier and harder languages in regard to grammar. Simplicity in one part of the language may be balanced by complexity in another part.

8. Children Can’t Speak or Write Properly Any More


**The Myth addressed:** It is believed that young people are more susceptible to making mistakes, mainly caused by the too permissive teaching methods. Throughout the time, in every period it was said that the English language was becoming more ignorant, full of mistakes and in a continuous decline. The moral decline was often associated with the language decline.  

**The authors regard:** The author does not agree with people claiming there was a Golden Age where most of the people could write and talk because as evidence shows there are fewer illiterates than there were 50 years ago or more. He thinks people are also being discriminated against if they do not use what is called the „Standard English”. He thinks that the school system is not to blame for all usage of language since children learn how to speak before they go to school.

9. **In the Appalachians they speak like Shakespeare**  

**The myth addressed:** There is a belief that in isolated places (especially in the Appalachians of North Carolina) in the country people still use “Elizabethan” or “Shakespearean” English. Another reason for this myth is the desire to contradict the stereotypes used when describing the mountain people living in those areas (people would expect dangerous uneducated people) and stating that they still speak Shakespearian English might improve their image (romantization of mountain life).  

**The authors regard:** The author believes there is little and unpersuasive evidence to support that theory. Since no one came directly from Britain to the Appalachians they could not have preserved their English themselves. Moreover the belief throughout linguists is that all language varieties change even isolated ones even though the mountain culture has not been isolated.

10. **Some Languages Have no Grammar**  

**The myth addressed:** Grammar is defined as a set of rules which the speakers of the language follow when they speak. The proposition”Spelitian has no grammar” is then discussed and the author actually makes same good points to demonstrate that it is false and that every language has grammar.

**The authors regard:** Many languages do not have the same rules as Latin however we cannot conclude that English has less grammar than Latin. He believes you have to consider the kinds of grammatical distinctions a language makes and not HOW it makes them. A language without grammar is a contradiction in terms.

11. **Italian is Beautiful, German is Ugly**  

**The myth addressed:** There seems to be a view that some languages are more aesthetically pleasing than others. That is in fact tied up to other opinions we have on that certain cities (countries) and people. It is actually the social connotations of the speakers of a language variety
(whether they are associated with poverty, crime, being uneducated) that dictates our aesthetic judgment about the language variety. „Social connotations hypothesis”!

*The authors regard:* The authors states that sounds are in the ear of the beholder, to be variably interpreted and socially constructed rather than to be measured. He believes views about beauty and ugliness of a language or dialect are built on cultural norms, pressures and social connotations.

12. Bad Grammar is Slovenly

*The myth addressed:* “Bad grammar” is a cover term to describe a number of different kinds of English expressions. Some are widely used by educated speakers and writers but are outlawed by traditional prescriptions which are difficult to sustain. Some appear to attract covert social prejudice by virtue of their association with low status groups and some follow the very characteristic but still rule governed patterns do informal speech.

*The authors regard:* The prescriptions which are recommended as “good grammar” are revealed as at best marginal and frequently unrealistic and trivial.

13. Black Children are Verbally Deprived

*The myth addressed:* There are differences in varieties of English which may sometimes correlate with ethnicity (African America vs. Anglo American). According to The linguistic inferiority principle the speech of a socially subordinate group will always be interpreted as inadequate in comparison with the socially dominant group. A classification has been made by some educators who observed that some African American children may say little in specific conditions – All evidence indicates that black culture is a highly verbal culture which values the development of verbal skills.

*The authors regard:* Social acceptability has become the same as linguistic patterning, thus a social judgment is translated into a misguided notion of language organization. To put it easier: if you think there is something wrong with someone, you think there is also something wrong with their language or way of speaking. The author believes people should actually thank the black cultures for enriching our language etc.

14. Double Negatives are Illogical

*The myth addressed:* The main reason people evoke when they object to double negatives is logic which is not an appropriate way to think when looking at a language. The way we use negatives might have something to do with how definite our negations are (maybe it’s not, it’s definitely not...). Some people hate them some people love them; more people, however utter double negatives without realizing the emotional havoc they could be causing and without worrying about being illogical.
The authors regard: the different types of double negations are used by varying groups of people. There is a type used in formal speech and the other one used more common in speaking. The author ends with the phrase "double negatives are, very definitely, not illogical".

15. TV Makes People Sound the Same

The myth addressed: Some believe that the reason why language change is always taking place is the mass media but especially the television. There is no evidence for television disseminating or influencing sound changes or grammatical innovations. Language changes are spreading at the same moment as the globalization of mass media but it is not cause and effect.

The authors regard: The author thinks that mass media does not influence how people talk and there are other reasons why TV People Sound the Same. Standard speech is standard to reach lots of types of people.

16. You Shouldn’t Say “It is me” because “Me” is Accusative

The Myth addressed: English pronouns show a system similar to that in Latin. You can actually find nominative and accusative cases. Of course, English does not have to follow the Latin structure or any other for that matter.

The authors regard: Latin should not dictate what is acceptable in English. People are confusing the prestige of the language with the one of the people who use it. He thinks you should not impose the patterns of one language on another.

17. They Speak Really Bad English Down South and in New York City

The Myth addressed: There are popular associations of certain varieties of English with professional and intellectual competences (e.g. a Doctor would speak a high form of English rather than have a NY accent). Studies show that people believe that people speak, bad English” in the south.

The authors regard: A belief in the superiority of inferiority of regional varieties is simply a US language myth. Like all groups who are prejudiced against, Southerners fight back by making their despised language variety a solidarity symbol but they suffer linguistic insecurity.

18. Some Languages are Spoken More Quickly than Others

The Myth addressed: Speakers of some languages seem to be really fast while others appear to speak slowly with a drawl. There are 3 possibilities: some languages are spoken more rapidly as a result of the way the sounds are produces; we only get that impression like an illusion; in some
societies it is preferred to speak slowly. We are all capable of speaking faster or slower when we want to and tend to adjust our speed to our state.

The authors regard: a relationship has been found between speech rate and perceived competence. The alternation between speaking fast or slow has a communicative value. The author believes the only way we are going to be able to test this is by much more research across a wide variety of languages and social situations.

19. Aborigines Speak a Primitive Language

The Myth addressed: People think there is just one Aboriginal Language, that they do not have grammar, that the vocabulary is simple and lacks detail. The Aboriginal language is thought to not be able to deal with the 20th century. Those ideas are far away from the truth.

The authors regard: Aboriginal languages are very complex and have played an important role in linguistics over the past decades. They have extended our notions of what complex organizing principles can be found in human languages.

20. Everyone has an Accent Except Me

The Myth addressed: Accent defines and communicates who we are. The fact is that everyone has an accent but its construct is relative; where you find yourselves has much to do with that. Our perceptions and production of speech also change with time (depends what job we have, to whom we speak, what surrounds us…).

The authors regard: The author turns to George Bernard Shaw’s Pygmalion where Eliza Doolittle’s transformation is the apparent result of her accommodation to a new social milieu. We all leave parts of the speaking style of our early years behind. Whether we change a lot or a little depends on individual choices within a web of social circumstance.

21. America is ruining the English Language

The Myth addressed: One way American are ruining English is by changing it. Many people regard what is foreign as barbarous and corrupt. Judgment of what is beautiful or ugly, valuable or useless is highly personal and idiosyncratic. American did not corrupt British. They evolved in different ways from a common ancestral standard.

The authors regard: It is hard to say which variety of English is more conservative and which one is more innovative. Both have changing and go on changing. British people tend to be more aware of American innovations than American are of British ones. The author does not agree that change is ruin!