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apostrophe's.

**A study of the apostrophe in New Zealand today: its
use, attitudes towards its use and its place in a
historical continuum.**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

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Abstract

This is the first study to tell the whole story of the apostrophe in one comprehensive work. In a two-part study, the investigation first traces the history of the apostrophe from its origins to the prescriptive rules that govern its use today, before exploring the factors that influence modern attitudes and practices, as well as implications for the future. Part I involves an examination of the relevant literature and original manuscripts and texts to trace the history of the apostrophe from a 2,000 year old Greek papyrus, through French and into English in the sixteenth century, showing that it did not come via Latin as dictionary etymologies suggest. Once in English, the apostrophe was used inconsistently to mark a variety of forms of omission, and while some authors argue that the possessive apostrophe was derived from the form *the king his sons*, the study shows this to be unlikely. Although prescriptivism eventually brought about a period of relative stability, evidence suggests that there has always been a degree of inconsistency in apostrophe use.

In part II, a mixed-methods design was employed to investigate the modern apostrophe in New Zealand English, utilising both quantitative and qualitative elements, the latter adding a whole new perspective to apostrophe research. Examples of apostrophe use were collected from speakers of New Zealand English, while a series of questionnaires and interviews, involving the general public and teachers, captured the complexity that is apostrophe use today. Many participants associate standard apostrophe use with *educatedness*, but since ideological change banished grammar from the classroom in the 1970s, many teachers today are uncertain of its functions. Consequently, young people have developed new strategies for using apostrophes, relying on appearance rather than rules. This not only results in inconsistent apostrophe use, but it also means young people are more susceptible to the influence of the nonstandard use they see around them. Until editing devices on computers become sophisticated enough to make our apostrophe decisions for us, it seems nonstandard apostrophes will become increasingly evident in future.

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Glossary and Terminology used in this study

Abbreviation: (in this study) the removal of a letter or letters that do not reflect pronunciation and is used to save space or time, e.g. *gov't*, 'government'.

Affix: in English, a prefix or suffix which is added to a word, but cannot stand alone, e.g. *Un-help-ful-ness*.

Aphaeresis: a form of elision in which the initial vowel of the second word that is omitted, e.g. (Greek) μη̄ κ for μη̄ ἐκ'.

Bottom up: in reading: skilled readers focus on individual words first and rely less on contextual cues to decode the meaning (see also top down)

Critic: a morpheme similar to an affix in that it cannot stand alone, but it can be moved. In English, the possessive -'s is a critic rather than inflection, because it can be moved to the end of a complex possessive phrase.

Complex possessive phrase: when the possessor is a complex noun phrase the -'s goes on the end, e.g. *the lady wearing the big hat's husband*

Contraction: (in this study) the contraction of two words into one, e.g. *it's*, 'it is'; *we'll*, 'we will'; *don't*, 'do not' (contraction within a single word is referred to as *omission* in this study)

Cultural capital: the cultural acquisition of knowledge and skills (see also symbolic capital)

Deductive learning style: prefers to learn the rules, then practice them (see also inductive learning style)

Descriptive grammar: Rules of grammar based on how language is used rather than how it should be used (see also prescriptive grammar).

Diacritic: a symbol other than letters used in writing to representing pronunciation

Early Modern English: (eModE) the period of Modern English from 1500 to 1650 (see also Old English, Middle English and Modern English)

Elision: (in this study) used in its narrowest sense - the omission of a final unstressed vowel before another vowel, e.g. *th’image*, ‘the image’; *t’order* ‘to order’

Garden path sentence: a sentence that initiates an erroneous interpretation which has to be reanalysed when the rest of the sentence is read

Grammar: 1. (*non-count noun*) the structure of language – including morphology and syntax
2. (*count noun*) a book of prescriptive grammar rules, may include instruction and Practice. (See also descriptive grammar and prescriptive grammar)

Hiatus: The coming together of two vowels in separate syllables or words, as in *piano* or *three apples*

Inductive learning style: learners notice patterns and induce the rules for themselves (see also deductive learning style)

Inflection: affixes marking tense, person, number, gender etc.

Linguistic environment: (in this study) includes the linguistic landscape and other publicly accessible language, including the internet and the media.

Linguistic landscape: the language used in public signage

Linguistic whateverists: (in this study) from Baron’s (2010) *linguistic whateverism*: those who do not believe in the importance of using apostrophes according to the rules.

Majuscule script: the capital letter script that was used in Greek until the ninth century (see also minuscule script)

Middle English: (ME) the period from 1066 to 1500 (see also Old English, Early Modern English and Modern English)

Minuscule script: a small letter script that was used in Greek after the ninth century and was developed to save valuable parchment (see also majuscule script)

Minus apostrophe: (in this study) the category of words that do not have apostrophes in the standard forms, e.g. *its name*, *three books* (see also plus apostrophe)

Modern English: (ModE) the period from 1500 (see also Old English, Middle English and Early Modern English)

Morpheme: the smallest unit of meaning, e.g. *books* is two morphemes, *book* + *s*

Morphology: The structure of words, the study of words and how they are formed

Old English: (OE) the period from 499 to 1066 (see also Middle English, Early Modern English and Modern English)

Omission: (in this study) general omission of a letter reflecting pronunciation within a single word, e.g. *'tis*, 'it is'; *ne'er*, 'never'; *call'd*, 'called'

Phoneme: a single unit of sound

Phonology: the sounds of a language, the study of sounds and how they are put together

Plus-apostrophe: (in this study) the category of words that have apostrophes in their standard forms, e.g. *it's hot*, *the book's reviews* (see also *minus apostrophe*).

Prescriptive grammar: rules of grammar based on how language should be used, such as those set by the eighteenth-century grammarians (see also descriptive grammar).

Prevocalic: a sound (vowel or consonant) that occurs immediately before a vowel.

Schwa: a neutral, unstressed vowel represented in the International Phonetic Alphabet by [ə].

Stem: the base morpheme with no affixes attached

Sticklers: (in this study) those who believe in using apostrophe according to the prescriptive rules in most contexts, and who may judge others on their failure to do so.

Style: different varieties of language that are used in different contexts and with different people.

Symbolic capital: the social status gained through the acquisition of cultural capital

Syntax: the structure of sentences

Top down: in reading – relies on context and prior knowledge to help the decoding process
(see also bottom up)

Truncation: the clipping off of the end of a word

Notations and abbreviations

Notations

There are a number of notations that are used throughout the thesis that indicate different aspects of a word, sound or letter. They are as follows:

- e (italics) denote a phrase, word, or sound/letter under general discussion
- <e> (angle brackets) denotes spelling, referring to the letter or letters
- [e] (square brackets) denotes the sound or pronunciation
- ‘word’ (single quotation marks) denote meaning
- s (en dash before a letter or letters) denotes a suffix

Acronyms used

- BSB Bavarian State Library, Munich (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek)
- ECCO Eighteenth Century collections online
- EEBO Early English books online
- LLL Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost*
- OED Oxford English dictionary
- UCLA University of California, Los Angeles

Abbreviations used in tables

- id. identify/identified
- NR No response (to question)
- NS nonstandard
- Poss. Possessive
- pp per person/participant
- Resp. Respondents
- std standard
- 3PSG third-person-singular (verbs)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

apostrophe's.

In one word, the title of this study is able to convey the whole essence of the topic under investigation. Some readers will not even notice the intrusive apostrophe, while others will throw their arms up in horror and alarm at the impending degeneration of the English language. Few people have no opinion on the apostrophe, with some detesting aberrant use while others call for its abolition, and still others wonder what all the fuss is about. The use of an apostrophe in a plural noun exemplifies a nonstandard use that is becoming increasingly widespread in the English-speaking world today. However, as the strange font may suggest, this is not a modern example. It comes from an English grammar book published in 1658, so it also hints at the history and development of apostrophe use in English. The title, *Apostrophe's*, therefore encapsulates the history of the apostrophe, its current usage, attitudes towards its use and perhaps it also signals the future of the apostrophe. These are the four key aspects of this research.

When the topic was first suggested to me, I wondered how it was possible to write a whole thesis on the apostrophe. However, I quickly came to realise that there were many facets to the apostrophe which would take me into different fields of linguistics, including phonology, morphology and syntax, historical linguistics and language change, prescriptive and descriptive grammars, as well as sociolinguistics. I found this prospect very exciting. Having been educated in the late 1950s and 1960s, I absorbed the prescriptive rules of apostrophe use that were taught and reinforced at that time. Nonetheless, I was at university in my 40s before I discovered that the possessive *its* had no apostrophe. I had always assumed that

because *its* was possessive, it had an apostrophe and it took my Chinese lecturer in Chinese to enlighten me. I would not have noticed a sign with a stray apostrophe in *its*, yet I still felt surprise when I first noticed signs advertising *pizza's* or *combo's*, and I wondered how the writers could have gone through school without knowing that plural nouns do not have apostrophes. At the same time, I was aware of occasional letters to the editor expressing anger over incorrectly placed apostrophes, and a search on the internet found two websites devoted to the venting of feelings about aberrant apostrophe use and their users. It became a compelling prospect for me to learn why people have different understandings of apostrophe use, and why this little mark has the power to upset people so deeply. But first, I needed to learn where the apostrophe came from.

1.2 Objectives of the research

1.2.1 A brief outline of the literature

When I started looking at the literature on apostrophes I found not only that there was little written about the history, but also that information was often contradictory. On the other hand, there is abundant literature on modern apostrophe use. However, it tends to be subjective and is often either critical of apostrophe ‘abusers’, or critical of the critics themselves. There seemed to be many gaps in knowledge of the apostrophe, as well as some areas of debate. Most studies rely on other literature and observations of use, but none had actually asked people about their use, understanding of, and beliefs about apostrophe use. And there were no studies that had investigated apostrophe use and attitudes within New Zealand. This left me with many questions and a great deal of curiosity about the apostrophe – its past, its present and its future.

1.2.2 The research questions and aims of the study.

The research, therefore, aims to answer the following questions:

- Q. 1 How did the apostrophe develop from its emergence in Greek to the prescriptive rules of apostrophe use in English?
- Q. 2 What are the current practices and attitudes of New Zealand English speakers regarding the prescriptive rules of apostrophe use; what shapes these attitudes and how do they influence practice?
- Q. 3 What predictions can reasonably be made about the impact of current practices and beliefs and the future of the prescriptive rules for apostrophe use in New Zealand English?

Overall, this study will add significantly to the pool of knowledge on the apostrophe. It aims to explain where the apostrophe came from and how it developed once it arrived in English. By investigating the literature alongside actual evidence from early manuscripts and printed materials, the study seeks to fill in some of the gaps, smooth out some of the contradictions and to dispel some of the myths. This will provide a basis for the research into modern apostrophe use in order to consider whether modern phenomena are new, or simply part of a continuum of use and attitudes.

The research into modern use first aims to situate the study in New Zealand. Data demonstrating nonstandard use of apostrophes are an important part of this study, but it also delves beyond the nonstandard use and criticism to uncover the attitudes behind these phenomena – by asking people. Factors such as personal attributes, education and changing educational ideologies, as well as exposure to nonstandard use are explored. And it would be impossible to examine apostrophe use today without considering the effect of technology, now and into the future. Ultimately the study aims to bring all these different perspectives of the apostrophe together into one comprehensive study.

1.3 The structure of the thesis

The content of this thesis dictates a somewhat unconventional structure. Following this chapter, the study is divided into three parts. It was necessary to separate the historical and contemporary components because they required different methodologies, and these constitute parts I and II respectively. The two strands are then drawn together with the discussion and conclusion in part III.

This introduction is short, because the relevant literature and other details are incorporated into the body of the historical section and included in the introduction to part II. This chapter provides some background, explaining the motivation for the choice of topic and presenting the research questions, along with an explanation of the aims of the research. Finally, it explains the structure of the thesis and provides an outline.

Part I consists of two chapters covering the history of the apostrophe in response to research question 1. Chapter 2 begins by providing a road map of the historical section and then traces the apostrophe from its origins in Greek to its emergence in English. It is based on a study of the literature along with an examination of early manuscripts and printed material. Chapter 3 investigates the apostrophe's subsequent development in English. This is researched through diachronic studies of early printed books, which also provide data for an examination of the changing functions of the apostrophe in English. The historical section concludes with an investigation of the impact of social factors and the development of the apostrophe into the prescriptive rules that still govern its use today.

Part II investigates the use of the apostrophe in New Zealand today, and people's attitudes towards its use. It has a more conventional design with an introduction, methodology and findings and while it focuses on research question 2, it also addresses research question 3. Chapter 4 provides an introduction to part II. It presents the objectives and outline for part II and examines stances taken by different researchers on various aspects of the modern apostrophe, including apostrophe use, factors contributing to change, and attitudes. Chapter 5 provides a detailed account of the methodology, explaining the overall mixed method design and detailing each data-collection instrument. Some notes on ethical issues,

generalisability and the presentation of data are also included. Chapter 6, the first of three chapters presenting the results and findings, describes how the apostrophe is used today. It focusses on nonstandard use, people's understanding of the apostrophe and some social factors that may influence use. In chapter 7 different aspects of education are explored, including people's experiences of education in apostrophe use and the impact of changing educational ideologies on teaching practices. Factors outside the classroom are then considered, the most salient of these being the impact of technology on apostrophe use. Chapter 8 investigates different beliefs and attitudes around apostrophe use and people's beliefs about the future of the apostrophe.

Part III brings the findings from the historical and contemporary components together. Chapter 9 is the discussion chapter which addresses each of the three research questions. In response to the first research question it summarises the main findings in the historical study. The chapter then considers the second research question by expanding on topics from the previous chapters related to apostrophe use and the interrelationship between attitude, identity, educatedness, knowledge and use. The third research question regarding the future of the apostrophe is addressed in a discussion of where the apostrophe is headed and the likely impact of technology. The closing chapter begins by outlining some of the key findings of the study and summarising the study's contributions to the body of knowledge of the apostrophe and related fields. It then considers the strengths and limitations of the methodology and some areas for further research, before winding up with a final word.

PART I: THE HISTORY OF THE APOSTROPHE

CHAPTER 2

THE APOSTROPHE'S JOURNEY INTO ENGLISH

2.1 Introduction to part I

Part I of this thesis encompasses the historical component of the research, which investigates the origins of the apostrophe, its journey into English in this chapter and the subsequent changes in function that give rise to our modern English apostrophe, as well as the impact of social change on setting the current standards of apostrophe use, in chapter 3. Most etymological dictionaries state that the apostrophe came into English from Greek via Latin and French (Ayto, 2001; Harper n.d.; Oxford English dictionary [OED], 2017; Rey, 1992). However, as we will discover in the following sections, the chain of transmission was anything but linear.

In order to investigate this chain of transmission, part I is based on a number of sources, as presented in table 2.1, below. Nevalainen (2006) explains that the use of authentic text is important in tracing language change, since it “takes us much closer to the ‘real English’ of the day” (p. 179). As the main resources utilised for this part of the investigation, these websites provided materials that are here analysed and discussed in order to come to conclusions about the history of the apostrophe.

Table 2.1. Sources of data used in chapter 2

Language	# texts	Period	Sources
Greek	2	1 B.C.	Bacchylides papyrus, Jebb, (1905); Kenyon, (1897)
	60	9 th -16 th C	Manuscripts from the Bavarian State Library (BSL) & University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) websites
	10	2008-2009	American Library Association website
Latin	41	7 th -16 th C	Manuscripts from the BSL & UCLA websites
	1	1454-5	<i>Gutenberg Bible</i> , Gutenberg Digital website
	11	15 th C	Texts in private collection (John Ross)
Italian	14	14 th -16 th C	Manuscripts from the BSL & UCLA websites
French	10	13 th -15 th C	Manuscripts from the BSL & UCLA websites
	12	1516-1540	Gordon Collection, University of Virginia Library website
	1	10 th C	<i>Strasbourg Oaths</i> , National Library of France website
Latin (in England)	12	12 th -17 th C	Manuscripts from the Early English Books Online (EEBO) website
English	12	11 th -15 th C	Manuscripts from the UCLA website
	14	16 th C	Printed books from the EEBO website
Sources of data used in chapter 3			
English	4	1598 1631 1685 1765	Shakespeare's <i>Love's Labour's Lost</i> (LLL): First quarto, British Library website Second quarto, British Library website First folio (hard copy) Samuel Johnson's edition, Bodleian Library website
			Printed books from the EEBO website
			Cusack (1998): <i>Everyday English 1500-1700</i>
			20
			Printed books from the Eighteenth-Century Collections Online (ECCO) website
	2	18 th C	Journals of James Cook and Joseph Banks
	35	16 th -20 th C	Grammars ¹ from EEBO, ECCO and other websites

The sources were used in a variety of ways. In the case of manuscripts, sometimes there were few examples available and all were analysed, but elsewhere it was necessary to select samples. This was a random process, aiming for a balanced chronological coverage and some variety in genre, although most were religious writings. Where there was variation in apostrophe use within a time period, more texts were selected but during periods when apostrophe use seemed stable, fewer were selected. Generally, the first 10 pages and a

¹ The word *grammar* in this work is often used to refer to 'grammar book', a common use of the word for older generations but, as I discovered, not a term that is familiar to younger people.

random selection of pages from throughout each item were examined, although this varied depending on the size of the script, illustrations, and the condition and legibility of pages. The pages were scanned in order to determine the presence, frequency and consistency of use of the apostrophe, as well as the constancy of function. The modern Greek texts from the American Library Association were short stories which were selected randomly and read in full. Data were kept in chronological lists which included a description of apostrophe use, and some images.

Chapter 3 includes some diachronic studies, beginning with Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*. The whole of each edition of the play was examined simultaneously and parallel lists of examples were created, with colour coding being used to aid analysis. In the EEBO and ECCO studies, a random sample of texts were selected throughout each century and again, the first 10 pages and a random selection from throughout the books were investigated. In the case of the collection from Cusack all texts were read in full. Each item was listed in chronological order with notes and examples, and the key points were then transferred into a chronological chart. Colour coding was used to highlight the different functions, clearly indicating the presence, frequency and consistency of each function across time. Grammars were generally located through their mention by other researchers and some through my own searching. They were examined for mention of the apostrophe and its functions, as well as apostrophe use by the author. Notes were taken for each volume, which were again entered into a chronological chart.

The findings from these processes are presented in this and the following chapter. In this chapter the sections are organised by language, following the etymological order in which the dictionaries place the pathway of the apostrophe, from its beginnings in Greek through Latin and French to English today, but with the addition of Italian. In chapter 3, the data from the LLL, EEBO, Cusack and ECCO studies first form a series of diachronic studies of the English apostrophe and the data from these studies is then used in the following section which examines the development of each function of the English apostrophe. Social change and the rise of the grammarians is then discussed, culminating in a chronological account of grammars as they herded the apostrophe along the path to prescriptivism.

This chapter begins the historical investigation in the following section with an exploration of Greek. The first goal was to ascertain when the apostrophe first emerged and in 2.2.1 we see evidence of the apostrophe in Greek as early as 50 B.C., where it was used to mark elision². Section 2.2.2 presents evidence from manuscripts accessed through the BSL and UCLA websites which show that the apostrophe was used in Greek throughout the Middle ages where it continued to mark elision, although it was not used consistently. The impact of print on apostrophe use is considered in section 2.2.3 and this section also includes an examination of a random sample of modern Greek texts, written between 2008 and 2009 (American Library Association, 2018), inquiring into the presence, function, frequency and consistency of apostrophe use.

Latin was the next language in the etymological chain of transmission and this is covered in 2.3, beginning with some observations of the contact between the Roman and Greek cultures during the period of the Roman Empire. Evidence of pre-medieval apostrophe use is found in a reference from Priscian in the sixth century, quoted by Tory in 1529, and this is discussed in 2.3.1. This apostrophe marked omission³, but not elision. However, section 2.3.2 examines evidence from manuscripts on the BSL and UCLA websites which shows that by the Middle Ages, the apostrophe had become a mark of abbreviation⁴ and did not reflect pronunciation at all.

This Latin mark of abbreviation was also found in Italian manuscripts. Section 2.4 provides evidence for the fact that such use of the apostrophe was common in Italian throughout the Middle Ages and coexisted with the Greek-type apostrophe marking elision for a short while after it was first introduced in 1501. This section also posits that since Italian culture was greatly admired by the French at the time, the adoption of the apostrophe into French may have been influenced by its use in Italian.

² In this study, the term *elision* is used in its narrowest sense, to denote an unstressed vowel sound that has been omitted when it precedes another vowel.

³ In this study the term *omission* refers to the omission of a letter reflecting pronunciation within a single word e.g. *ne'er*, *walkin'*, *'bout*

⁴ In this study the term *abbreviation* refers to the removal of letters from a word that do not represent phonological omission, e.g. *gov't*, 'government'; *In'gill*, 'Invercargill'.

With regard to French, in section 2.5.1 an examination of medieval French manuscripts confirmed that the apostrophe was used for abbreviation, as in Italian. Section 2.5.2 investigates the emergence of the apostrophe marking elision in French. To begin with, the literature was conflicting and sometimes misleading, but it was established that the mark of elision was in use in French by 1531 (Dubois, 1531). In section 2.5.3, the impact of print is considered, and a small diachronic study of printed books dated around the period the apostrophe was introduced, accessed through the Gordon Collection, investigates the decline of the apostrophe marking abbreviation and the rapid uptake of the new apostrophe marking elision.

English is the final link in the chain. In section 2.6.1 an examination of Latin manuscripts published in England and early English manuscripts demonstrated that the Latin mark was sometimes used in Latin texts but I found no examples in English texts. The earliest evidence of apostrophe use in English is discussed in section 2.6.2 where we see it marked elision, as it did in Greek, Italian and French. The extent of elision in English is explored in section 2.6.2.1 while the role of French in the transmission of the apostrophe into English is discussed in 2.6.3. At the conclusion of chapter 2 the apostrophe has arrived in English, but with a function that is unfamiliar to English speakers today.

Unlike in Italian and French, the apostrophe did not spread rapidly in English after its arrival and this is explored in chapter 3 through the diachronic studies. The first of these considers four versions of Shakespeare's LLL, in section 3.2.1, tracing the increase in use as well as the changes in function. In 3.2.2 the findings of the EEBO study are presented in a table which indicates the frequency of overall apostrophe use and the presence or absence of each function of the apostrophe over time. The Cusack study, discussed in 3.2.3, demonstrates that the apostrophe was unfamiliar to almost all of these non-literary writers, while the ECCO study in 3.2.4 signalled a sudden shift mid-18th century from erratic multi-functional use to relatively consistent use of the apostrophe as a marker of possession.

Section 3.3.1 begins the examination of functions by investigating those in which the apostrophe marks omission, including in verb endings, in contractions⁵ and omission. The

⁵ In this study the term *contraction* is used only when two or more words are involved, as in *don't*. Shortening within a single word, such as *ne'er*, which is sometimes referred to as contraction is termed *omission*.

development of the possessive apostrophe follows in section 3.3.2 and the anomaly of possessive pronouns which do not take apostrophes is also investigated. Many authors believe that the possessive -'s stands for *his* in constructions such as *the king his son* and in section 3.3.2.3 I use the evidence from the historical texts to show that this is unlikely. The historical precedent for today's use of apostrophes in plural nouns is explored in 3.3.3, while in 3.3.4 I consider the examples I have found in terms of a theory proposed by Bunčić (2004), that the primary function of the apostrophe in all languages is the marking of morpheme boundaries. Before leaving functions I briefly consider the changes of functions in relation to language change, in section 3.3.5.

Having established how the functions developed I then needed to discover how, during the course of the 18th century, the erratic multifunctioning apostrophe came to be set into prescriptive rules. This begins with an investigation into the social environment which created a demand for language guidelines, discussed in 3.4.1. This demand was reflected by the attitudes of grammarians who began to push for the improvement and standardisation of English, which is covered in section 3.4.2. Finally, section 3.4.3 consists of a chronological account of English grammars as they gradually shaped the apostrophe into prescriptive rules.

2.2 The Greek apostrophos

According to the OED (2017) the word *apostrophe* comes from the Greek word ἀποστρέφειν⁶ meaning ‘to turn away’:

ἀπό + στρέψ-ειν
 [apo stroph e:n]
 away turn INFIN
 ‘to turn away’ (OED, 2017)

The word *apostrophe* was first used in the form ἀποστροφή [apostropʰe] as a rhetorical device used in court, and later on stage (D'Alessando Behr, 2007). A second word derived from this Greek root is ἀποστροφός [*apostrophos*], which describes the little hooked mark that is the focus of this study.

2.2.1 The Bacchylides papyrus and the earliest apostrophes

The earliest evidence of an apostrophe is in the Bacchylides papyrus, dated around 50 B.C. (Kenyon, 1897). The papyrus, a copy of the poems of Bacchylides who is thought to have been born around 518 B.C., was brought to the British Museum in fragments after being discovered in Egypt. In figure 2.1, below, there is a segment from the original papyrus, accompanied by Kenyon's print copy and Modern Greek transcription (figure 2.2), as well as an English translation. Kenyon's faithful reproduction of the original is evident not only in the uppercase script and lack of word boundaries, but more importantly, in the inclusion of diacritics only where they appear in the original.

⁶ The apostrophe-like mark above α is a *smooth-breathing mark*, not an apostrophe. It indicates the absence of a glottal fricative [h] at the beginning of a word (Hansen & Quinn, 1992; Zuntz, 1994).

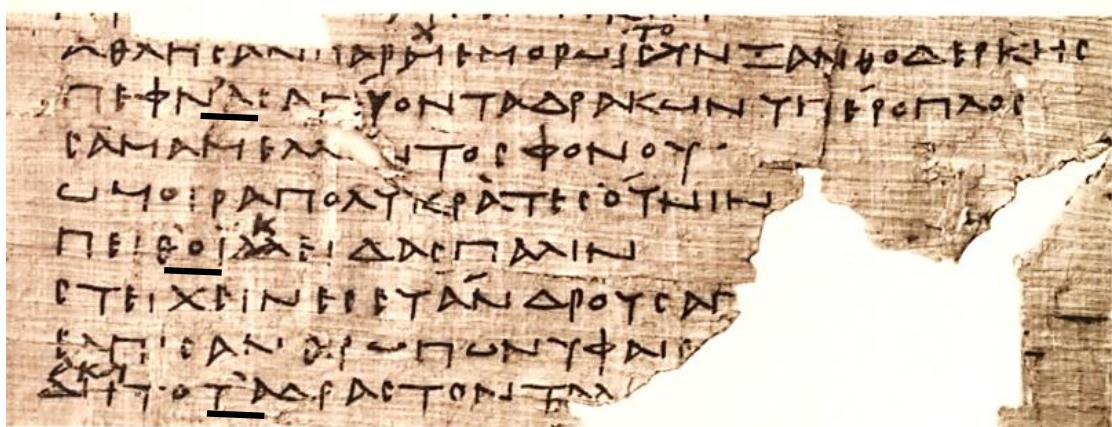


Figure 2.1. Fragment of Bacchylides papyrus, Jebb, 1905, p. 144.

ΒΑΚΧΥΛΙΔΗΣ	[I. IX. 20.]	ΒΑΚΧΥΛΙΔΗΣ
ΑΟΛΙΣΑΝΤΑΡΧΕΜΟΡΩΙΣ ^{το} ΝΕΑΝΘΟΔΕΡΚΗΣ	ἀθλησαν ἐπ' Ἀρχεμόρῳ. τὸν ξανθοδέρκης	
ΠΕΦΝΑΙ ΑΓΥΡΓΟΝΤΑ ΔΡΑΚΩΝΥΠΕΡΟΠΛΟΣ	πέφνι τάσαγενοντα δράκων υπέροπλος.	
ΣΑΜΑΛΕΜΟΝΤΟΣΦΟΝΟΥ·	σάμα μέλλοντος φόνου.	
15 ΟΜΟΙΡΑΠΟΛΥΚΡΑΤΕΣ ΌΥΝΝΙ	15 ὁ Μοῖρα πολυκρατές· οὐ νιν	
ΠΕΙΘΟΙ ΔΡΑΣΤΟΝΤΑΙ	πεῖθοι· Οἰκλείδας πάλιν	
ΣΤΕΙΧΕΙΝΕΣΕΥΑΝΔΡΟΥΣΑΓ[στείχειν ἐς εὐάνδρους ἀγ[νιάς].	
ΕΛΠΙΣΑΝΩΡΩΠΩΝΥΦΑΙ. [ἐλπίς ἀνθρώπων ύφαιρ[ει]	
ΔΗΤΟΤΔΡΑΣΤΟΝΤΑΙ]	ἀ καὶ τότε· Λδραστον Ταλ[αιονίδαν]	

Figure 2.2. Print copy and Modern Greek transcription of segment, Kenyon, 1897, pp. 72-73.

Gloss of apostrophe examples:

ΠΕΦΝΕ ΑΓΥΡΓΟΝΤΑ

[pefn(ε) asageüronta]

'killed' 'while sleeping'

ΠΕΙΘΕ ΟΪΚΛΕΙΔΑC

[peith(ε) oikleidas]

'could [not] 'son of
persuade' Oicles'

ΤΟΤΕ ΑΔΡΑΣΤΟΝ

[tpt(ε) adraston]

'then' 'Adrastus'

English translation:

"...honour of Archemorus, whom a monstrous fiery-eyed serpent killed as he slept, an omen of bloodshed to come. A powerful fate! The son of Oicles could not persuade them to go back again to the city streets, rich in heroes. Hope steals away men's [thinking] – she who even then was sending Abrastus, son of Talaus..."

Campbell, 1992, p. 163.

The reproduced segment reveals the prolific and regular use of the apostrophe throughout the papyrus and three of these are underlined in the small fragment in the image. They mark elision, which seems to be always reflected in the spelling and is almost always marked by an apostrophe. Different types of words were affected by elision, including both functional words and lexical items.

The Bacchylides papyrus is very important in establishing that the apostrophe was used at least as early as the first century B.C.; first because of its survival and second because in spite of the majuscule script, it features apostrophes. Kenyon (1897) tells us that “The manuscript is unusually well provided with accents, stops, and other aids to the reader” (p. xx) although he does not mention the apostrophes. The only author who alerted me to the existence of the papyrus and the apostrophes within it, was Levin (1984).

Levin (1984) claims that the apostrophe was the first diacritic to be widely accepted in the Greek language, and this seems to be supported by the Bacchylides papyrus in which the apostrophe appears much more consistently than other marks, such as accents and breathing marks. The Bacchylides papyrus provides evidence that the apostrophe was used in Greek as early as the first century B.C., but given its frequent and consistent use in the papyrus, it seems likely that the apostrophe was already well established by then.

2.2.2 The Greek apostrophe during the Middle Ages

Apart from the Bacchylides papyrus, there is little other evidence of apostrophe use until the ninth century C.E. By the late eighth century C.E., papyrus was in short supply and was gradually being replaced by parchment (Reynolds and Wilson, 1974). Parchment was made from animal skins, which while more readily available, was considerably more expensive to produce. This led to a substantial shift in writing style, as in order to economise on parchment the large, uniform majuscule letters that had dominated for so long were transformed into tiny, cursive characters. Known as *minuscule scripts*, these alphabets are the forerunner of today’s lower-case letters, although when they first developed, texts were either written in all majuscule, or all minuscule characters (*ibid.*).

Along with the changes in writing style came a marked increase in the use of symbols such as breathing marks, accents – and the apostrophe. Below are excerpts from ninth and tenth century manuscripts which demonstrate the dramatic change between script styles. Figure 2.3a shows a manuscript in capitals which has some diacritics that are part of the original text, but most have been added later. The minuscule script in figure 2.3b is liberally covered in accents, breathings, punctuation marks and apostrophes.



Figure 2.3a. Evangelistarium,
9th century.

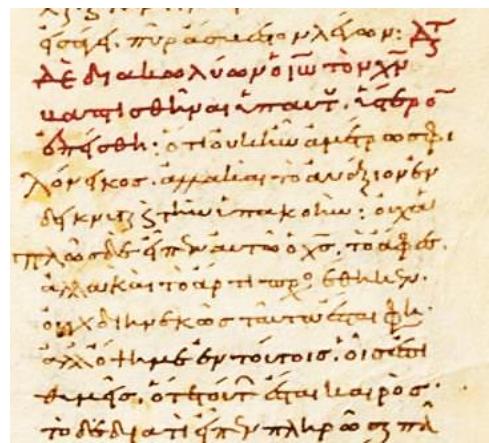


Figure 2.3b. Quaestiones et solutions,
10th century.

Because parchment was more durable, manuscripts are extant in good numbers from the 10th century on. However, there are some issues with identifying apostrophes in the medieval Greek manuscripts. First, there is a wide variation in writing styles, from the formation of individual letters, which may also be affected by dialectal differences, to the general legibility and the condition of the script. Some texts, including minuscule scripts, have little or no spacing between words, while spaces may occur within a word, making word boundaries difficult to identify. Second, apostrophes, breathing marks and accents can vary in shape, often look very similar and may be misplaced. These issues can make the identification of apostrophes difficult.

In the images below, for example, there are instances of elision in which apostrophe-like marks appear. The two marks that appear in figures 2.4a and 2.4b could be analysed as apostrophe-breathing mark sequences. However, in 2.4a, although the marks look similar, there is no other accent on the two-syllable word *αυτον* ‘him’. Since accent marks were

used to indicate stress in words of more than one syllable, it is likely that this sequence of marks is breathing-accent, and that there is no apostrophe.

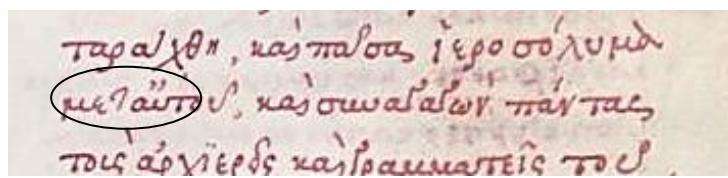


Figure 2.4a. Quaestiones et solutions, 10th century.

In 2.4b the second mark is straighter suggesting it could also be a breathing-accent sequence, but since the second word is single-syllable and does not require an accent, it is more likely an apostrophe-breathing sequence.

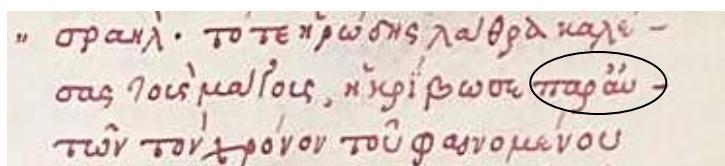


Figure 2.4b. Quaestiones et solutions, 10th century.

On the other hand, in 2.4c there are four marks which can be analysed as breathing-apostrophe-breathing-accent since the elided word *αλλ'* 'but' has one syllable that does not require an accent.

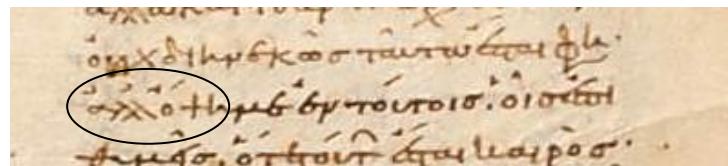


Figure 2.4c. Quaestiones et solutions, 10th century.

Example 2.4d has only two marks, but the placement of the first mark makes it easier to interpret as an apostrophe.

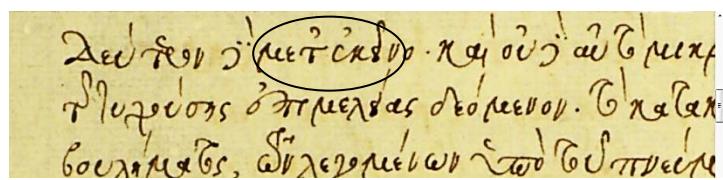


Figure 2.4d. Basil of Caesaria, 16th century.

Such analysis can only be made where the text is clear enough to interpret the marks, letters and word boundaries. This is often not the case and therefore there has been no statistical analysis of the rate of usage in the manuscripts, since the results would not be accurate. Nevertheless, there are a number of interesting observations to be made of the features and patterns found in the manuscripts.

If the apostrophe was used with greater regularity than other diacritics in the Bacchylides papyrus, this is not the case with later scribes, most of whom employed breathing marks and accents systematically, while apostrophe use is infrequent and inconsistent. It appears in manuscripts throughout the period nevertheless, and contrary to Threatte's claim that diacritics never appear in capital scripts (1996, p. 278), we saw in the Bacchylides papyrus, and in figure 2.5, below, that they do. There were no apostrophes identified in the ninth-century capital script in figure 2.3a above, however figure 2.5 highlights one of a number of apostrophes in this 10th century manuscript. Other markings have been added later, but the apostrophe seems to be part of the original text. Although it is misplaced, it appears above a consonant and not a vowel, therefore it cannot be a breathing mark or accent.



Figure 2.5. Evangelia Matthei, Marci, Lucae et Ioannis, 10th century.

The most notable feature of apostrophe use in the Greek manuscripts between the ninth and 16th centuries is its consistent inconsistency. In each century, there are manuscripts in which no apostrophes have been found, and others in which apostrophes occur almost regularly. In between are manuscripts that have occasional apostrophes and others in which there are possible, but no definite apostrophes in the pages examined. As a conservative estimate, almost two-thirds of the 39 manuscripts I examined from the Bavarian State Library website had at least some apostrophes, although in some cases these were difficult to find. Apostrophes were abundant in only a very small number of manuscripts spread

throughout the period, with a page from a 14th century manuscript displaying ten apostrophes being a rare example. As late as the 16th century, half the manuscripts I examined had no identifiable apostrophes, while the others, particularly from the latter part of the century have used them almost regularly.

While the frequency of use is erratic, the environments in which they are found are more regular. Apostrophes occur nearly always with the function words *αλλα* ‘but’, *μετα* ‘with’, *παρα* ‘to’, *επι* ‘on’ and in a small number manuscripts with *τ'* or *δ'* (for *τὰ*, *τὸ*, *τέ* and *δέ*), although there are occasional exceptions to this. The same manuscripts that feature apostrophes generally also have examples in which these words have been elided but are not marked by apostrophes; hence apostrophe use is not just inconsistent across manuscripts, but also within each individual manuscript. In figure 2.6 below, for example, the elision in *αλλα* is marked with an apostrophe, whereas *παρα* in the next line is elided, but there is no apostrophe.

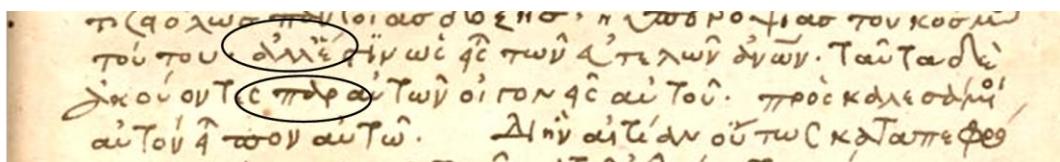


Figure 2.6. Ioannis Chrysostomi, 15th century.

The inconsistent use of apostrophes within most of the manuscripts is a salient feature of apostrophe use in Greek from the ninth to the 16th centuries. It would take another major development in written language to affect the regularity of the apostrophe use.

2.2.3 The advent of print and the post-medieval Greek apostrophe

The printing press was invented in Germany in the mid-15th century and its use spread quickly throughout Europe. It was some time, however, before the first books were printed in Greek because the delicate characters and diacritics were difficult to accommodate in typefaces (Febvre & Martin, 1958; Reynolds & Wilson, 1974). Towards the end of the 15th century, however, the new typefaces developed by Italian printer Aldus Manutius meant

that “during his twenty years of business he had almost a monopoly of preparing Greek texts” (Reynolds & Wilson, 1974, p. 139). Figure 2.7, below, is a section from a page of Aristotle’s works printed in 1495. It demonstrates the delicacy of Manutius’s type face which accommodated apostrophes, paving the way for a more consistent use of apostrophes than was seen in the medieval manuscripts.

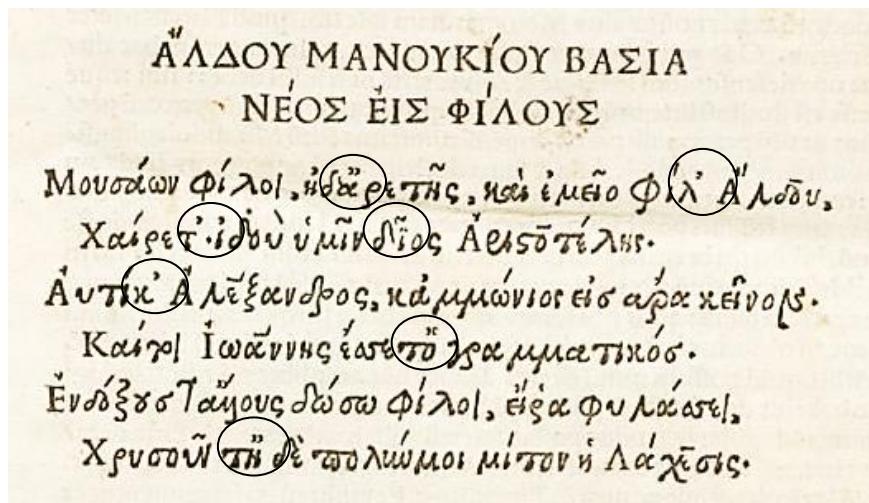


Figure 2.7. Aristotle’s Praeicamenta, 1495.

The main function of the apostrophe in Greek today remains the marking of elision. An examination of modern short stories (American Library Association, 2018) shows that the apostrophe is used with more consistency. Holton, Mackridge and Philippaki-Warburton (1997) observe that elision is “never obligatory” in either the spoken or written language, and my findings in these short stories were that apostrophes are used with moderate frequency and that elision is usually, but not always, marked in writing. The type of words that were affected by elision in the medieval Greek manuscripts such as κατὰ, αλλα and παρα, are rare in these texts, and when they occur they are unelided. Instead, elision most commonly affects single-syllabic function words, as in these examples:

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. τα ‘the’: τ’ ἀγια | 2. με ‘with’: μ’ αετούς |
| [t’ agia] | [m’ aetous] |
| ‘the holy one’ | ‘with eagles’ |

(Aggelou, 2009)

According to Buck (1933) and Palmer (1995), the apostrophe also marks aphaeresis⁷ in Greek. While I identified no instances of this in the medieval Greek manuscripts, it was not uncommon in the modern Greek texts as these examples show.

3. τα εχουν ~ τα 'χουν
ta echoun ~ ta 'choun
'they have'

4. ποι εστειλε ~ πο' 'στειλε
poi esteile ~ po' 'steile
what PAST send
'what he sent'

(Aggelou, 2009)

Example 4 is interesting because it illustrates both elision and aphaeresis. Elision alone would still leave a hiatus, as in *πο' εστειλε*, hence the following initial vowel undergoes aphaeresis leaving just one vowel pronounced between the words. There is clearly an order in the application of the two processes, since if aphaeresis occurred first the remaining hiatus would be within the word *ποι* which would not undergo any further deletion. A unique convention of Modern Greek orthography can be seen in these examples, whereby a space is always retained between the two words (Haralambous, 2002), thus preventing any confusion with breathing marks.

The examination of the modern Greek texts has highlighted that apostrophe use in Greek has become standardised, and although elision is not mandatory, the use of the apostrophe and the environments in which it occurs is similar across all the modern texts examined. Moreover, the main function of the apostrophe in Greek – that of elision – has not changed since it first emerged over 2,000 years ago.

2.3 The Latin apostrophus

The next language in the chain of transmission is Latin, and during the Roman and Byzantine Empires (between 146 B.C. and 1453) there was widespread borrowing between Greek and Latin. Bilingualism was not uncommon among educated Romans and Greeks (Horrocks, 2010) and was often evident in the form of alphabet switching, whereby the words of one language were written using the characters of the other (Adams, 2003). Moreover, Greek

⁷ A process similar to elision in which it is the initial short vowel of the second word that is omitted.

culture was highly regarded by the Romans and the impact of the Greek language on Latin was much greater than the reverse (Horrocks, 2010; Palmer, 1954). This created an ideal environment for the apostrophe to cross from Greek into Latin.

However, there is conflicting evidence from other researchers as to when, how and even whether the apostrophe was used in Latin. Piton & Pignot (2010), for example, claim that the apostrophe was “used in Greek but absent from classical Latin except in poetry” and André (2008) suggests that the apostrophe was used in classical Latin but “disappeared” to reappear later in popular Latin. Two dictionaries place the apostrophe in Late Latin (200-550 C.E.), (Harper, n.d.; Merriam-Webster, 2013), while Rodríguez Álvarez (1996) maintains the apostrophe was used in 15th century Latin in England to mark missing inflectional endings.

Other authors make no mention of apostrophe use in Latin and it is not listed in some dictionaries at all, Entick (1783) and Niermeyer’s *Medieval Latin lexicon* (1976), for example. Most notable in his failure to mention the apostrophe in Latin is Levin (1984), who was such a valuable source of information about the apostrophe in Greek as well as its introduction into Italian and French. In fact, he states that “no diacritics were familiar to the readers of Latin and the newer Occidental languages, except German, until the great revival of Greek studies that began in Italy in the 14th century” (p. 23). This seems to indicate that the apostrophe was not a feature of Latin at all, at least until relatively recent times, with Hammond’s only mention being that the apostrophe is found in “modern texts” (1976, p. 218) where it marks aphaeresis in examples such as *crēditum’st* (*crēditum est*) ‘it is believed’ and *memoriā’s optuma* (*memoriā est optuma*) ‘you are of an excellent memory’ (p. 218). In the 18th century, English grammarian John Smith explains that:

The Apostrophe was of singular service [in Latin legal documents] to puzzle the Civil Reader; but convenient to the Compositor, because by means of our mark of Abbreviation he was at liberty to shorten and to lengthen all such words as would admit of either (1755, p. 108).

Yet in Lewis and Short’s Latin to English dictionary (1891) they include both the Latin and Greek spellings of *apostrophe* which they define as “a mark of elision” (p. 139). Given the huge variation in the accounts of apostrophe use in Latin, some of which are no more than a sentence or two, it is difficult to piece together an accurate picture.

2.3.1 The pre-medieval Latin apostrophe

In ancient Roman times, the Latin word *apostrophus* was used in the numerical system. According to the Collins English Dictionary (2012) and Handy (1997), it referred to a symbol resembling a reversed letter *C* which, along with a letter *I*, represented the numeral 500, as in *IC* (now written as *D*). This was derived from the symbol *CIO* which came from the Greek letter phi Φ , representing 1,000. While the word is of Greek origin and the shape of the symbol resembles the curve of the Greek apostrophe, the referent is very different from Greek's mark of elision.

I found no examples in the medieval Latin manuscripts that I examined on the BSL and UCLA websites of the apostrophe being used to mark elision in Latin, although according to other researchers there is evidence that elision occurred in spoken Latin as it did in Greek. Buck (1933) for example, notes that "elision was doubtless common in actual speech" but it was not marked in writing (p. 160). And according to Sturtevant (1916), elision occurred frequently in everyday speech, being most common in comedic poetry. He does not mention whether elision was indicated in writing, but his argument for the existence of elision in Latin would seem unnecessary if elision were marked.

Norberg (2004) explains that in Late Latin and on into the Middle Ages, poets and hymn writers often avoided hiatus environments, sometimes at considerable inconvenience to the poet. He found "that elision and hiatus were generally avoided but that these two phenomena could nevertheless occur" (p. 27). This is illustrated by the lines below, which are from a sixth and an 11th century hymn respectively. Without elision or aphaeresis occurring in the underlined segments, the dots indicate that each line has nine syllables, where the tetrameter lines require eight.

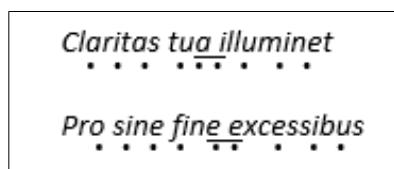


Figure 2.8. Sixth and 11th century hymns (Norberg, 2004, pp. 27-28).

Perhaps we can conclude that while elision as a phonological process did occur in Latin, there is no evidence that it was reflected in the orthography by use of an apostrophe.

There is some indication, however, that the apostrophe was used to mark another form of phonological omission in Late Latin. Evidence of this is found in *Champ Fleury*, a printers' manual written in French by Geoffroy Tory (1529/1970). Under Tory's discussion of the printed form of the letter <s> he observes that in Latin verse the sound [s] is sometimes omitted, and this is marked in writing with "ung point Crochu" ('a hooked point', a French term used to describe both apostrophes and breathing marks, but always translated in the English version by translator George Ives as *apostrophe* [Tory, 1529/1967]). Tory illustrates the *point crochu* with a quotation from Priscian, who lived around 500 C.E., who explains that the *apostrophi* is used to mark the loss of [s] before the conjunction *ne*, so that *videsne* 'do you see?', *satisne* 'sufficiently' and *visne*, 'do you want to?' become *Viden*', *Satin*' and *Vin*' (p. LVIv). Priscian's mention of the apostrophe in Latin in the sixth century is compelling evidence that the apostrophe existed at this time and was used to mark a form of phonological omission, albeit a different form from that of the Greek apostrophe of elision.

2.3.2 The Latin 'apostrophe' of the Middle Ages

By the eighth century Latin was no longer used as an everyday spoken language, having branched into languages such as French, Italian, Spanish and Rumanian (Fairburn, 2011). However, its influence continued to be felt across much of Europe and Britain for many centuries, as Latin remained the language of writing, even though it was now written by speakers of other languages, including English. I found no evidence of an apostrophe marking elision, or the omitted [s] of Priscian's description in the medieval Latin manuscripts I examined. There were apostrophe-like marks, though, that did not represent phonology. As discussed with reference to Greek, the ninth century saw papyrus give way to the more available, but expensive, parchment, which precipitated the need to economise. In Latin, this economy was achieved through the development of a system of abbreviations in which symbols replaced particular segments of words. This became widespread over the medieval period "becoming especially dense and complex in scholastic and legal manuscripts of the

13th to 15th centuries, but less common in texts intended to be read aloud" (Clemens & Graham, 2007, p. 89). Parisse (2002) observes that up to 50% of the words in a text could be abbreviated in some manuscripts, saving money but, as Cappelli (1982) notes, at considerable cost to readability.

The symbols used included a macron-like mark, which could be curved as well as straight, used as in *dī* for *dicitir* 'it is said' or *noīe* for *nomine* 'name' (Clemens & Graham, 2007, p. 89) and a superscript 9 used to represent *-us*, *-os*, *-is* and *-s* endings as in *pri⁹* for *prius*, 'first' and *i⁹t⁹* for *iustus*, 'just' (Cappelli, 1982). Neither Cappelli (1982) nor Clemens and Graham (2007) make any mention of the use of apostrophes in their detailed accounts of Latin abbreviation devices, which list and discuss dozens of symbols. Nonetheless, an apostrophe-like sign was used to mark abbreviation and, as it happens, there are several examples in Cappelli's (1982) article which the author ignores. Figure 2.9a, below, is from a list of examples illustrating "...the most common abbreviations of word endings" (p. 6). Yet while Cappelli discusses the role of the macron in marking truncation, he makes no comment on the apostrophe-like sign which clearly also plays this, and other, roles.

...l̄, .l̄ = ...lis, ...bilis; epal̄ = episcopalis, ḡutil̄ = convertibilis etc.
 ...m̄ = ...men, ...mum; cr̄im̄ = crimen, f̄m̄ = firmum etc.
 ...ū = ...vit, ...um; c'ad̄ = creavit, h̄ab̄ū = habendum etc.

Figure 2.9a. Cappelli, 1982, p. 7.

The same point is exemplified in figure 2.9b, below, where the ampersand and macron are discussed, yet the apostrophe in the middle warrants no comment at all.

&t̄nū = aeternum.

Figure 2.9b. Cappelli, 1982, p. 18.

The inclusion of the apostrophe sign in Cappelli's examples places it within the Latin abbreviation system nevertheless, although I found no evidence of this mark being called an *apostrophus*.

An analysis of the Latin manuscripts available on the BSL and UCLA websites brings to light many examples from throughout the Middle Ages. Thirty-eight Latin manuscripts were examined. The two available from the seventh century were both in majuscule scripts with a small scattering of abbreviations, but no apostrophes. By the eighth century, however, apostrophe-like marks are emerging, although they are not common, appearing in only three of the fifteen Latin manuscripts from the eighth and ninth centuries on the UCLA website. Frequency increases from the 10th century.

Some examples of use can be seen in the images below.

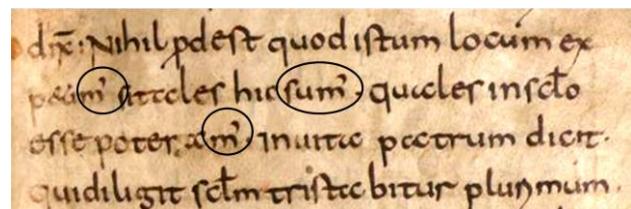


Figure 2.10a. *Liber scintillarum*, 8th century.

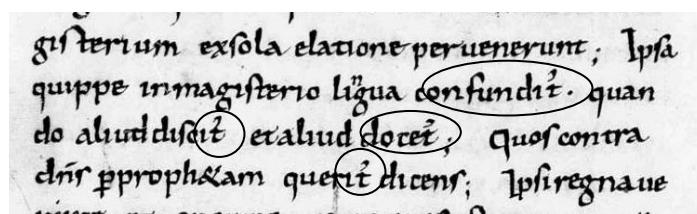


Figure 2.10b. *Sancti Gregorii liber pastoralis*, 10th century.

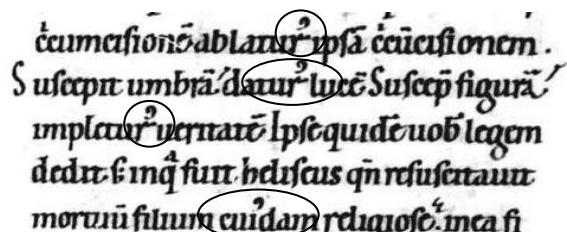


Figure 2.10c. *Homiliensammlung*, 12th century.

There seems to be a common pattern in that they are mostly in word-final position and stand to represent a limited set of letters. As can be seen in the examples below, the apostrophe symbol represents a final *-is* or *-us*, or in the case of the last example a medial *-us-*.

Figure 2.10a. *sum'* *sumis* 'assume'

Figure 2.10b. *confidit'* *confunditis* 'support'
docet' *docetus* 'teach'

Figure 2.10c. *daiur'* *daiuris* 'given unto'
cui'dan *cuiusdan* 'certain'

Manuscripts from the 14th and 15th centuries indicate that frugal use of parchment must have been at its zenith, since writing was often small, cramped and covered with accents, marks and squiggles indicating abbreviation, not to mention decorative flourishes on letters. In the 15th century manuscript in figure 2.11 below, there appear to be a number of apostrophe-like marks. They occur in many different environments, final as well as medial and while it is unclear what they represent, the apostrophe seems to have become a more general marker of abbreviation.

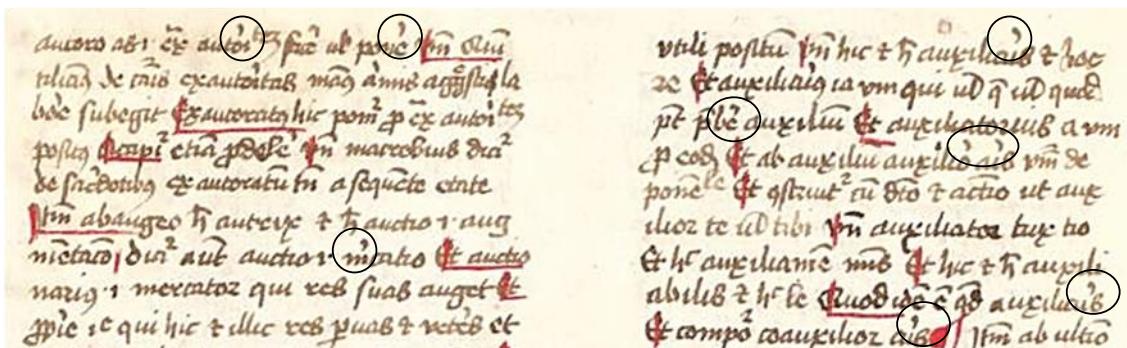


Figure 2.11. Huguacionis Lexicon cum ampio 'registro', 15th century⁸.

During the latter part of the 15th century print had made its debut. Latin was the language of choice for printers and, as mentioned in 2.3.2, remained the dominant language used in print for some time. The text of the Gutenberg bible (Gutenberg Digital, 1999-2017), which was the first book to be printed, includes many instances of the superscript 9 and other

⁸ The red marking on these pages appear to be later additions, possibly made by a reader.

abbreviation marks, but no apostrophes on the 18 pages I examined. The three pages of a commentary of the *Epistles of Paul to the Romans* printed in Nuremberg in 1497, on the other hand, display many examples of both marks. The superscript 9 continues to represent the same endings, although it is difficult to identify what the apostrophe marks represent. In the following examples, a pattern is clear in the number of apostrophes that follow *I*, yet I have been unable to establish what missing segments they represent.

apl's apl'us Bal' fil'e fil'es ronabil'r sil'r b' fbd'it fbit.

This function of an apostrophe-like mark in Latin shows a significant departure from its use in Greek, where the *apostrophos* was, and still is, used systematically for elision. The lack of apostrophes in the earliest manuscripts examined could suggest a chronological gap between Priscian's apostrophe marking the omission of [s] and the apostrophe-like mark of abbreviation, which lends support to Andre's (2008) claim, noted in 2.3, that the apostrophe disappeared then reappeared in Latin.

On the other hand, it is possible that Priscian's apostrophe is an evolutionary link between an earlier use marking elision in Latin and the later mark of abbreviation. Given that Priscian's two examples of apostrophes in Late Latin come from two different volumes of Virgil's *Aeneid*, the lack of evidence in early manuscripts may be explained by rarity of use rather than the complete disappearance of the apostrophe. Furthermore, Priscian's apostrophe affects the sound [s] in words like *Viden'* for *videsne* 'do you see?' (see 2.3.1) while in early manuscripts the Latin mark of abbreviation affected segments with <s> in the orthography, as in *docet'* for *docetus* 'teach' (see figures 2.10a-c), which gives some credence to this suggestion.

Nonetheless, during the Middle Ages the Latin apostrophe did not represent phonology, and thus was not a diacritic, which explains Levin's (1984) failure to include the Latin apostrophe in his article, the topic of which was *diacritics*. This is further supported by the fact that no evidence that any form of the word *apostrophe* was used to refer to the Latin mark of abbreviation during the Middle Ages has been found. The Latin form *apostrophus* seems to be confined to the ancient numerical ɔ (see 2.3.1) and to later speakers of other languages

such as Tory (1529/1970), who quotes Priscian as using the term *apostropho* in the sixth century, but translates it into French as *apostrophus* (p. LVIv).

2.4 The Italian apostrophe

It was Italian that next borrowed the apostrophe – but directly from Greek, not Latin. The earliest evidence is in Francesco Petrarca's *Le cose volgari di messer Francesco Petrarcha* (Levin, 1984; Piton and Pignot, 2010) printed in 1501 by Aldus Manutius. As can be seen in the opening paragraph in figure 2.12 below, this volume contains the frequent and regular use of the apostrophe, which marks both elision and aphaeresis, as the examples show.

ch'ascoltate	~	chi ascoltate
Di quei sospiri, ond'io nudriua il core		'the ones who listen'
In ful mio primo giovenile errore,		
Quand'era in parte alt'huom da quel ch'i fono;		
Del uario stile, in ch'io piano etragono		
Fra le uane speranze e'l uan dolore;		
Oue sia, chi per proua intenda amore,		
Spero trouar pietà, non che perdono.		
Ma ben ueggi'hor, si come al popol tutto		
Fauola fui gran tempo: onde souente		
Di me medesmo meo mi uergogno:		
E del mio uaneggiar uergogna e'l frutto,		
E'l pentirsi, e'l conoscer chiaramente		
Che quanto piace al mondo è breue sogno.		
e'l	~	e il
ch'i	~	che io
		'(it) is the' 'that I'.

Figure 2.12. Petrarcha, 1501.

Elision was also a feature of spoken Italian, but in writing it was previously either unmarked or contracted into one word; *di amore* 'of love', for instance, was often simply written as *d amore* (Levin, 1984, p. 29). It is not surprising that Manutius would see the benefit of identifying the <d> as a separate morpheme with the mark he had been using for this purpose in his Greek printing.

An examination of the 15 pre-18th-century Italian manuscripts available through the UCLA and BSL websites, however, brings to light not only examples of Italian apostrophes marking elision, but also, in the earlier manuscripts, of an apostrophe-like mark used for abbreviation. Where these marks appear, they perform a very narrow function in which they represent -e or -i in words such as *ch'* for *che* 'that' or *chi* 'who', or in longer words such as *qualunch'* and *bench'* for *qualunche* 'anything' and *benche* 'although'. As can be seen in the examples below (figures 2.13a and 2.13b) these are not always in pre-vocalic position and therefore indicate the Latin function of abbreviation, rather than elision.

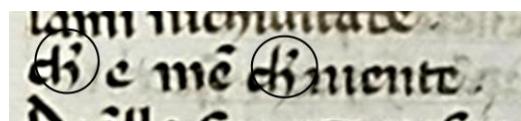


Figure 2.13a. Laudario Mortara, 14th century.



Figure 2.13b. Deiphira, 15th century.

This function is not common in the manuscripts, with only two of the nine texts from the 14th and 15th centuries having such identifiable marks. Interestingly, in an example from Deiphira in the 15th century (figure 2.13c, below), the apostrophe is used as illustrated in the first line up to this point, after which a new symbol, crossing the ascender of the *h*, is introduced and the apostrophe-like mark disappears.

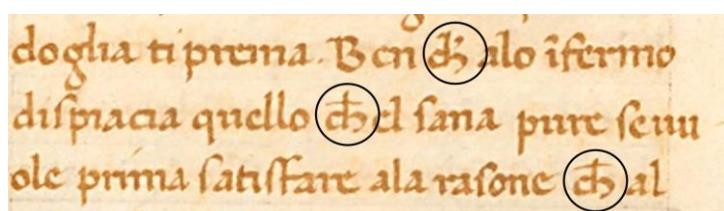
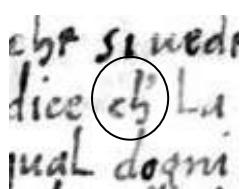


Figure 2.13c. Deiphira, 15th century.

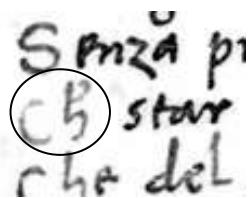
The remaining Italian manuscripts from the 14th and 15th centuries have no apostrophe-like marks on the pages examined and although some have a number of other abbreviation marks, this is not on the scale of abbreviation found in Latin. The use of the apostrophe

mark in this capacity falls off dramatically in the 16th century Italian manuscripts, while the apostrophe as a marker of elision increases, demonstrating the rapid introduction of the Greek-like apostrophe.

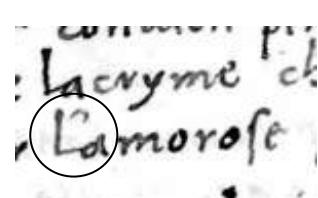
One 16th-century Italian manuscript is particularly interesting because it exhibits the transition from the Latin-type apostrophe to the Greek-type apostrophe. In *The Rhymes of Jacopo Sannazaro and others*, the first four pages (approximately 600 words) have 19 instances of *ch'* and *-ch'*, as can be seen in figures 2.14a and 2.14b, below.



*che si uedi
dice ch' La
qual dogni*



*Spnza p1
ch star
che del*



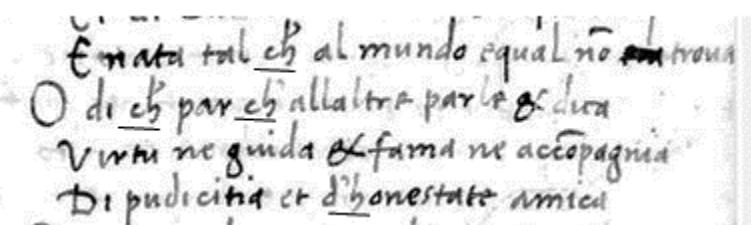
*Lacryme ch
Lamoroſe*

Figure 2.14a. p. 2r.

Figure 2.14b. p. 2r.

Figure 2.14c. p. 3v.

These marks bear a closer resemblance to an apostrophe than the apostrophe marking elision in example 2.14c. Here the apostrophe marks the elision in *l'amoroſe* for *le amorose* ‘the lovers’ and this is the first instance of the apostrophe marking elision in the manuscript, appearing on the fourth page of text. On the previous pages the few examples of hiatus are written in full, as in *de amorosi* ‘of lovers’ on the first page. Over the following few pages the incidence of elision increases and the two marks occur side-by-side through the central section of the book. From page 25v the shape of the abbreviation mark becomes squarer with the tail reaching and crossing the ascender of the *h*. This distinguishes between the two marks, as can be seen in figure 2.14d below, where the first two marks are Latin-type apostrophes while the second two mark elision.



*Enata tal ch al mundo equal nō entras
O di ch parch' all'altra par le g'dica
Virtu ne guida & fama ne accompagna
Di pudicizia et d'honestate amica*

Figure 2.14d. p. 69r.

By page 82r apostrophes are used exclusively to reflect elision. All instances of *ch'* are prevocalic, while elsewhere *chi* and *che* are written in full. During the period of writing the apostrophe has become a mark of elision, reflecting modern usage in Italian.

2.5 The French apostrophe

At the same time that the apostrophe was becoming popularised in Italian “Italian culture was being enthusiastically imitated in France” (Rickard, 1974, p. 87). It was the Italians who brought printing to France in 1470 (Febvre & Martin, 1958), and it was Italy that taught the French printers the intricacies of their trade (Rickard, 1974). At the same time, the French developed a wide appreciation of Greek classics and began translating them into French (Richard, 1974; Sandy 2002). It can be surmised, then, that French scholars would also have been aware of the Greek apostrophe and its function, as well as of its popularity with Italian writers.

2.5.1 French manuscripts

As in Italian, there is also evidence of the Latin-type apostrophe in the French medieval manuscripts examined and it is possible that the Latin mark of abbreviation was always part of the written French vernacular. The Strasbourg Oaths, written in 842, is a document that is believed to be the first text written in a Romance language, namely, Old French (Rickard 1974), although the earliest extant text was written at the end of the 10th century. Figure 2.15, below, shows an excerpt from this version, alongside an edited French version and an English translation.

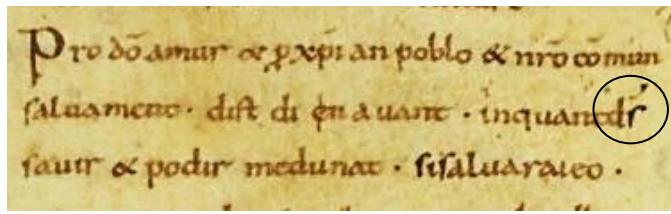


Figure 2.15. Strasbourg Oaths, 10th century.

Transcription: *Pro Deo amur et pro christian p̄bilo et nostro commun
salvament, d'ist di in avant, in quant Deus
savir et podir me dunat, si saluarai eo...* (Ayers-Bennett, 1996, p. 16)

Translation: *'For the love of God and the protection of the Christian people and our common salvation, from this day forward, in as much as God gives me the wisdom and power, I shall help this ...'* (Ayers-Bennett, 1996, p. 18)

As can be seen in the excerpt, there is no apostrophe marking the elision in *dist* where one appears in the modern version. There is, however, a mark that looks very much like an apostrophe at the end of the second line, which does not mark elision but appears to represent missing letters. The letters are unclear but it is transcribed as the word *Deus* ('God'). During the Middle Ages, it was a common practice to abbreviate the name of God due to "the belief that the name of God was ultimately inexpressible" (Clemens & Graham, 2007, p. 89) and it is therefore possible that this is the purpose of the mark. It conforms with the Latin pattern of abbreviation, and a number of macrons marking abbreviation can also be seen. It would seem natural that these conventions hitherto used by French scribes writing in Latin would also find their way into the vernacular language.

Other early French manuscripts examined have used the Latin-type mark to indicate abbreviation as a space saving tool. It represents different missing segments, as in *ap's* for *après*; *resp'od'* for *responder*; and *pio't* for *point*, and was used alongside a small number of other marks of abbreviation that were also found in Latin. Elision is either not marked at all, or it is represented in the orthography without the use of apostrophes and these options are usually applied inconsistently. I found no instances of apostrophes marking elision.

2.5.2 The emergence of the modern French apostrophe

The emergence of the Greek-type apostrophe in French is less clear cut than is the case with Italian. Almost all authors agree that it was introduced after the advent of the printing press, but they disagree as to when and by whom it was introduced. The earliest reference to apostrophe use is in two French dictionaries (Imbs, 1992; Rey, 1992), which give the year 1514 as its first occurrence, the former supporting the claim with a name, Guillaume Michel, and a reference to the work in which it supposedly first appeared: *Les églogues de Virgile*. However, there is no mention of this in any of the literature. Guillaume Michel worked as a translator between 1516 and 1542, translating Latin classics, and Latin versions of Greek classics, into French (Worth-Stylianou, 2002). It is not inconceivable that he translated Virgil two years earlier, but there is no evidence of the existence of a 1514 edition on the internet, so this cannot be verified. Nor can the use and function of the apostrophe be ascertained. However, an edition entitled *Les Bucoliques de Virgille Maron* printed by Michel two years later in 1516 has a number of superscript 9s, but no apostrophes in spite of there being several examples of elision marked in the spelling, as in *dune* ‘of a’, *larticle* ‘the article’ and *laternite*, ‘the eternity’.

Many authors, including Catach (2002), Febvre and Martin (1958), Parkes (1993) and Piton and Pignot, (2010), credit Geoffroy Tory with introducing, or at least recommending, the use of the apostrophe to mark elision in French in his book *Champ Fleury*, published in 1529. Tory lived in Italy for many years (Febvre & Martin, 1958) and was likely to have encountered the apostrophe since its use was, by then, widespread in Italian. However, the only mention of the apostrophe in his book is in relation to Late Latin, as is discussed in 2.3.1. In relation to French, he observes that “Les Dames de Paris” (p. LVIIr) sometimes omit [s] in spoken French, but he uses no apostrophes in his examples and does not suggest their use. The only other mention of *ung point Crochu* is with reference to breathing marks in Greek. He uses no apostrophes in the French text, with elision being marked in the spelling without apostrophes as in *cest*, *l'homme* and *dune* for *c'est* ‘it is’, *l'homme* ‘the man’ and *d'une* ‘of a’. There are many examples of the superscript 9, though, which could be mistaken by some for apostrophes, although these were well established in French texts at the time.

There are also no apostrophes in what is believed to be the first French grammar written a year later, in 1530. Notwithstanding the title, *Leclaircissement de la langue française* was written in English by John Palsgrave for English learners of French. In it he describes the French convention of elision, providing many examples including that in his title. He also comments on the problems elision creates for learners of French, who may attempt to find words like *Jaime* ‘I love’ or *mhabite* ‘I live’ in vocabularies.

The apostrophe was introduced into French in a book by Jacques Dubois published a year later in 1531 (Rickard, 1974). This French grammar is written in Latin but, significantly, no apostrophe-like marks appear in the Latin, although they are used frequently and systematically in the French examples. Moreover, the apostrophes are used to mark elision, as these examples show:

<i>d'or</i>	‘of gold’	<i>d'argét</i>	‘of money’
<i>l'homé</i>	‘man’	<i>ch'est</i>	‘it is’

The apostrophe is sometimes replaced by, or used in conjunction with, a hyphen as in:

<i>ch'-est</i>	‘it is’	<i>g'-hai</i>	‘I hate’
----------------	---------	---------------	----------

These apostrophes were all added later by hand, since as André (2008) observes, the first font to include apostrophes in France was not developed until 1533. However, Dubois has left spaces for these additions, and he explains the use of the “Apostrophon enim Græcorum”, or the ‘apostrophe of the Greeks’, as a marker of elision in French (p. 55). It seems reasonable to assume, then, that the French apostrophe came directly from Greek, rather than Latin or Italian, although Italian is likely to have influenced its enthusiastic uptake by the French.

2.5.3 The impact of print

By the time Dubois was writing his grammar book in 1531, printing was well established in France. The newly invented paper was much less expensive than parchment, which meant that conservation was no longer a priority for scribes and printers. In addition, once printing

was established the accommodation of complex systems of abbreviation in type-faces would have been more inconvenient for compositors.

By 1530 the reliance on Latin as a written medium was dwindling (Febvre & Martin, 1958) and attention was turned to French, with printers beginning to focus on ways to improve their language. Clearly the use of the apostrophe to mark elision was seen as such an improvement and once introduced into French, the apostrophe spread rapidly and, indeed, its use became obligatory in some environments such as those involving *le* or *la*, *me* and *te* (André, 2008; Garrappa, 2012; Piton & Pignot, 2010).

Table 2.2, below, presents the findings from an examination of texts written around the time the apostrophe was introduced in French, and it demonstrates the transition between the Latin-type apostrophe and the uptake of the Greek-type apostrophe.

Table 2.2. Symbols use in early printed French books <i>Gordon Collection (per approximately 1,000 words)</i>								
Text:		' of elision	accents	€	Abbreviation marks:			
					,	-	9	other
1516	de Vermandois					99	4	7
1529	de Bourdigné				1	21	1	3
1529	Verney				1	137	1	1
1532	Alexis					15	2	2
1532	Boccacio					156	9	7
1533	Marot					90	9	15
1534	Marot	75	14			10	2	
1534	Theseus					44	4	2
1534	Alberti	93	16			57	11	13
1539	Petrarca	54	41			29		
1540	Aretin	45	52			6		
1540	de La Perrière	62	41	16		53		

The most frequently used mark up until 1533 is the macron. While the use of other marks of abbreviation had dropped dramatically since the Middle Ages, the macron remained popular. Use of the abbreviation apostrophe however, is rare, with just three appearing in the 4,500 words examined in the Bourdigné text and two in the 1,435 words in Verney.

While at this time there may have been some overlap in French of the use of the two types of apostrophes as we saw in Italian, there is no evidence of it here and we can conclude that this, if it occurred, would be minimal. Also notable in the table is the coincidence of the use of accents emerging only where apostrophes also occur. The final interesting point is the appearance of the *barred e* in one text only. According to Rickard (1968), grammarian Montflory advocated the use of apostrophes to mark the elision of a final vowel in monosyllabic words, but where the first word consisted of more than one syllable he recommended the use of an “*e barré*” or ‘barred e’ instead of an apostrophe. While few printers followed this practice, these symbols appear in the La Perrière text and also in a Marot text from 1543, as can be seen in figure 2.16 below.

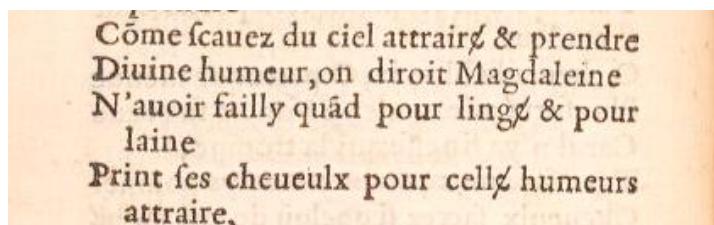


Figure 2.16. Marot, 1543, p. 21.

Unlike monosyllabic words, where elision created a bound morpheme that attached to the following word, multisyllabic words remained free morphemes, which may explain their different treatment. The fact that the apostrophe was not used to mark elision where the morphemes remain free may lend support to Bunčić’s (2004) argument that apostrophes were viewed as morpheme boundary markers (see 3.3.4). The barred *e* was short-lived, however, because over the middle of the 16th century, the phonological final *e* in these words was lost (Rickard, 1974) and the barred *e* became obsolete.

The two Marot texts in table 2.2 illustrate clearly the contrast between the pre- and post-apostrophe texts which occurred within the space of one year. In 1533, *Ladolescence*

Clémentine has no apostrophes marking elision, although there are a number of abbreviation marks. A year later, however, an updated version of the text *L'adolescence Clémentine*, makes consistent use of apostrophes marking elision from the title onwards, and accents are also beginning to appear. There are few abbreviation marks and although two superscript 9s occur, interestingly in different places from those in the earlier text, they are rare in the text overall. The following two corresponding excerpts show these changes clearly.

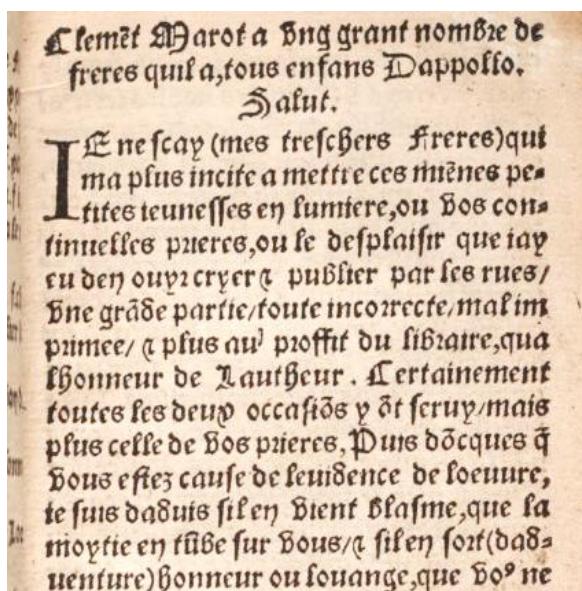


Figure 2.17a. Marot, 1533, p. iiir.

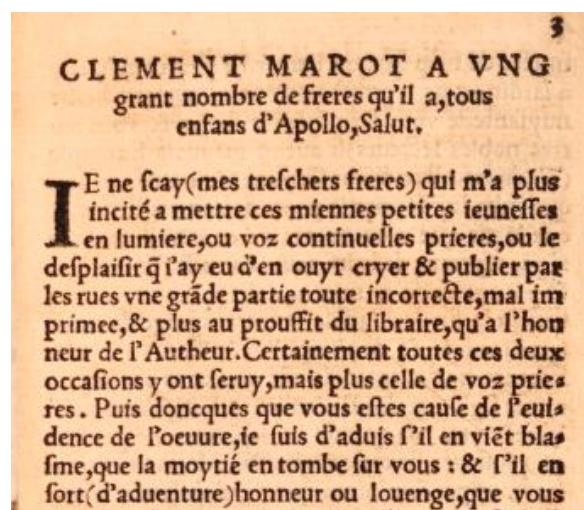


Figure 2.17b. Marot, 1534, p. 3.

Unfortunately, there are no late 16th century manuscripts available online to examine, although those from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries indicate that the apostrophe was well-established by then in both hand-written texts and print. The data in table 2.2 above indicate the rapid up-take of apostrophe use in French and a simultaneous waning in the use of Latin abbreviation marks. Since then, the function of the apostrophe in French has changed little – it is still used to mark elision between monosyllabic vowel-final words, such as *la, ce, je, que* and *si*, and a word beginning with a vowel or the letter *h*. There is an exception to elision before [h] where historically some words began with a Germanic aspirated [h]. As Rickard (1974) explains “Though this Germanic *h* is no longer aspirated, it to this day prevents the elision of a preceding vowel, or liaison with a preceding

consonant..." (p. 12), and so we have *l'homme* 'the man' and *les homme* /leɪzom/ 'the men', but *le hazard* 'the chance' and *Les Halle* /leɪ al/ 'the halls' (Helium, 2012).

As in Greek and Italian, the French apostrophe marks elision. But given the functions of the apostrophe in English today, at first glance it seemed unlikely that the English apostrophe followed this line of succession.

2.6 The apostrophe's arrival in English

2.6.1 The Latin apostrophus?

Today in English the apostrophe is used to mark contraction, omission, possession and abbreviation, although dictionary definitions define it first as a mark of omission (Collins, 2012; Merriam-Webster, 2013; OED, 2017). It may seem natural to believe therefore, as Little (1986) does, that the English apostrophe came from post-medieval Latin where it also marked missing elements in a word, especially considering that written Latin continued to be used in England much longer than in Europe. An investigation of manuscripts, early printed texts and the literature, however, suggests this is not the case.

The use of Latin in writing persisted into the 18th century in Britain, which was considerably longer than in the rest of Europe. Like Latin texts elsewhere, those in England contained many symbols of abbreviation, including an apostrophe-like mark, which denoted a number of missing segments, as the example in figure 2.18 below shows. Here, as in the Strasbourg Oaths (see figure 2.15), the apostrophe has been used to abbreviate the word *deus* 'God' where it represents the missing *eu*, but it also represents *un* in *sunt* 'are' and *uo* in *quod* 'that'. Notably, apostrophes are not the only marks of abbreviation employed in this short excerpt; a number of other marks including macrons, tildes and superscript 9s affect 26 of the 49 words.

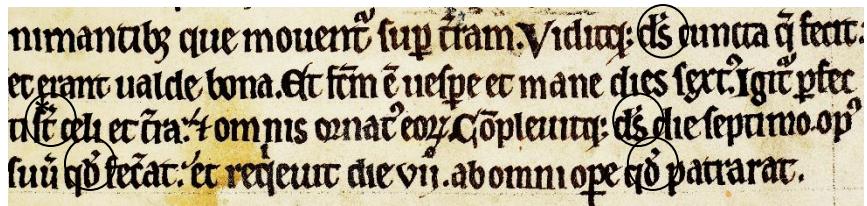


Figure 2.18. The Aberdeen bestiary (Genesis, 1:26-28, 31; 2:1-2), c1200.

Transcription:

...nimantibus que moventur super terram. Vidiisque deus cuncta que fecit,
et erant valde bona. Et factum est vespero et mane dies sextus. Igitur perfec
ti sunt celi et terra, et omnis ornatus eorum. Complevitque deus septimo opus
suum quod fecerat, et requieuit die septimo, ab omni opere quod patraret.

Once Latin texts began to be produced in print, however, there was a marked reduction in the range and frequency of abbreviation marks used, particularly over the 16th century. In six early 16th century Latin texts of English origin on the EEBO website, macrons dominate on almost every page, usually (but not always) denoting a missing nasal. Other abbreviation marks, however, are few. Small numbers of the superscript 9 occur in all but one of the texts, while only half of the texts feature abbreviation apostrophes, and these are used almost exclusively with *qd'* for *quod*, meaning 'that', although one text also has a number of instances of *apd'*, possibly for *apud* meaning 'with'. Therefore, although its use was not universal, this apostrophe-like mark was an established feature of Latin texts produced in England.

The English manuscripts examined from this period, however, utilised abbreviations more sparingly than seen in Latin and they used a narrower range of symbols. No symbols resembling an apostrophe were found in these English texts. In fact, overall there seems to be little evidence for Little's claim (1986) that the apostrophe crossed from post-medieval Latin into English books.

The first book printed in English was *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye* by Raoul Lefèvre, translated from French and printed by William Caxton in 1473/4. It had very few abbreviations and while the macron appears frequently, there are no apostrophes. In a study of ten randomly selected texts from the first half of the 16th century on the EEBO

website, it was found that the macron was used in only half the texts with other marks from the Latin abbreviation system occurring rarely. Interestingly, among these rare marks are a small number of superscript 9s indicating missing *-us* endings, which occur in three separate texts, but no Latin-type apostrophes. Caxton's printing of *Recuyell* has examples such as *merueillo⁹*, *pſumptuo⁹*, and *perillo⁹* for 'marvelous', 'presumptuous' and 'perillous', and *th⁹* for 'thus' appears in a poem by William Neville from 1530, but again, no abbreviation apostrophes. The only link I have found between the English apostrophe and the Latin mark is grammarian William Mather's insistence on calling it "An *Apostrophus* (commonly, but not rightly called an *Apostrophe*)" in his 1727 instructions on English apostrophe use in *The Young Man's Companion* (p. 35). No apostrophe-like marks indicating abbreviation were found in the pages of any of the English texts I examined up to and including the 16th century, which indicates that if they do occur, they are rare.

2.6.2 The Greek apostrophos?

Most authors point to 1559 as being the year the apostrophe was first introduced into English, in William Cunningham's *The Cosmographical Glasse, Conteinyng the Pleasant Principles of Cosmographie, Geographie, Hydrographie, Or Nauigation* (Andre, 2008; Parkes, 1993 and Piton & Pignot, 2010) and while Crystal (2005) does not mention this book, he gives 1559 as the date from which the apostrophe was used. On the other hand, Bunčić notes that according to Salmon (1999, in Bunčić, 2004) a number of apostrophes appear earlier in John Hart's *The opening of the unreasonable writing of our Inglish toun* of 1551, and indeed there are a number of apostrophes in this text. Danielsson (1955) states that his copy of Hart's book is accurate, and a comparison with the included page from the original supports this. The excerpt below gives some insight into Hart's perspective on the arrival of the apostrophe in English:

Now the tourner (which the Latines cal aversio, and the Grekes Apostrophos) signyfieith the eating and taking away of a voel at the end of a word, by the convenience of the folowing voel beginning another word: as in this sentence, writ th'articles plaine t'understand: for write the articles plaine to understand: another sentence, Christians d'obey th'officers and rulers that b'appointed of God in th'earth: for Christians obey the officers and rulers that be appointed of God in the earth.
(Hart, 1551, p. 153)

First, it is interesting that Hart uses the term *tourner* (elsewhere spelt <turner>) which seems suggestive of the literal Greek meaning of the word *apostrophos* – ‘turning away’. Second, while he discusses the other accents using conditional expressions such as *if*, *should* and *would*, when he explains the use of the *tourner* he uses the simple present, or ‘habitual’ tense in “Now the tourner signyfieh...” which implies that the apostrophe was already a feature of written English at that time. It seems probable, therefore, that the emergence of the apostrophe in English predated Hart’s book of 1551. Most importantly though, the function Hart describes is that of elision. As can be seen in his examples, when the apostrophe first arrived in English it was used to mark the elision of an unstressed vowel in words like *the*, *to*, *do* and *by* before a vowel-initial word, exactly as in Greek, Italian and French.

2.6.2.1 Elision in English

There is some evidence that elision occurred in this environment in spoken English at the time the apostrophe first emerged. Hart’s book contains a small number of examples in which elision was indicated in the spelling by bringing two words together as in *thaccents* for ‘the accents’, *thexample* for ‘the example’ and *thonli* for ‘the only’. In the extract below from a 15th century manuscript of Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* (figure 2.19) there are two examples of elision marked in the orthography: *thexcellent* for ‘the excellent’ and *thempours* ‘the emporer’s’, and one in which elision has not been indicated: *pe ende* ‘the end’.

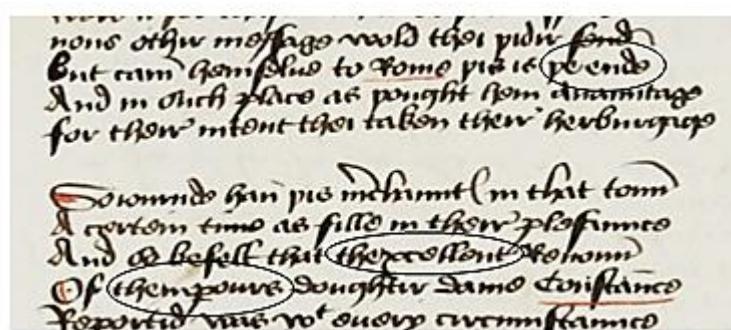


Figure 2.19. Chaucer, 15th century.

In Caxton’s first printed version of *The Canterbury Tales* in 1476, elision is not indicated (Chaucer, 1476), but in Reverend Skeat’s 1900 version elision has been marked without apostrophes. He claimed to have researched a number of manuscripts and printings, and

taken metre into account to inform his transcription. Overall, though, these forms are not frequent. Of the ten pre-1551 texts examined from the EEBO website, there was only one in which elided forms were found. Nevertheless, these few examples are evidence that elision was sometimes represented in written English before the introduction of the apostrophe.

2.6.3 The French apostrophe?

The lack of Latin-type apostrophes in early English texts, along with the evidence that elision was the first function of apostrophes in English, clearly indicate that Latin was not the conduit through which the apostrophe arrived in English. During the 16th century, the English admired French culture in the same way that the French admired the Italians, and French “was zealously cultivated by a cultured minority in England” (Rickard, 1974, p. 83). This ‘cultured minority’ was enthusiastically learning French, which created the demand for books on French grammar (*ibid.*) that motivated Palsgrave (1530) to produce the first French grammar, intended for English speakers rather than the French (see 2.5.2). Moreover, spelling reformers such as Hart took much of their inspiration from the French humanist movement (Suárez, 1996). Hart’s term *tourner* is likely to be French as is the term *apostrophe*. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that the English apostrophe came from Greek via French, but not via Latin.

However, if the English apostrophe was borrowed from French, the path it was to follow differed from that of the French apostrophe in two important respects. First, the apostrophe was not taken up with the same enthusiasm that it was in French, and it would be more than 150 years before its use became widespread. And, unlike the French apostrophe which has maintained the function of elision to the present day, the function of the English apostrophe did not stand still.

2.7 Summary

The apostrophe has been used to mark elision in Greek for over two thousand years, and this chapter has followed the apostrophe along its journey from Greek to English. The

Bacchylides papyrus provides evidence of this early use and Greek manuscripts from throughout the Middle Ages demonstrated the continued, albeit inconsistent, use of the apostrophe to mark elision. In Latin, evidence suggests that the apostrophe was used to indicate phonology in Late Latin, but we cannot say whether this derived from the Greek mark of elision. We do know, however, that the use of this mark diverged markedly from the Greek apostrophe during the Middle Ages, to become part of an elaborate system of abbreviation marks. And while there is evidence of this mark of abbreviation in Italian and French manuscripts, this is not the apostrophe that is found in these languages today. When it emerged in the 16th century, the apostrophe in Italian and French mirrored that of the Greek apostrophe. Moreover, the apostrophe performed the same function when it first arrived in English. Hence the English apostrophe came from Greek via French, with Latin playing no part in its transmission. The apostrophe we know today, however, performs functions other than elision and in the next chapter we consider the pathway the English apostrophe took in developing the functions that are familiar to us today.

CHAPTER 3

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE APOSTROPHE IN ENGLISH

3.1 Introduction

This chapter continues the historical investigation of the apostrophe by following its haphazard pathway to the prescriptive rules that still largely govern its use in English today. It continues the exploration of research question one: *How did the apostrophe develop from its emergence in Greek to the prescriptive rules of apostrophe use in English?*

The chapter begins by exploring the use of apostrophes through a series of diachronic studies covering the two hundred and fifty years following the arrival of the apostrophe in English. These include a comparison of different editions of Shakespeare's LLL, an examination of texts from the EEBO and ECCO websites, as well as handwritten texts. This will indicate the chronological development of the apostrophe, considering factors such as changing functions and consistency, as well as providing data for the discussion of the development of each individual function of the apostrophe that follows.

The remainder of the chapter traces the development of each current function of the apostrophe, before moving on to discuss the social factors that opened the way for the work of the 18th-century grammarians and the eventual fixing of the apostrophe into prescriptive rules.

As in the previous chapter, the discussion will be largely based on the analysis of historical texts. When reproducing examples of early writing I have retained the original spelling, providing transcriptions where necessary. I have, however, changed obsolete letters to modern ones, using <s> and <th> where <j> and <p> appeared in the originals, for example, and <v/u> and <i/j> as modern spelling dictates. I also refer to different periods of English

and table 3.1, below, shows the dates these periods cover and the abbreviations used to denote them.

Table 3.1. Time periods of the English language		
OE	Old English	499 – 1066
ME	Middle English	1066 – 1500
eModE	Early Modern English	1500 – 1650
ModE	Modern English	1500 –

3.2 Diachronic studies of apostrophe use

As we saw in the previous chapter, the apostrophe was in use in English by 1551 as a marker of elision, but English did not seem to welcome the apostrophe with the same enthusiasm as did the Italians and French. While they used the Latin mark of abbreviation in Latin manuscripts, the English do not appear to have used it in English manuscripts, nor in printed texts. The Greek mark of elision was used in English, but not frequently.

Although he explains their use, Hart (1551) does not use apostrophes himself. On the other hand, in 1559 Cunningham had no such qualms about using apostrophes in *The Cosmographical Glasse*. This work is written in dialogue form and the resulting informality may explain the frequent use, however, he also marks elision with apostrophes in his formal dedication to the King and in the preface. He uses the apostrophe to mark an elided <e> in *the* before a vowel, and he uses it almost without fail. In the 90 pages of text in this volume there are a total of 469 apostrophes in words such as *th'earth*, *th'east*, *th'iland* and *th'eclipse*. It is difficult to explain, then, why his other works, both before and after *The Cosmographical Glasse*, (1558, 1563, 1566) use few, or no, apostrophes. This hints at the inconsistency that was to be the hallmark of apostrophe use in English over the next two hundred years.

The following diachronic studies investigate what happened to the apostrophe after its introduction into English. Diachronic studies in linguistics examine the use of language across time and enable us to trace language change and to see patterns in that change. The

following sections present four separate Diachronic studies: *Shakespeare's Love's Labour's Lost* in section 3.2.1, *The EEBO study: 1500-1700* in section 3.2.2, *Handwritten texts from 1500-1700* (Cusack, 1998) in 3.2.3 and *The ECCO study: 1700-1800* in section 3.2.4. The LLL study involves examining four lexically identical texts which enables the mapping of change affecting individual words. The remaining studies aim to explore this change over a wider period of time and through a range of authors and genres. The two studies involving 16th and 17th century texts reveal a marked contrast between the literary and non-literary texts, while the study of 18th century texts covers the period of transition to regular use of the apostrophe as prescriptivism takes hold. Together, these studies also provide data for the detailed discussion of the development of the different functions of the apostrophe that follows in section 3.3.

3.2.1 Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*

The aim of this investigation is to explore changes in apostrophe use through the four editions of the play. It is a comparative study which, as well as providing an initial overview of the development of the apostrophe in English, focuses on the orthography of individual words both before and after the apostrophe was added. Unfortunately, none of Shakespeare's original works exist (Fisher, 1996), therefore we cannot know if or how Shakespeare used apostrophes himself. LLL is thought to have been written around 1595-96 (Royal Shakespeare Company, 2017), but the earliest extant version is known as the *First Quarto*, dated 1598. I also examined the *Second Quarto* (1631), the *Forth Folio* (1685) and Samuel Johnson's 1765 edition. With all four editions of the play open simultaneously, I drew up handwritten parallel lists of examples where apostrophes appeared in any of the four editions. These examples were then colour-coded with felt pens according to apostrophe type for easy analysis.

As can be seen in table 3.2, below, there was an overall increase in the numbers of apostrophes used in the play from only 48 in 1598 to almost 600 in 1765.

Table 3.2. Diachronic study of apostrophe functions
Shakespeare's Love's Labour's Lost

Functions:	1st Quarto 1598	2nd Quarto 1631	4th Folio 1685	Johnson 1765	Examples
Elision	5	6	5	12	<i>th'one, th'enforce</i>
Aphaeresis	1	2	2	5	<i>do't, 'to it' to's 'to us'</i>
Verbs: -'d	5	117	129	197	<i>arm'd, allow'd</i>
-'st	0	6	10	13	<i>mean'st, call'st</i>
-'s	0	2	1	0	<i>Speak's, fare's</i>
Omission	4	10	29	87	<i>o'er, 'bide, tho'</i>
Contraction	33	88	114	143	<i>'tis, she's</i>
Possession	0	2	8	142	<i>King's, world's</i>
Total	48	233	298	599	

In general, instances of all functions of the apostrophe increased with each edition, including elision. Contraction was by far the most common usage in the first edition, but this was superseded by use in <-'d> for -ed verb endings in the other three editions. The need to indicate pronunciation in this way seems to suggest that the loss of the unstressed vowel (schwa⁹) was relatively recent. The apostrophe was first used to mark possession around 1600 (see 3.3.2) and the table above exhibits a gradual development until the 1765 edition when it was used almost consistently.

I have presented some of the more interesting patterns in orthography from the Shakespeare data in the following three figures. These also give an indication of the inconsistency of spelling both between and within the different editions and this is clearly evident in the examples of apostrophe use in elision and verb endings in table 3.3a, below.

In the first example of elision we see that elision is marked without an apostrophe in the 1598 edition while apostrophes appear in the three later editions. This was not a regular pattern though, with other examples having apostrophes in all versions, or using apostrophes in some and full unelided forms in others. The second example is interesting because it is not elision in the sense used in this research since the omission occurs before a consonant rather than a vowel. There were two other examples of this, *th' week* and *th'*

⁹ A neutral, unstressed vowel represented in the International Phonetic Alphabet by [ə].

princess, but these were the only examples of this I found in this project. *Com'on* is another interesting example because it suggests that the word *come* may still sometimes have been pronounced with two syllables.

Table 3.3a. Spelling patterns across time – elision and verbs

Shakespeare's Love's Labour's Lost

	1598	1631	1685	1765
Elision	thendeavour	th' endeavour	th' endeavour	th' endeavour
	th' darke	th' darke	th' dark	th' dark
	com'on	come on	come on	come on
Verb endings	witherd	withered	withered	wither'd
	catcht	catcht	catch'd	catch'd
	laught	laugh'd	laugh'd	laugh'd
	bard	bard	bar'd	barr'd
	calde	call'd	called	call'd
	denide	denide	deni'd	deny'd

As we saw in table 3.2, the use of the apostrophe in the *-ed* endings on verbs increased rapidly from only five in the *First Quarto* to 197 in Johnson's edition. Table 3.3a above shows many variations and inconsistencies in these verb endings, as attempts were made to represent the lost [ə] in the spelling. The first example shows *witherd* without the <e> in the *First Quarto* but with <e> in the next two editions, while other words have apostrophes from the 1631 edition on. The apostrophe adds clarity to words like *bard*, which could be confused with another word. *Calde* for 'called' is one of a substantial number of verbs that were spelt with a <de> suffix instead of <ed>, other examples including *kilde* 'killed', *plaide* 'played' and *obtainde* 'obtained'. Of note here is that in the earlier editions the spelling of *catcht* and *laught* reflects the voicing harmony between the voiceless final consonant and the suffix, while in later versions the suffix is standardised in the orthography to <d>, regardless of pronunciation.

Y-final words seem to cause difficulty across all word classes when a suffix is added, and this is illustrated in the variant spellings of *denied*. Since English orthography had not as yet been standardised and there was no rule changing word-final <y> to <ie> when a suffix was added, <i>, <y> and <ie> endings were used interchangeably in uninflected forms in some

16th and 17th century texts, and also when suffixes were attached. This is revisited in chapters 6 and 9.

Contractions and omissions also underwent some interesting orthographical changes before the apostrophe was adapted to this function. Previous attempts to reproduce the phonology in the spelling of these words sometimes made them barely recognisable, as can be seen in table 3.2b below.

Table 3.3b. Spelling patterns across time – contraction and omission <i>Shakespeare's Love's Labour's Lost</i>				
	1598	1631	1685	1765
Contraction	he'le 'he'll'	hee'll	he'l	he'll
	yele 'you'll'	you'll	you'l	you'll
	toot 'to it'	too't	to't	to't
Omission	nere 'never'	ne'er	ne'er	ne'er
	neare 'never'	neere	ne're	ne'er
	ore 'over'	ore	o'er	o'er
Abbreviation	though	though	though	tho'

The addition of an apostrophe increases the clarity of these words. This is not the case for *tho'* and it is unclear whether this marks phonology or is simply an abbreviation in the written form. It is possible that the apostrophe represents the loss of a final consonant sound, since according to the OED (2018), the word was still sometimes pronounced with a final [f], as in *laugh* and *tough*, into the mid-18th century and even later in some dialects.

Table 3.3c, below, shows examples of possessive nouns. There were no possessive apostrophes used in the First Quarto and the table demonstrates some of the different ways in which possession was marked before the apostrophe was adapted to this function.

The first example shows that the possessive *kings* was spelt with the <s> without an apostrophe, until the 1765 edition when the apostrophe was added. In the next two lines, however, *kinges* and *yeeres* have an <e> before the <s> which is lost in *kings* in the Second Quarto, but retained in *yeeres* until the 1658 version. This demonstrates the gradual and inconsistent loss of the orthographical <e>, which may reflect inconsistency in the loss of the sound it represented, and this is discussed further in section 3.3.2.1. We also see an

example of the plural possessive in *years'* which shows this was being used by the mid-18th century. In the next example, *ladyes*, we see another y-final word but this time, in a possessive noun.

Table 3.3c. Spelling patterns across time - possession
Shakespeare's Love's Labour's Lost

1598	1631	1685	1765
kings	kings	kings	king's
kinges	kings	kings	king's
yeeres	yeeres	years	years'
ladyes	ladies	ladies	lady's
Gods	Gods	Gods	God's
God his	God's	God's	God's

Inconsistency is again evident in the examples of *Gods* with the final example being of particular interest because it illustrates the *his-genitive* construction that some claim is the source of the possessive -'s, as is discussed in 3.3.2.3, below. *His* is replaced by an apostrophe in the other versions. By the 1765 edition, the apostrophe was being used almost consistently for marking possession and less consistently for a variety of other functions. These functions did not include apostrophes in plural nouns, though, since not one example of this was found in any of the four editions.

3.2.1.1 *Later Shakespeare*

In Hudson and Boston's 1857 edition of the play, apostrophe use in the introduction is used for possession only and contractions are all written in full. The play continues to emulate earlier copies by using <-'d> endings with apostrophes, as do modern versions such as Delphi Classics (Shakespeare, 2011) and those available online. It is unnecessary to mark the lost schwa today since modern speakers would not pronounce it, but perhaps it is seen to give a flavour of authenticity. In the line "Which I hope well is not enrolled there" (Act 1, scene 1, line 42), however, contemporary readers would read *enrolled* as two syllables, thereby reducing the ten-syllable line to nine. It would perhaps be more useful today to mark words where schwa retains its full quality, as in *enroll-ed*, indicating the necessary three-syllable pronunciation.

On the other hand, neither authenticity nor meter seem to be considered where elision was necessary to the meter. In the line “The endeavour of this present breath may buy” (Act 1, scene 1, line 5) earlier versions maintained the 10-syllable meter through elision in the forms *thendeavour* or *th' endeavour*. Elision no longer occurs in English, but its memory remains in the extra beat its loss creates in lines such as this.

3.2.1.2 Summary of the Shakespeare study

This investigation tells us that the use of the apostrophe was slow to become established, but then doubled between the 1685 and 1765 editions, an increase that occurred across all functions, including elision. This study traces changes in the orthography of individual words and shows erratic spelling to be a salient feature of the earlier editions. Omission and contraction are represented in the orthography without apostrophes, producing words such as *nere*, *neare* and *neere* for ‘near’, *bard* for ‘barred’ and *toot* for ‘to it’, hence the later addition of the apostrophe increased the clarity of words that may otherwise be ambiguous. In the earlier editions, possession is unmarked and a final <e> appearing on many nouns, including before the s in possessive nouns, is still a common feature. There is only one example of the his-genitive in these editions, and it is the 1765 edition before possessive apostrophes appear in any numbers and by this time, the orthography is becoming more stable.

3.2.2 The EEBO study: 1500-1700

The intention of this study is to discover more about the rate of uptake of the apostrophe in English, the frequency of use and the consistency of use between different authors. This entailed examining 60 texts selected at random from the EEBO website. As with the manuscripts, the first 10 pages were examined along with random pages from throughout the text. Notes from each text, including examples, were kept in a chronological list and the examples were colour coded according to apostrophe type. Table 3.4, below, was then compiled to illustrate the changes in apostrophe use that had taken place.

Table 3.4. Apostrophe use from 1559 to 1700, EEBO study

Year	Author	Genre	Frequency	Elision	'd	'st	Contraction	Omission	Possessive	Plural Nouns	3PSG verb	His-genitive
1559	Cunningham, W	Treatise										
1563	Anon.	Manual										
1568	Thevet, A	Treatise										
1574	Ramus, P	Treatise										
1577	Dee, J	Treatise										
1579	Bullinger, H	Religious										
1580	Hooper, J	Religious										
1584	Lyly, J	Play										
1585	Stubbes, P	Report										
1587	Guillemeau, J	Treatise										
1589	Puttenham, G	Essay										
1590	Marlowe, C	Play										
1596	Griffin, B	Poetry										
1597	Qn Marguerite	Prose										
1598	Alberti, LB	Fiction										
1599	Anon.	Religious										
1600	Colville, J	Political										
1601	Macey, G	Religious										
1606	Marlowe, J	Play										
1608	Machin, L	Play										
1614	A.R.	Prose										
1617	Abbot, G	Treatise										
1622	Magini, GA	treatise										
1627	Madd, I	letter										
1633	Marlowe, C	Play										
1633	Fisher, J	Poetry										
1636	Lady Jane Grey	Religious										
1636	Taylor, J	Poem										
1640	Maddison, R	Political										
1645	A.A.	Political										
1649	Alford, J	Treatise										
1656	Wight, S	Letters										
1659	Hues, R	Treatise										
1662	Dugdale, W	Treatise										
1666	Rockley, R	Legal										
1674	Anon.	Treatise										
1676	Magalotti, L	Treatise										
1682	Allestree, R	Treatise										
1688	Lady Jane Grey	Record										
1696	Taylor, J	Treatise										
1698	Cullen, FG	treatise										
1700	Centlivre, S	Play										
1700	Barber, A	Treatise										
1700	Birchley, W	Religious										

I have established that the apostrophe was in use in English by 1551, however I found no apostrophes in the 16 texts examined prior to Cunningham's *Cosmographical Glasse* of 1559. The subsequent texts are presented in table 3.4. The shading of the cells under the heading *Frequency* gives an indication of the frequency of apostrophe use in each text, with no shading relating to no apostrophes and black representing high use. In the individual function categories, the shading reflects only the use of apostrophes in the particular category and not frequency of use.

Cunningham's *Cosmographical glasse*, with its frequent use of the apostrophe, stands alone in a desert of non-use. It is thirty years before the next apostrophes appear, in George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* in 1589 where they are still used exclusively to mark elision. Only two earlier texts show elision indicated in the orthography without apostrophes – *thoder* 'the other' and *thone* 'the one' in William Neville's 1530 poem and *thende* 'the end' in Aesop's fables from 1551. We can see, then, that marking elision was not a frequent practice in English, and the slow uptake of the apostrophe in English may be due to it being seen as of limited use. Apostrophe use increases only when new functions emerge, and it is the middle of the 17th century before apostrophes appear in all the texts in the study. By then, with one exception in a play of 1700 (and, as we saw above, in LLL) it no longer marks elision.

Once established, apostrophe use in past-tense verb *-ed* endings becomes the most frequent use, while use in the old second-person *-est* suffix remained rare. There is only one example of an apostrophe in a third person plural verb, in the y-final word *defy's* in a text from 1700. It is likely that the <y> ending has triggered this in a similar way to vowel-final plural nouns, which are discussed further below.

By 1606, contractions and omissions were added to the mix, often in verse in order to comply with metre, but by no means always. Interestingly, *t'was* and *t'is* were found in the first two texts with contractions – the apostrophe marking the morpheme boundary rather than the missing sound, and this is a topic that is discussed below in 3.3.4. Other examples of contractions are *mai't* 'may it', *I'le* 'I'll', *shee's*, 'she's', *upon't*, 'upon it' and *what's* 'what is'. Negated contractions, such as *don't*, *won't* and *can't* appear in only one of the texts,

Centlivre's play of 1700. Another apparent example, *can't*, in Marlowe's *The famous tragedy of the rich levv [Jew] of Malta* (1633) stands for 'can it', rather than 'cannot'. The apostrophe also appears marking the omission of sounds from individual words in several of the texts, as in *vent'rous* '[ad]venturous', *'em* 'them' *ne'er* 'never' and *'bout* 'about'.

The first instance of a possessive apostrophe is found in Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* printed in 1606. There are two examples: "Hero's gentle heart" (p. B2r) and "Hero's eares" (p. B2v). It is not repeated in other possessive nouns. Over the next 16 texts, spanning sixty years, only four contain possessive apostrophes, and these use them irregularly. After this very slow start, possessive apostrophes are beginning to appear with consistency in some texts towards end of the 17th century. The only example of the his-genitive (discussed in 3.3.2.3) is in a text from 1688.

It is not until 1698 that the apostrophe appears in plural nouns, in *phenomena's*, and *mathematico's* in a narrative by Cullen, although he does not seem to think the apostrophe necessary in *maleficos* in the same paragraph. Very few vowel-final nouns were found in the texts and this may explain the small number of apostrophes in this context. According to the theory discussed below in 3.3.3, it is only vowel-final plural nouns that trigger apostrophe use, although the example *cliff's* 'clefs' from Barber (1700) shows this was not always the case.

3.2.2.1 Summary of the EEBO study

In this study we find a deeper appreciation of the slow uptake of the apostrophe in English, the appearance of new functions and the inconsistency of use during this period. Although the apostrophe had been in English since 1551, it is 1589 before it appears in most texts and 1656 before it is used in all the texts examined. Apostrophes in verbal endings appear in 1590 and contractions, omissions and possessive apostrophes all appear in 1606. The function of elision has largely fallen out of use by 1636. Towards the end of the 17th century the first few apostrophes appear in plural nouns and third-person-singular verbs and, as in the Shakespeare study, there was only one example of the his-genitive. The frequency of apostrophe use is variant and it is used inconsistently within most texts. By the end of the 17th century, most writers are using apostrophes, the apostrophe marking elision has

disappeared and the possessive apostrophe is being used with more regularity by individual writers.

3.2.3 Handwritten texts: 1500-1700

Before moving on to 18th century texts, I was interested in how apostrophe use may differ in the less formal texts found in Cusack's publication from the same period as the EEBO texts. Cusack's (1998) volume of unpublished texts includes handwritten journals, letters and official reports which the author has carefully transcribed taking care to preserve the original orthography. The language in these texts is more colloquial and there is considerably more variation in orthography than in the published works from the same period. A text from 1617, for example, spells *business* <buisnes>, <besnes> and <besynes> within four lines, while in a will dated 1593 the testator's name is spelt variously as <Maertemer>, <martimer>, <mertimer> and <merttimer>. Since they were short, all 64 texts were read in full with notes being kept in chronological order and colour coded to aid analysis.

Only three of the texts have apostrophes. The first, written in 1644, has a number of examples such as *turn'd*; *hang'd* and *undervalu'd*. Interestingly, this text is from Virginia, the only text from outside the British Isles, which suggests the use of apostrophes may have been more widespread in the colonies than in the home of English at the time, although there is also an example of *thend* 'the end' with no apostrophe. The following year two apostrophes appear in a text, one marking elision and one possession, while one apostrophe appears in *ordain'd* in a text dated 1682-4. There are, however, several examples of the his-genitive in these texts, as is discussed below in 3.3.2.3.

This investigation demonstrated that there was considerable variation between the apostrophe use of the literary writers in 3.2.2 and the producers of these handwritten texts, implicating a lag in usage by the general population when it came to new conventions such as the apostrophe in written language. Perhaps the latter are less educated and less well-

read, meaning they have had less exposure to modern writing trends and the possibilities of the apostrophe.

3.2.4 The ECCO study: 1700-1800

Examining the development of the apostrophe in the 18th century is important to this study because this is the period when the production of grammars was at its zenith. My aim, therefore, was to examine the influence of prescriptivism on apostrophe use. Twenty texts from the ECCO website were examined and the data was listed chronologically and colour coded as in the previous two studies.

A time-related pattern became apparent almost immediately. As can be seen in table 3.5 below, in the first half of the century apostrophe use reflects patterns similar to those at the end of the 17th century, seen above. However, there is a clear demarcation in the use of apostrophes in the second half of the century, with the possessive apostrophe coming to dominate while other functions all but disappear.

Table 3.5. Apostrophe use in the 18th century, ECCO study

Year	Author	Genre	'd	Contraction	Omission	Possession				Plural nouns	Verbs
						Singular	his-genitive	Plural	Pronouns		
1702	Stillingfleet, J	Religious						*1			
1706	Garrett, W	Religious									
1713	Ford, E	Novel									
1721	Renolds, G	Treatise									
1725	Haliday, S	Religious									
1732	Pullen, J	Geography									
1746	Nicholls, B	Religious									
1752	Abernethy-D	Religious									
1763	Walcot, C	Report									
1768	Buller, F	Law									
1777	Inglis, J	Political									
1780	Lothian, W	Treatise									
1782	Kelly, H	Novel		*2							
1787	Dickinson, W	History						*1			
1789	Abercrombie	Gardening									
1793	Dalzel, A	Geography									
1796	Vaughan, W	Report									
1798	Triplett, T	Medicine									
1799	Pawson, J	Religious	*3								
1800	James, E	Novel									

*1 Singular possessive form <'s> used for plural possessive noun
 *2 One example in reported speech
 *3 One example in verse

Elision made its last appearance in 1700 and the use of <'d> on past-tense verbs was by no means consistent in any of the texts. Contractions were beginning to fall out of favour in the first half of the century and other forms of omission such as *tho'*, *e'er* and *wat'ry* 'watery' also appeared inconsistently, until by 1763 all such words were written in full, apart from one example of *thro'* in 1799. There is only one instance of an apostrophe in a verb – *do's* for 'does' in the 1702 text. There is also only one text with apostrophes in plural nouns, affecting vowel-final words as in *idea's* and *Criolio's* 'Spanish emigrants', and an interesting example of a sibilant final in *Hypotheses's*, which needed neither apostrophe nor *s* (Pullen, 1732). But again, there are only a few examples of vowel and sibilant-final words in the texts.

In the 1706 text, Garrett's prolific use of the apostrophe is somewhat idiosyncratic, as can be seen in the following examples where it marks an unstressed vowel before final <n>, as in *op'n* 'open', *tak'n* 'taken' and *pers'n* 'person'. He also used it to mark silent consonant letters as in *o'n* 'own', *'holly* 'wholly', *ri't* 'right', *desi'n* 'design', *tho'ts* 'thoughts', *dou'tless* 'doubtless', *pe'ple* 'people'. Many of these words rely heavily on context for interpretation, with the word *'ro't*, for example, bearing little resemblance to its full form 'wrought'. Nevertheless, Garret was typical of the period in his regular use of the apostrophe to mark singular possessive nouns.

The apostrophe was used consistently for singular possessive nouns in all but the 1702 text. Here we see the second of only two examples of the his-genitive in the 80 texts examined from EEBO and ECCO. Interestingly, while the writer, Stillingfleet, used the apostrophe for most possessives as in *God's will*, he missed them consistently from *Saviours*, in *Saviours words* for example, and reserved the his-genitive for *Jesus* in *for Jesus his sake*. The other authors used the apostrophe consistently for singular possessive nouns, but the conventions for plural possessive nouns were still uncertain.

Almost all missing possessive apostrophes affected plural nouns, as in *Quakers conceits* (Stillingfleet, 1702), *mens prejudices* (Garrett, 1706), *ladies tears* (Ford, 1713), *mens persons* (Buller, 1768) and *horses stable* (Abercrombie, 1789). There were also three examples where the singular apostrophe form <'s> has been used where plurality is intended, twice in *Quaker's plain Words* (Stillingfleet, 1702) and also in *king's reigns* (Dickinson, 1787). It is not until James's text of 1800 that we see the use of the plural possessive apostrophe, in *stationers' court*. Apostrophes also sometimes appear in possessive pronouns, affecting *it's* in three instance and also *their's*, *your's* and *her's*.

This investigation has demonstrated a marked change in apostrophe use over the 18th century. The same pattern is evident in the scholarly essays included in Bolton (1966) where apostrophes mark many functions in the first half of the century, while in the seven post-1754 essays it is used regularly and exclusively to mark possession. Once used inconsistently for a wide range of functions, by the beginning of the 19th century the apostrophe had

become more stable and was used almost exclusively to mark singular possession, since the shortening of words was no longer in style, at least in published works.

3.2.5 Summary of the diachronic studies

These diachronic investigations have demonstrated the slow uptake of the apostrophe in English and the overlap of many different functions which were used inconsistently over the centuries. In the Shakespeare study we saw the haphazard spelling of pre-apostrophe contractions and omissions and the gradual increase of apostrophe use in the first three editions which then doubled in the last edition. The EBBO study shows the use of apostrophes by different writers, and the frequency of use, to be inconsistent but it also reflects the loss and emergence of different functions. The handwritten texts demonstrated a marked contrast with the published texts from the same period, suggesting that it took some time for this innovation to filter down to the general population. And finally, the ECCO study appears to reflect the rise of prescriptivism in the abrupt change mid-18th century, from an inconsistent multi-functional apostrophe to one used almost exclusively and consistently to mark possession.

3.3 Language change and the multifunctional English apostrophe

Having considered how the functions of the apostrophe changed after its arrived in English, I now turn to consider why it changed. This seems to be linked to language change that the English language as a whole experienced around the time the apostrophe arrived in English and, in particular, sound change. In this section I draw on the findings from the diachronic studies above, examples from other texts and the work of other researchers to examine each function and to consider why the English apostrophe diverged from its origins as a marker of elision to embrace multiple functions, before finally conforming to a set of rules in which it became primarily a mark of possession.

3.3.1 The apostrophe as a marker of omission

The apostrophe was first used in English to mark various types of omission, beginning with elision and then expanding to indicate lost sounds and letters within single words as well as in contractions. Kamm (2015) describes the use of the apostrophe in elision and contractions as a “printers’ convenience” (p. 31). Yet replacing one letter with an apostrophe is unlikely to increase convenience and while the apostrophe today does sometimes mark abbreviation in the written form only, it is much more commonly used to mark phonological omission.

3.3.1.1 Elision

Elision is the earliest function of the apostrophe in English, and this is the role it also played in Greek, Italian and French. We see evidence of this having occurred in the spelling of words such as *themperor* (Chaucer, 15th century) and *thende* (Aesop, 1551), but as explained in 3.2.2, the evidence from this study shows that the marking of elision in spelling in pre-apostrophe English was not common and consequently, writers would have seen limited value in a symbol indicating elision.

Continued sound change further eroded the need to mark elision. The word *the* regained its full status as a syllable before a vowel, with the quality of the vowel changing to [i] in a pre-vocalic environment to ease articulation. The last examples of elision seen in table 3.4 were in 1636, with an isolated example in 1700. Some grammars, such as those of Coote (1700) and Mather (1727), continued to promote marking elision as a function of the apostrophe into the 18th century, although this use by then was confined to verse.

3.3.1.2 Verb endings

Sound change was also behind the second function of the apostrophe, its use to mark the missing [ə] in the past-tense verb ending -ed. According to Barber (1976), by the beginning of the 16th century, the past tense verb ending had become regularised to [-əd], with the alternative pronunciations of [-d] and [-t]. However, examples from my collection demonstrate that the orthography was still widely variant and included <-ed> *cryed* ‘cried’; <-d> *kild* ‘killed’; <-t> *lokt* ‘locked’ and <-de> *turnde* ‘turned’; <-id> *askid*, ‘asked’; <-it> *cryit* ‘cried’; <-yd> *pullyd* ‘pulled’; <ydd> *callydd* ‘called’ and <-’d>.

Osselton (1998) notes that the use of <-'d> endings increased steadily until the mid-18th century before gradually falling out of use. The increase is illustrated by the LLL study where the use of <-'d> rises from just five in the First Quarto (1598) to 117 in the Second Quarto 33 years later, and to 197 in Johnson's 1765 edition (see table 3.2). The writers of the handwritten documents in Cusack seem to be unfamiliar with this ending, though, since they appear in only two. Contrary to Osselton's statement, the results of the ECCO study (see table 3.5), suggest a relatively abrupt, rather than gradual, loss of the <-'d> verb ending, since the omitted vowel sound had by then become the norm.

Apostrophes were also sometimes used in the second person singular ending -est, although these are less common than past-tense endings. There are many examples of this in *LLL* where words including *mean'st*, *speak'st*, *gain'st*, *should'st* and *can'st* appear sometimes with and sometimes without apostrophes. A small number appear in other texts examined with *seem'st*, and *mak'st* appearing at the same time as the first <'d> ending, in 1590. The only other examples in the texts are *lov'st* in 1633 and *read'st* in 1688, indicating the suffix was in the process of being lost. Its appearance dwindles with time until the apostrophe became redundant because this inflectional form no longer existed.

In the case of the third person singular verb ending, our modern -(e)s suffix originated as a northern variant of -eth which gradually spread south and gained acceptance because of its simpler pronunciation (Barber, 1976; Nevalainen, 2006; Shay, 2008). Since, unlike the -ed endings, the <e> in these -es endings had never had phonetic value following a non-sibilant sound, there was no need for an apostrophe to indicate pronunciation. It is interesting, then, that there are several examples in Mather's *Young man's companion* (1727), *honour's* and *hinder's*, for example. Moreover, Mather clearly sees this as a function of the apostrophe when he writes: "Note, that these Verbs, are, by the Curious written with an *Apostrophus*, as *Refreshe's*, for *Refresheth*, or doth *Refresh*, especially when the Verb and the Noun are both alike, to distinguish them, as, he *Hide's* himself amongst the *Hides*" (p. 12). Yet he makes no mention of this in his definition of the *apostrophus*. I also found a small number of examples, two in Shakespeare's LLL: "He *speak's* not like a man" in the two 17th century editions and "How *fare's* your maiestie?" in the 1631 edition, as well as *delay's*

in a play from 1700 and the use of *do's* for *does* was used by authors including Jonson (1612) and Stillingfleet (1702) in the ECCO study.

3.3.1.3 Contractions

As with elision and verb endings, contraction was often reflected in the orthography without apostrophes, as these examples from LLL show: *tis*, ‘it is’; *lle*, ‘I’ll’; *youle*, ‘you’ll’ and *hees* ‘he’s’. It seems inevitable that the apostrophe would also find its way here in order to improve clarity.

The contractions with apostrophes in the First Quarto of LLL (1598) include: *ther's*, *that's*, *wit's*, *what's*, *he's*, *in't*, *heer's*, *wher's*, *you'l*, *they'l*, *shee's*, and *let's* in variant spellings. There are 33 contractions with apostrophes in the First Quarto and over 100 contractions represented in the orthography without apostrophes, compared with 143 contractions with apostrophes in the 1798 edition. In the EEBO study there are no apostrophes used in contractions until 1606 when it appears in *t'was* (Marlowe) and two years later in *t'is*, *mai't*, *l'le*, *shee's*, *upon't* and *what's* (Machin, 1608). The placement of the apostrophe in *t'is* and *t'was* is interesting as it was found only in these two works, printed two years apart by different authors and different printers.

These examples fit into two distinct categories, contraction involving a pronoun and verb, and the shortening of *it*. Interestingly, in the less formal texts in the Cusack collection there were no contractions, with or without apostrophes. Gailor (2011) claims that <'s> for *is* appeared soon after 1550, but he gives no examples and the evidence from this study makes this date unlikely. Bullokar used an apostrophe in the contraction *need's* for ‘need is’ in 1586, and I have found some examples of contraction in Marlowe’s texts from 1590 and 1594, including *lets*, *lle* (several times) and *weele* ‘we’ll’ without apostrophes, as well as *what's*, *ther's* and *heere's* with apostrophes. Ben Jonson (1612) was a prolific user of the apostrophe in all its functions and used some interesting contractions that seem to be idiosyncratic, including *ga'you* ‘gave you’, *ha'it* ‘have it’, *y'are* ‘you are’ and *h'is* ‘he is’, as well as examples where the apostrophe is superfluous since contraction has not occurred, as in *I'am* and *you'have*.

Apostrophes in negative forms such as *don't*, *can't* and *won't* came later. Brainerd (1989) cites a number of texts in which forms such as han't for 'have not' appear as early as 1629, albeit rarely. I was able to verify an example of *beant* for 'be not' in Richard Brome's *Antipodes* of 1640, but there was no apostrophe. The earliest example of a negative contraction with an apostrophe in my data is *can't* in the 1685 edition of LLL and this appears twice in the 1765 edition. Cantlivre's 1700 play is the only text in the EEBO study to use them while the 18th-century texts elicited two examples, *won't* in 1752 and *don't* in reported speech in 1782. Mr Theobold's and Mr Rowe's prefaces to Johnson's 1765 edition of Shakespeare have *don't* and *can't*, as well as other examples where the words are not contracted. These negative phrases are not contracted in the texts in Cusack, nor in James Cook's (1772) and Joseph Banks's (1768) handwritten journals. The apostrophe in this capacity, therefore, emerged very slowly while at the same time, as we saw in table 3.5 contractions in general were becoming less acceptable in formal writing.

3.3.1.4 Other omission

The omission of medial sounds seems to have first appeared alongside the first instances of other contractions in the findings of the EEBO study, with *vent'rous* appearing in 1606 and *howsoe'er* in 1608. While such omission was common in verse where it affected metre, only four examples with apostrophes were found in the First Quarto of LLL leaving many instances of omission without apostrophes such as *neer* 'never', *gainst* 'against' and *foolrie* 'foolery'. However, by Johnson's 1765 edition, omission was regularly marked with an apostrophe and there are 87 examples.

The apostrophe was also used to mark the omission of letters in *tho'*, *altho'* and *thro'* which, as noted in 3.2.1, may represent a lost final [f]. Its first appearance is not until the end of the 17th century, in Cullen 1698, after which it appears in all texts in the EECO study up until 1752, when apart from an isolated instance in 1799, it disappears. Apostrophised forms appear only in the 1765 edition of LLL with previous editions having the word in full, or sometimes shortened without an apostrophe. Banks's journal (1768) is peppered with *tho* without apostrophes whereas the few examples in Cook's journal (1772) have apostrophes, and there are no examples in the handwritten texts from Cusack.

3.3.2 The apostrophe as a marker of possession

Having found two examples of possessive apostrophes in the 1606 edition of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* in the EEBO study, I viewed the other editions available and found one possessive apostrophe, as seen in figure 3.1 below, in the 1600 edition.

*Relenting Hero's gentle heart was strooke,
Such force and vertue hath an amorous looke.*

Figure 3.1. Marlowe, C. 1600, *Hero and Leander*, p. B2¹⁰.

In the 1606 edition, *Hero's eares* (p. B2v) also had an apostrophe, but this is spelt *Heroes eares* in the 1600 edition. The 1598 edition had no apostrophes and the 1609, 1613 and 1637 have each copied one of the previous three editions. No other possessive apostrophes were found on the pages examined in any of these editions, with *Heroes looks*, *cupids day*, *Dianas name* and *Leanders face* having no apostrophes.

Brosnahan (1998) cites examples of the genitive apostrophe from as early as 1591 in the works of Robert Greene, including some -s' forms in sibilant-final names. However, on examining these works I found no apostrophes. In *A maidens dream* (1591), *Homers quil* appears without an apostrophe as do *womans fault* in *A looking glass* (Lodge & Greene, 1594), and *Dianas rose* and *Europas love* in *The honorable historie of frier Bacon* (Greene, 1594). Without access to digitalised original copies in 1998, Brosnahan has used later versions that have been edited. Possessive apostrophes may have appeared before 1600, but the Marlowe example is the earliest I found.

3.3.2.1 The English possessive

Before the apostrophe arrived in English, inflectional endings on nouns had undergone considerable change. In OE, genitive case marking on nouns varied depending on the gender, number and class of the noun. The examples below show the genitive case marking on the words *queen* and *king* from around 900 C.E:

¹⁰ Image published with permission of ProQuest. Further reproduction is prohibited without permission.

Genitive		
	Singular	Plural
<i>queen</i>	cwēne	cwēna
<i>king</i>	cyninges	cyninga

(Fries, 1927, p. 694)

During the ME period these inflections were reduced to the invariant form -(e)s (Koike, 2006). This resulted in the forms *quenes* and *kinges* which were identical to the nominative plural forms and were often spelt *quene* and *kinge* in the singular, with the <e> as part of the stem. At the same time, these identical suffixes began a process of phonological change. Many unstressed vowels in English, particularly those in a final syllable, weakened to schwa and this affected the -(e)s suffixes, which changed from [-ɪs] to [-əs] (Barber, 1976; Shay, 2008). Sound change continued as voiceless fricatives following schwa became voiced, changing [kɪŋgəs] to [kɪŋgəz], then during the 15th century the schwa was lost altogether to produce [kɪŋgz]. One final sound change assimilated the [z] phoneme to the preceding sound, resulting in the three allomorphs we know today (Barber, 1976): [-z] following a voiced segment, as in *kings*; [-s] following a voiceless segment, as in *cats* and [-əz] following a sibilant, as in *busses*.

Sklar (1976) maintains that there is a 200-year gap between the loss of the schwa in the suffix in the 15th century and regular use of the possessive apostrophe in the 17th century. She argues that this gap precludes any link between the possessive apostrophe and omission, since “the apostrophe would have to represent a sound heard by no speaker and a letter seen by few” (p. 176). Nevalainen (2006), however, describes the loss of the schwa as a more gradual process which began in the 14th century but was not completed until sometime in the 16th century. Moreover, my evidence shows that the schwa continued to be represented in spelling well into the 17th century, at the same time that the possessive apostrophe was becoming established. The First Quarto version of LLL (1598), for example, includes *worldes*, *earthes*, *kinges*, *queenes*, *hertes* ('hearts'), and *boyes* and several of these also appear in the 1631 edition. *E*-final nouns also appear frequently in the earlier texts from the Cusack collection, with a few examples such as *booke*, *childe*, and *wheele* appearing as late as 1664.

The loss of the <e> was gradual and inconsistent, sometimes affecting words that are *e*-final today, such as *carridg* and *constabl*. The uptake of the possessive apostrophe was also gradual and inconsistent, but there is some overlapping of the two as we can see in *Hero's eares* (Marlowe, 1606) and in the 1631 version of LLL where *foote*, *winde*, *queenes*, *childe* and *speakē* appear alongside *God's* and *Apollo's*. In the 18th century, grammarians such as Lowth (1775/1970) and Priestly (1772) still saw the possessive apostrophe as marking omission: "It was formerly always written, 'Godis grace;' we now always shorten it with an apostrophe" (Lowth, 1775/1970, p. 17). It appears, then, that while the schwa sound may have been long forgotten when the possessive apostrophe was becoming established, people would still have been aware of the orthographical <e>.

Then, over time as the possessive apostrophe became more entrenched, it came to be regarded as a mark of possession, rather than omission. As Goold Brown wrote in 1851: "The apostrophe, whatever may have been its origin, is now the acknowledged distinctive mark of the possessive case of English nouns" (p. 251). This allowed the apostrophe's extension to plural possessive nouns as we saw in *years'* (LLL, 1765) and *stationers' court* (James, 1800) where it did not indicate a missing element. Nevertheless, some grammarians continued to see it as marking omission and this is exemplified by grammarian Charles Mason (1878), who informs on one page that with regular plural possessive nouns the apostrophe goes after the <ss>, as in "the birds' feathers" (p. 28), then on the following page states that "It is therefore an unmeaning process to put an apostrophe after the plural -s, as 'birds'" because no vowel has been dropped there" (p. 29).

3.3.2.2 Possessive pronouns

Possessive pronouns have always been somewhat of an anomaly – they are possessive, yet they do not take the possessive apostrophe. The definite possessive pronouns: *hers*, *yours*, *ours*, and *theirs* have no nominal head and, therefore, rely on context to convey both the possessor and the possessed. These pronouns developed during the ME period and varied in orthography within and between regions, for example *hiren* and *hires* for 'hers'; *owres*, *yurs* and *youres* for 'yours' and *hoeran*, *holes* and *pairs* for 'theirs' (Allen, 2002). Most modern forms were in use by eModE, although the spelling still varied. In Lowth's (1775/1970) table of pronouns the definite possessive apostrophes have no apostrophes, yet on the facing

page these same words appear with apostrophes. He explains in a footnote that *our's* and *her's* developed from *ures* and *oewers*, which suggests he saw the apostrophe as marking a missing <e>. Thus, it seems there was always some uncertainty as to apostrophe use with this set of pronouns.

This uncertainty also surrounded the use of apostrophes in the pronoun *its*, which is a relatively recent development. During the ME period the masculine pronoun *his* was still being used for both masculine and neutral items, although there was the non-possessive pronoun *hit* (also spelt *yt* or *it*). In OE, nouns were marked for grammatical gender, but by eModE inflection for grammatical gender had been lost. Therefore, *his* came to be associated with natural gender and seemed at odds with neutral nouns (Fries, 1927; Shay 2008). First recorded around 1600 (Barber, 1976), the word *its* was created by adding the possessive *-s* to *it* (Shay, 2008). Again, apostrophes were sometimes used and I found a small number of examples in the EEBO and ECCO studies in texts dated from 1627 to 1782. Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1994) observe that *its* and *it's* both appeared as possessives and these quotations from two grammarians illustrate the confusion that existed over this form: “*It's* is frequently, but improperly, used for *it is*, which ought to be written, '*tis*'” (Burn, 1778, p. 44) and “The genitive *its* is often improperly used for '*tis* or *it is* as, 'Its my book'" (Murray, 1823, p. 154).

As noted above, over the 19th century the apostrophe increasingly came to be seen as marking possession, rather than omission. Yet, as Crystal (2005) observes, there was no clear direction from the grammarians on possessive pronouns “with the result that *its* and *hers* now stand out as exceptions to the possessive rule” (p. 545). Fries (1928) posits that apostrophes were not applied to words that cannot be pluralised. Hence definite pronouns such as *its*, *hers*, *yours*, *ours* and *theirs* do not need apostrophes since they can only be possessive, whereas the apostrophe distinguishes the indefinite pronouns *one's* and *other's* from their plural forms. This is not a simple rule.

3.3.2.3 The apostrophe and the his-genitive

Some researchers believe that the possessive apostrophe does not mark this missing <e> at all, but stands for the word *his* which was sometimes used instead. Kamm (2015) claims that

those using -'s to mark possession in the late 16th century “were far outnumbered by uses of the his-genitive form” (p. 31). While my investigations failed to find an apostrophised form prior to 1600, the his-genitive was rare and it was the -(e)s suffix that was used most frequently to mark possession.

Table 3.6 below lists all the instances of the his-genitive I have found in the corpus of texts investigated for this study.

Table 3.6. List of his-genitive forms found in texts			
Source	Year	Example	Other possessive forms used
LLL	1598	<i>God his making</i>	<i>Kings, Kinges, ladies</i>
EEBO	1688	<i>K. Henry the Eighth his second sister</i>	<i>Queens, Lords</i>
ECCO	1702	<i>for Christ Jesus his sake</i>	<i>God's, Saviours</i>
Cusack	1528	<i>the lord latimer his cosyn</i>	<i>godyn</i>
	1595	<i>Mr Richard Prideaux his garden</i>	<i>St Saviors</i>
	1634	<i>the king his coacheman</i>	<i>Greyhoundes</i>
	1649	<i>Master Higgins his house</i>	<i>mistresses</i>
	1664	<i>Jonathon his boy Eles her daughter</i>	<i>Mr Woods</i>
	1682	<i>Wilm Morisone of Prestoungrang his eldest son and child Mr Gearge Bannerman Advocat his house</i>	<i>kings</i>

Other forms of possession, on the other hand, were too numerous to record. As can be seen in the table, none of these texts uses the *his*-genitive form exclusively; it co-exists with forms such as -s, -es, -ys and -'s. It is interesting that most of the examples come from Cusack's collection (1998) of handwritten documents. This suggests that the interpretation of possessive endings as the word *his* may have been more prevalent among the less erudite.

Barber (1976) claims that the *his*-genitive existed in OE, although he does not support this with evidence. In the 15th century the possessive suffix was commonly spelt <-is> and <-ys> and was sometimes separated from the noun, as in *the king ys son*. At the same time, in an unstressed position the initial [h] from *his* had been lost, which meant that *the kingys son* and *the king his son* were phonologically identical (Wylde, 1956). Unsurprisingly, it was

sometimes interpreted and spelt as the latter, leading some researchers to regard this as the origin of the possessive apostrophe.

Sklar (1976) believes the his-genitive explanation to be the more likely than the lost schwa, due to the 200-year gap she posits between the loss of the schwa and the use of the apostrophe to mark possession. I have demonstrated above that there was a degree of overlap, rather than a gap and since forms such as *wordes* and *Goddes* were much more prevalent than the his-genitive, these are more likely to have generated the -'s forms.

Hock and Joseph (2009) also argue that the use of the his-genitive on the end of complex possessive phrases demonstrates that <-'s> is derived from a blend of the pronoun clitic and the possessive -s ending. However, they give no examples of this. While they discuss the complex possessive phrase, their examples are of simple phrases in which the his-genitive follows the possessor noun. As my last two examples above show, the his-genitive did sometimes occur at the end of complex phrases, but not always.

A detailed explanation is provided by Janda (1980) as to how the fact that the possessive <-'s> behaves as a clitic suggests it derives from the his-genitive rather than the -(e)s inflectional ending. Unlike inflection, a clitic is able to move to other parts of a possessive phrase, to the adjective in *the girl in red's name*, for example. Janda argues that movement from inflection to a clitic (or from morphology to syntax) is an unusual pattern in language change. He proposes that the -(e)s inflectional ending was first reanalysed as the separate pronoun *his* as in *the king his son*, which was then shortened by means of an apostrophe to *the king's son*.

Other researchers disagree with the his-genitive hypothesis. According to Lowth (1775/1970), “‘Christ his sake’, in our liturgy is a mistake, either of the printers, or of the compilers” (p. 17) and Ash (1786) considers that this “...notion has been sufficiently exploded” (p. 30). Mason (1878) expresses stronger feelings: “It is almost incredible how many persons have been induced to adopt the silly notion that the -'s of the possessive case is an abbreviation for *his*” (p. 29). And Priestly (1772) explains:

Mr Pope, and some of his contemporaries, to avoid a harshness in the pronunciation of some genitives, wrote the word [his] at the end of a word; as *Statius his Thebias*, *Socrates his fetters* (Spect.) imagining the [’s] to be a contraction for that pronoun : But analogy easily overturns that supposition ; for *Venus his beauty*, or *Men his wit*, were absurd (p. 68).

Barber (1976) also pinpoints such sibilant final words as prompting the *his*-genitive, but this only accounts for one of my examples above. Brown observed in 1851 that the *his*-genitive “is bad English; and always was so, how ever common may have been the erroneous notion which gave rise to it” (p. 251). While Mason (1877) concedes the longevity and frequency of the *his*-genitive, he believes “The mistake is so stupid, and shows such blank ignorance of the principles of grammatical forms, that one wonders how the notion could have originated” (p 29). He argues that since *his* stands for *he + possession*, it does not make sense as a possessive marker added to another noun.

Allen’s article (1997) outlining the development of the complex possessive phrase, or *group genitive*, refutes Janda’s argument that the *his*-genitive is the source of -’s. Allen argues that it was the -(e)s ending that developed into the clitic, but that this was a very gradual process. She explains that the loss of the OE inflections was not complete until well into the ME period, meaning an awareness of inflection would have lingered. Even after the separate genitive first emerged, around 1250, it always appeared immediately following the possessor noun which suggests it was not seen as a clitic. It was not until the last of the irregular inflections became regularised in the early 14th century that it was possible to reanalyse the possessive suffix as a clitic. Then it is towards the end of the 15th century before the -(e)s ending first moves from the possessor noun to the end of a group genitive, at this point becoming a clitic. This can be seen in *The grete god of Loves name*, from Chaucer in 1489 (*ibid.*)

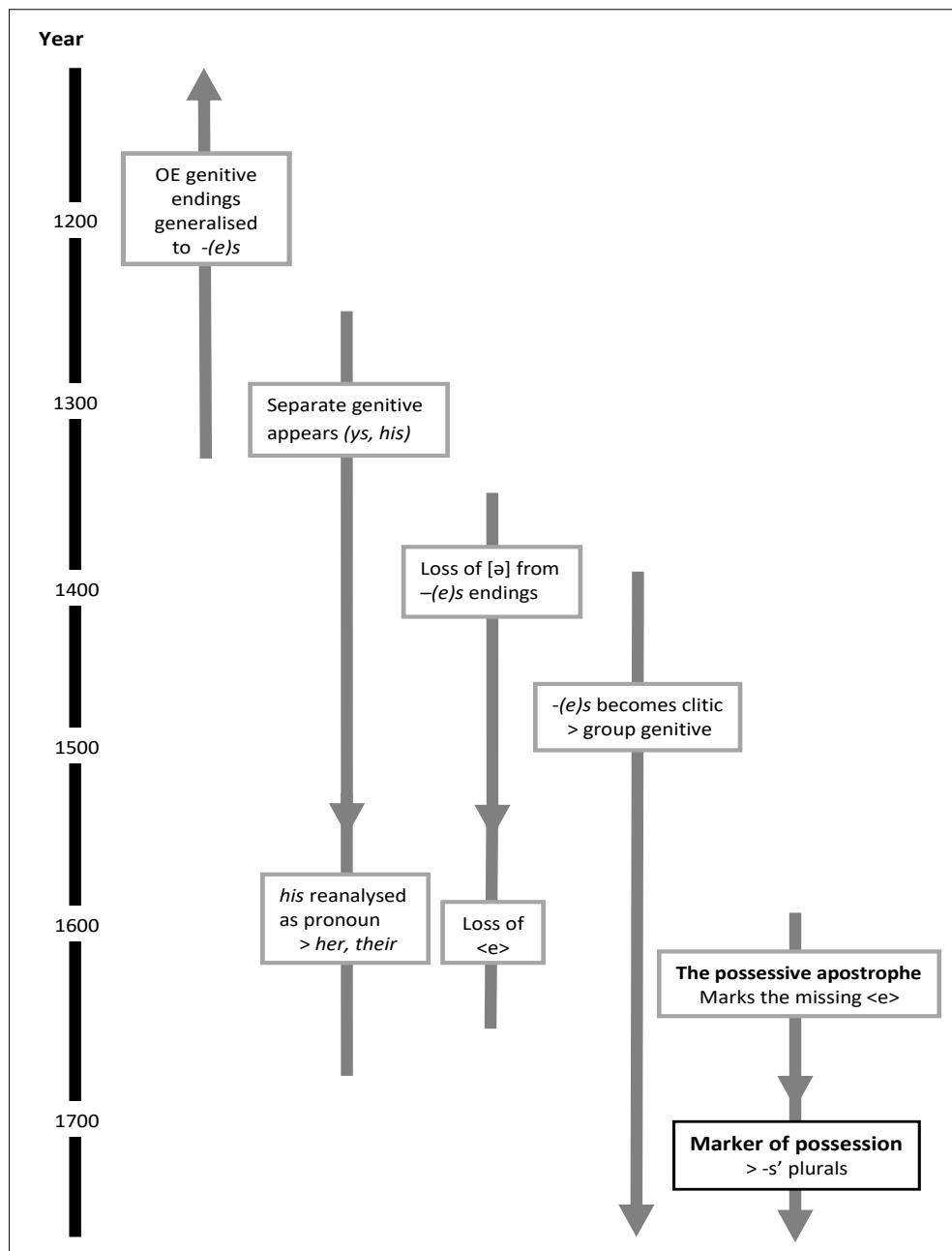
My examples above in table 3.6 illustrate Allen’s argument that the attached and separate possessive forms appeared together in texts, with the former considerably outnumbering the latter. The example *Eles her daughter* from 1664 is particularly interesting, because it is the only example I have found using the pronoun *her*. Allen argues that the fact that

feminine and plural forms did not develop soon after the his-genitive first emerged shows that it was not regarded as a pronoun. Barber (1976) claims that *her* forms existed in OE but, again, provides no evidence of this. His earliest example is the same as Allen's, *Lucilla hir company* from Lily's *Anatomy of wit*, 1578, which suggests Allen's claim of a later emergence may be more accurate. Furthermore, Allen provides a list of examples from the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries using the separate genitives *his* and *ys* in which an analysis as a pronoun is nonsensical. It is the 16th century before *her* and *their* genitives appear, according to Allen, and she believes that this is the point at which *his* was sometimes reanalysed as a pronoun, with the new forms being derived through analogy.

By refuting Janda's argument, Allen has shown that it was the inflectional ending that became the clitic, rather than the pronoun *his*, and that the his-genitive was not recognised as a pronoun until well after the possessive -(e)s, derived from OE inflection, was established. Nonetheless, it is possible that there were always some writers who regarded *his* as a pronoun. My findings have shown, however, that at the time the possessive apostrophe was becoming established, most possessive markers consisted of -(e)s, with comparatively few examples of the *his*-genitive. Where texts switch between use and non-use of apostrophes, they switch between -'s and -(e)s, not *his*. Moreover, it would be difficult to argue that my earliest example of a possessive apostrophe, in *Hero's*, represents the pronoun *his*, especially since where the apostrophe is not used it is spelt <*Heroes*>, with an attached <-es>, and not <*Hero his*>.

The timeline below summarises the development of the possessive suffix in English, based on evidence from the texts examined and the literature, Allen's argument in particular. The flat-ended lines represent the beginning, end or completion of a process while the arrows represent a continuing phenomenon (either forwards or backwards in time). An arrowhead midway represents a process that has developed from another.

Figure 3.2. The development of the possessive apostrophe in English



3.3.3 Apostrophes and plural nouns

As the title of this thesis illustrates, apostrophes were also used in plural nouns during the 17th and 18th centuries. According to Barber (1997) "...when an apostrophe was used it appeared as often with plurals as it did with possessives" (p. 143), and this sentiment was also shared by Fries (1927). Given that the schwa and the letter <e> had also been lost from plural nouns, we might expect the apostrophe to mark this, as grammarian Mason observed

in 1878,: “The plural *books* has just as good a right to an apostrophe as the possessive singular, a vowel having been omitted” (p. 29). However, my investigations show that while apostrophes did appear in plural nouns during this period, they were not frequent and did not follow the same patterns as the possessive apostrophe (see tables 3.4 and 3.5, above).

Unlike the possessive apostrophe, in the 17th and 18th centuries the plural apostrophe was most commonly found following a sibilant as in *genius's*, or a vowel as in *idea's*, *toga's*, and *folio's* (Sklar, 1976). This limited environment suggests that the apostrophe was not motivated by a missing element, but rather by word endings that seemed awkward when the plural suffix was added. This can explain why, contrary to Barber and Fries' claims, they were much less frequent than possessive apostrophes, since words with these endings were not common at the time. There were no plural apostrophes found in LLL or in the handwritten texts from Cusack and figure 3.7, below, shows all examples found in the texts examined.

Table 3.7. List of plural nouns with apostrophes found in texts				
Source	Year	(author)	Plural noun apostrophes	Other plurals
Prefaces to LLL	1765	Mr Pope	<i>quarto's</i> (3x) <i>comma's</i>	
	1765	Mr Rowe	<i>genius's</i> , <i>stanza's</i>	
Banks's journal	1768-71		<i>dagysa's</i>	<i>dagysas</i>
Cook's journal	1772-75		<i>Eowa's</i> , <i>Whanno's</i> , <i>Earee's</i> <i>Eatua's</i> , <i>divinity's</i>	<i>toutous</i>
EEBO	1698		<i>phenomena's</i> , <i>mathematico's</i>	<i>maleficos</i>
	1700		<i>cliff's</i> 'clefs'	
ECCO	1732		<i>idea's</i> , <i>Criolio's</i> , <i>Hypotheses's</i>	<i>Bermudas</i>
Mather	1772		<i>nature's</i> , <i>chapter's</i> , <i>country's</i> <i>homily's</i> , <i>Wesno's</i> , <i>Rotolo's</i>	<i>curiosities</i> , <i>layers</i>

The number is very small considering the large number of texts involved in this study. While most of these examples comply with the conventions of the time, some like *cliff's* and *nature's*, along with those in italics without apostrophes, demonstrate that apostrophes were neither always used, nor only used in a vowel-final environment. Furthermore, in the 27 editions of Coote's grammar available on EEBO (1596, 1614, 1627, 1630, 1635, 1636, 1637, 1640, 1641, 1651, 1655, 1656a, 1656b, 1658, 1662, 1663, 1665, 1669, 1670, 1673, 1675, 1680, 1684, 1687, 1692, 1696, 1700), apostrophes appeared in *apostrophe's*

intermittently between 1630 and 1658, including an apostrophe in one 1656 edition but not the other. Most other editions had either no apostrophe or the singular form.

While the lost <e> could have been marked in both possessive and plural nouns, it seems the apostrophe was seen as distinguishing possessive from plural and that its primary function in plural nouns was to provide clarity by marking the morpheme boundary.

3.3.4 Defining the apostrophe: A morpheme boundary marker?

Before concluding this discussion of the functions of the apostrophe, Daniel Bunčić (2004) proposes a theory which warrants some consideration. He believes that the main function of the apostrophe in all languages is to mark morpheme boundaries, and he proposes a number of arguments to support this.

One of these beliefs is that the apostrophe has been a morphological marker “from the beginning” (p. 187) and to discuss this I return to the apostrophe’s origins in Greek. As we saw in the Bacchylides papyrus (figure 2.1), morpheme boundaries were not represented in capital scripts at all. Later when the minuscule script was developed, spaces marked morpheme boundaries and these spaces were usually retained when apostrophes were used, as is the case in written Greek today. Therefore, the apostrophe marked elision while the morpheme boundary was marked by a space.

In French and Italian, on the other hand, elision was marked in the spelling with no space before the apostrophe was introduced. The apostrophe, therefore, provided extra clarity and sometimes distinguished elided forms from single words as in *l'une* ‘the one’ and *lune* ‘moon’ in French. We can say then, that while the apostrophe marked elision it can also be analysed as marking the morpheme boundary, as Bunčić argues. However, in the earliest mention of apostrophe use in French in 1531, Dubois described the apostrophe as a marker of elision and it is most likely that this was, and still is, the general perception of its function.

The English apostrophe was first used in exactly the same way as in French. Elision had been represented in spelling before its introduction, reducing phrases to single words as in *thimage*. The apostrophe provided clarity by marking the morpheme boundary, and this may have been the perception of its function. Hart's description of it in 1551, though, suggests otherwise. He refers to it as a *turner* which he describes as "the eating and taking away of a voel" (p. 153), both of which imply the marking of the missing vowel, rather than the morpheme boundary.

Moreover, the English apostrophe was soon extended to other functions, among the first of which were in forms like *'tis*, *'twill* and *ne'er* where it did not mark a boundary. Nonetheless, as noted above, the first two texts in which contractions appeared, Marlowe (1606) and Machin (1608), had the forms *t'was* and *t'is* respectively and this appears to support Bunčić's theory, since the apostrophe marked the boundary and not the missing sound, but they are the only examples like this found. Apostrophe use was most prolific in verse because it indicated the pronunciation required to maintain meter, regardless of where the omission occurred. It seems probable, then, that the apostrophe was considered by writers of verse, such as Marlowe and Machin, to be a marker of phonological omission.

While Bunčić argues that contracted forms are not used in formal writing other than verse, this was not the case in the 17th century and the first half of the 18th century. We saw that they were used in several of the prologues in Johnson's 1765 edition of Shakespeare's works and throughout the works in the EEBO and ECCO studies. *Tho'* was almost a standard spelling and other examples included *wou'd*, for 'would', *'em* for 'them' and *o'er* for 'over', none of which cross morpheme boundaries. If the apostrophe was seen primarily as a morpheme boundary marker, it seems unlikely that it would have been adapted to these other purposes. It was only later that such forms became unacceptable in formal writing.

Another claim is that "...the apostrophe was placed between the stem especially of foreign words and the plural or genitive ending -s" (p. 199), implying that the apostrophe was applied to both forms in the same way. I have demonstrated above, however, that the processes were quite different. The apostrophe does seem to have been a boundary marker employed to clarify vowel-final plural nouns as we saw in examples such as *comma's* and

phenomena's, but there were no such constraints on possessive nouns and the apostrophe was applied regardless of the word's origins or endings. Thus, the motivation for the possessive apostrophe was different and if there were a morphological basis for the possessive apostrophe we would expect to also find it in all plural nouns. While Bunčić's claims may be true of apostrophe use in Italian and French, they are more problematic when applied to English, and this is explored further with reference to modern use in 9.2.1.3.

3.3.5 Summary of language change and the apostrophe

As we have seen above, the apostrophe seems to be associated with different aspects of language change. Its first function of elision reflected a change in pronunciation that elided an unstressed final vowel before another vowel, but through further sound change this function became obsolete. By then the apostrophe had been adapted to accommodate other sound changes, such as the loss of the schwa in verbs like *ordain'd*, *mak'st*, and *speak's* and segments dropped from contractions such as in '*tis*', *I'll* and *can't*. Lexical change prompted the use of apostrophe in plural nouns because borrowed vowel-final words made awkward plurals in English.

On the other hand, the possessive apostrophe reflects the loss of <e> in the orthography. The extension of the possessive apostrophe to group genitives was a result of morpho-syntactic change, in which the fixed inflectional suffix eventually became a moveable clitic. Then the second half of the 18th century saw a change in which writing practices diverged from spoken language. It was no longer acceptable to reflect the shortened forms typical of everyday speech in formal writing and these became limited to reported speech and verse. The apostrophe became primarily a marker of possession, and the next section explores how this change came about.

3.4 The eighteenth-century grammarians

This examination of the changes that took place in the mid-18th century begins by considering the social background against which these changes occurred and how attitudes created a demand for language guidelines. The following section considers the attitudes of the grammarians as they wrestled with each other over how English should be used. And finally, a chronology of grammars illustrates how these differing attitudes and ideas eventually converged into a set of prescriptive rules for apostrophe use.

3.4.1 Social change and the apostrophe

While the apostrophe was becoming established in English, English society was changing in a way that would have a major impact on its use. In pre-18th-century English society, there was a clear division between the land-owning noble classes and the labourers, cottagers and paupers that made up the remainder of society. Status was a right of birth and this was understood by all as “divine intervention” (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brinberg, 2003, p. 33). With the industrial revolution of the 18th century, however, it became possible for some to climb up from their humble beginnings, and those who did formed a new middle class of wealthy and literate people with aspirations of upward mobility (Baron, 2000; Crystal, 2005; Shay 2008). People in the lower middle class in particular, were less secure in their new status and sought to distance themselves from their working classes origins (Bourdieu, 1991; Crystal 2005, Eckert, 2000), and notions of *politeness* came to rule all aspects of their lives.

Politeness in the 18th century had a deeper meaning than it does today. Middle-class insecurity was partly based on an awareness of a lack of refinement in comparison to the French, whom they sought to emulate (McIntosh, 1998). Politeness was about “decorum, grace, beauty, symmetry and order” (Watts, 2002, p. 161) and it was demonstrated through amassing property and possessions, through how they dressed and behaved, and also through language (Crystal, 2005). Bourdieu (1991) describes *cultural capital* as the cultural

acquisition of knowledge and skills while *symbolic capital* refers to prestige this may confer. Language, therefore, gave the middle classes symbolic capital which “along with dress, manners, etc., came to be seen as embodiments of cultural value: clarity, logic, elegance” (Eckert, 2000, p. 19). Books on etiquette appeared on the market advising them how to dress and behave – and alongside these “a veritable explosion of grammars” (Tieken-Boon van Oostade, 2006, p. 242) which would shape the way the middle class spoke and wrote – and used apostrophes.

Perhaps Shakespeare foreshadowed these attitudes in LLL with his character Holofernes, who makes a rather cryptic reference to apostrophes. In Act 4, scene 2, after Sir Nathaniel reads a letter aloud, Holofernes retorts: “You finde not the apostraphas, and so misse the accent” (First Quarto, 1598). Since the apostrophe affects neither stress nor the quality of vowels, it is unclear what Shakespeare intended by linking it to *accent*. However, it seems Holofernes is admonishing Sir Nathaniel for some solecism, thereby displaying his superiority through linguistic prowess. It is sometimes said that the character Holofernes was based on grammarian Richard Mulcaster (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004), whom we will encounter below.

3.4.2 The grammarians

At the same time that societal attitudes were changing, writers, grammarians and lexicographers were gaining a new appreciation of the English language, which according to Palsgrave, by 1540 had reached “the higheste perfection that ever hytherto it was” (in Bailey, 1991, p. 31). It was people’s use of English, they believed, that undermined its perfection. In his *Elementarie*, published in 1582, Holofernes’s alter-ego Richard Mulcaster deplores colloquial language which he describes as “naughtie custom” (p. 84) railing against such custom when he writes “To abuse speche in anie hir deliverie whether by tung or pen ... is extreme beastlie” (p. 84), and he colludes with the reader to end such abuse: “both you, and I will scratch out the eies of common error, for misusing good things” (p. 86).

It seems there was an ambivalence about the language, and now English had overtaken Latin as the language of writing it was widely believed that there was a need for regulation and standardisation (Finnegan, 1980). As books became more widely available and literacy rates increased, the need for more clarity was recognised, since without the visual and prosodic cues of spoken language, variant spelling created ambiguity (Crystal, 2006a). Moreover, spelling was believed to be a major obstacle for English writers in the European market (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004, p. 77).

Some believed that regularising spelling and grammar could prevent language change (Burnley, 1992). To this end, Hart (1551) and Bullokar (1586) developed reformed spelling systems in which one symbol corresponded to one sound. Samuel Johnson (1755) on the other hand, was more realistic and disparaged any lexicographer who “shall imagine that his dictionary can embalm his language, and secure it from corruption and decay, that it is in his power to change sublunary nature, or clear the world at once from folly, vanity, and affectation” (p. 10).

Nonetheless, spelling was fixed, so that each word had one spelling, by the end of the 17th century. This spelling was not always logical and was not always adhered to (Mugglestone, 2006). Even Samuel Johnson, who is credited with ‘fixing’ English spelling, uses “downright bad” spelling in his private letters (Osselton, 1998, p. 34). For example, he spells the word ‘does’ as *does*, *dos*, and sometimes *do’s* (*ibid.*) and has entries for *complete* under both *complete* and *compleet* (Horobin, 2013, p. 146). As for the apostrophe, Crystal (2006a) observes, “Compositors found most of the new marks confusing, and there is a great deal of inconsistency of usage” (p. 139). The apostrophe in particular remained inconsistent well into the 18th century, as the studies above have shown.

Grammar was also in need of improvement and many objected to the free borrowing of foreign words into English, in what became known as the *inkhorn controversy* (Burnley, 1992). Towards the end of the 17th century, some writers such as Dryden, Swift and Defoe were calling for the establishment of a language academy similar to *L'Académie française* in Paris (Crystal, 2006a; Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006) in order “...to encourage Polite Learning, to polish and refine the English Tongue” (Defoe, 1697, p. 233). The academy did

not eventuate because, according to Finnegan (1980), the dictionaries and grammars flooding onto the market made this unnecessary. These dictionaries and grammars were written by people from many backgrounds, including clergymen, scientists, teachers and poets, who set themselves up as language experts (Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006; Watts, 2002).

Mulcaster's comment "I honor the Latin, but I worship the English" (1582, p. 254) illustrates the beliefs held by many grammarians at this time. English was highly esteemed, but they saw Latin as the vehicle through which English would be enriched and perfected. It was the regularity and stability of Latin that they admired and although Latin "lacked the natural flux and variance of living, breathing languages like English", (Burridge, 2004, pp. 154-5), this was the model the grammarians applied as they set about corraling English into a set of rules (Aitcheson, 2001; Bailey, 1991; Finnegan, 1980).

However, as Bourdieu (1991) notes, "...each speaker fashions an idiolect from the common language" (p. 39), and accordingly each grammarian based his pronouncements on his own beliefs about language (Kamm, 2015; Leonard, 1929). As a consequence, there was little agreement among writers and grammarians, and arguments as to what forms should be the standard went on for generations (Finnegan, 1980). They saw themselves as the authorities on language with the right to criticise their fellow writers' failings. Although his own use of apostrophes was irregular, Lowth (1775/1970) asserts that his book will show "that our best authors have committed gross mistakes, for want of due knowledge of English" (p. viii), and he uses examples from writers such as Shakespeare, Pope and Milton to illustrate these deficiencies. Defoe (1697) vowed "to purge from [English] all the Irregular Additions that Ignorance and Affectations have Introduc'd..." (p. 233). Yet he, in turn, was vilified for his penchant for apostrophes in its many functions.

With regard to the apostrophe, they argued about what constituted possession, about use with possessive pronouns and about use in plural nouns (Burridge, 2004). In an article in *The Spectator* dated 1711, Joseph Addison (1837) condemns the forms *drown'd*, *walk'd* and *arriv'd* as "disfiguring the tongue" (p. 203) while contractions such as *mayn't*, *can't*, *shan't*,

wo'n't “untuned our language, and clogged it with consonants” (p. 204). A year later Swift (1712) opined:

Most of the Books we see now a-days are full of those Manglings and Abbreviations. Instances of this Abuse are innumerable ; What does Your LORDSHIP think of the Words drudg's, disturb'd, rebuk't, fledg'd, and a thousand other everywhere, to be met in Prose as well as Verse? (p. 22)

Yet the word *refus'd* appears on page 45 in the same volume.

Disagreement and criticism continued into the 19th and 20th centuries. Shaw (1902), for example, saw no need for apostrophes in contractions, writing “There is not the faintest reason for persisting in the ugly and silly trick of peppering pages with these uncouth bacilli” (in Crystal 2006a, p. 138). Yet eventually English was set into prescriptive rules.

3.4.3 The grammars, the prescriptive rules and the apostrophe

As Beal (2010) notes, many early grammars make no mention of the apostrophe. Nevertheless, as we saw in chapter 2 the function of the apostrophe was given some attention by John Hart as early as 1551. He describes in detail the use of the apostrophe, or *tourner*, to mark elision, although *thaccents*, *thexample* and *thonly* appear in the same volume without apostrophes. On the other hand, Mulcaster (1582), Bullokar (1586) and Puttenham (1589) make no mention of the apostrophe in their grammars, although they have all used at least one. It is not until Coote’s 1596 edition of *The English School Master*, that the apostrophe is mentioned again. He writes: “And so a word ending in a vowell, both lose it sometime when the next word begineth with a vowell, as thintent, for the intent, which exactly should be written thus, *th’intent”, and in the margin: “*Called apostrophus” (in some editions, “*called apostrophe’s”). The content of this entry remains unchanged in the 1700 edition, although elision was obsolete by then, and there is no further explanation of the functions of the apostrophe. The first English dictionary, written by Robert Cawdrey and published in 1604, is also unlikely to have an entry for *apostrophe* since it does not appear in the 1623 edition I examined. In 1617, Hume provides more guidance with

“Apostrophus is the ejecting of a letter or a syllab out of one word or between tuae” (p. 23) and he includes examples of this, including elision. There is no mention of possession and it is towards the end of the century before possession warrants comment.

In *The English Grammar* (1688), Miege explains that in the possessive case the noun “assumes an s, with an Apostroph” (p. 34). This includes s-final words, such as Thomas’s, but excludes plural possessives, both with and without s-finals. He makes frequent use of the apostrophe in contractions, such as ‘twould, that’s, don’t and ’em, but does not explain this function. He does, however, explain that with past-tense verbs “to reduce two syllables to one, ’tis usual to pronounce and write, for example *esteem’d* for *esteemed*”. He includes a list of examples of both *d*- and *t*-final verbs in which apostrophe use is inconsistent in the *t*-final words, as can be seen in the examples *mark’t* and *lookt*. More interesting though, is his description of *y*-final words when they take a suffix. Where such nouns are pluralised, -y’s and -ies are optional spellings and similarly *y*-final verbs can become -y’d or -ied as in *marry’d* or *married*. There are also examples of third-person-singular verbs as in *imply’s/implies* and *signify’s/signifies*. His frequent use of phrases such as “I think”, “I’m sure” and “is commonly used” is typical of the largely descriptive nature of the grammars of this period.

Bailey’s 1726 dictionary defines the apostrophe as “an Accent or Mark, shewing that there is a vowel cut off, express’d thus (’)” (p. 69) and the following year Mather explains its use for omission, contractions and possession. As well as explaining its functions, Mather makes frequent use of the apostrophe for every function it has ever had in English: elision, a wide range of omission, contractions, possession as well as in plural nouns (*nature’s, homily’s*), third-person-singular verbs (*honour’s, hinder’s*) and even in an adverb (*sometime’s*).

Samuel Johnson’s renowned dictionary was published in 1755 and was based largely on Bailey’s dictionary (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Ostade, 2006). His definition of *apostrophe* is “the contraction of a word by use of a comma; as, tho’, for though; rep’, for reputation” (p. 144). It is unclear whether he includes the loss of <e> in the possessive in this definition although he uses an example, *Smith’s Retorick* in the line above his definition. Smith’s *The printer’s grammar*, published in the same year, devotes a whole section of two-

and-a-half pages to the apostrophe. It covers different types of omission, and one sentence at the end explains its function marking the genitive case of singular nouns.

Joseph Priestley, in *The rudiments of English grammar* (1761), explains the apostrophe's use in possession for both singular and plural nouns, observing that it represents the missing <i> of the earlier possessive form. Priestley also notes that it is used in plural nouns ending in a vowel or <s>, but expresses a personal preference for <-es>. Typically for the time, Priestley's grammar reflected language as it was used rather than how it should be used (Finnegan, 1980; Leonard, 1929). However, one month after the publication of Priestly's grammar, the public's attention was drawn to a new arrival on the grammar market.

Lowth's *A short introduction to English grammar* first published in 1762 marks the beginning of the prescriptive rules of English (Burridge, 2004; Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Oostade, 2006). While he describes how English is used, he also proscribes what he regards as unacceptable use by other authors (see 3.4.2), and so "Lowth, and others after him, presented his reading public with a norm of correct English" (Nevalainen & Tieken-Boon van Oostade, 2006, p. 284), and, of course, incorrectness. Lowth (1775/1970) only mentions the apostrophe's function in possession, and like Priestley, he saw the apostrophe as marking the missing <i> and therefore problematic in phrases like *Thomas's book* where the <i> still has phonological value. He explains apostrophe use with complex nouns phrases and also notes that the <s> is not added to some s-final nouns, and never to plural nouns. Lowth gave people confidence in their language use, but at the same time his proscriptions and prescriptions were unyielding (Finnegan, 1980), and "Notions of 'right' and 'wrong' in English became hot topics" (Burridge, 2004, p. 155).

Towards the end of the 18th century some grammarians still saw omission as the main function of the apostrophe. Ash's entry in the 1775 edition of his dictionary describes the apostrophe as "A note of contraction like a comma, the elision or cutting off of some letter or part of a word" (unnumbered) yet in the grammar section he explains "the *genitive case* is formed by adding *s*, with an *apostrophe*, to the *nominative*" (p. 6). Other grammarians indicate that the apostrophe used for omission and abbreviation was beginning to fall out of favour. Both Murray (1796) and Lovechild (1798) use the apostrophe exclusively for

possession and only explain its use in possession. Lovechild (*ibid.*) also explains its ability to distinguish possessive nouns from plural. By the end of the 18th century, the demands of the middle classes had been answered with the publication of over 250 grammars and 20 dictionaries which each “reflected the biases of their creators” (Kamm, 2015, p. 22).

The grammars continued to come in the 19th century. In 1825 Hansard harks backward to Smith’s seventy-year-old printers’ manual, rewriting almost verbatim Smith’s guidelines of use in omission and possession, in which the apostrophe is not used with plural possessive nouns. Brown (1851), while he only uses apostrophes for possession, gives a more all-round explanation of functions that includes possession, omission and pluralising individual letters or numbers. He also notes that Lowth’s objection to the apostrophe in Thomas’s was now “overruled by custom” (p. 251) because the apostrophe now denotes possessive case. In 1878, Mason mentions only possession as a function, explaining the rules for both singular and plural nouns. This demonstrates that while there was still some recognition that the apostrophe marked omission, it was coming to be viewed as a possessive marker. According to Little (1986) it was towards the end of the 19th century before grammarians agreed on how the apostrophe should be used, but by then deviations from these rules were already apparent.

These prescriptive grammars came to be seen as the complete guide to perfect English. Bailey (1991), however, compares this notion of a perfect language with theme parks and historic villages, which sanitise history by overlooking the “sewage, sickness, slavery and squalor” that was the reality (p. 271). Those who hark back to this golden age of English hark back to something that never really existed and Burridge’s (2010) term ‘superstandard’ also places prescriptive grammar outside the bounds of reality. Pinker (1994) observes that if prescriptive rules were a natural part of the English grammar system, they would not need to be instilled so rigorously. Yet as we will see in the following chapters, modern linguists believe that some aspects of language, including the apostrophe, need to be governed by rules.

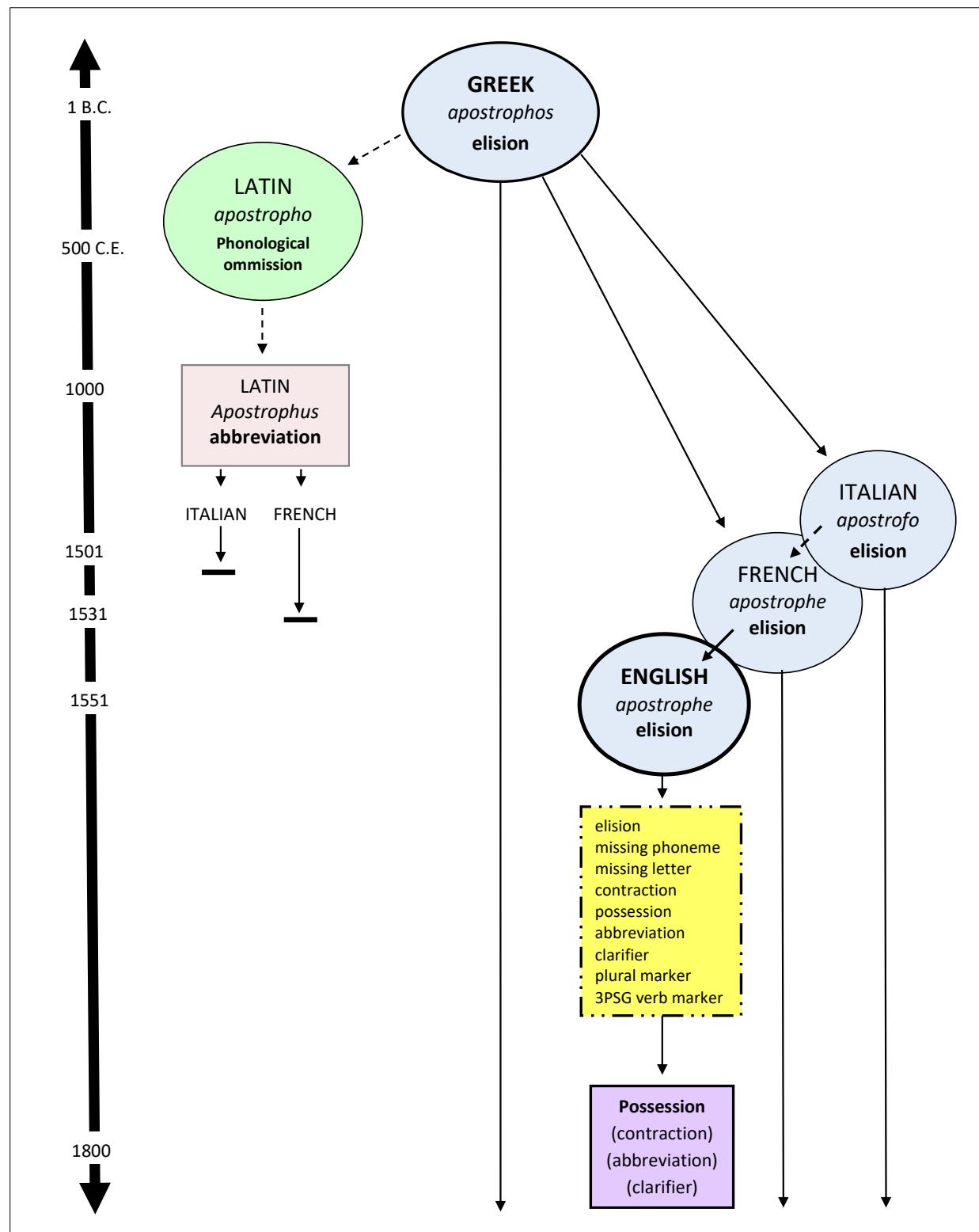
3.5 Summary of part I

The apostrophe's journey from its emergence in Greek to the English prescriptive rules we know today was a long one. The earliest examples of the apostrophe are over 2,000 years old – in the Bacchylides papyrus. Through the ensuing years the Greeks used the apostrophe to mark elision, albeit inconsistently. The use of the apostrophe in Latin is less clear, but the fact that Priscian described the apostrophe in the sixth century as marking phonological omission suggests it may have developed from the Greek mark of elision. The Latin apostrophe of the Middle Ages, though, was very different, becoming part of an abbreviation system that no longer reflected pronunciation. While both the Latin and Greek apostrophes were used in Italian and French it is the Greek-type apostrophe that we see used today. And it was the Greek-type apostrophe that arrived in English, via French, in the 16th century.

Originally, the apostrophe marked elision in English as it had in Italian and French. Elision was uncommon in English though, and it was not until the apostrophe was assigned to other purposes that it began to proliferate as a mark of omission. By the beginning of the 17th century it was used to mark the loss of the <e> in the possessive suffix and not, as some believe, the his-genitive. It was also sometimes used in awkward plural nouns and occasionally even in third-person-singular verbs. However, unlike in Italian and French its use remained inconsistent both between writers and within a single work.

Meanwhile social patterns were changing and this created a demand for guidance for language use befitting of *polite* society. Grammarians answered the call by setting themselves up as authorities on language, and with Latin as their guide, they set about regularising English into prescriptive rules. The English apostrophe eventually became stabilised into a mark of possession with the secondary functions of omission and abbreviation, at least in formal writing. Figure 3.3, below, illustrates the development of the apostrophe from its emergence in Greek over 2,000 years ago.

Figure 3.3. The history of the English apostrophe



CHAPTER 4:

INTRODUCTION TO PART II

4.1 Introduction

Part I has traced the apostrophe from its origins in Greek to the prescriptive rules we know in English today. Part II now explores the adherence to these rules in contemporary New Zealand. First, it seeks to explore how the apostrophe is used, focusing on the incidence of nonstandard use. Second it investigates the impact of changing social patterns, educational policies and practice, and technology on people's beliefs and attitudes surrounding apostrophe use. And third, part II considers how these factors might shape the future of the apostrophe.

Part II, therefore, addresses the second and third research questions:

- Q. 2 What are the current attitudes and practices of New Zealand English speakers regarding the prescriptive rules of apostrophe use; what shapes these attitudes and how do they influence practice?
- Q. 3 What predictions can reasonably be made about the impact of current practices and beliefs and the future of the prescriptive rules for apostrophe use in New Zealand English?

Responding to these questions necessitated a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods and so a *parallel convergent mixed methods design* was selected. This included the collection of examples of nonstandard apostrophe use, a face to face questionnaire, an online questionnaire and a series of interviews targeting different groups of people, including teachers.

The methodology is described in detail in the following chapter, along with a discussion of ethical considerations and generalisability. There are also some notes on presentation including the editing of transcripts, tables, and the codes used to identify participants. The following three chapters cover the results and findings, presented under topic headings with

the quantitative results generally being presented first followed by the findings from the qualitative methods. Chapter 6 is largely quantitative data and presents apostrophe use in New Zealand today, considering some of the social factors that may be associated with its use. Chapter 7 covers the sources of people's understanding of apostrophes – how they were taught in the past and the impact of educational ideologies on teaching practices and learning. It also considers factors outside the classroom, technology in particular. Chapter 8 then reports on attitudes towards apostrophe use and the beliefs that underpin these attitudes, as well as people's thoughts on what the future may hold for the apostrophe. The findings from parts I and II are then brought together in the discussion and conclusion in part III.

In this chapter, the work of other researchers is considered in a review of relevant concepts around the apostrophe that provides a useful framework for the study presented in part II. The following section considers aspects of apostrophe use, including the functions and social factors that may be associated with use. Section 4.3 then outlines the current conventions of apostrophe use, while section 4.4 addresses the likely impact of educational and technological change on apostrophe use. Beliefs and attitudes surrounding apostrophe use are covered in section 4.5 and in section 4.6 we take a glimpse into the future.

4.2 Stances towards contemporary apostrophe use

This section provides some background to apostrophe use and the trend towards nonstandard use. Nonstandard use is the first thought many people have when they hear the word *apostrophe*, with the *sticklers*¹¹ often expressing their dismay at what they see around them. It is important, then, to explore how the apostrophe is used today in order to assess the frequency and types of nonstandard use and to determine whether the state of the apostrophe is as dire as some believe. Apostrophes in plural nouns is the nonstandard form that attracts the most attention, and according to Hughes and Wallace (2010),

¹¹ The term *sticklers* is used in this study to describe those who pride themselves in their knowledge of apostrophe rules and believe in sticking to them. The intention of this term is to avoid the negative connotations that terms such as *pedant* or *grammar Nazi* (as some have suggested) may have.

“...errors involving the addition of incorrect apostrophes are more common than their omission where they are called for” (p. 14). However, we will see that this is not the reality.

4.2.1 The greengrocer’s apostrophe

The so-called *greengrocer’s apostrophe*, or the insertion of apostrophes in plural nouns, is evident in the public domain and Barfoot (1991) includes many examples of these from his own observations. Some writers put forward possible explanations for such use. Barfoot (*ibid.*) makes a case for apostrophes in plural nouns being simply a continuation of the historical use which, he claims, never really died out, although his study covers only the 40 years prior to writing so cannot demonstrate this continuum. He reasons that most cases of apostrophe error involve nouns ending in vowels as was the case in 18th-century English, although this does not explain all his own examples. Crystal (2006b) and Truss (2003) support this theory, explaining the apostrophe in plural nouns ending in vowels as an attempt to clarify pronunciation, since words like *bananas* and *tacos* suggest the aberrant pronunciation [bənənæs] and [takɔs] rather than [bənənəz] and [takoɔz]. By marking the morpheme boundary with an apostrophe, pronunciation is made clear. Yet this cannot explain all the examples we see today.

4.2.2 The possessive apostrophe

Missing possessive apostrophes also seem to be very common, although perhaps less noticeable than intrusive apostrophes. Hall (2009) explains that the broad definition of possession is difficult for children to understand, especially since the word *belonging* is often used in the classroom. This makes it difficult for children to grasp the more abstract forms as in *Tuesday’s weather* and *in three days’ time*, much less in business names where the possessed object is absent, as in *McDonald’s*. Furthermore, possessive apostrophes are slowly being removed from signage. As early as 1891 the United States Board of Geographic Names first suggested removing apostrophes from place names and about this time businesses in the UK were beginning to remove apostrophes from their names (Little, 1986).

Barfoot (1991) has found the use of apostrophes in branding and advertising to have changed considerably over the 20th century, with relatively consistent standard use giving way to inconsistency and a higher frequency of non-use towards the end of the century. He observes that businesses were often unaware of their oversight, and in order to investigate this he contacted a number of large British businesses, from which he received some interesting replies. He discovered that Barclays Bank have never used an apostrophe in their name and there is no evidence of any discussion of the topic. Harrods' apostrophe seems to have disappeared when the word *Store* was cut from the name in 1920. His reply from Lloyds Bank was interesting because *Lloyds* refers to 'two Lloyds' and the apostrophe therefore followed the *s*, as in *Lloyds' Bank*. However, this confused people who seldom used it correctly, and this was a particular problem in legal documents. As a consequence, Lloyds made the decision to drop the apostrophe from its name as far back as 1889, explaining to Barfoot that "The only way to avoid expensive and lengthy unscrambling of errors has been to eradicate their cause" (p. 131). The archivist from Selfridges believes that the apostrophe always marked the store as belonging to the founder, rather than to the family, explaining that "After the founder resigned in 1939 and almost as if to emphasise the severance, the apostrophe was dropped and the company reformed and reregistered as Selfridges Ltd (4TH March 1940): NO APOSTROPHE!" (p. 132).

While some businesses remove their apostrophes, others make a feature of theirs. Little (1986) gives the example of the US department store Macy's which has a star in place of the apostrophe. The images below are my own examples, also from the USA and with an apostrophe made from sports balls in one case and the stalk of a chili in the other.



Figure 4.1. Chicago sports store



Figure 4.2. Las Vegas airport
restaurant

There is also a notable trend for apostrophes to be omitted from business names in New Zealand, and Hughes and Wallace (2010) found that companies often drop the apostrophe

from their names when they become a registered trade mark. They also observe that many organisations omit apostrophes from their names, including schools. So, for example, *Auckland Girls' Grammar School* has an apostrophe, while *Epsom Girls Grammar School* does not.

As noted above, defining *possessive* can be problematic since the possessive form often expresses relationships other than ownership. Some argue that an apostrophe is unnecessary in phrases such as *boys high school* because the school is for the boys, rather than being owned by them (Hughes & Wallace, 2010). Little (1986) observes that some regard modifiers in such phrases as behaving more like adjectives. In Cappon's *The Associated Press Guide to Punctuation* (2003) he advises:

Don't use **apostrophes** in such primarily descriptive phrases as *a New York Mets outfielder, a teachers college, a writers manual, a childrens book, the agencies request*. As the *AP Stylebook* helpfully notes, the apostrophe is usually skipped if 'for' or 'by' would go better than 'of' in a longer version: *college for teachers, manual for writers, request by the agencies* (p. 16)

Hughes and Wallace (2010) describe this argument as "dubious" (p. 15), however, and I also find a number of problems. First, adjectives do not take -s suffixes, and when nouns are used as adjectives the singular forms are generally used, as in *teacher needs* or *child advocate*. This is sometimes used as a means of avoiding uncertainty over apostrophe placement, according to Barfoot (1991) and Truss (2003). Second, Cappon's example, *the agencies request*, creates ambiguity in which the noun *request* could initially be interpreted as a verb. Third, the irregular plural form in Cappon's example, *a childrens book*, demonstrates that this can only be possessive case, since the -s is not a plural suffix. Although we can only see this clearly in words with irregular plural forms, it demonstrates that all Cappon's examples are possessive and that making such exceptions only increases confusion over possessives.

It is interesting that, while Cappon has used *a childrens book* as an example of this exception, the *AP stylebook* (Associated Press, 2015) further complicates the matter by excluding irregular plurals from the exception to the possessive rule. Yet, *a children's book* is

neither less descriptive nor more possessive than *a teachers' college*. Cameron (1995) writes that house styles often reflect the personal preferences of the editor, but in this case there is inconsistency between different AP publications on style. Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finnegan (1999) refer to these forms as *classifying genitives* which “answer ‘what kind of’ rather than ‘whose’” (p. 294), but they are genitives nevertheless. Perhaps the problem is in the terminology and the use of *genitive* rather than *possessive* may be less confusing.

4.2.3 Contractions

There is little of any depth written about apostrophe use in contractions in modern times. Apart from being acknowledged as one of the main functions of the apostrophe it is noted that that contraction is now more prevalent in writing (Honey, 1997) and that it is easier for children to learn and use than the possessive apostrophe (Bryant, Devine, Ledward & Nunes, 1997). Baron (2010) reported that children tend to leave spellcheck to insert apostrophes in contraction while Aitcheson (2001) comments that the word *lets* is now commonly seen as a single word, rather than a verb and pronoun. This suggests a possible trend towards children not understanding what contractions stand for and there is some support for this in a short video in which a class of 11 and 12-year olds had difficulty identifying what *-d* in *they'd* stood for (Powers, 2008). While they recognised it as a “squished” word, they guessed *did* and *would* before they guessed the only one that made sense in the context – *had*. Without the requirement to write the full forms they are less exposed to them and may come to see them as a single unit.

4.2.4 Social factors and apostrophe use

Social factors associated with apostrophe also warrant investigation. For example, given the changes in teaching practices described below, we might expect to find variation in apostrophe use between older and younger groups. Interestingly, though, according to Bell (2014) and Holmes and Wilson (2017), evidence points to the use of nonstandard forms falling during the middle years. This is thought to be due to the need for standard language

in the workplace, whereas nonstandard forms are identity markers for adolescents and a feature of a more relaxed life-style for older people. “The use of standard or prestige forms typically peaks between the ages of 30 and 55 when people experience maximum societal pressure to conform” (Holmes & Wilson, 2017, p. 187). While this pertains to spoken language, we might expect the same pattern to occur in written language for the same reason.

Another factor to examine is the theory that women tend to use fewer nonstandard forms than men, although conversely, they are also at the forefront of language change (Bell, 2014; Eckert, 2000; Holmes & Wilson, 2017). Trudgil (1972) suggests this may be because women are less able to achieve symbolic capital in the workplace and must find it by other means. Holmes and Wilson (2017), however, found the difference to be independent of status and suggest that, among other reasons, men use more vernacular language because it distances them from the feminine environment of their education and makes them appear more masculine. Women, consequently, reject nonstandard forms because they seem masculine. While these theories focus on spoken language, it will be interesting to consider if they have any relevance to the findings in this study.

4.3 Current Guidelines to Apostrophe Use

A comment accompanying a photograph a colleague sent to me reads “Grrr! It’s not hard, it’s honestly not!”. Apostrophe use may seem straight forward to some, but this is not the impression given by the entry under *Apostrophes* in the 2014 edition of *New Hart’s Rules* (Waddington, 2014), a style guide popular with the New Zealand media (personal communication, December 20, 2017). There are over 30 points in the guidelines explaining where and where not to use apostrophes. It explains both basic and complex rules, including that -’s indicates residences and places of business as in *at Jane’s* or *going to the doctor’s*, but also that not all businesses use apostrophes. It explains that -’s is usually used with names ending in -s as in *Charles’s* or *Thomas’s*, although the second <s> may be omitted if pronunciation is difficult. Apostrophes are not used with plural nouns except for

lower-case letters, such as *i*'s and *t*'s, but they offer the alternatives of italicising the letter, but not the suffix as in *is* and *ts* or using quotation marks as in 'i's and 't's.

There are still some grey areas. For instance, Lauchman (2010) advises the use of the apostrophe alone with singular nouns ending in *s*, as in *Jones'*, while Truss (2003, p. 55) prefers that -'s should be used, as in *Jones's*, although she notes this is "not set in stone" (p. 56). Others, such as Waddington (2014), Butterfield (2015) and Hughes and Wallace (2010) advise the use of pronunciation as a guide in this issue.

Modern grammars are less prescriptive than those published before the middle of the 20th century. In the latest two editions of Fowler's dictionary (Birchfield, 1996; Butterfield 2015), for example, while guidelines for the use of the apostrophe are set out, they are sensitive to current trends and adapt accordingly. Where the 1965 edition (Fowler, 1965) stated that apostrophes are used in past-tense verbs ending in a vowel such as *one-idea'd* and *moustachio'd*, which would otherwise "look absurd" (p. 144), the 1996 edition notes that some writers prefer to add *-ed*, as in *hennaed* (p. 237). By the 2015 edition *moustachioed* is the standard practice while the apostrophised form has been adapted to accommodate the rising popularity of alphabetisms, in examples such as *OD'd* and *OD'ing* (p. 58). This seems to be an increasing trend in modern fiction as the following examples from Kellerman's *Heartbreak Hotel* (2017) demonstrate: *I.D.'d*; *photo'd*; *GPS'ing*; *X'd out* 'crossed out' and *911'd*.

Nevertheless, a number of linguists believe a degree of prescriptivism is still necessary for punctuation, and that rules for apostrophe use need to be taught (Crystal, 2006a; Hall, 2009; Hook, 1999). Hall (2009), for example, points out that "...there has to be conventions or rules, for without these, punctuation would be utterly idiosyncratic and the chances of using it to facilitate effective communication would be either lost or severely hindered" (p. 271). Moreover, according to Hersch and Andrews (2012), readers with a sound lexical knowledge and good spelling skills use more *bottom-up* processing for reading, meaning they focus first on words rather than context, to decode the message. A missing or misplaced apostrophe could, therefore, inhibit reading fluency for skilled readers. The

guidelines of apostrophe use, according to modern style guides, are summarised in table 4.1 below:

Table 4.1. A taxonomy of apostrophe use		
Type	Form	Examples
Missing sounds		
Contraction	'	<i>don't; I'd; it's; would've</i>
Omission	Ø	<i>ne'er; goin'; fish 'n' chips</i> cello; phone; flu
Missing letters		
Abbreviation	'	<i>Gov't, 'government'; In'gill 'Invercargill'</i>
Possession		
Singular (SG)nouns	's	<i>Linda's cousin; the cat's tail; a day's work</i>
Irregular PL nouns		<i>men's shirts; children's voices</i>
Complex noun phrases		<i>the boy <u>in the red jacket's sister</u></i>
Compound nouns		<i>Max and Mary's car (the same car)</i>
		<i>Max's and Mary's cars (separate cars)</i>
Double possessives		<i>That recipe of your sister's</i>
Pronouns - indefinite		<i>on one's own; another's idea; everybody's names</i>
definite	Ø	<i>its; yours; hers; theirs</i>
Some -s final SG nouns	s'	<i>Jesus' name; for goodness' sake</i>
Plural nouns (PL)		<i>the cats' tails; the Joneses' house; two days' work</i>
With periods of time	's or s'	<i>in an hour's time; in a few days' time</i>
Plural nouns		
Nouns	Ø	<i>Stereos, cats, babies, ideas</i>
Alphabetisms		<i>DVDs; BAs</i>
Lower case letters	's	<i>p's and q's; How many c's?</i>
Some instances for clarity		<i>do's and don'ts</i>
Numbers		
Decades and numbers	Ø	<i>1960s; in her 40s; 1,000s</i>
Abbreviation of years	'	<i>'65 (for 1965)</i>
Verbs		
For clarity only	'd / 's / 'ing	<i>cc's; OK'd; OD'ing</i>

4.4 Game changers: Factors effecting change in apostrophe use

As Saville-Troike (2003) observes, language symbolises social difference, and we saw in the previous chapter that the grammarians' widely variant and idiosyncratic ideas of grammar converged over time into sets of rules through which the middle classes of 18th-century England gained status and power. These prescriptive grammars became an established feature of the classroom, which was at that time still the domain of the middle classes. Bourdieu (1991) suggests that through constant correction a child is lead "to become durably what he has to be" (p. 52). In other words, he can develop the cultural capital befitting his class so he can take advantage of the symbolic capital this affords him.

In New Zealand, from the first European arrivals in the early 19th century, there was less social distinction than in England. While the early settlers intended to recreate a class structure similar to England, it was mostly lower middle and working-class people who came (Gordon & Sudbury, 2002; Gordon, Campbell, Hay, MacLagan, Sudbury, & Trudgill, 2004). The wealthy classes consisted of the more successful of these so that, although social class existed in New Zealand, there was less distinction and freer movement between them.

In addition, education, which was once the domain of the privileged few had, by the 20th century, become universal throughout the English-speaking world and in New Zealand, the Education Act 1877 extended free education to all (Swarbrick, 2012). This meant that in the 20th century teaching of prescriptive grammar was no longer exclusive to the middle classes. Schools became the authorities on standard English and so, as Crystal (2005) and Honey (1997) observe, attitudes behind the standard use of English today have become more about *educatedness* than *politeness* or class: "The defining quality symbolised by the use of standard English is not social rank as such, but instead, of educatedness" (Honey, 1997, p. 131). Watts, however, (2002) argues that social status is still promoted as the goal of educatedness and that "'Standard English' remains linked to social climbing, prestige, elitism and exclusivity" (p. 171). This may be the case in England, but with its different social structure, this is not necessarily so in New Zealand and is an interesting point to be investigated.

Then towards the middle of the 20th century, linguists began to question prescriptivism and the constraints it placed on the natural course of language change. They challenged the notion that there was one acceptable and unchangeable variety of English and turned their attention to English as it was used by those who spoke it. This is *descriptive grammar* in which “Linguists look at the language people actually use, not what some 18th century grammarian thought they should use” (Gordon, 2010, p. 18).

4.4.1 English grammar in education: Changing ideologies and practices

Prescriptivism led the way for English teaching in schools, and schools became the medium through which the prescriptive rules were maintained. For two hundred years children “were taught bogus, pointless and manufactured rules that have nothing to do with the effective and fluent use of language” (Kamm, 2015, p. 8). *Plain Sailing*, used in my school in the late 1960s, was a series of three books written for secondary students (Sweeney, 1954, 1955, 1957). Each chapter consists of a reading passage followed by a series of exercises covering a diverse range of language skills including comprehension, vocabulary, language structure and writing skills. Apostrophe exercises, however, are few and are found only under *Revision time*, implying that a sound knowledge of apostrophe use as well as the underlying structures and terminology were expected before entering secondary school.

However, as linguists began to question the relevance of prescriptive rules, educationalists also began to question the role of formal grammar in English education. Over the course of the 20th century, educational ideologies around the teaching of grammar changed dramatically throughout the English-speaking world. Kolln and Hancock (2005) detail the process in the USA, where the teaching of prescriptive grammar was already being questioned before World War I. Decades of debate eventuated in the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) taking an anti-grammar stance, creating a public furore. Kolln and Hancock (*ibid.*) claim that the NCTE’s research was selective and skewed to support its argument. Yet the NCTE’s anti-grammar policy governed the teaching of English in America for four decades and “Unfortunately, the conversation about grammar, in all of its definitions, simply disappeared from NCTE journals and convention programmes in the

1970s and 1980s" (*ibid.*, p. 19). Although some teachers continued to teach grammar, "often behind closed doors" (*ibid.*), grammar also disappeared from teacher training, and as a consequence teachers' knowledge base was significantly eroded.

We see a very similar situation in the UK where in the 1960s, as Honey (1997) relates, grammar came to be regarded as detrimental to children's free expression. It was believed that the rules stifled children's creativity and did not reflect their real-life experiences. Consequently, teachers were advised to ignore mistakes and "children were encouraged to write freely without the discipline of craft, and without bothering about spelling, punctuation and grammar" (Professor Brian Cox, 1995, in Honey 1997, p. 171). It was believed that children would simply absorb correct usage from their environment and as in the USA, conversation around grammar stopped. When the issue was again raised in the late 1980s the debate was polarised between the current no-grammar policy and a return to the "old-fashioned grammar lesson" (Honey, 1997, p. 173). The latter was feared by many, including teachers who had by then lost confidence in their ability to teach grammar, and thus the status quo remained.

4.4.2 English grammar and the apostrophe in New Zealand schools

In New Zealand, according to Gordon (2005, 2010), Professor John Pride of Victoria University, Wellington, believed in teaching language in context with minimal instruction in grammar or even of language terminology. This thinking became accepted practice for 6th and 7th forms in New Zealand in 1967 and soon after for all secondary levels. "The change to the new prescription was swift, with no gentle transition from the traditional to the new" (Gordon, 2005, p. 49). The use of the term *prescription* to describe the new regime is interesting, suggesting that Gordon considers this a shift from one form of prescriptivism to another. This new regime focused attention on different genres of language use and teachers found themselves having to adjust to a whole new approach to their teaching. At first teachers reported more interest in English from their students, but they soon began to acknowledge the new methods were not working. And, inevitably, "It wasn't long before

people realised that there were teachers with no background themselves, who couldn't use the inductive method because they had no idea what to induce" (Gordon, 2010, p. 19).

Where the apostrophe is concerned, studies show that morpho-syntactic awareness gives a clear advantage in understanding apostrophe use. In 1997, Bryant et al. presented two intervention studies in which they established a link between a lack of grammatical knowledge and the inability to use apostrophes successfully. The first study found that children do not use apostrophes if they are not taught about their use, and that instruction improves use. The second study found that children had more difficulty with the possessive apostrophe than with contractions, but that once they were made aware of the genitive case, their apostrophe use improved. Another study by Bryant, Nunes and Bindman in 2000 came to two clear conclusions, first that "the apostrophe is a formidable developmental hurdle in the English orthography" and second that "We found a specific and long-lasting connection between children's morpho-syntactic awareness and their eventual success with apostrophes". By removing grammar from schools, policy makers not only deprived children of the knowledge of where to use apostrophes, but also of the underlying grammar that may have allowed them to induce the rules.

The depth of misunderstanding among young people became apparent as they entered New Zealand universities (Gordon 2005, 2010). This led to the setting up of a committee in 1986, chaired by Gordon, which met regularly over three years to consider, among other things, how grammar should be taught to 6th and 7th form students. Committee members were reluctant to return to the old methods of isolated exercises and drills. Modern universities use the comparative method of teaching language structure, which involves comparing structural patterns of English with those of other languages. As anyone who has studied a second language knows, understanding how another language works gives a deeper awareness of one's own language – and studying language structure at university excited me in a way *Plain Sailing* (see 4.4.1) never could. By discovering how the genitive is formed in French or Japanese, for example, one gains a greater understanding of the genitive case in English and consequently, a better understanding of when to use apostrophes. The committee realised that this was a method that would have many benefits for students.

The committee aimed to create a uniquely New Zealand syllabus and selected te reo Māori as the comparative language, not only because it was a logical choice for New Zealand but because its structure was sufficiently different from English to provide useful comparisons. As well as gaining a sound awareness of English grammar, students would also gain a little knowledge of Māori grammar and vocabulary. The committee reassured teachers that they would be provided with support and materials, and surveys conducted showed they had a high level of backing from teachers.

However, the committee did not count on the strength of opposition from pedants and politicians. David Lange, New Zealand's then Prime Minister and Minister of Education, did not ratify the proposal because he did not understand the principles of comparative linguistics, as the first part of his response to the proposal in Parliament demonstrates:

I can draw a distinction between the study of English and the study of language. I am convinced that to study English one has to study English. Some of my best friends speak English, and I am sure they will keep doing so. There is a legitimate place for the study of Māori. The legitimate place for the study of Māori is not in the study of English... (Gordon, 2005, p. 55).

A great opportunity to teach grammar in a meaningful way was lost because an inexpert politician did not understand. As Cameron (1995) observed in her book *Verbal Hygiene*, good ideas are often rejected because the advice of experts is ignored due to the "underlying assumptions" (p. 79) of those with little knowledge. In 1995, Gordon was also invited to help produce *Exploring Language*, a book for teachers aimed at filling the grammar gaps in their knowledge. Yet she was dismayed to find that when her daughter went through teacher training, there was still no conversation on grammar and the book was barely mentioned (Gordon, 2010).

The complete removal of prescriptive grammars from New Zealand schools is important in this study because, as we saw in 4.3 above, effective use of the apostrophe depends on prescriptive rules. The failure to incorporate grammar into new pedagogies and to ensure that English teachers have at least some training in the structure of language, is likely to have a major impact on apostrophe use.

4.4.3 The apostrophe and technology

Around the turn of the century another change was taking place which is likely to affect apostrophe use well into the future. Digital devices are now part of our everyday lives and this is having a major impact on people's understanding and beliefs around apostrophe use. It is transforming writing patterns – who writes, how much we write and how we write. This is a relatively new domain for linguistic research, and because technology develops so quickly, the implications for language can also change within a short period.

Texting on older mobile phones, for example, set the trend for elaborate systems of abbreviation, not unlike those we saw in medieval Latin (see 2.3). Latin abbreviations saved time and valuable parchment and in a similar way, abbreviations in texting also saved time and money. However, as Kemp (2010) points out, abbreviations may increase writing fluency but as with Latin, this is often at the expense of reading fluency. When smart phones arrived with their predictive texting, people found less need to use abbreviations (Horobin, 2013), although even today when most people are using smart phones, textisms are still used (Grace, Kemp, Martin & Parilla, 2015). This is largely because textisms have gone beyond the saving of time and money to become associated with identity and group membership (Kemp, 2010). Therefore, while smart phones have eliminated much of the need for textisms, the influence of the old push-button phones remains in these markers of identity.

An interesting result of technology is that people are now writing more than ever (Baron, 2010). Texting and other forms of messaging have made constant written communication not only possible, but desirable. People who would never have put pen to paper are now texting, messaging and/or emailing many times a day. The style of writing has also changed. Where once most written language tended towards the formal, today casual conversations are carried out in written form, hence writing has become closer to spoken language. Baron (*ibid.*) also comments that where writing once allowed thinking time, texting and messaging require fast thinking which gives less time to consider language use. This led her to ponder the question "Is the sheer fact that we are replacing so much of our spoken interaction with

written exchanges gradually eroding public sense that the quality of our writing matters?” (p. 6).

Baron (2010) describes a general trend towards informality that has occurred in the USA over the last thirty years, evident in features such as clothing and forms of address. New Zealand has undergone a similar process, and the changes that have occurred also affect language use. Baron observes that people are less concerned with correct language use today and she describes this attitude as *linguistic whateverism*. She views this as a reflection of societal change – exacerbated rather than caused by technology, although technology has become the modern scapegoat for blame where language change is concerned.

Written language has become casualised, yet as with spoken language there are contexts in which formality is still required. Written language, therefore, seems to have acquired a range of styles that mimics that of spoken language. Crystal (2008) and Baron (2010) point out that an awareness of appropriacy in written language is essential. Grace et al. (2015) note that a commonly voiced concern is that textisms will intrude into formal writing if this sense of appropriacy is not developed. However, their study demonstrated that most students had a good sense of style, deeming textisms inappropriate for exams and assignments. On the other hand, use of textisms was frequent in communication with friends and, in fact, was often expected within peer groups. They also commented that due to the lack of proximity, the nature of texting and messaging means that style is largely determined by the recipient of the message, rather than other contextual factors as is the case with spoken language.

This demonstrates *accommodation theory*, in which speakers adjust their speech patterns towards those they are speaking with. One of the categories of accommodation theory presented by Beebe (1988) is *similarity attraction theory*, whereby a speaker wishes to identify with the group. Young people, for example, will follow the phonological and lexical patterns of the group to which they wish to belong. Texting will also follow group norms and may include high use of textisms. Although, as Kemp (2010) noted, reading fluency may be compromised, identifying with the peer group outweighs the need for accuracy and there is

likely to be a high degree of tolerance for ambiguity within groups where textisms rule. However, when communicating with parents the same person is likely to adopt a more formal style in both speech and texting. This illustrates the *social exchange* category of accommodation theory (Beebe, 1988) which centres on membership in the wider social group, demonstrating that the theory also applies to written language.

Conversely, Irvine (2001) describes style as “the more subtle ways in which individuals navigate among available varieties to try and perform a coherent representation of a distinctive self” (p. 31). Style, it seems, can mark both individual difference and group membership and is closely associated with identity. Perhaps in texting there is room to develop individual styles within the accepted boundaries of the different social groups to which one belongs.

Apostrophe use may be a marker of style. An apostrophe was problematic on older phones because it often involved multiple keying. Moreover, Crystal (2008) observes that “Texters also seem to be well aware of the low information value of punctuation marks” and it is perhaps not surprising that apostrophes are viewed as expendable in texting. Baron (2010) found apostrophe use to be much lower in texts than in instant messaging where only one stroke is needed, commenting that “Paucity of apostrophes in texting undoubtedly results from input complexity” (p. 159). Her study showed that spelling errors in instant messages were low at only one per 12.8 messages. However, 37% of these were missing apostrophes and where other mistakes were sometimes self-corrected in subsequent messages, missing apostrophes were not.

Kemp (2010) found that the missing apostrophe was one of the most common texting practices to be transferred into other forms of writing. Grace et al. (2015), however, regard missing possessive apostrophes as outside the influence of texting and also question whether missing contractive apostrophes are a result of texting or a trend that would have happened anyway – victims of Baron’s *linguistic whaterverism* (see above).

Smart phones eliminate multi-keying but still usually require the effort of opening another screen to find the apostrophe. Baron’s (2010) students tell her, however, that they do not

insert them in contractions because autocorrect does it for them. She points out that URLs and email addresses cannot have apostrophes and that google searches without apostrophes are not a problem – and wonders if this will affect ‘good’ writing. This pertains to another concern, reported by Grace et al. (2015), that “with sufficient exposure to text messaging, traditional orthographic representations of words in students’ mental lexicons will be overwritten by their text-like versions” (p. 795). There is much in the influence of technology on apostrophe use that warrants investigation.

4.5 Investigating beliefs and attitudes towards the apostrophe

We saw in 4.4.2 that what children are taught is determined by those with the power, but not necessarily the knowledge, to implement educational policy. Spolsky (2004) observes that “Beliefs both derive from and influence practices” (p. 14) and the beliefs of policy makers have an impact on what teachers, and subsequently their students, learn, believe and practice. Yet teachers also bring their own sets of beliefs to the classroom, so policy will be implemented by different teachers in different ways. Beliefs and attitudes around apostrophe use govern how we use apostrophe and also how we expect others to use them, and so represent a central aspect of apostrophe use today, as well as a factor to take into consideration for the apostrophe’s development in the future. However, in order to study this central aspect of apostrophe use, we need to look more closely at what these two terms, *beliefs* and *attitudes*, mean.

There are a number of different models pertaining to beliefs and attitudes. Oskamp and Schultz (2004) explain that *attitude* once described physical stance, but has since come to mean “posture of the mind” (p. 8). Researchers first focused on mental attitude as early as 1862, and motor attitude was added in the late 1880s, but by the 1930s attitude was assumed to encompass both (Allport, 1935). Allport found that the common thread running through the many definitions of attitude he collected was “preparation or readiness for response” (p. 805).

Modern researchers have developed different theories, which usually include *beliefs* as part of the model. In Gibbons and Ramirez's (2004) article on language maintenance, the authors have used the term *beliefs* to cover both *beliefs* and *attitudes* "because separating them in practice is difficult" (p. 99). Oskamp and Shultz (2004) view belief, attitude and behaviour as three separate, but closely linked, phases in which attitude (readiness for action) is triggered by belief and expressed as behaviour. They tell us that "a belief states a relationship between an object and some characteristic" (p. 92). The authors explain that over time, the evaluative nature of attitude has become increasingly important, in other words, the assessment of people, objects and situations as being either favourable or unfavourable.

Garrett, Williams & Coupland (2003) also view attitude as "an evaluative orientation to a social object of some sort" (p. 3), but they see attitude as encompassing three different components, of which belief is one. *Belief* is the cognitive component, the judgements we make about people or things, so language beliefs might include that certain dialects have more prestige or that it is important for children to maintain their mother tongue. The next component of attitude is *affect* – the influence of feelings and emotions that is always part of attitude and both shapes and is shaped by belief. Affect may also influence *behaviour*, or a predisposition to certain behaviour, which is the third component of attitude.

The model of attitude developed by Gharibi and Seals (n.d.) has been adapted from Spolsky's model of language policy. Spolsky's (2004) study examines the role of language policy in language maintenance and his three components of language policy are language practice, i.e. the choices people make about what varieties of language they use; beliefs or ideology about language use; and management, or forms of intervention in language use. Gharibi and Seals (n.d.) observe that the study of belief alone does not consider behaviour and note that: "In the current research 'attitudes' is considered as a multi-layered construct which has beliefs at its core" (p. 3). Therefore, they bring belief and attitude together in their model, in which they visualise attitudes as a set of concentric circles with belief at the centre, practice in the middle ring and management in the outer ring.

The Gharibi and Seals model (n.d.) can explain some of the attitudes expressed in this study, however Garrett, Williams & Coupland's model (2003) is more useful in describing attitudes

regarding apostrophe use, because affect is a major component of this – the element that links belief to behaviour. For this study, therefore, I use the term *attitude* to encompass belief, affect and behaviour.

4.5.1 Attitudes towards apostrophe use

According to Milroy and Milroy (1999), sticklers for correct language use hold the following three assumptions, or beliefs:

1. That there is one, and only one, correct way of speaking and/or writing the English language.
2. That deviations from this norm are illiteracies or barbarisms, and that non-standard forms are irregular and perversely deviant.
3. That people ought to use the standard language and that it is quite right to discriminate against nonstandard users, as such usage is a sign of stupidity, ignorance, perversity, moral degeneracy, etc. (p. 33).

When applied to the apostrophe, the first belief may hold some truth in that, as noted above, inconsistent use of the apostrophe undermines its ability to clarify. However, while nonstandard use may be irregular as in belief two, it cannot be illiterate because illiterate people cannot write. The third point is more complex because rightly or wrongly, people are judged by their use of language and a nonstandard apostrophe in a job application, for example, is likely to disadvantage the writer. This is because managers in many different spheres persist in prescriptive thinking, according to Crystal (2006b). However, managers must make judgements on limited information when recruiting and they may believe that nonstandard apostrophe use in a job application reflects negatively on the writer, even though, according to Wray & Bloomer (2006), “Most people who use apostrophes incorrectly do so because no one has ever explained the rules to them” (p. 255).

Beal’s article (2010) argues that the 21st century has seen a resurgence of prescriptivism and intolerance towards nonstandard use. She uses Truss’s zero tolerance to illustrate this. Lynne Truss (2003) advocates strict adherence to the rules, and suggests that like-minded people go into the community armed with stickers, pens and paints ... and a gun and her book was “met by prayers of thanks by verbal hygienists the world over” (Burridge, 2010, p.

4). Beal (2010) cites numerous online articles found under *greengrocer's apostrophe* and the “hall of shame” (p. 61) websites, which seek to ridicule nonstandard users. She also observes that while the 1965 edition of Fowler’s dictionary referred to such usage as “fatuous vulgarism”, in Birchfield’s edition (1996) this has been softened to “...but it continues to appear, to the amusement of educated people, in signs and notices”. She believes, however, that in the 21st century “the ‘amusement of educated people’ turned to rage” (p. 60). It is interesting, then, that the 2015 edition of Fowler (Butterfield) omits this phrase altogether, suggesting that while our style guides and dictionaries are becoming less prescriptive and judgemental, this is not necessarily reflected in society.

Not everyone is a stickler for standard apostrophe use of course. *Kill the Apostrophe* (n.d.) is a website dedicated to its eradication from English and the following is an outline of the writer’s six reasons for doing so:

1. They seldom make a semantic difference.
2. A large amount of money is spent on proofreading and actioning spellcheck.
3. They are a “tool of snobbery”.
4. It is time consuming to use them on electronic devices.
5. They impede communication for those who do not understand their purpose.
6. They are a distraction to those who “fret” over misuse.

He finishes this last point by asking “Are you a teacher who has marked a student down for apostrophe misuse? Shame on you, if so, for prioritising form over content”.

4.5.2 *The apostrophe and identity*

Attitude is also closely linked with identity. Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1985) believe that it is attitude that determines the choice of language we use in a given context. Saville-Troike (2003) expands on this when she points out that attitudes are inherent in group membership, and that “Language is a key factor – an identification badge – for both self and outside perception...” (199). Language, therefore, is an important part of identity which “...is clarified through social comparison between ingroups and outgroups” (Abrams, 1992, p. 59), according to social identity theory. Milroy and Milroy (1999) tell us that spelling is the most stable feature of English while Sebba (2007) believes that given the importance of the written word in literate societies today, the ability to spell has become an

identity marker. It follows, then, that the ability to use the apostrophe is also a marker of identity for some.

In fact, according to Bryant (1997) “The apostrophe has become a kind of cultural shibboleth: educated people it is typically assumed, use it well and uneducated people do not” (p. 107). In the 21st century, though, it seems the ‘uneducated’ must include many of our teachers. On the other hand, those who do have a sound knowledge of apostrophe use may see this as part of their identity that sets them apart from others. They may become the sticklers who post photographs on websites and disparage nonstandard apostrophe users.

Beal (2010) refers to this group as “the grumpy generation” whose correction or commenting on misused apostrophes gives them “a sense of superiority and of security in an uncertain world” (p. 63). Yet, an upbringing of prescriptive grammar in which teachers, parents and other adults consistently correct grammatical errors is likely to produce adults with an egocentric attitude towards correct language use. It has been instilled in their value systems and identities, and as a consequence it is perhaps not surprising if they experience alarm, shock or horror when they see forms displayed in public that would once have earned them a large red cross.

Beal (2010) and Crystal (2006b) make the observation that since the sticklers belong to the older generations, the problem will die out with them. Burridge (2010), on the other hand, considers it an ongoing situation: “As long as we signal our identity via linguistic means, we will continue to judge others by how they speak” (p. 12) or, indeed, write. It is not just the ‘grumpy’ generations who slate apostrophe blunders. Burridge (2010) found that a group of first year linguistics students in Australia felt very strongly about apostrophe abuse, and conversely not all of the ‘prescriptive’ generation rigidly adhere to the rules. An important part of this study will be to examine these issues of identity. As Cameron (1995) suggests, it is more than “snobbish affectation” (p. 14) but goes deeper into identity and how people wish to be perceived.

As far as I am aware, there have been no qualitative studies examining attitudes towards apostrophe use. This study attempts to understand where beliefs come from and how they influence people's behaviour, by asking them.

4.6 Into the Future

It is unlikely that the apostrophe will be brought under control in the future. Little (1986) points out that children today are surrounded by written language, mistakes and all, wherever they go and this becomes part of their world view. They will use the apostrophe as they see it used and Truss (2003) is unrealistic to think we can stem this tide. Some researchers believe the genitive apostrophe could easily be dropped from English. Burridge and Mulder (1999), for example, say that if it does not benefit the processing of language then it is of no use and Sklar (1976) believes that there would be no ambiguity left by its absence.

We saw in 3.4.2 that Shaw disliked these "uncouth bacilli" (in Crystal 2006a, p. 138) and similarly, Bynington (1945), a firm believer in the adage "When in doubt omit the apostrophe" writes "The fact is, the apostrophe is a morbid growth in English orthography, and our language would be none the worse for its abolition" (p. 27). Room (1989) also favours the removal of the apostrophe, arguing that meaning will always be indicated by context. The writer of the webpage *Kill the Apostrophe* (n.d.) uses no apostrophes and the page is perfectly readable. The author notes that some words, such as *hell* and *were* for *he'll* and *we're* may seem confusing but that their position in a sentence will always make the meaning clear. Truss (2003), of course, sees it otherwise: "if abolitionists get their way – how will they write 'Goodbye to the apostrophe: we're not missing you a bit'" (p. 67). Whatever happens to the apostrophe in the future, it will be determined to a large extent by technology, but perhaps the internet will buoy the apostrophe, rather than destroy it.

4.7 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of different stances taken on various aspects of the apostrophe. Current trends in apostrophe use were considered along with possible links with the social factors of age and gender. A synopsis of the current guidelines for apostrophe use was then presented, noting the move away from prescriptivism as the guidelines adapt to modern language phenomena. Changes over the 20th century that have contributed to current practices were then examined, including social patterns, educational ideologies and technology. These changes saw schools become authorities on standard language use in the first half of the century, while in the latter part of the century grammars disappeared from schools and children were left to learn about apostrophes inductively. The end of the century then brought digital devices into our homes, and rapidly changing technology is likely to affect apostrophe use into the future. The chapter then considered attitudes, beginning by selecting a model for this research in which attitude embodies belief, affect and behaviour. This was followed by a review of the literature on attitudes and the role of identity, before finally considering some views on the future of the apostrophe.

These different aspects of apostrophe use in New Zealand today form the basis for the following chapters in part II of this study, which provide answers to the second and third research questions. In order to gain an insightful understanding of apostrophe use, a variety of methods are required, and these are described in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY FOR PART II

5.1 Introduction

In the last chapter we saw that the three main objectives of part II of this study is to investigate the apostrophe as it is used today, to draw out attitudes towards apostrophe use and perceived abuse and to consider any implications for the future. In order to achieve these objectives, multiple methods of data collection need to be employed, since the study involves not only research into a linguistic phenomenon, but also into why this phenomenon occurs and people's understanding of, and attitudes towards it. This chapter begins with a description of the overall design and the reasons the instruments were chosen. Then follows a detailed account of each instrument, beginning with the quantitative methods which include observations of apostrophe use and questionnaires. The qualitative methods include observations of expressed attitudes and a series of interviews. The final three sections of the chapter cover ethical issues, then generalisability, validity and reliability and finally some notes on presentation.

5.2 A parallel convergent mixed methods research design

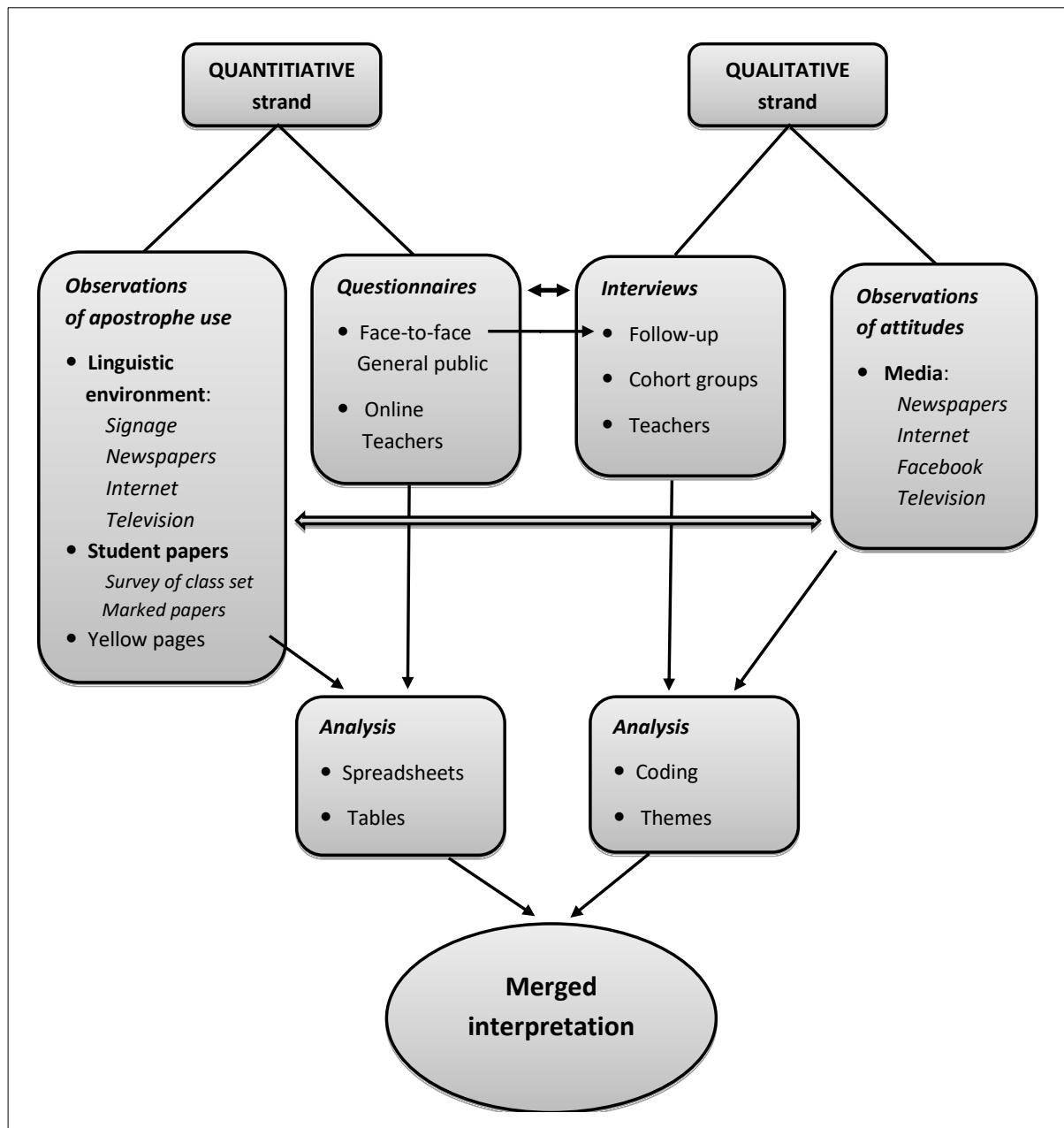
It was always clear that the objectives of part II of this project would call on different methods, with use of the apostrophe being measurable and thus lending itself to a quantitative design, while a qualitative design is appropriate for the more insightful data sought on attitudes. However, these two objectives are inextricably linked because apostrophe use is largely determined by attitudes towards its use, and therefore the methods employed to collect the data cannot be conducted in isolated from one another. The natural choice of approach to this research, therefore, was an *integrated mixed*

methods design according to Schutt (2015), or a *parallel convergent mixed methods* design according to Creswell (2015) and Creswell and Plato Clark (2011).

A *mixed methods* design is one in which quantitative and qualitative approaches form, to use Creswell's (2015) term, two *strands* in a single study. It is the mixing of the data from these two strands of enquiry that is the key to mixed methods research, providing a depth of data greater than the sum of the two stands.

As a specific type of mixed method design, a *parallel convergent mixed methods* design begins with the concurrent collection of quantitative and qualitative data, which receive equal attention and are then merged together at the interpretation stage (Creswell & Plato Clark, 2011). This contrasts with other mixed method approaches which begin with one strand and then use the other to either explain or explore the first. The parallel and then merging pattern of the design used can be seen in figure 5.1 below, which gives a visual overview of the methodology for part II of the current research.

Figure 5.1. A parallel convergent mixed methods study of apostrophe use, and attitudes towards its use.



In order to investigate nonstandard apostrophe use, I collected examples from the linguistic environment. These were also used later to elicit data about attitudes in the interviews. Student papers were employed both as another source of examples of nonstandard apostrophes and in a survey of a class set of papers, which gave more scope for comparison. The *Yellow Pages* of the Palmerston North phone book were used to give an indication of the rate of apostrophe use and non-use in business names involving possessive nouns and

this was supplemented by material received in response to emails sent to a small number of New Zealand businesses enquiring about apostrophes in their names.

Questionnaires and interviews all had quantitative and qualitative components and included a number of tasks, along with a wide range of open and closed questions. This was aimed at procuring information about people's learning and understanding of apostrophe use as well as their attitudes towards their own use and nonstandard use by others. They also had questions pertaining to technology and the future of the apostrophe. The face-to-face questionnaire and follow-up interviews targeted the general population in order to provide an overview, while the cohort interviews involved a retired and a youth group aimed at intergenerational comparison. I also wanted to learn about teachers' understanding, beliefs and practices surrounding the apostrophe, and hence the design includes interviews with Palmerston North teachers and an online survey of teachers from throughout New Zealand. There was also a collection of examples of attitudes expressed in various branches of the media.

5.3 Quantitative methods

5.3.1 Quantitative method 1: Collection of examples of apostrophe use

The collection of examples of apostrophe use and attitudes is an important part of this study because it simply observes what is happening and thus reflects reality, which may not always be the case with methods involving participants. Questionnaires can sometimes result in inaccurate self-reporting (Bell, 2014; Liamputting & Ezzy, 2005) and people are sometimes unsure of what they do, or how or why they do it and may give what they perceive to be the desired answer (Wray & Bloomer, 2006). These authors consider unobtrusive methods as useful because people are unaware of being observed or, as is the case in this study, observations may be of material things and not involve people at all. Bell (2014) and Androutsopoulos (2014) use the term *linguistic landscape* to describe "how language constructs the public space" (Androutsopoulos, 2014, p. 82) through the language

used on signage. Androutsopoulos (2014) also observes that *computer-mediated communication* is “a vast archive of written language” (p. 77) where language practices can be freely observed. This has some limitations for this study, however, since the internet is not an exclusively New Zealand medium. Other sources of observable written language in the public domain include newspapers, magazines, television and mailers. As we saw in chapter 4, Barfoot (1991) and Sklar (1976) have based their studies on collections of examples of apostrophe and/or attitudes from the linguistic environment, and this seemed an obvious place to start for this study.

5.3.1.1 *Collection of examples of apostrophes from the linguistic environment*

The first quantitative instrument under this method is the collection of examples of nonstandard apostrophe use from the *linguistic environment* – a term that includes the linguistic landscape, the media and the internet. This instrument was selected because of its unobtrusive nature, because it reflects actual use in a number of different environments, and because its ongoing nature may also reveal a degree of change over time. On the whole these examples were passive observations, with no particular measures being taken to seek them out.

Most of the examples have been collected in photographic form with some screenshots and others kept in a word document. The objective of this instrument was to investigate patterns in apostrophe use, determining what types of nonstandard use are most common and highlighting the more innovative uses. There was no attempt to compare the frequency of nonstandard with standard use because it is difficult to predict all instances where nonstandard use may occur, making such comparison difficult. Bell (2014) suggests conducting a study by photographing all signage in one block of shops, which could then be analysed. However, this would give limited results for this study because in New Zealand apostrophes are still used in standard forms for the vast majority of the time and would be likely to yield many examples of missing possessive apostrophes in business names, but little else. Business names seemed worth investigating though, since my casual observations put the rate of non-use of apostrophes at around 50%.

5.3.1.2 Apostrophe use in business names in the Yellow Pages

An examination of the Palmerston North Yellow Pages would give an indication as to the rate of missing possessive apostrophes in business names. This involved counting names with and without apostrophes. Even here there are some issues with identifying what constitutes a possessive noun which necessitated compiling a set of criteria. Personal names that may or may not end in *s*, such as *Andrews* and *Richards*, were not counted and neither were nouns that could be seen as plural rather than possessive – so, for example, *PlaceMakers* was not counted but *Bunnings*, which comes from the name *Bunning*, was. Where there was an advertisement as well as a listing under the same heading it was only counted once, unless as sometimes was the case, they were different. However, multiple listings under different headings were all counted due to the difficulty of identifying those previously counted.

In addition to this I have followed Barfoot's (1991) lead and have made a brief examination of some of new Zealand's older companies with possessive names, looking at the use and non-use of apostrophes. This involved searching the internet for historical evidence of the companies' names, through photographs of buildings, catalogues and advertisements for example, as well as emailing four businesses regarding the lack of an apostrophe in their names.

5.3.1.3 Examples from student papers

The second quantitative instrument is a survey of a set of students' assignments and exam papers. Grace et al. (2015) used student papers in their study of students' use of textisms in formal writing and Lunsford and Lunsford have used student essays in their 2008 study entitled "Mistakes are a fact of Life". The use of student papers seemed a valuable resource of apostrophe examples because a degree of formality is expected in academic writing. Since assignments are submitted electronically, the students have aids such as spellcheck to help them as well as the opportunity to revise and edit their work before submitting. On the other hand, exam papers are handwritten and without these benefits. While an academic standard is expected in both types of paper, the different conditions of writing was expected to be reflected in the use of apostrophes. This instrument is more systematic and

can provide some statistical data comparing standard use and missed apostrophes, however the problem of identifying standard use still remains where non-use is standard.

The papers for this instrument were obtained from a colleague and consisted of a set of 50 assignments and 50 exam papers from the same group of students. The papers were from two 200-level linguistics courses, which implies a degree of interest in, and competence with language. I developed a coding rubric as I examined the papers, adding new categories as they arose, since all nonstandard usage is of interest in this study, indeed, novel use is of particular interest. The students' initials were used in order to match the assignments with the exam papers, but once the data were entered onto the spreadsheet the initials were removed, rendering the data anonymous.

In addition to this I have obsessively collected interesting examples from student's papers that I have marked. This collection consists of a list of anonymous examples grouped under years, although examples of apostrophes missing from possessive nouns were not kept because of their frequency. Some interesting patterns and trends emerged during the six years of collection that make this a valuable source of data.

5.3.1.4 *Analysis of examples of apostrophe use*

The collection of examples of apostrophe use from the linguistic environment and students' papers was a straight forward process. The data were entered onto Excel spreadsheets, with the exception of the business name survey which involved a pencil and paper and resulted in only two figures. For the data collected from the linguistic environment and student papers I had marked, individual words were kept, divided into years and listed under category headings which enabled me to look for patterns in the types of words affected. On the other hand, the data from the student paper survey was entered in numerical form rather than individual words. The assignment and exam data for each student were entered in the same line to allow for easy comparison. There were slight differences in the headings used for each instrument, but they tended to be quite specific, for example, *apostrophe use in plural nouns* was divided into *vowel-final words*, *consonant-final words* and '*interesting' forms*'. Once the data were entered onto the spreadsheets, they were then analysed and tables were compiled in order to see interesting patterns more clearly.

5.3.2 Quantitative method 2: Questionnaires

Observations may produce valuable information about apostrophe use, but they cannot tell us about the knowledge and understanding or the beliefs and attitudes that have gone into producing the examples collected. This project includes two questionnaires which sought to provide this information and they are discussed in detail below. In Susan Gal's 1978 study of language choice in a bilingual community "there was a high degree of agreement between observed usage and the questionnaire results" (p. 6). Schutt, on the other hand, reports widely disparate results between observations and questionnaires investigating the same phenomenon. This demonstrates how the combination of observations and questionnaires increases validity, either by confirming findings or by highlighting discrepancies between observed and reported behaviour, which may in itself be insightful.

Questionnaires are generally regarded as tools of quantitative research; Berg (2009) and Liamputton and Ezzy (2005), for example, do not mention questionnaires in their works on qualitative research. Nevertheless, they can also have qualitative-type questions (Wray & Bloomer, 2006), and while the questionnaires in this study are primarily quantitative, they also have some qualitative elements. The development of questionnaires for this study has drawn on the works of Bell (2014), Fowler (1995), Peterson (2000), Schleef (2014), Schutt (2015), and Wray and Bloomer (2006). These authors stress the importance of having clear objectives and of careful thought in each stage of compiling the questionnaire, right from the individual word to the overall format. They give very detailed accounts of the types of questions that can be used in questionnaires, as well as many tips on how to make them more effective.

Questionnaires need to look interesting and to engage the participant, they need to be clearly understood and answer options need careful consideration. Different types of questions elicit different types of data. Likert-like scales alone can be adapted to gather many different types of data, and there are a number of studies that have used them to measure attitudes. In Fatemi Jahromi's study of attitudes towards computer assisted learning, and Kärchner-Ober's study of attitudes of multilingual students toward the language they speak, both used questionnaires with Likert scales as the sole means of

gathering data. Likert scales were also used in Choi's (2010) study of Korean ESL students' attitudes towards grammar, but this was combined with a correction exercise. Matsumoto (2011), and Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) employed Likert scales, multiple choice questions and semantic differential scales in their studies of motivation in second language learning.

Grace et al. (2015) used questionnaires in a study of textisms conducted prior to the study of student papers mentioned above. They also used Likert scales to measure attitudes towards certain written forms, but rather than measuring correctness the participants were asked to rate by *appropriateness*. A similar practice has been followed throughout this study when asking participants to evaluate apostrophe examples, with participants being asked to indicate *acceptability* of forms in order to avoid the labels *right* and *wrong*. Fowler (1995) observes that researchers need to keep in mind that people fear being judged. Labels of correctness would be seen as testing knowledge of the rules of apostrophe use and therefore implying judgement, whereas participants may feel less intimidated when asked to express an opinion on *acceptability*. The current research has used two questionnaires in order to obtain data from the general public in the first instance and from teachers in the second. These are outlined below.

5.3.2.1 Main questionnaire

A questionnaire was seen as an effective means of attaining a general overview of a range of aspects of apostrophe use and attitudes towards its use. I planned to survey 100 people and aimed for maximum variation in sampling (Liamputpong & Ezzy, 2005; Kuzel, 1999) by conducting the survey in various venues around Palmerston North, New Zealand. Shopping malls were considered an ideal venue to reach a cross-section of the community, but I was unable to obtain permission and The Square was also ruled out due to weather. In the end, four venues were chosen: the Massey University student café, the Palmerston North Public Library, the Palmerston North Airport and Lollipops Playland, with permission being sought and received, face-to-face in the library and via email from the latter two venues. These venues reflect less of a cross-section than I had hoped, since the Massey venue will have a bias towards a more educated sector of the population and the airport and library may also be slightly biased in this direction. However, I found in the range of backgrounds of those

approached in the library to be quite surprisingly variant, while the respondents at Lollipops tended to be less educated which may partly offset the bias of the other venues.

The questionnaire was conducted face-to-face but the respondents were left to complete the form themselves. This instrument allowed some control in that I was able to approach possible participants on the basis of obvious variables such as age and gender. However, it is likely that those who declined to participate were those who lack interest in language and, as Berg and Lune (2012) note, this may leave a significant gap in the data collected.

A questionnaire was developed (see appendix D) with a total of 16 questions and tasks, plus five demographic questions. The questions were divided into five sections, the first being an introduction which included two of the tasks, followed by four sets of questions under the themes: *the respondents' own use of apostrophes; attitudes towards the use of others; attitudes towards the critics; and the future of the apostrophe*. Schleef (2014) and Wray and Bloomer (2006) stress the need for variety to keep the respondent engaged and so a variety of question types have been used, including variations on multiple-choice, Likert-like scales and semantic differential scales. As well as maintaining interest, the variety of question types used was aimed at collecting different types of data, and also at discouraging automated ticking. Multiple choice questions varied between 'tick one' and 'tick all that apply' and also as to whether they had an 'other' option, depending on the data I was seeking.

For the scales, there were two main considerations. First, Peterson (2000) and Wray and Bloomer (2006) advise not using numbers since respondents often associate the number 1 with the favoured answer. The second consideration, according to Peterson (2000), is whether to use odd or even numbers of categories in scales – an odd number providing a neutral option whereas an even number forces the participant to choose a side. Schutt (2015) favours a neutral option, noting that while this may tempt respondents to opt out of making a choice, forcing choice on those who don't have a strong opinion may distort the results. Therefore, I designed my scales as long lines broken by short bars or dots with a middle option allowing participants to take a neutral stand. The semantic differential scale question is claimed by Bell (2014) to be the best way of capturing attitudes in a

questionnaire and he suggests asking for judgements on language forms using adjectival-pair anchors such as educated/uneducated and reliable/unreliable. I have used anchors relevant to my study and have mixed the order of the positive and negative anchors, again, in order to avoid automated ticking.

As well as the questions, three tasks were included in the questionnaire. The challenge was to ascertain participants' understanding of apostrophe use without them being aware of this. Many authors researching attitudes to language cite Labov's well-known study in which he posed as a customer in New York department stores and secretly recorded shop assistants' responses to his questions in order collect examples of natural spoken language (Aitcheson, 2001; Beebe, 1988; Finegan, 1980; Hoffman, 2014). This is not easy to adapt to the purposes of this study because the focus is on a specific point of language and written examples of random text from participants would be unlikely to contain the variety of categories of apostrophe use needed for this research. I needed more control over the content.

Wray and Bloomer (2006) suggested removing punctuation from a text and asking the respondents to replace them and this was easy to adapt to my needs. The first task, therefore, was a *correction task* comprised of a text (see appendix D) in which participants were asked to correct any errors they saw. Along with a small number of other errors included as distractors, there are 15 words where apostrophes could be inserted – producing either standard or non-standard forms. It seemed risky to use what might be considered a rather intimidating task at the beginning of the questionnaire, especially in view of the fact most authors advise against this. Peterson (2000), for example, recommends *funnel questioning* as moving from easy to the more specific and Schleef (2014) also recommends leaving open and more difficult questions to nearer the end. However, it was necessary for respondents complete this task before the topic was disclosed in order to maintain a degree of spontaneity in their responses.

The second task was the *recognition task* in which respondents were asked to identify the apostrophe symbol from among a number of enlarged punctuation marks on a card. This was prompted by a university student who had referred to an exclamation mark as an

apostrophe in an assignment. The third task was to rate two standard and two nonstandard examples (*men's*, *singlets*, *shirt's*, *polo's*) on an image of a Warehouse sign according to acceptability. These tasks focused on the respondent's understanding of apostrophe use and could be correlated with other questions to show, for example, whether actual use coincided with their understanding of the functions of the apostrophe, or their stated confidence in their use of apostrophes.

As suggested by Wray and Bloomer, (2006) the questionnaire provided two boxes for additional comments as space allowed, but respondents were also encouraged to make other written comments on the questionnaire if they wished to expand on the answer options. The demographic section came at the end as recommended by Peterson (2000) and Schleef (2014), and included the variables I was interested in: sex, age, first language, education and occupation. I followed Peterson's suggestion of avoiding asking about educational qualifications by asking for 'the highest level of education completed' and also tried to word the question on occupation in a sensitive manner. The final item on the questionnaire was an invitation for participants to express interest in a follow-up interview by filling in their contact details.

There was a lot of advice to take into consideration on the presentation of the questionnaire which I have attempted to follow. Most authors agree a questionnaire should appear clear and uncluttered, and that sections should be clearly defined and questions differentiated from instructions by the consistent use of different fonts, capitals or shading. Wray and Bloomer (2006) also comment that respondents are sometimes intimidated by a questionnaire that looks too official. The different types of questions in my questionnaire helps make it look interesting and I have shaded section headings and used different fonts for questions, instructions, and answer options, as well as using good-sized fonts and leaving plenty of white space. As a result, the questionnaire exceeds Schleef's (2014) recommended maximum of four pages long, but with a total of 21 items, including the demographic questions, is well below his recommended limit of no more than 30-50 items. Peterson (2000) suggests that if the questionnaire is four or more pages long it should be presented in booklet form, and so I have presented my questionnaire in a folded A3 format with the introductory section on a separate A4 sheet – which also provided room for further

comments on the back if required. The end result was an interesting looking questionnaire which I believed would not appear too daunting for participants.

5.3.2.1.1 Main questionnaire implementation and evaluation

The authors also stress the importance of evaluating all aspects of the survey process and the pretesting of questionnaires in the field. My questionnaire was first distributed to friends and colleagues along with an appraisal form (see appendix B) and the 14 responses provided useful suggestions for improvements. Some had an issue with the time taken to complete it, but since the time taken varied from 14 to 39 minutes this seemed not to be an issue for most evaluators. Next the questionnaire was piloted at the Massey University student café, which went well, and since only two minor adjustments to the questionnaire came out of this, these ten respondents were included in the actual survey.

During the survey process a limitation of the correction task was noted. While the insertion of an apostrophe is deliberate and makes the intention quite clear, the failure to insert an apostrophe, whether it is standard or non-standard, could indicate a deliberate decision that no apostrophe is required, uncertainty, no consideration at all, or simply oversight. Thus, although all non-insertions where the standard form has no apostrophe have been counted as standard, in some cases this may not reflect the respondents' actual understanding. This task was, as a consequence, changed to a dictation task in the interviews.

Building rapport with the participants in order to minimise intimidation was an important part of the administration of the questionnaire. It was hoped that by administering the survey myself some of the problems of using research assistants noted by Wray and Bloomer (2006) would be mitigated, as I would have control over how the survey was presented to the participants. As Fowler (1995) notes, the survey is not important to the participants who may feel indifferent towards filling in the form, so it is up to the person administering it to motivate them. Schleef (2014) discusses the very relevant problem of participants feeling intimidated by their nonstandard use of language and suggests strategies to minimise this, such as pointing out the widespread use of the phenomena and I

attempted to do this both in the introductory letter (see appendix C), the verbal introduction given to respondents and in the wording used in the questionnaire.

At the venues, potential participants were approached and I explained that I was looking at language change, and invited them to take part in the survey. If they agreed, they were given the introductory letter, which explained that the research area was language change and informed them of their rights and the anonymity of the survey. Peterson (2000) notes that this letter can be an important stage in building rapport with the respondent and it should make the survey sound interesting, without being too long. Respondents were then given the questionnaire and were instructed to complete the introductory page before moving on to the main questionnaire. Participants were left to complete the questionnaire on their own, although I remained nearby to answer any questions. The questionnaire was then collected and the respondent thanked with a mini chocolate bar and a pen. Many respondents at Massey completed the questionnaire in around ten minutes, while they took considerably longer at the airport, perhaps reflecting the time they had available. The first task did not seem to daunt anyone, apart from one who seemed uncomfortable and did not complete the questionnaire.

As each questionnaire was completed, it was given a code consisting of a letter representing the venue, followed by a number. The two sections of the questionnaire were clipped together and placed in a file. In all, 103 questionnaires were collected with three being eliminated, two from non-native English speakers and one that was not completed. This left the target number of 100 which included 47 males and 53 females with even numbers across the first three age groups, but falling away in the last two. They were all native English speakers with most born and educated in New Zealand, and there was a wide range of educational levels and occupations.

A heading in the invitation to participate in an interview at the end of the questionnaire would have been useful because many participants seemed to see it as a request for contact details. Consequently, although a good number completed this section, the subsequent uptake for interviews was very low.

5.3.2.2 *Online teacher questionnaire*

The second questionnaire procedure was an online questionnaire targeting teachers, with the aim of gaining an overview of teachers' own understanding of apostrophe use and their beliefs and practices around teaching it. Schutt (2015) notes that web surveys are ideal for some sectors of the community, with the main problems being obtaining contacts and the inability to reach people not on the web. However, in surveying teachers the availability of contacts for schools online makes an online survey not only feasible, but an ideal medium able to reach teachers from throughout the country while allowing them to respond at their own convenience.

The survey was designed using LimeSurvey software. Again, there was a variety of types of questions (see appendix G), some similar to the main questionnaire while others were specifically about teaching practices. The questions were adapted to the online format and included a number of yes/no questions, some open-ended questions, multiple choice and various rated questions. There was also a task asking teachers to rate the acceptability of a list of standard and nonstandard examples of apostrophes and several spaces allowing teachers to elaborate on answers or make comments. Since the programme required an answer for each question before advancing to the next set, it was necessary to include a 'no answer' option in order to protect the participant's right not to answer a particular question. The demographic section was again at the end. A pilot was conducted among friends and colleagues and a number of adjustments were made as a result. Again, there was some concern with the length, but the depth of data to be obtained seemed worth the risk of some not completing. An email (appendix E) with an introductory letter (appendix F) and the link to the survey was sent out to the administrators and/or principals of 151 schools, comprised of 38 secondary schools, 110 primary and three area schools from Northland to Southland, with an even spread across decile ratings.

One disadvantage of the online survey is that, while care was taken to reach a cross-section of schools, I had no control over which schools would pass the link on to the teachers, nor who would respond. The survey is more likely to appeal to those with an interest in language, although in view of this any results deviating from standard thinking can be regarded as significant. Of the 120 teachers who responded, only 83 completed the survey,

which suggests a considerable number found the survey too long. Since a frustrating number of participants completed all but the demographic details, perhaps placing the demographic details at the beginning of the survey would have procured a higher completion rate.

5.3.2.3 *Analysis of questionnaire data*

For both the face-to-face and the online questionnaires the quantitative data were numerically coded and entered onto spreadsheets. The data on the spreadsheets were processed using the filter and sort functions, and the results entered into tables in Word. Since the main questionnaire had exactly 100 respondents the number results also represented the percentage of respondents and most other results have been presented in percentages or averages. A number of sets of data were compared to give correlations between demographic factors and use and attitudes as well as between attitudes and use and so on. The qualitative data from the two questionnaires were put into a file under the question number for easy reference, as well as under theme headings.

5.4 Qualitative methods

5.4.1 Qualitative method 1: Collection of examples demonstrating attitudes towards apostrophe use

The qualitative observation instrument involved the collection of attitudes through comments observed in newspapers, magazines, Facebook and other online sources – in some cases the same sources as apostrophe examples. This collection, however, is less valuable to the study than examples of apostrophe use for a number of reasons. First, they are neither as numerous nor as visible as nonstandard apostrophe use and second, they tend to only express negative attitudes towards perceived abuse and therefore give a very one-sided view. Third, there are few sources from New Zealand, the richest sources being online and therefore mostly from overseas contributors. In the end, this was not a useful instrument and more significant data on attitudes were found in other parts of the study. A

study of letters to the editor in the *New Zealand Listener* was also abandoned when after three hours no examples had been found.

5.4.2 Qualitative method 2: Interviews

The qualitative component of the research design, therefore, consists of three interview instruments with different groups of participants. Interviews complement the collections of examples and questionnaires by giving more insight into the ‘why’ behind behaviour. As Brinkman and Kvale (2015) note “... we talk to people because we want to know how they describe their experiences or articulate their reasons for their actions” (p. 3) in order to explain “the concrete, individual sequence of events, thoughts, or actions that result in a particular outcome...” (Schutt, 2015, p. 200). Examples of apostrophes can tell us how they are used and questionnaires tell a little about people’s understanding of their use, but they cannot explain why people make the choices they do, or why they hold certain beliefs about apostrophe use – this requires a deeper investigation.

Carr and Pauwels (2006) used audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews as their only means of collecting data in their study of boys’ attitudes to second language learning, and were surprised at the efficacy of their interviews. They eased participants in with some easy questions and tried to maintain a friendly and relaxed atmosphere and found the boys both eager to participate and valuable sources of data. Other studies, such as Atai and Dashtestania (2013), have used interviews as a component of triangulation, and of course they are an important component of a mixed methods research design. Chung and Huang (2009) employed focus groups in their study of attitudes towards Communicative Language Teaching because of the capacity of interaction between participants to stimulate thinking, however, for this study strongly held beliefs would be likely to intimidate other members of the group.

The three interviewing instruments employed in my design were follow-up interviews to the face-to-face questionnaires, interviews of young and retired cohort groups, and teacher

interviews. As Liamputpong and Ezzy (2005) point out, in qualitative research sampling is more concerned with richness of information than with numbers of participants, and the size of the sample is determined only when sufficient data has been collected. Therefore, rather than aiming for maximum variation as for the questionnaires, the sampling used for the three interview instruments was homogenous group sampling (Liamputpong and Ezzy, 2005; Kuzel, 1999) since it targeted specific groups. Each of these instruments will be discussed in more detail below, but since the design and implementation of the three interview instruments was very similar, I begin with a general description of the interviews.

As with the questionnaires, I drew on the advice of others in the design of my interviews. First, I needed to decide what type of interview I wanted to use. There are three main types of interviews, the structured interview which is based on a questionnaire from which the interviewer does not deviate, while a semi-structured interview follows a questionnaire, but may deviate depending on responses received. In the final type, an unstructured interview, there is no set structure, no set wording or sequence and the interviewer takes cues from the responses to lead the conversation (Berg, 2009; Liamputpong and Ezzy, 2005). I see these types of interviews as forming a continuum between the two extremes. For their in-depth interviews, Liamputpong and Ezzy (*ibid.*) recommend preparing a ‘theme list’ of important topics to use as a guide, rather than a questionnaire. They note, however, that it requires greater skills and experience to conduct these interviews, and for this reason I decided on semi-structured interviews. McCracken (1988) regards the questionnaire as an essential tool to ensure full coverage and give the interview direction. The questionnaire offers safety, but with the freedom for questions to develop their own momentum and for the interviewer to take a low profile while the interviewee tells his or her story. For the purposes of this study I will refer to the questionnaires used in the interviews as *interview guides* to prevent confusion.

The interview guides (see samples in appendices J, O, P, S) consisted mostly of open-ended questions or closed questions with prompts to draw out more information, and they were modified for each instrument, sometimes being tailored to the individual participant. Questions covered the same topic areas as the face-to-face questionnaire with the addition of questions on teaching practices in the teacher interviews. The data collected was

primarily qualitative, although as Hoffman notes (2014), you can include quantitative questions within the interview by including items with scalable answers – and to this end some tasks were used to assess the interviewee's understanding of the rules of apostrophe use. In addition to the tasks, a number of visual aids were used to elicit reactions and stimulate discussion – for example, photographs of signage from my linguistic environment collection have been used for this purpose in all the interview instruments.

There is a lot of useful advice on interviewing techniques, and given the need to establish rapport with the interviewee, a positive first impression was essential. McCracken (1988) reminds us that an interview is an imposition on the participant's time and privacy, and the participant may feel intimidated. It is important, therefore, to maintain a balance between formality and informality – being trustworthy and friendly, but not too intimate. Much of the advice on interviewing techniques can be summed up in Berg's *10 commandments of interviewing* which were a helpful guide:

10 commandments of interviewing:

1. *Never begin an interview cold:* Chat, establish rapport.
2. *Remember your purpose:* Keep on track.
3. *Present a natural front:* Ask as if the question just popped into your head.
4. *Demonstrate aware hearing:* Use appropriate non-verbal responses.
5. *Appearance:* Dress appropriately.
6. *Place:* Find a place where the subject feels comfortable.
7. *No mono-syllabic answers:* Probe - 'Can you tell me a little more?'...
8. *Be respectful.*
9. *Practise, practise, practise.*
10. *Be cordial and appreciative:* Thank interviewee and answer questions etc.

(Berg, 2009, p. 143)

In order to maintain consistency between interviews, Hoffman (2014) advocates reading each question from the interview guide, while Wray & Bloomer (2006) note the importance of changing questions as little as possible for the same reason. However, Berg (2009) describes the role of interviewer as switching between actor, director and choreographer –

a performer reading lines and listening for cues, a director reflecting on his or her own performance and that of the interviewee, and a self-aware choreographer controlling the interview process. I found myself following the interview guide for the most part but able to probe further, to rearrange questions and to veer off course according to the flow of the conversation. From a practical point of view, most authors recommend the recording of interviews because, as Wray & Bloomer (2006) note, writing answers means having to think about what to write rather than focusing attention on the interviewee.

5.4.2.1 Follow-up interviews to the main questionnaire

The first interviews followed on from the main questionnaires and were intended to probe more deeply into some of the responses given in the questionnaire and to add a qualitative perspective. Participants had been invited take part in either a face-to-face or an email interview by filling in their contact details in a section at the bottom of the questionnaire. In spite of a good proportion of respondents completing this section, in the end only eight agreed to be interviewed, so rather than selecting 10-12 from a pool as I had hoped, the sample consisted of a small self-selected group. A further two expressed interest in entering into an email dialogue but one of these only replied to the initial question and the other did not reply at all. All the interviewees came from the Massey and library venues with an imbalance of six females to only two males, although the age group, qualification and occupation categories were more balanced.

The interviews took place either at Massey or in the public library. The interview guide was tailored to each individual in this procedure to take account of the answers given in the questionnaire (see sample in appendix J). Because of this, there was no pretesting of the instrument due to the difficulties of emulating a realistic interview with testers. The interview guides consisted mostly of open-ended questions with prompts, and a number of tasks and visual aids were also used. This included further discussion of the acceptability of the four words in the *Warehouse sign*, and a set of words in an *acceptability task* in which participants marked words as *acceptable*, *sometimes acceptable* or *not acceptable* (see appendix J). An A4 sized card with a selection of photographs of examples of nonstandard apostrophes was used to prompt discussion, as was a card listing the current conventions of apostrophe use. However, the latter elicited few comments in the first three interviews and

was discontinued. Finally, there was a list of sentences with missing apostrophes intended to gauge reactions and elicit comments as to readability. The interviews on the whole went well and the interviewees seemed to be engaged and interested, with the average length of the interviews being 41 minutes.

5.4.2.2 Age-cohort group interviews

Two cohort groups were targeted in the second interview instrument. This involved interviews with six retirees aged 65 and over and seven young people between the ages of 18 and 30 with the main objective being to look for patterns of change across the generations.

For the retired cohort, interview request letters (appendix K) were distributed to retirement villages in Palmerston North. However, this procured only one response and so a snowball approach as suggested by Given (2016), Hoffman (2014) and Kuzel (1999) via personal contacts was used to recruit a further five interviewees. There were five female interviewees and one male, and interviews were conducted in various places including a café, a community centre, interviewees' homes and my home.

The interview guide (appendix O) combined questions, tasks and visual aids. The questions were mostly open ended or sometimes yes/no questions with prompts and in one instance there were alternative pathways of questioning depending on a yes or no response, as suggested by Wray and Bloomer (2006). The first task was a *dictation task* which replaced the *correction task* in the face-to-face questionnaire for the reasons explained in 5.3.2.1.1, but also because a number of respondents changed the contractions to their full forms, rather than using apostrophes. Writing the text, I believed, would require participants to think about spelling and apostrophe use and give a clearer picture of their understanding.

The second task was a reworked version of the acceptability task used in the above instrument (see appendix O). This time the categories of apostrophe use were mixed and arranged in pairs – one with an apostrophe and one without to enable participants to see both forms. A scenario of a Christmas letter from a young relative was given and they were

asked to tick or cross each phrase to indicate acceptability and they were able to tick both forms if they wished.

In addition, a number of visual aids were used to generate discussion. Again this included photographs, but this time each one was on a separate laminated card rather than all on one card, which allowed the interviewee to move them around and focus more on individual images. One visual aid that was abandoned after a few uses because it failed to add any useful data was a card with two quotations from critics of ‘apostrophe abusers’. A card that was more fruitful, though, was of the title image *Apostrophe’s* and the accompanying excerpt from Coote’s 1658 grammar (see appendix T). The final visual aid was a *readability card* which had a similar, but different, text on each side (see appendix T). Each text contained 110 words which included 27 words using apostrophes – which were present on one side, but omitted from the other. Participants were asked to read the side with the apostrophes first, then the other and this led to some interesting discussions.

There was no pretesting of this instrument due to the experience gained from conducting the follow-up interviews. Some interviews followed the interview guide quite closely while others took their own course, occasionally getting off-track, which sometimes brought to light some interesting points, but not always. The interviews took an average of 48 minutes.

The youth cohort was the last group of interviews to be completed, and in view of the previous difficulties with recruiting I decided to try and make the interview requests look more appealing to young people. The wording was made less formal, pictures of electronic devices were added and a small gift for participation was promised (see appendix L). The requests were dropped off at workplaces employing large numbers of young people, such as the Warehouse and supermarkets. However, it was three months before there was any response from this, and interestingly, when this participant learnt the gift was a \$20 Warehouse voucher she said this might entice her friends to also take part. Indeed, this one response resulted in three interviews, which strongly suggests that a more explicit description of the gift in the interview requests may have resulted in a higher uptake. A further two interviewees were recruited through personal contacts and a final two (interviewed together) through a direct approach in The Square. There were three females

and four males, four of them students and three working with NCEA level 3 as their highest qualification.

Interviews took place in the library, outdoors or in one participant's workplace. The interview guide was shorter (see appendix P), partly due to simplification and the elimination of some questions but also to less need for written prompts at this stage of the data gathering process. The dictation task was used along with the apostrophe identification task from the face-to-face questionnaires. This was not used with the retired cohort because it did not occur to me to use it, but perhaps I should not have presumed they would all know. Another amended version of the acceptability task was used (see appendix P), this time there were two lists of pairs of words in phrases with and without apostrophes, each list using different examples of the same type of words. There was a different scenario for each list – the first set was from an informal text such as an email or letter from a friend while the other was from a more formal context such as a business letter. Changing the task to this degree for this instrument meant clear comparisons between the youth and retired cohorts would not be possible. However, it was believed that this would be offset by the valuable extra information gained through the comparison of the two registers of language, and this would have been a better task to use in all the interviews. The visual aids used were photographs and the readability card.

5.4.2.3 *Teacher interviews*

The third interview instrument was a series of interviews with teachers. The objective in talking to teachers was to explore the beliefs of teachers regarding the teaching of apostrophe use and to consider the impact of changing ideologies on both teachers' and children's understanding of apostrophe use. Interview requests (see appendix Q) were distributed to all six secondary schools in Palmerston North and ten primary schools. Again, response was slow with only four interviews eventuating from this. The interview pool was again supplemented by using a snowball approach through personal contacts to give a total of 12 interviews, five with primary teachers and seven with secondary. Nine participants were female and three male, with seven falling in the 26-40 age group and the other five in the 56+ group, which provided a good contrast for the objectives of this instrument.

Most interviews were conducted in classrooms or staff rooms, but some took place in a café or the interviewee's home. The interview guide (see appendix S) covered similar ground to that of the other interview instruments, although this was shortened somewhat in order to accommodate questioning about teaching practices and beliefs. Five questions pertaining to their teaching experience were also added to the demographic section. This time in the *Acceptability Task* interviewees were asked to rate the acceptability of pairs of standard and nonstandard apostrophe use from one to five and the same with the four words in the Warehouse sign task, rather than simply ticking or crossing. Three visual aids were used: photographs of signage, the *readability* card and the card with the excerpt from Coote's 1658 grammar (appendix T). Most teachers who agreed to the interview seemed very willing to talk and they provided valuable information, with the interviews varying in length from 20 to 64 minutes, averaging 36 minutes. At the end of the interview they were given a \$20 book voucher to compensate them for taking the time to do the interview.

5.4.2.4 *Implementation and analysis of interviews*

Once the interviewees were finally recruited, the interviews went very smoothly and Berg's *10 commandments of interviewing* (see 5.4.2) were useful to keep in mind during the interviewing process. Interviews began with a chat aimed at relaxing the interviewee. This was followed by reading the information sheet, signing the consent form and completing demographic details, which Berg (2009) suggests placing at the beginning of interviews both as an ice-breaker, and to allow the flow of ideas to continue at the end. I checked that the interviewees understood their rights and were happy for the interview to be recorded, and the interview began.

I found myself engaged with the interviewees and looking at my interview guide or jotting down notes, as suggested by Bell (2014) and Hoffman (2014), felt like an unnatural intrusion into the conversation, so I kept these to a minimum. The recording of interviews was invaluable in highlighting areas for improvement in interviewing technique, in particular, my tendency to prompt too much and too soon. I learnt to hold back and allow the interviewee time to think.

The main problem with the interviews was noise. Following another of Berg's commandments, interviewees were asked to choose a venue and for the most part they chose seemingly suitable ones. However, there was unexpected noise in several interviews – people nearby talking loudly or making loud phone calls in the library, dogs barking in interviewees' homes, wind blowing in the microphone, vacuum cleaners outside classrooms, tables and chairs being moved during the 'quiet' time in the student café, loud coffee machines in cafes and in one instance a new coffee machine being installed. This caused some distraction during the interviews but was more problematic in the transcription process.

After each interview the quantitative sections and demographic details were entered into a spreadsheet and analysed as for the questionnaire results. The interviewees were given identity codes as for the questionnaire participants, but in addition they were given coded pseudonyms "so that the reader can see the person behind the data being presented" (Given, 2016, p.166). The recordings were transferred onto a computer and transcribed by me. While time-consuming, this has a number of benefits such as allowing me to engage more deeply with the subject and to begin the interpretive process (Brinkman and Kvale, 2015), even to the extent of setting themes and codes (Given, 2016). Drawing on suggestions by Humble (n.d.), and Brinkman and Kvale (2015) a set of transcription guidelines was compiled before beginning and this was revised during the early stages of the transcribing process. The transcriptions were formatted in blocks of conversation pertaining to a line of enquiry rather than being divided into lines, as this more accurately reflects the flow of conversation. The use of markedly different fonts for the interviewer and interviewee as suggested by Gillham (2005), as well as additional comments, made the transcripts easy to follow. Some other symbols that were used were angle brackets for interjections, forward slashes for overlapping conversation, dashes for pauses and a semi colon to mark false starts and self-repairs.

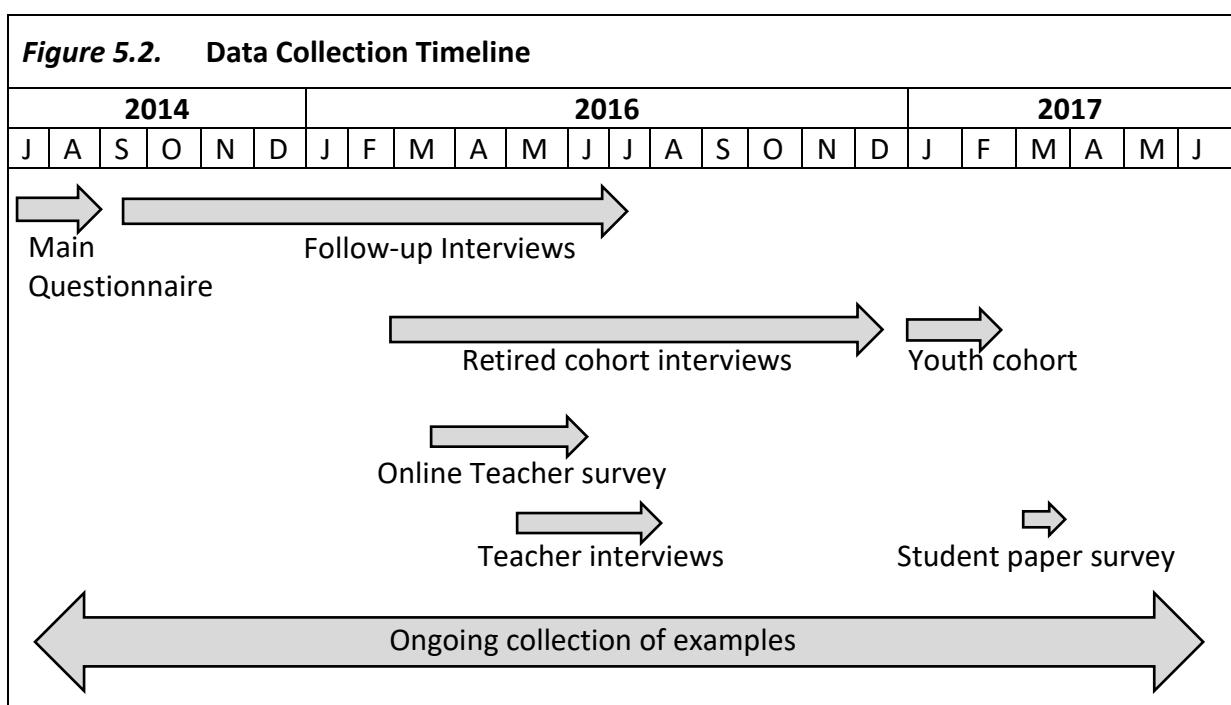
Once each transcription was completed it was copied and pasted, the copy then being sorted under theme headings. At this point the themes were not uniform across the interviews but reflected the content of the individual interview. The font for each themed transcript was then colour-coded to identify the interviewee, enabling the material from

each interview to be identifiable when it was integrated into one file with the other transcripts. Once integrated, similar themes were grouped together, the theme headings refined and significant excerpts were highlighted. Each theme was then examined for patterns, anomalies and interesting features, and where relevant the data on the spreadsheet was correlated with the verbal responses.

5.5 Instruments and participants

5.5.1 Data collection timeline

Below is a diagram of the timeline for the instruments employed in this study. As discussed above, recruitment of participants took longer than expected for some instruments, resulting in the data collection phase of the study taking two years. The follow-up and retired cohort interviews in particular were spread out over a long period, although the other instruments were completed relatively quickly, including the youth cohort interviews in spite of the very slow start. The arrow across the bottom indicates the ongoing processes of gathering examples of apostrophe usage.



5.5.2 Summary of participants

The following three tables provide an overview of the participants. Table 5.1 below summarises the participants in each of the questionnaire and interview instruments, while tables 5.2 and 5.3 present the demographic details of participants in each instrument.

<i>Table 5.1. Participants and instruments</i>			
Instrument:	Participants	How recruited	#
Face-to-face Questionnaires	General public, from Palmerston North venues	Direct approach	100
Follow-up Interviews	Those who indicated willingness to be interviewed from the above participants	Via email using contact details provided on questionnaire	8
Cohort Interviews	Retired people and people between the ages of 18 and 30.	Letters left at appropriate places, and word-of-mouth	13
Online Questionnaires	Teachers from primary and secondary schools from throughout New Zealand.	Via emails sent to schools	83
Teacher Interviews	Primary and secondary teachers from the Palmerston North area.	Letters left at schools, and word-of-mouth.	12

Table 5.2. Demographic data*Questionnaires and interviews*

	Main questionnaire		Cohort interviews	
	Quest.	Interviews	Retired	Youth
Total participants:	100	8	6	7
Sex:				
male	46	2	1	4
female	54	6	5	3
Age:				
16-25	30	3		7
26-40	28	2		
41-55	26	2		
56+	16	1	6	
Country of education:				
NZ	89	7	6	7
UK/Ire	6	1		
USA/Canada	3			
No response	2			
First language:				
English	96	8	6	7
Maori	3			
M&E bilingual	1			
Qualifications				
None	5		2	
NCEA =	56	6		6
Cert/diploma	9	1	3	
Degree	16	1		1
Post grad	15		1	
No response	9			
Occupation:				
Prof., management	17		4	
Technical / trade	13	2		
Service, clerical	19	4	2	1
Labour	12			1
student	29	2		4
Not paid	7			1
No response	3			

Table 5.3. Demographic data - teachers <i>Online survey and interviews</i>		
	online	Interviews
Total participants:	83	12
Sector:		
primary	45	5
secondary	38	7
Sex:		
male	19	3
female	61	9
Age:		
16-25	6	0
26-40	18	7
41-55	32	0
56+	27	5
Country of teaching qualification		
NZ	78	11
UK	3	
USA/Canada	2	1
School decile rating		
1-3	21	
4-7	27	
8-10	34	
No response	1	

5.6 Ethical considerations

Since this research involved the participation of human subjects, the design for the project followed the guidelines set down by the Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations Involving Human Participants. This code seeks to minimise harm to participants and researchers through the gaining of informed and voluntary consent, anonymity and confidentiality, cultural sensitivity and the avoidance of deception. As there is little harm inherent in this project, it was evaluated by peer review and judged to be 'low risk' (see Low Risk Notification, appendix A).

The ethical guidelines require informed and voluntary participation. Full information on the project and on participants' rights was provided in the introductory letters, on the consent

forms and reinforced orally before the questionnaires and interviews. However, full disclosure of the explicit topic was withheld for some instruments until the initial tasks had been completed. Kvale (1996) explains this is sometimes useful “in order to obtain the interviewees’ natural views on a topic and to avoid leading them to specific answers” (p. 113). Participation was voluntary and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the survey at any stage.

Consent forms were completed by all interviewees, whereas for the questionnaires consent was implied in their agreement to participate. Participants were also assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Wray and Bloomer (2006) and Berg and Lune (2012) differentiate between these two terms, defining anonymous as meaning that the author of the data is unknown even to the researcher, whereas with confidentiality the researcher knows the author’s identity but undertakes to keep this confidential. The teacher online questionnaire was completely anonymous and the face-to-face questionnaire was also anonymous, unless the participant chose to fill in the interview request box, in which case they were assured of confidentiality. Questionnaire respondents were all given code numbers related to the place and sequence of the questionnaire, with no other identifying marks. Interviewees were assured of confidentiality and their names only appear on the consent forms which have been stored separately from other materials such as tasks, transcripts and recordings. A system of coded pseudonyms has been used in all other materials to maintain confidentiality (see 5.8.1).

While there was minimal harm inherent in this study, I was concerned that some participants may feel intimidated and perhaps judged by the questioning, and steps were taken to minimise this by maintaining a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. This was also considered in question design, for example by asking about *acceptability* (opinion) rather than *correctness* (knowledge). With harm minimised, there was still a cost of time to the participants. According to Kvale (1996), the interviewing relationship needs to be reciprocal, in that any costs to the participants need to be offset by some benefit, which may be found in the interview process itself. On the whole the participants in my study seemed to enjoy the experience and learn something from it, with the retired cohort, in particular, seeming happy just to chat over a coffee. However, since teachers are busy people, I felt that some

extra compensation for their time was needed and they were therefore given vouchers. The youth cohort were also given vouchers, but for a different reason. I realised they would be less likely to see any personal benefit in an interview, and given the difficulty attracting participants in the other interview instruments, it seemed something extra was needed to offset the cost of their participation. While the Code of Ethics states that payments should not be used “as an inducement to participate in research” (2015, p 17), I felt that offering a ‘small gift’ on the interview request letter would demonstrate reciprocity. Overall, while the participants in the different instruments were reciprocated in different ways, I believe that a reasonable balance between cost and benefit to the participants was maintained.

5.7 Generalisability, validity and reliability

As a mixed methods study, the expectations of generalisability for the different instruments in this research vary between the quantitative and qualitative streams, with the results from quantitative methods generally being regarded as generalisable while the results from qualitative methods, with its smaller sample size, are not. The distinction between the two streams of research, however, is not so clear cut. Kvale (1996) suggests that results from both streams of research can be generalisable, but that the criteria for doing so are different. Stake (1980, cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985) describes two forms of generalisation – formulaic and naturalistic with the former referring to the quantitative representation of data that can be generalised to a whole population. Naturalistic generalisation, on the other hand, is left up to the readers who use their own understandings to relate findings of particular cases to other similar situations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) view most research as sitting on a continuum between the poles of the general (formulaic) and the specific (naturalistic) which suggests the criteria used may also be fluid. The different instruments within this study are dispersed along this continuum, rather than being strictly formulaic or naturalistic.

Validity and reliability are related to the quality or robustness of a study, and these are important in both streams of research. Below I explain the measures that have been taken to ensure the findings of this study meet these criteria.

5.7.1 Quantitative findings

“Quantitative research allows the researcher to familiarise him or herself with the problem or concept to be studied.” This quotation from Golafshani (2003, p. 587) demonstrates that quantitative research may have goals other than generalisation. The main purpose of the quantitative elements of this study is exploratory, concerned with examining patterns and trends in apostrophe use that are likely to reflect those in the general population.

Care was taken in the design of the instruments and questions to ensure the validity and reliability of the study. The mixed method design encompasses triangulation, which is a well-known technique for providing checks in order to enhance validity and reliability (Golashani, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, triangulation provides a range of sources of data and a range of instruments through which to collect data, which included a variety of question types and tasks, as well as observations. This allows for some cross-checking within an instrument, by comparing actual use in the tasks set with reported understanding of the functions of the apostrophe, for example. The quantitative strand, therefore, provides important background information that feeds into, and complements, the qualitative segments.

5.7.2 Qualitative findings

When it comes to qualitative research, though, some researchers believe it has little value, since it cannot be generalised in the same way as quantitative research (Kvale, 1996), even though, as shown above, some believe quantitative research is not totally generalisable either. Chenail (2010) discusses a number of researchers who have found different ways in which qualitative data can be generalised, depending on the type of study. Leung (2015) also notes that: “Given the diverse genera and forms of qualitative research, there is no consensus for assessing any piece of qualitative research” (p. 325), suggesting that if and how qualitative data can be generalised will vary, depending on the type of data. Stake (1978), for example, acknowledges that a case study of one cannot represent a whole population, but people can relate an individual story to other similar situations in their own

minds and thus the one case can be generalised to some others. And if one story can be generalised to other situations, then the 31 people interviewed in this study, along with the dozens of answers to open-ended questions in the questionnaires, can provide considerable insight into the practices and beliefs regarding apostrophe use in the wider New Zealand population.

Validity and reliability are less straight forward in qualitative research, since measurement and repeatability are not relevant to qualitative research. Researchers still use these terms in qualitative research, although they use different ways of demonstrating these qualities. Kvale (1996), for example, sees validity as pertaining to the ability to elicit the required information, but in qualitative research this is achieved through checking and questioning the truth of the findings and building knowledge, rather than statistical measurement. Similarly, Leung (2015) notes that validity in qualitative research is measured by the “appropriateness” of all stages of the methodology (p.325). Where in quantitative research reliability refers to the replicability of the research and results, in qualitative research it is about consistency.

Again, the triangulation aspect of the mixed methods design, which draws together data from many different sources, helps maximise validity and reliability. Golashani (2003) states that triangulation is important in capturing multi-layered nature of people’s experiences and “will lead to more valid, reliable and diverse construction of realities” (p. 604). The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, the use of visual aids and tasks along with the questions in interviews, as well as open-ended questions in the written and online questionnaires all increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. In some instances, the findings of two sets of data may support each other, while in others they may reveal anomalies which can add interesting and significant insight to a study of this nature.

5.7.3 Possible issues for generalisation

I was concerned about two issues that may affect the findings of the study. First, as mentioned previously in the discussion of each instrument, while efforts were made to

engage a cross-section of the population there is a degree of bias in all of them. In particular, the online teacher survey seemed to provide an opportunity for teachers to vent their angst at nonstandard apostrophe use. This means that the balance between those with an interest in language and those without is unlikely to be representative of the population as a whole. Nonetheless, as we will see, the study uncovered a wide range of attitudes, and triangulation is invaluable here because it means other instruments are able to fill in some of the gaps. Observations of apostrophe use in the linguistic environment or the student paper survey, for example, can give some indication of the prevalence of nonstandard use that will complement the findings from the limited number of participants who may care little about apostrophes.

The second issue is the self-reporting nature of the instruments. As Schutt (2015) and Wray and Bloom (2006) note, there are problems inherent in self-reporting that may compromise accuracy, and it is possible some participants have provided what they see as expected, or perhaps face-saving answers, rather than honest answers. Careful wording of questions and, in the case of interviews maintaining a relaxed atmosphere, were aimed at making participants feel comfortable about opening up. The anonymity of the open-ended questions in the online questionnaire in particular seemed to provide a platform in which teachers felt very free to express their feelings. Within each instrument, the use of a variety of question types, tasks and visual aids allowed cross-checking of information, as well as observations of reactions to images and so on. Awareness of these problems means their effects are able to be minimised, resulting in findings that are both valid and reliable.

5.8 Some notes on presentation

Quotations from written surveys and transcripts have been edited slightly. In the written answers, spelling and punctuation errors have been corrected. In quotations from transcripts pauses, false starts and repetitions have been removed unless they are important in indicating features such as hesitation or emphasis. Punctuation has also been added to break up long utterances, easing readability. I have also attempted to keep tables

simple. In most instances percentages and averages are used and these are rounded to the nearest whole number, with .5 being rounded up, which may result in small discrepancies in the totals. Non-responses are sometimes not included and this may also explain small discrepancies.

5.8.1 Terminology and coded pseudonyms used to identify survey participants

Since data have been collected from a number of different instruments, a system for identifying the instrument a particular participant took part in has been adopted, as seen in table 5.4 below, in order to avoid wordy and repetitive explanations.

Table 5.4. Terms used to identify participants				
Participants		Identifier		
Generic term		Participant		
<i>Main questionnaire</i>		(Questionnaire) Respondent		
<i>Online teacher survey</i>		Teacher (surveyed) teachers		
Pseudonyms for interviewees				
<i>Main questionnaire</i> <i>Follow-up</i> M	Cohorts		Teachers	
	<i>Retired</i> R	<i>Youth</i> I	<i>Primary</i> P	<i>Secondary</i> S
Mary	Ruth	Isla	Penny	Sarah
Maddie	Rita	Isabel	Pam	Sean
Max	Rona	Ian	Paula	Sue
Myra	Rosie	Ivan	Pete	Sally
Megan	Robyn	Isaac	Pip	Steph
Molly	Ross	Irena		Steve
Mike		Ike		Shona
Mimi				

In general discussion, the word *participants* is used. When attributing material to individual participants, however, the following terms and codes are used. The participants from the main questionnaire are referred to as *respondents* or sometimes *questionnaire respondents* where extra clarity is needed. Participants from the online teacher survey are referred to as

teachers. All participants in the interviews are referred to by name. They have been given coded pseudonyms, in which the initial letter of the name matches the initial letter of the instrument, as can be seen in the chart above. One exception to this is the youth cohort, where because of the dearth of names beginning with <Y> they have <I> initial names. These terms and pseudonyms are used throughout the remainder of the study, which begins with the findings about actual use of the apostrophe in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6

USE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE APOSTROPHE

6.1 Introduction

This and the following two chapters present the findings of the investigation that makes up Part II of this thesis. This chapter presents findings relevant to the second research question, focusing on the practices of New Zealand English speakers today and their understanding of the prescriptive rules. Findings relating to educational factors and how people acquired their understanding of apostrophe use is explored in the following chapter, while chapter 8 presents findings pertaining to attitudes towards apostrophe use, now and into the future in response to the second and third research questions. These themes are then drawn together in part III.

This chapter begins with an overview of apostrophe use in New Zealand, considering recognition of the apostrophe symbol and the incidence of standard and non-standard apostrophe use. A detailed discussion of non-standard apostrophe use follows, beginning with a description of the typology and frequency of different the types of non-standard use, before moving on to a detailed exploration of each type in turn. Consistency of use is then examined along with some correlations with social factors. Finally, this chapter investigates people's understanding of the functions of the apostrophe, and their confidence in its use. Overall, the chapter found that while standard apostrophes are still used most of the time, few people use standard forms all of the time, and use overall is inconsistent.

The findings in this chapter come primarily from the quantitative strand. Examples of apostrophe use from the linguistic environment provide a rich source of non-standard apostrophe use and this chapter makes use of photographs of signage to illustrate the different types of nonstandard use that are discussed. The marked student papers add

significantly to the collection of examples of apostrophe use, while the survey of student assignments and examination papers allows for some comparisons to be made. The findings from the tasks set in the questionnaires and interviews are also presented, and some qualitative material has also been included to illustrate some findings. Apostrophe use in business names is investigated through a study of names in the *Palmerston North Yellow Pages* along with material elicited from a small number of businesses about their use of apostrophes.

6.2 An overview of standard and non-standard apostrophe use

Overall, while most participants could identify the apostrophe symbol, when it came to using apostrophes, only a small number used standard forms exclusively. Beginning with the most basic aspect of apostrophe knowledge, the recognition of the symbol itself was tested in question 1.3 in the main questionnaire, prompted by observing a student refer to an apostrophe as an exclamation mark. While 93 respondents identified the apostrophe mark, seven of these also circled other marks, including the comma and semicolon, while five changed their selection from another mark to the apostrophe. This meant that only 81 selected the apostrophe outright. Of those who did not identify the apostrophe at all, four identified the comma and one the exclamation mark, while the final two did not respond.

In all, ten respondents identified the comma, and this confusion between the apostrophe and the comma appeared in other areas of the research. Three interviewees referred to apostrophes as commas several times during their interviews. Ian, for example, while correctly identifying the apostrophe on the chart, referred to it as a comma four times during the interview, but as an apostrophe only once. Another informant used the word *I'm* twice in an email, spelt <I,m>. Moreover, a recently retired teacher, who did not wish to be interviewed, told me over the phone: "Oh apostrophe --- Oh, I'll tell you what I used to tell the children, I used to tell them that where you would stop for a breath in a sentence – that's where you put an apostrophe – if there isn't an *and* --- yes". This indicates an

element of confusion for some people between these two marks, in spite of their different functions, positions and names.

The current guidelines for standard apostrophe use, as discussed in chapter 4, include marking possession, with the apostrophe before the <s> for singular nouns and after the <s> for regular plural nouns. In the case of nouns ending in a sibilant, the extra <s> after the apostrophe is optional. The apostrophe represents sounds and letters omitted from single words and contractions and sometimes clarifies plural nouns that may otherwise be unclear, such as do's and don'ts, or p's and q's. However, as will be demonstrated throughout this chapter, these guidelines are not always adhered to in New Zealand today.

In the correction task of the main questionnaire, when comparing overall standard use and non-standard use, respondents have used standard forms 79% of the time, which means that non-standard forms – missing, misplaced or intrusive apostrophes – have been used 21% of time. The overall rate of standard apostrophe use, therefore, is quite high, except that on an individual basis only eight of the one hundred respondents used apostrophes according to the style guides consistently – inserting apostrophes where, and only where, required. A further 11 respondents used only one non-standard form. When divided into groups of those who used three or fewer non-standard forms and those who used four or more, the spread is quite even, with 52% falling into the former group and 48% into the latter. At the higher end of the scale, ten individuals used 7 non-standard forms and the largest number was eight non-standard forms used by two respondents.

Table 6.1, below, presents results from the student paper survey. Set A shows the number of nonstandard apostrophes used by students, while set B provides a comparison between apostrophe use in assignments and exams. Set A shows that 34% of students used no non-standard forms in the assignments examined. Altogether, 90% of students used three or fewer non-standard apostrophes in assignments compared with only 10% using four or more. This is in contrast with exam papers where only 16% used no non-standard forms, 58% used three or fewer and 42% used four or more. This shows that these students were four times more likely to use four or more non-standard apostrophes in an exam than in an assignment. This contrast may be expected, since although a formal register is required in

both types of assessment, assignments have the benefit of time, spellcheck and autocorrect, as well as access to other information on writing and grammar, all of which are absent in examinations.

Table 6.1. Non-standard apostrophe use in exams and assignments <i>Student paper survey</i>				
A. Number of NS uses per student			B. NS use in assignments compared with exams	
Number of NS uses:	Assignments	Exams		
0	34%	16%	No NS uses in exam or assignment	8%
1 - 3	56%	42%	More NS uses in exam than assignment	62%
4 - 9	10%	38%	Fewer NS uses in exam than assignment	22%
10 - 19	0%	4%	Even between exam and assignment	8%

It is perhaps surprising then, that the results from set B show only four students, or 8%, did not use any non-standard forms, and that although most students used more non-standard forms in the exams, 22% used more in assignments than in exams. One student, for example, had four misplaced apostrophes in possessive nouns and an apostrophe in a plural noun in the assignment, but no non-standard forms in the exam, which included 13 standard possessive forms.

The highest number of non-standard forms in an assignment was nine, whereas one student used 13 and another 19 in the exams. The student who used 13 non-standard forms omitted apostrophes from all nine possessive nouns in the exams and included them in four plural nouns. By contrast, in this student's assignment, apostrophes were missing in only two of seven possessive nouns and there were no redundant apostrophes in plural nouns. The student who used 19 non-standard forms seems to be a little more habitual in that apostrophes were missing in three of four possessive nouns in the assignment, and 17 of 18 in the exams, with two apostrophes being used in plural nouns. In order to explore this non-standard use of the apostrophe, the study will now consider the different types of non-standard forms we see today.

6.3 The hierarchy of non-standard apostrophe use

Results from the student survey and main questionnaire are able to give some idea as to the relative frequency of the different categories of non-standard apostrophe use, and this is shown in table 6.2 below.

Table 6.2. Non-standard use by category				
A. Student paper survey	Total number			B. Question 1.2, Main questionnaire
	Assg	Exam	Total	
Category of non-standard use:				% of NS use
Possessive: missing apostrophe	48	108	156	48%
Plural noun: intrusive apostrophe	15	20	35	7%
Possessive its: intrusive apostrophe	2	26	28	21%
Contraction: missing apostrophe	2	21	23	26%
Possessive: misplaced apostrophe	17	6	23	1%
3PSG verb: intrusive apostrophe	0	1	1	2%
Contractions: misplaced apostrophes	0	0	0	1%
Total	84	182	266	

In set A, the missing possessive apostrophe is the most common form of non-standard apostrophe use, which with 156 instances, far outnumbers the next category, the use of apostrophes in plural nouns, numbering 35. Missing possessive apostrophes make up 59% of the total number of nonstandard uses, compared with only 13% for intrusive apostrophes in plural nouns. Considering that plural nouns are much more prevalent in most written texts than possessive nouns, this frequency becomes even more significant. Next most frequent, at 28, is the intrusive apostrophe in the possessive pronoun *its*, which is in its own category since, unlike possessive nouns, it has no apostrophe. This is followed by 23 cases each of contractions with missing apostrophes and possessive nouns with misplaced apostrophes. While in other categories nonstandard use is higher in exams, often significantly so, with misplaced possessive apostrophes nonstandard use is almost three times higher in assignments.

Table 6.4 B, above, demonstrates that the most common form of non-standard use in the correction task in the main questionnaire is also the omission of the apostrophe from

possessive nouns, where it occurs in 48% of cases. The second most frequent non-standard use at 26% is omission from contractions, which comes fourth on the student survey list, however, as is discussed below, autocorrect helps keep this category down the list in the student paper survey. Of the respondents who omitted apostrophes in the correction task, 50% omitted them in both possession and contraction, while 31% omitted them in possession only, which contrasts with the 6% who omitted apostrophes only in contraction. In the remaining categories, apostrophes are inserted in the possessive *its* 21% of the time, in plural nouns 7% of the time (a much lower rate than in the student papers) and just 2% in verbs. We will now investigate the use of apostrophes for each of these categories of non-standard forms.

6.4 Categories of non-standard use

6.4.1 Possessive nouns

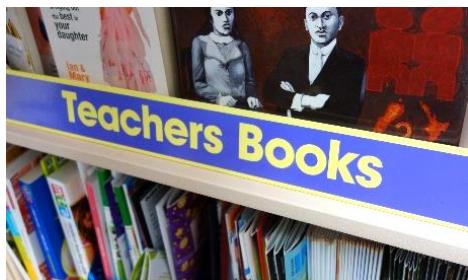


Figure 6.1. Primary school staff room.

Missing apostrophes in possessive nouns is a common sight in the linguistic landscape. The highest frequency of non-standard apostrophe use is in business names, which are discussed in detail below, but for now we will consider some of the more interesting examples of other possessive nouns from the linguistic environment. This is exemplified by *Teachers Books* in figure 6.1, which since the image was taken in a school staffroom is significant because it demonstrates that not one teacher in the school has felt compelled to insert the missing apostrophe. It may have been a reasoned decision to omit the apostrophe in accordance with Cappon's guidelines (2003), as discussed in 4.2.2, although it is unlikely the staff are familiar with these conventions.

Missing or misplaced apostrophes are not uncommon in educational media, including school websites. A secondary school, for example, includes the phrases *Principals PA* and *Principles Blog* on its homepage, *Parent's Zone* appears on a primary school home page, *learners needs* in a tertiary education report, *the universities concern* in our own Vice Chancellor's blog and at the English Language Partners' Conference in 2015 *ELPs* appeared as a possessive noun twice on a power point, minus apostrophe. Menus are another rich source of non-standard apostrophes, including an up-market Auckland restaurant that, under the heading *Fromage*, offers *goats, cows* and *sheeps*, with the lack of apostrophes conjuring up a rather different image from crackers and cheese.

We saw above that the student survey demonstrated that the most common form of non-standard apostrophe use in both assignments and exams is the missing possessive apostrophe, with 48 instances in assignments compared with 108 in exams (see table 6.3, below).

Table 6.3. Possessive apostrophe use <i>Student paper survey</i>					
	Total poss.	Standard	Non-standard	Missing apostrophe	Misplaced apostrophe
Actual number of uses:					
Assignments	394	329	65	48	17
Exams	239	125	114	108	6
Total	633	454	179	156	23
Percentage of total use:					
Assignments		84%	16%	12%	4%
Exams		53%	48%	45%	3%
Total		72%	28%	25%	3%

As a percentage of the total use of possessive nouns, this means that apostrophes are still used in possessive nouns according to the guidelines 84% of the time in assignments, but this drops to 53% in exams, meaning that in almost half the instances of possessive nouns in exams, the apostrophe is either missing, or misplaced. It is also interesting to note the overall number of possessive forms used, standard or non-standard, because students have used 40% fewer possessive nouns in exams (239) than in assignments (394), which perhaps suggests a degree of avoidance in contexts where spellcheck is not available. The fact that

fewer possessive forms are used and more possessive apostrophes are missing in exams increases the overall rate of non-use in comparison with assignments, with 45% of possessive apostrophes missing in exams compared with only 12% in assignments.

There is also a contrast between assignments and exams in the consistency of non-standard use. In assignments everyone who used a non-standard possessive form also used standard forms, whereas in the exams 14 students were consistent in missing apostrophes and a number of others used predominantly non-standard forms. Interestingly, as noted above, there were much fewer misplaced possessive apostrophes in exams than in assignments (three, compared with 17) which perhaps suggests students prefer to omit them rather than guess when handwriting, whereas they trust spellcheck to help in assignments.

In the correction task in the main questionnaire, a significant 60% of respondents did not insert an apostrophe in the business name *Barneys*, which suggests a high degree of tolerance towards business names without apostrophes, or in some cases perhaps a lack of awareness of the function of the <s> when it is not followed by a noun. Apostrophes were missed from the word *Tuesday's* 55% of the time, which may be due to the more abstract possessive relationship, and this may also apply to *New Zealand's* in which 42% were missing apostrophes. The lowest incidence of missing apostrophes in possessive nouns was in *John's*, and while this concurs with the findings in the student survey which showed possessive personal names were more likely to be given apostrophes, at 29% this is still a significant rate of omission. Overall, this seems to indicate a considerable degree of tolerance for apostrophes being omitted from possessive nouns.



Figure 6.2. Mosgiel restaurant.

Most misplaced possessive apostrophes involve the singular form being used when plurality is intended, perhaps implying a lack of knowledge of the guidelines for possessive plural nouns. This is exemplified by figure 6.2 above, which appears to offer just one lucky senior a special menu, while the *Parent's Zone* example mentioned above is likewise exclusive to one parent. However, there are a number of plural forms being used on what are clearly singular nouns, which is less easy to explain. In the collection of examples from marking student papers, I have not kept missing possessive apostrophes, however I have recorded misplaced possessive apostrophes and other unconventional forms. As with the student paper survey, misplaced apostrophes consist mostly of singular forms for plural nouns, although there are a few examples where the opposite occurs, as in *Davids'*. There are also examples like *Finches* with an <e> instead of an apostrophe, *Alexy'* and *Grice'*, with an apostrophe but no <s>, *pilots's* and *peoples's*, and finally a double apostrophe in *Campbell's'*.



Figure 6.3. Palmerston North Public Hospital.

Returning again to the linguistic landscape, a walk through to women's health in the Palmerston North Public Hospital takes you past three different spellings of *Women's* (figure 6.3). Irregular plural nouns are problematic for a number of people, many of whom

are unaware that the apostrophe precedes the <s> when the plural form does not end in <s>. It is interesting, therefore, that the signage in the hospital does not include an example of the more common non-standard form, *Womens'*. And a sign advertising *woman's cuts* outside a hair salon perhaps reflects the recent trend towards pronouncing *woman* and *women* as homophones, without the distinctive [ɪ] in the first syllable of *women*.

ie sector needed to be strengthened in the
tition. He shares the universities concern
cings. This led to discussion about how the

Figure 6.4. Massey V.C.'s Blog 13.10.14.

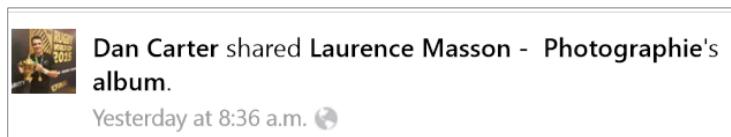


Figure 6.5. Facebook 15.11.11.

The above two images illustrate a notable trend in which confusion over the rule governing <y> endings and pluralisation is evident. In the first example the writer has simply used the plural *universities*, rather than the possessive form *university's* and there is a small number of these in the student paper survey and the marked student papers, including *companies*, *societies* and *celebrities*. An interesting variation is seen in image 6.5 where the plural form has been used but an apostrophe is also added to *photographie's*, and there are two examples of *lade's* in my collection.



Figure 6.6. Palmerston North CBD.

Finally, the image above was taken in 2017, yet the possessive form *owneres* would be more at home in a sixteenth century text. The insertion of <e> in a possessive noun where the

apostrophe should be is difficult to explain, as it is unlikely the writer has any knowledge of the historical precedent.

6.4.1.1 Business names with possessive nouns



Figure 6.7. Palmerston North business.

As previously mentioned, in the linguistic landscape it is the missing possessive apostrophe in business names that comprises the bulk of non-standard use, as exemplified by *Georgies wigs and Hair* in figure 6.7. This is also reflected in the correction task in the main questionnaire, where as noted above, 60% of respondents failed to insert an apostrophe in the name *Barney's*. Significantly, for six of the 11 respondents who used only one non-standard form in the text, this one non-standard form was the missing apostrophe in *Barneys*. This indicates a strong acceptance of business names without apostrophes, even with this group of respondents who have been so pedantic elsewhere.

As noted in the methodology section, I estimated the use of apostrophes in business names to be around 50% and this was confirmed on examining the *Palmerston North yellow pages*, where 206 of the 402 business names involving possessive nouns did not have apostrophes. As discussed in 4.2.2, Barfoot (2004) observes that many businesses and organisations in Britain today choose not to use apostrophes in their names for a variety of reasons. I was told that St Albans Church here in Palmerston North, like Lloyds Bank, made a conscious decision to remove their apostrophe because of the difficulty people had placing it correctly, although I have been unable to confirm this. It made me curious about other New Zealand organisations though, and I have investigated the following seven businesses, which are some of New Zealand's oldest companies:

<i>Company:</i>	<i>Established:</i>
Ballantynes	1854
Gregg's	1861
Briscoes	1862
Harraways	1867
Smith & Caughey's	1880
Farmers	1909
Wattie's	1934

As can be seen from this list, three of these company names, Gregg's, Smith & Caughey's, and Wattie's still use an apostrophe, and appear to have always done so. Hughes and Wallace (2010) claim that Wattie's uses an apostrophe in Wattie's, but not in Watties Food Services, however I found apostrophes to be used with consistency on their current websites, including in Wattie's Food Services, and there is even an interesting example of a double possessive apostrophe in "Wattie's' success..." on its history page. This addition of a second apostrophe is necessary because it is a double possessive – the first apostrophe is within the trademark *Wattie's* itself, while the second denotes the possessive relationship with the following word, *success*. The remaining four companies do not use apostrophes today, and the results of my internet search and responses to my emails are discussed below.

Ballantynes is a department store established in Christchurch in 1854, and photographs available on the internet showed that the Ballantynes name on its original building had an apostrophe, but this had disappeared by the time the building was destroyed by fire in 1947. The Timaru store, built in 1913, had no apostrophe on the building signs, although a leadlight window above the front door did. Modern stores do not use apostrophes in any of the branding and the Executive Director informed me that "For some time our practice has been to regard "Ballantynes" as a brand name, (i.e. a name in its own right) and the "s" as no longer signifying ownership". This suggests the name is seen as a more inclusive plural and is simply *Ballantynes*, rather than standing for something like *Ballantynes' Store*.

While Briscoes was originally a British company, it survives today only in New Zealand, where it was established in 1862. The company name was Briscoe and Co., although a

photograph taken in 1938 in Dunedin (Murray, 2013) shows the name BRISCOE'S on the side of what was then an old building, indicating that an apostrophe had been used in this shortened version of the name. All other evidence, however, points to there being no apostrophe in the name. In the absence of a response to my email I can only speculate from the evidence available on the internet as to why the apostrophe is no longer used. The company trades under the name *Briscoes Homeware*, which demonstrates a clear possessive relationship. The company name is Briscoe Group Ltd but in the history page on their website, the name appears several times in a plural possessive form, as in “Briscoes’ rapid expansion” (Briscoe Group Ltd, 2016). This implies that the name *Briscoes* is now seen as a trademark in a similar way to *Ballantynes*. However, unlike *Ballantynes*, which just has the one word in its name, Briscoes also has the word *Homeware* in its signage which means the possessive relationship is still there. Its omission may be an issue of appearance, as is the case with the next company, Harraways.

Harraways, a Dunedin company producing oat products since 1867, like Barclays Bank (Barfoot, 2004), has never had an apostrophe in its name. According to the Marketing Manager “Harraways has never had the apostrophe incorporated because it is less pleasing to the eye visually in design...”. Photographs of packaging throughout the years confirm this (Harraway & Son Ltd, n.d.), with no sign of an apostrophe, apart from in a newspaper advertisement in the 1990s which is likely to be a printer’s ‘error’ rather than being initiated by the company. This suggests that even in the 19th century appearance sometimes outweighed grammatical correctness. The marketing manager continues “...and given that the word Harraways talks to the founding family – the trademark is likely to be portraying short hand for ‘the Harraways’, i.e. as we sometimes reference families → ‘the group of Harraways together’ ”. This establishes that the name is now seen as plural and therefore a tradename in its own right, similar to Ballantynes. Nonetheless, in product names, such as *Harraways Oats*, there is still a possessive relationship.

The well-known New Zealand department store, *Farmers*, did not respond to my email, but a lot of useful historical information and photographs are provided on their website (Farmers, n.d.). The company began as a mail-order company called *Laidlaw Leeds* in 1909, supplying the rural population. It became the *Farmers’ Union Trading Company* in 1919, and

later the *Farmers' Trading Company*, complete with apostrophes in both signage and catalogues. However, in 1927 when the huge lit FARMERS sign was erected on the Auckland store, there was no apostrophe, perhaps understandable given that the letters in the name were all very large, separate and set partly above the parapet, creating the technical difficulty of suspending an apostrophe in mid-air. Once the word *Farmers* was used alone, it seems the apostrophe was lost on shop signage, although it was retained in the catalogues until well into the 1980s. Today *Farmers* seems to be regarded as a tradename in its own right, like *Ballantynes*, without the need for an apostrophe in signage, catalogues or advertising. However, the name of the company is still *Farmers Trading Company*, which today nearly always appears without an apostrophe. As seen in 4.2.2, Barfoot (2004) discovered that the omission of Selfridges' apostrophe seemed to distance the name from the founder of the company, and perhaps Farmers also seeks to dissociate itself from its origins as a company solely for farmers, which may be implied by the use of the possessive form *Farmers'*.

These businesses, therefore, had good reasons for rejecting their apostrophes, some because of concerns about the appearance of the logo (Harraways), eliminating misplacement of the apostrophe (St Albans), names that become pluralised so they are seen as a trade name, rather than possessive (Ballantynes and Briscoes), and sometimes distancing the present business from its past (possibly Farmers). However, in today's environment with over 50% of possessive business names omitting the apostrophe it is likely that, as is the case with Georgies Wigs and Hair (personal communication, May, 2017) it may not even occur to some business owners to use an apostrophe in their names.

A number of interviewees believed the signs looked neater without the apostrophe, as Isabel explains: "...you want to have clean lines and apostrophes sort of get in the way" and she thought that apostrophes were unnecessary, particularly where uppercase lettering has been used. Molly said: "...you want to keep it looking clean – so you don't want, you want lot of clear space and you don't want lots of punctuation marks". Ross also believes this is why apostrophes are often dropped from business names, although he does not agree that they should be:

It seems to be acceptable by sign writers to keep it clean looking. It's for aesthetic reasons I think by – removing the untidy apostrophe – so they're looking for visual beauty – and consistency of look – rather than effectiveness of communication – and I'm not happy with that – I don't like it because you lose distinction and the apostrophe is a thing that distinguishes things.

6.4.2 Contractions and omission



Figure 6.8. Petone craft market.

According to Steve “Showing possessiveness is not as important as, say, things like contractions and all that sort of thing” and this belief is reflected in the small number of examples of nonstandard use in contractions I have collected from the linguistic environment – only 15. The embroidered baby’s bib in figure 6.8 has an apostrophe missing from the contraction *don’t*, and other notable examples include the ‘*Whats on*’ on the sign at the Albert Hotel in Palmerston north and the appearance of the word *ill* for *I’ll* twice in a typed note attached to a cosmetics catalogue left in my letterbox. The only example of a misplaced apostrophe is *ther’es* on a coffee mug, although there are many examples in Spike Milligan’s *Badjelly the Witch*, first published in 1973. As well as a good number of omitted apostrophes from both possessive nouns and contractions, there are several of instances of *could’nt*, *was’nt* and *did’nt*. The book is handwritten by the author, and although he is British, the book was popular in New Zealand (in fact, my edition is a special printing produced for New Zealand due to popular demand) and has exposed generations of our children to a somewhat random approach to apostrophe use.

In the student paper survey, contractions were very straight forward to analyse, and this is where we see the most marked contrast between the assignments and exams. There were only two contractions with missing apostrophes in assignments, which represented 1.5% of total contraction use, compared with 21, or 25% of total contraction use in the exams. The contraction *it's* was included here because it conforms to the same pattern as other contractions, and it is interesting that both missing apostrophes in the assignments affected the word *it's*, which comes up with a grammar-check alert rather than being autocorrected, as for other contractions, as we can see in these examples:

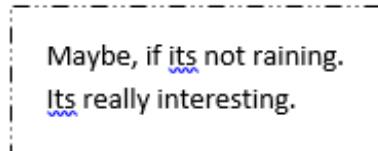


Figure 6.9. *It's* and grammar check.

There were no examples of misplaced apostrophes in the student paper survey, but two interesting examples in the marked papers involves omission in the word ‘about’, written as *bout*', where an apostrophe marks the wrong end of the word, and *doesn'ot* where there is an apostrophe but no contraction. A similar example is *cos'* for ‘because’ from the Palmerston North yellow pages, where the apostrophe denotes the missing e rather than the missing first syllable. Omissions like these are not common.

Table 6.4, below, presents the findings pertaining to contractions from the correction task, question 1.2 in the main questionnaire.

	Total	they'll	don't	one's	it's
Standard	69%	88%	67%	48%	72%
Changed to full form	5%	5%	0%	15%	1%
Total Standard	74%	93%	67%	63%	73%
Missing	25%	5%	32%	37%	27%
Misplaced	1%	2%	1%	0%	0%
Total Non-Standard	26%	7%	33%	37%	27%

As shown, contractions have been changed to standard forms 74% of the time; this is made up of 69% who inserted apostrophes and 5% who changed the contractions into their full forms, reflecting a degree of resistance to contractions in writing. However, there is considerable inconsistency in this, with no one respondent changing more than two of the contractions. In addition, some contractions appear to be less acceptable than others, for instance 15 respondents changed *everyones* to its full form, but not one did so with *dont*. Of the 26% non-standard forms appearing in the contractions, 1% consisted of misplaced apostrophes in *do'nt*, *theyll'* and *the'll* (with the <y> crossed out) while the remaining 25% were missing apostrophes.

Apostrophes in *everyones*, *dont* and *its* have been missed by 37, 34 and 27 respondents respectively, which is less frequent than with most possessive nouns, but indicates a high tolerance for contractions without apostrophes nevertheless. There is less tolerance for missing the apostrophe in *theyll*, with only five of the 100 respondents making no attempt to change it. Eighty-eight inserted an apostrophe, five changed it to the full form and two inserted a misplaced apostrophe. Furthermore, of the ten respondents who only inserted one apostrophe in the text, eight inserted it in the word *theyll* while a ninth changed the contraction to *they will*. This clearly demonstrates that some contractions without apostrophes are found to be less acceptable than others, even by those who generally use few apostrophes.

6.4.3 Plural nouns



Figure 6.10. Palmerston North carpark. Figure 6.11. Auckland restaurant.

Apostrophes in plural nouns are an increasingly significant non-standard usage, and image 6.10 is a typical example, where the warning *Pedestrian's keep clear* appears at every entrance to the Plaza carpark in Palmerston North. In image 6.11, *nacho's* is interesting because it is an example of use in a vowel-final word, which is quite common in the linguistic environment collection.

As discussed in 4.2.1, Barfoot (1991), Crystal (2006b) and Truss (2003) all argue that apostrophes in plural nouns are often triggered by a vowel-final sound because these words look odd with just <s> added, and also suggest erroneous pronunciation. Indeed, there are 39 examples of these in this collection. While the overall proportion of vowel-final words in the English language is small, they tend to be associated with food and other commodities and are, therefore, high-frequency words in the linguistic landscape. These words include *menu's*, *panini's*, *combo's*, *stereo's*, *Kiwi's*, *bra's* and *photo's*, and we can see how some, including *menus*, *paninis*, *combos* may suggest an alternative phonology, /mɛnʌs/ rather than /minjuz/ for example. Pete noted this was common with his students: "Where it ends in a vowel with the um, an apostrophe gets put in there otherwise it looks like *comboss*. Lots of people put the apostrophe in there". This visual-phonological trigger for apostrophe use seems to be demonstrated in two images of menu boards in my collection, both of which show an apostrophe in the word *panini's*, but not in the other plural nouns, since they are not phonetically vowel-final. This is also behind the small number of plural nouns in which apostrophes are standard today. In instances such as *do's* and *to-go's* (seen on recently Facebook), the apostrophe adds clarity to the otherwise confusing forms *dos* and *to-gos*.

However, this theory is unable to explain apostrophe use today since there are also 54 consonant-final examples in this collection, 38% more than vowel-final. The consonant-final group includes words that are phonetically consonant-final but orthographically vowel-final such as *cakes* and *females*; those that are phonetically vowel-final in NZE, but orthographically consonant-final such as *teachers* and *sisters*; and words ending in <y> such as *Tuesdays* and *boys*, since these do not have the visual-phonological features that are thought to trigger apostrophe use. Examples include *kid's*, *American's*, *pancake's* and *brick's*, as well as *candidate's* in a paragraph about grammar and punctuation in an old doctorate guidebook.

Comprising the second most common non-standard use according to the student paper survey, there were a total of 34 apostrophes used in plural nouns across the 100 papers examined. Fifteen of them occurred in assignments and 19 in exams, which is not a significant difference. Exactly half the students used at least one apostrophe in a plural noun in either the assignment or the exams, but interestingly only two did so in both the assignments and exams, while the remaining 23 used apostrophes in one, but not the other. The lack of significant difference between assignments and exams in this instance may be explained by the fact that spellcheck generally ignores these forms, as can be seen in the first three sentences in figure 6.12, below where neither a red nor a blue line alerts the writer to any problem. In the fourth sentence, however, the missing <e> seems to prompt a grammar alert – but not consistently. Not only does it ignore *hero's*, but when the adjectives are removed from the sentence the blue lines disappear, reappearing in sentence six although there is no adjective, but not in seven.

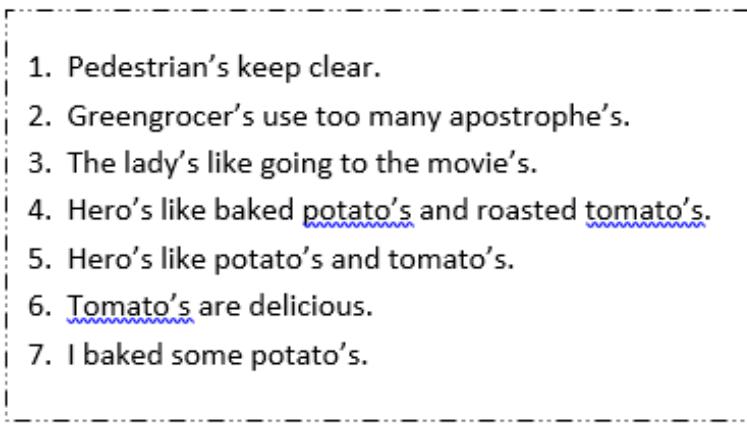
- 
1. Pedestrian's keep clear.
 2. Greengrocer's use too many apostrophe's.
 3. The lady's like going to the movie's.
 4. Hero's like baked potato's and roasted tomato's.
 5. Hero's like potato's and tomato's.
 6. Tomato's are delicious.
 7. I baked some potato's.

Figure 6.12. Plural nouns and grammar check.

There were more apostrophes used in consonant-final words than in vowel-final words (17 compared with 13), perhaps reflecting an environment where vowel-final words are less frequent than the linguistic landscape, and this difference is much more striking in the examples collected from marking, as is discussed below. Due to the high frequency of plural nouns occurring in English only non-standard plural forms were counted in this survey, however, the occurrence of apostrophes in plural nouns is much less frequent than it may seem. For example, on examining one assignment that had two plural nouns with apostrophes, 81 examples of standard plural nouns were also found, giving a rate of less than 2.5% non-standard use, and while *honorific's* appeared once, *honorifics* appeared six

times elsewhere. Apostrophes in plural nouns, therefore, occur relatively infrequently and always inconsistently, with no apparent rationale as to why an apostrophe is used in one instance, but not another.

Inconsistency is also evident in the findings from the correction task in the main questionnaire, where 7% of the words in the plural noun category had apostrophes inserted, and while one respondent inserted apostrophes in four of the five plural nouns, most have only done so in one or two. All the plural nouns in the text have had an apostrophe added at least once, with *Sundays* topping the list at 17, followed by *menus* with 11, *coffees* with five, two in *wines* and one in *beers*. The relatively high use in *Sundays* may be explained by the proximity of the possessive *Tuesday's* which may have confused some, unable to rationalise why there should be an apostrophe in one but not the other. And with 11% of respondents inserting an apostrophe in *menus*, in one case the only apostrophe inserted in the text, it seems vowel-final words like this are still problematic for some. A sign observed in a shop window announced *Great Christmas gift idea*, although there seemed to be several ideas. I wondered if this was a case of avoidance in which, unable to decide whether an apostrophe was appropriate in *ideas*, the writer simply omitted the suffix.

However, a significant finding in the collection from marking papers is that where the apostrophe is used in plural nouns, it is overwhelmingly found in words that are consonant-final. Over hundreds of papers there are only 25 instances of apostrophes used in vowel-final words, compared with 191 in consonant-final words. If the grocer's apostrophe was ever confined to vowel final words as Barfoot (1991), Crystal (2006b) and Truss (2003) argue, this is certainly not the case in New Zealand today.

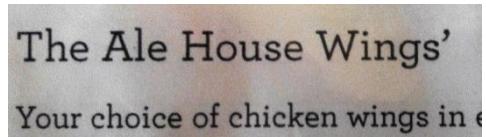


Figure 6.13. Palmerston North restaurant.

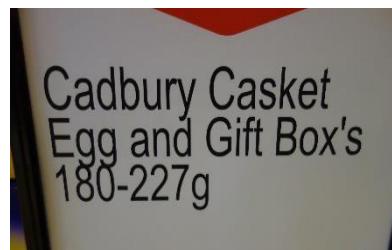


Figure 6.14. Palmerston North supermarket.

An interesting trend in this category is the use of the apostrophe after the <s> in plural nouns, as in *wings'* (image 6.13), which suggests there is an awareness of some rule governing apostrophes and plurality. This example also demonstrates inconsistency since the word is repeated in the next line without an apostrophe. While this is the only example in my collection from the linguistic landscape and there were none in the student survey, there are 25 instances of the apostrophe being placed after s in non-possessive plural nouns in the marked papers, including *monkeys'*, *guests'* and *behaviours'*.

Another interesting group in this category is represented by the word *box's* in image 6.14, which seems inexplicable given it marks a vowel that is still phonologically present. Similar examples are *mattress's* from a newspaper advertisement, *Christmas's* in an assignment in the student paper survey, and a number in the marked papers including *pitch's*, *witness's*, *suffix's* and *Xmas's*. It seems likely that these apostrophes are not intended to mark a missing vowel, but are simply confused with possessive forms. Problems also arise when students are unsure of irregular plural forms, as seen in *emphasis's* in an assignment and *criteria's*, *analysis'*, *anaysis's* and *corpus'* in the marked papers.



Figure 6.15. Product in Kmart, Palmerston North.



Figure 6.16. Main street, Opunake.

We saw above how <y> / <ies> word endings cause difficulties when forming possessives, and these images demonstrate that this is also a problem for some people when forming plural nouns. Possessive forms have been used to form the plural, in one case on a product while in the other it is in the name of the business. Other examples from my linguistic environment collection include *sticky's*, *fry's*, *berry's*, *family's* and *memory's*. Again, this seems to suggest a lack of awareness of the spelling rule, with the apostrophe perhaps being added because *bunnys* did not ‘look right’, a common criterion for usage as discussed in section 7.8. This problem was not very evident in the student paper survey, with only two examples appearing in assignments, *country's* and *hierarchy's*, and none in the exams. However, there are 20 examples in the marked papers, where confusion over these endings has resulted in words like *husky's*, *analogy's* and *eighty's* and in three cases where the plural form has been used, with an apostrophe following the <s>, as in *celebrities'*.

6.4.4 Possessive pronouns

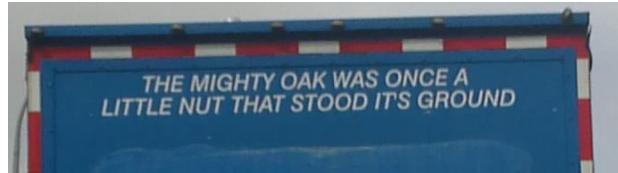


Figure 6.17. On a truck, Palmerston north.

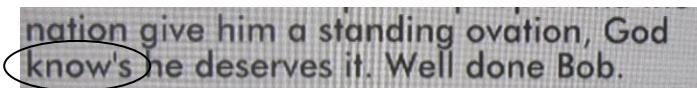


Figure 6.18. Massey University carpark

Image 6.17 is a typical example of an apostrophe intruding into the possessive *its*, which can be confusing because it behaves differently from possessive nouns. The example in the image is the only one in my collection from the linguistic landscape, however there are many examples in the student paper survey. In contrast to possessive nouns, possessive pronouns occur more frequently in exams than in assignments, with 68 examples in the former and 39 in the latter, but there is more than ten times the number of intrusive apostrophes in the exams than in the assignments – with apostrophes appearing in 37% of possessive *its* in exams and only 5% in assignments. Perhaps spellcheck and/or autocorrect help here, but it tends to come up as a grammar-check, and then not always. Included in the exam data are two examples of *its'*, which is interesting since *its* cannot be plural, thus it is difficult to understand the rationale behind this use. In nine of the 22 intrusive apostrophes in the marked papers, the apostrophe has been placed after the <s>, and another interesting use here is five instances of *it's self*. The correction task in the main questionnaire also shows quite a high frequency of intrusive apostrophes, with 21 appearing in the possessive *its*.

Other possessive pronouns occur infrequently and I found no instances of definite pronouns with apostrophes in any of my observations. On the other hand, as illustrated by image 6.18 above, there is a small number of indefinite pronouns without apostrophes, such as *ones*, *someones* and *others*, scattered throughout the collections.

6.4.5 Verbs



nation give him a standing ovation, God
know's he deserves it. Well done Bob.

Image 6.19. Campbell Live, TV3, 05.07.13.

Apostrophes are also beginning to creep into third-person singular verbs, as seen in the word *know's* in image 6.19, from a text displayed on a television news show. A similar example is *enjoy's* on a sign in a motor camp and an interesting use of an apostrophe in a verb is in "*Everybody be's a clown*", a quotation in the Manawatu Standard, 23.04.16, where the unconventional use of the verb *be* has been clarified with an apostrophe to prevent the confusion that may have been caused by "*Everybody bes a clown*". The apostrophe in a sign held aloft at a rugby match proclaiming *Charlie ♥'s Beauden* does not add clarity but was perhaps seen as necessary to separate the symbol and suffix. While these are the only examples of apostrophes in verbs in my linguistic environment collection, it must be remembered that verbs, and more specifically third person singular verbs, occur infrequently in the linguistic landscape. The trend towards apostrophes in verbs is most apparent in the marked student papers, where there are 41 examples, including *see's*, *ensure's*, *want's*, *come's* and many more.

The one example from the student paper survey is *vary's*, in an exam paper but there are three examples each of *reply's* and *try's* in the marked student papers, which indicates that confusion over <y> / <ies> endings also affects <y> final verbs. Other interesting examples have the apostrophe following the <s>, *forgets'* and *analyses'* for example. Moreover, with examples such as *possess'* and *focus'*, as well as *focus's* and *discuss's*, it seems both options of the rule governing possession and plural nouns ending in a sibilant are also sometimes being applied to verbs. The use of the word *teacher's* instead of *teaches* is another interesting example. And finally, the newest phenomenon to affect verbs is the insertion of an apostrophe in words like *learn't* and *mean't* – the first example of this was seen in a 2015 paper and the other two in 2016. As yet this is rare, but it is interesting because it represents confusion between the irregular past tense ending *t* and the contracted negative ending *n't*. Only two respondents inserted apostrophes in the verb *opens* in the text in the correction task. However, one respondent provided an interesting example when he

changed the sequence *our menus feature New Zealand's...* to *our menu feature's New Zealand's...*, although he did not add an apostrophe to *opens* and for the most part used standard forms.

...
backyard. Separate cosy lounge, s
pantry. Highly spec'd, double glaze
the four double bedrooms have e

Figure 6.20. Palmerston North Property Press.

In the example above an apostrophe has been added to the word *spec'd*. *Spec* is a shortening of *specification* which has now become a word in its own right. The addition of the *-ed* suffix to create an adjective, however, would be problematic without an apostrophe, as we can see from the alternative spellings *sped* or *specd*, where phonologically the /k/ would become /s/ in the first instance while the final consonant cluster in the second looks odd to English speakers. So, while this is a non-standard use of the apostrophe in English, it performs the important function of increasing clarity.

Similar examples are *cc'd* and *lol'ed*, both from Facebook. *Cced* or *ccd* make awkward past-tense verbs from the acronym *cc* ('carbon copy') and the apostrophe again helps clarify meaning. While the acronym *lol* is already a verb, the past-tense *laughed out loud* is not transferable into the acronym, so again the apostrophe prevents problematic forms like *loled*, *lolled* or *lold* which, while they comply with English phonology, may not be recognised as past tense forms of the acronym *lol*. The apostrophe makes this clear, although it is interesting that the writer included an <e> as well as the apostrophe in this instance.

The apostrophe enables suffixes to be added to these modern morphemes without confusion, thereby increasing clarity. This lends some support to Buncic's (2004, see 3.3.4) argument that people see the apostrophe as marking morpheme boundaries. Another interesting example is *Thai'd Up*, the name of a restaurant near Auckland. This clever play on words could be missed in *Thaid up*, but by separating the word *Thai* from the past-tense suffix, the apostrophe again provides clarity. An isolated example on Facebook, *overshadow'd*, leaves one wondering if the writer has been reading too much Shakespeare.

6.4.6 Creative and other miscellaneous use



Figure 6.21 Martinborough CBD.



Figure 6.22. Whitcoulls logo

As we saw in 4.2.2, the apostrophe can sometimes be a feature of a business name. The apostrophe in IN.GRE'DI.ENT (image 6.21) demonstrates a more playful use of the apostrophe, where it has been used purely to provide interest to the name of the business. Whitcoulls (image 6.22) has replaced the dot on the <i> in its name with an apostrophe; this is often used alone and has become widely recognised as the Whitcoulls logo. Whitcoulls informed me that the apostrophe was added because it is a feature of written language and seemed appropriate for a business selling books. The gift cards given to the teachers who participated in this study simply had a large apostrophe on them which clearly indicated their source, making them particularly appropriate for this project. As a business name, there is no need for a possessive apostrophe in *Whitcoulls* as the name is a blend in which the ending comes from the name *Coulls*.



Figure 6.23. Hanmer Springs café.

Image 6.23, above, is interesting because while it has used a French term it uses an apostrophe before a consonant which does not trigger the loss of /u/ in *du*. The writer is perhaps familiar with elided forms involving *du* and has assumed that *du* can be shortened in all contexts. Unnecessary apostrophes are also found in the name of a coffee roastery in Palmerston North *La'vita*, a shop called *Dynamic De'cor* and the motels *A' La Vista* and *A'*

Abode. These apostrophes serve no purpose but perhaps the businesses owners see it as conferring a more exotic quality to their names.

A frequent use of apostrophes in the student paper survey, in one of the assignments in particular, was in decades, as in the 1920's. These have not been classified as standard or non-standard because the conventions have changed for this usage and both are still acceptable. Today most style guides prefer no apostrophe (Butterfield, 2007; Hughes & Wallace, 2010; Waddington, A. (2014), after all it is not necessary for clarity. In view of this it may seem surprising that 57 examples of decades used in the assignment had apostrophes, while only seven did not. However, since one of the assignments was based on a given text, written in 1997, in which apostrophes were consistently used in decades, students may have followed this lead, although there were still more decades with apostrophes in exams (22) than without (13). Most students were consistent, with only four of the 22 who used decades in the assignments using both forms and one of 11 in the exams. One interesting example – 1960,s – has a comma instead of an apostrophe, reflecting a not uncommon confusion between the apostrophe and the comma, as shown above, in 6.2.

6.5 Consistency of use

Another feature of non-standard apostrophe use that comes through in the examples collected is consistency, or rather, inconsistency. As will be discussed further in 8.5, it is often the inconsistency of use that concerns people more than the non-standard use of apostrophes. The Warehouse sign used in the surveys has an apostrophe in *polo's* and *singlet's*, but not in *shirts*; the back of a van in Auckland advertises catering for *birthdays* and *wedding's*; *Freds Fish and Chips* in Gisborne is on the corner of two *street's*, and sells *Freds Combo's*, but takes *orders of chips*; a menu board in a children's playland displays *nacho's*, *combo's*, *panini's* and *brick's*, but also *combos*, *cheerios* and *sticks*; a business advertises *lawnmower's* and *chainsaw's*, but *tools* and *sales*; and while the Ale House has *wings'* on its menu, in the next line it is just *wings*. Matching signs on a shop front in Auckland have *Geoff's Emporium* to the left of the door, but *Geoffs Emporium* to the right.

This seems to suggest that in these cases, decisions regarding apostrophe use are not based on sound reasoning, but more on an impulse as each individual word is written. Sometimes, however, there is consistency as in the case of a café blackboard including the words *Today's special's* and *rosti's*. While the fact there are one standard and two non-standard forms is inconsistent, it is consistent in that all words in the sign with an <s> suffix have apostrophes, and this tells us that the apostrophe in *Tuesday's* is there because of the <s> rather than any understanding of possession.

6.6 Social factors associated with apostrophe use

6.6.1 Age and gender

Some interesting patterns emerge from the findings when age and gender are taken into account, in particular the contrasting results between the two set tasks. The links with age have been investigated through the quantitative data from the dictation task in the cohort interviews and the correction task in the main questionnaire, with the findings from these two sources being somewhat contradictory. Given the discussion in chapter 4 regarding the teaching of apostrophe use in schools, when considering the correlation with age, it might be expected that non-standard use would reduce with age, and this appears to be the case in the cohort study.

The retired cohort used all standard forms with only one exception, where one informant inserted an apostrophe in the possessive *its*; this is in marked contrast to the apostrophe use by the youth cohort. Table 6.5, below, presents the results of the youth cohort in the dictation task.

Table 6.5. Non-standard apostrophe use – youth cohort
Dictation task, youth cohort interviews

Interviewee:	Isla	Isabel	Ian	Ivan	Isaac	Irena	Ike	total	Av per word
Possessive (5 words)	1	1	1	3	1	3	4	14	2.8
Contraction (3 words)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0.3
Plural noun (2 words)	0	1	1	1	0	1	2	6	3
Total non-standard	1	2	2	4	2	4	6	21 = 3 pp	

As can be seen, interviewees in the youth cohort used an average of three non-standard apostrophes each. All the informants in the youth cohort used at least one non-standard form with one informant using six. When averaged out at the number of non-standard uses per word, unlike the findings discussed above where non-standard use is more prevalent in possessive nouns, here the highest incidence is seen in the insertion of apostrophes in plural nouns, at an average of three per word, while missing and misplaced apostrophes in possessive nouns follow closely behind at 2.8. More consistent with other findings, though, only one informant missed an apostrophe from contractions. Looking at the individual words affected by non-standard use, in the possessive nouns group the word *children's* had apostrophes missing in four cases and misplaced in one, meaning only two of the seven informants used the standard form, while four spelt *city's* as *cities*. The remaining three words were less affected with only one or two non-standard forms used. Four informants inserted an apostrophe into *kiwis* and two into *menus*, a clear indication of inconsistency of apostrophe use in plural nouns.

The change to a dictation task did not prevent informants changing words, with one participant from each cohort changing two words each to other standard forms, avoiding the need for an apostrophe by changing *its* to *the* and *you'd* to *we*, for example. Nevertheless, these findings represent a significant, and perhaps predicted, contrast in apostrophe use between the two age groups. The correction task in the main questionnaire, however, paints quite a different picture.

Focusing again on the numbers of non-standard apostrophe use, the findings from the correction task in the main questionnaire have been sorted into demographic categories, which have then been divided by the number of people in that particular category to give the average number of non-standard uses per person in that category, enabling comparisons to be made. In the age categories, since three respondents in the over 71 group is insufficient to provide useful indicators these have been merged with the fourth category to create a 56-plus age group.

Overall, the 100 questionnaire respondents used an average of 3.7 non-standard apostrophes each and the average non-standard use per person for all age-groups is between 3.2 and 3.9 (see table 6.6, below). However, contrary to the above findings, the lowest non-standard use is found in the youngest age group. The highest non-standard use is found in the two middle groups, while the 56-plus group falls between. When broken down into the types of non-standard use this pattern is clearly evident in the plus-apostrophe categories¹², while in the minus-apostrophe categories¹³ the average per person shows little variation at all, falling between .5 and .7 for all age groups.

The difference between these two studies may be explained simply by the numbers, the cohort study is too small to make any generalisations. It is also possible that these very different findings may be a result of the different cognitive processes involved in completing the two different tasks. And while the differences are not large, they do not follow expected patterns for age; this is discussed further in 9.2.1.4.

Turning now to the link between gender and non-standard apostrophe use, the correction task in the main questionnaire highlights some interesting patterns. On average, male participants have used four non-standard apostrophes compared with only three for females. However, when this is broken down into types of non-standard use, males dominate consistently in the plus-apostrophe categories, while the genders equalise at 0.6 each in the minus-apostrophe categories.

¹² *Plus-apostrophe categories* are those in which the standard form has an apostrophe, contractions and possessive nouns for example.

¹³ *Minus-apostrophe categories* are those in which the standard form has no apostrophe, plural nouns for example.

Patterns become more interesting when age and gender are combined, as is shown in table 6.6, below.

Table 6.6. Non-standard use by age and gender

Question 1.2, Main questionnaire

Age:	16-25			26-40			40-55			56+		
	Tot	M	F	Tot	M	F	Tot	M	F	Tot	M	F
Plus-apostrophe	73	36	37	87	49	38	88	51	37	45	25	20
<i>Average per person</i>	2.5	2.8	2.2	3.1	3.5	2.7	3.4	3.9	2.8	3.1	4.1	2
Minus-apostrophe	20	15	5	18	4	14	12	5	7	10	3	7
<i>Average per person</i>	0.7	1.1	0.3	0.7	0.3	1	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.5	0.7
Total non-standard	93	51	42	105	53	52	100	56	44	55	28	27
<i>Average per person</i>	3.2	3.9	2.5	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.9	4.3	3.4	3.7	4.7	2.7

In the correction task, overall non-standard use rises for males through the last three age groups, peaking at 4.7 in the 56-plus group. On the other hand, female non-standard use peaks at 3.7 in the second age group and falls to 2.7 in the 56-plus group, two fewer than the males in this age group and following the more expected pattern, given educational changes, of non-standard use reducing with age.

The different types of non-standard use also reveal some interesting patterns. Males consistently use more non-standard forms across all age groups by omitting apostrophes in the plus-apostrophe categories, as well as in the 16-25 age group in the minus-apostrophe categories, where 1.1 males inserted apostrophes compared with 0.3 of females. However, this is reversed in the other three age groups for the minus-apostrophe categories, where women use more non-standard forms, albeit by a small margin in the two higher age groups. While there are only two examples of non-standard use with verbs, these were both used by females, one in the 26-40 age-group and the other 56-plus group, although the respondent who altered the text to "...menu feature's..." was a male in the 26-40 age-group. It seems that in general females use apostrophes more than males – they are less likely to omit them from possessive nouns and contractions and are slightly more likely to insert them into plural nouns, possessive *its* and third person singular verbs.

6.6.2 Educational level

The correlation between educational level and apostrophe use is reflected in a steady decline in non-standard apostrophe use as the educational level increases. Nine participants did not respond to this question, although they completed the rest of the demographic details, suggesting they were uncomfortable with the question. They were also the group who used the highest number of non-standard apostrophes overall, at an average of six per person. The group with no qualifications used an average of 5.2 non-standard apostrophes and this drops to 3.6 for both the school qualification and tertiary certificate categories, then 2.6 and 2.4 respectively for those with degrees and post-grad qualifications. This pattern is clear in the plus-apostrophe categories, but less so in the minus-apostrophe categories where there is some fluctuation, as can be seen in table 6.7, below.

Table 6.7. Non-standard apostrophe use by educational level <i>Question 1.2, Main questionnaire</i>					
	No qualification	School (NCEA=)	Tertiary Cert	Degree	Post-graduate
Plus-apostrophe	21	138	25	30	28
<i>Average per person</i>	4.2	3	2.8	1.9	1.9
Minus-apostrophe	5	26	7	11	8
<i>Average per person</i>	1	0.6	0.8	0.7	0.5
Total NS use	26	164	32	41	36
<i>Average per person</i>	5.2	3.6	3.6	2.6	2.4

While these results reflect an expected pattern of decreasing non-standard use with increasing qualifications, it must be noted that those in the two highest qualification categories still used a number of non-standard forms, including the degree holder who changed the text to "...menu feature's...", inserting an apostrophe in the resulting verb. At the same time, those with no qualifications used standard apostrophes in 8.2 of the possible 15 instances. This demonstrates that while a link between qualifications and apostrophe use has been established, a degree of uncertainty appears to occur across all educational levels.

6.7 Understanding the conventions of apostrophe use

6.7.1 The functions of the apostrophe

In the main questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate which of five possible options they saw as being the functions of the apostrophe (see appendix D, question 2.5), the options being contractions, plural nouns, possessive nouns, abbreviated forms and third person singular verbs. Table 6.8 below, shows identification of functions by participants in the main questionnaire.

Table 6.8. Identifying functions of the apostrophe <i>Question 2.5, Main questionnaire</i>		
	Function	Number of people
Standard functions	Contraction	87
	Possession	76
	Abbreviation	44
	Total id. std	95
	Id. only std	60
Non-standard functions	Plural nouns	35
	3PSG Verbs	17
	Total id. NS	39
	Id. only NS	4

Ninety-five of the 99 questionnaire respondents who answered this question selected at least one standard function, which suggests that most of the respondents have some awareness of the standard functions of the apostrophe. However, only 60 of these associated the apostrophe with standard functions alone, with 25 selecting all three, 19 selecting two and 16 selecting just one.

Of the individual categories of functions, the largest number, 87, associated its use with contractions, 76 with possession and 44 with general abbreviation. A significant number of respondents associated the apostrophe with non-standard categories with 39 selecting at least one, although most of these also selected standard functions. Only four respondents

selected non-standard categories alone. Thirty-five respondents associated apostrophe use with plural nouns and 17 with third-person-singular verbs, which seems to be a high percentage of respondents who see these non-standard applications as functions of the apostrophe.

The findings have also been examined according to gender and age, as shown in table 6.9, below.

Functions:	Gender		Total	Age group			
	Male	Female		16-25	26-40	41-55	56+
Id. only std	63%	63%	63%	63%	68%	62%	56%
Id. only NS	7%	2%	4%	0%	7%	8%	0%
Id. std + NS	28%	35%	32%	37%	25%	27%	44%
NR	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	4%	0%

The identification of functions has been grouped into three categories: those who identified only standard functions, those who identified only non-standard functions and those who identified a combination of standard and non-standard functions. The results for those who associate the apostrophe with only standard functions are identical for males and females, while more males indicated only non-standard functions and more females a combination.

In terms of age, it was the oldest group that were least likely to identify only standard functions, although the differences are not significant. Interestingly, all those who selected only non-standard functions were from middle two age groups, meaning that not only all the oldest group, but also all the youngest group associated apostrophe use with at least one standard function. On the other hand, fewer in the middle two groups selected a combination of standard and non-standard functions than the older and younger groups. Overall these results demonstrate little significant difference associated with gender and age. They are significant, however, in that rather than showing a clear link between age and understanding of the functions of the apostrophe, they demonstrate considerable variation within each age group.

These results are more interesting when measured against the respondents' actual apostrophe use in question 1.2 of the main questionnaire, the correction task. To make this discussion simpler I will refer to those who have selected a particular function, regardless of whether or not it is a standard function, as group A, while those who have not selected the function will be referred to as group B. In table 6.10, below, group A results are shaded.

Table 6.10. Functions of the apostrophe – identification and actual use <i>Questions 1.2 and 2.5, Main questionnaire</i>						
Functions	Function selected	All standard functions selected	Frequency of non-standard uses			
			Total NS	1-2 NS uses	3 NS uses	4 NS uses
Possession	Yes	20%	80%	52%	11%	17%
	No	17%	83%	22%	26%	34%
Contraction	Yes	45%	55%	44%	10%	1%
	No	33%	67%	33%	17%	17%
Plural nouns	Yes	63%	37%	31%	3%	3%
	No	81%	19%	19%		
3PSG verb	Yes	100%				
	No	98%	2%			

Beginning with the possessive function, 20% percent of the respondents who selected this as a function (group A) inserted all the possessive apostrophes in the text, but so did 17% of those who did not select it as a function (group B). This means that similar percentages from both groups have omitted at least one apostrophe from possessive nouns in the text. Group A dominates those who have missed only one or two apostrophes, at 52% compared with 22% for group B. As the number of missed apostrophes rises, however, the balance shifts, with only 11% of group A omitting three apostrophes compared with 26% of group B, and 17% of group A omitting all four apostrophes to group B's 34%. Nevertheless, it is still interesting that 17% of those who selected possession as a function of the apostrophe chose not to insert any in the text. It is also interesting that 17% of group B inserted all the possessive apostrophes, perhaps indicating an implicit knowledge of apostrophe use that these respondents are unable to explain.

There is less similarity between the two groups' use of apostrophes in contractions, with 45% of the respondents in group A and 33% of group B inserting all four apostrophes in the text. Fifty-five percent of group A missed apostrophes compared with 67% of group B. Again, more of group A than group B have missed one or two apostrophes at 44% and 33% respectively. And again, this reverses at three missed apostrophes with group A missing only 10% to group B's 17%. Due to the low number of missed apostrophes in the word *they'll*, as discussed above, there is only one in group A and two in group B who missed apostrophes in all four contractions, but these constitute 1% and 17% of the total respondents in these groups.

Non-standard use was much less frequent in the minus-apostrophe categories, yet this still yielded some interesting results. A significant 35 respondents saw use in plural nouns as a function of the apostrophe, however, only 13 of these (37%) inserted apostrophes in the plural nouns in the text. On the other hand, the vast majority of group B did not insert apostrophes in plural nouns, yet 19% of them did even though they had not indicated this as a function. Thirty-one percent of group A inserted one or two apostrophes, as did 19% of group B and the only two who inserted 3-4 were from group A. There was only one example of a third person singular verb in the text and only two respondents inserted apostrophes into this – but interestingly they were both from group B.

By selecting all three standard functions and no others, 25 respondents imply they have a good understanding of the conventions of apostrophe use. Nonetheless, 18 from this group missed at least one apostrophe in possessive nouns and 11 omitted them from contractions – one of them omitting all eight apostrophes in the plus-apostrophe categories. Five of this group also inserted apostrophes in some plural nouns and one in the third person singular verb, although they did not indicate these as functions. In fact, only four in this group used no non-standard forms in the task. This is more marked in the 19 respondents who indicated two of the standard functions (all but one selecting both possession and contraction). All in this group used at least one non-standard form, with 18 missing possessive apostrophes, nine missing apostrophes in contractions and two inserting them in plural nouns. Two of this group also inserted apostrophes in third person singular verbs,

including the one where *menus feature* was changed to *menu feature's* – all three instances of apostrophes in verbs were in the groups who selected only standard functions.

6.7.2 Confidence in apostrophe use

Respondents' understanding of apostrophe use does not necessarily reflect their confidence in its use either. In question 2.1 they were asked to rate their confidence in their ability to use apostrophes by selecting one of five sentences rated from low confidence (level 1: "I don't know where apostrophes should and shouldn't be used") to high confidence (Level 5: "I always know where apostrophes should and shouldn't be used"). Overall the respondents rated their confidence quite highly with the majority (59) indicating the highest two levels.

The three tables below consider the correlation between some social aspects of apostrophe use and confidence in use. Levels 1 and 2, and levels 4 and 5 have been combined into *low confidence* and *high confidence* categories respectively. Although the only two respondents indicating the lowest category of confidence were female, in table 6.11 below, we see that males dominated in the low and medium confidence categories, while females dominate in the high confidence categories.

Table 6.11. Confidence by gender <i>Question 2.1, Main questionnaire</i>			
	Low confidence	Medium confidence	High confidence
Total number	11	30	59
Gender			
Male	15%	33%	52%
Female	7%	28%	65%

Table 6.12, below, indicates that the trend towards higher confidence holds through all age groups. As may be expected, the oldest group demonstrates the highest confidence with none selecting the low categories and 69% selecting the high categories. Less predictably, the lowest rate of high confidence is found in the next age group at 50%, while the lowest

rate of low confidence is found in the youngest age group, and the highest rate of low confidence in the 26-40 age group.

Level of confidence	Age				Total
	16-25	26-40	41-55	56+	
Low	7%	21%	12%	0%	11%
Neutral	33%	18%	38%	31%	30%
High	60%	61%	50%	69%	59%

The correlation with educational level again shows some predictability in that none of those holding a degree or post-graduate qualification have indicated low confidence while 69% and 73% respectively have indicated high confidence (see table 6.13, below). However, this is compared with 40% and 52% respectively of those with no qualifications or school qualifications have also indicated high confidence and the highest rate of high confidence is found in those holding certificates.

Qualification	Low confidence	Medium confidence	High confidence
None	20%	40%	40%
NCEA =	11%	37%	52%
Cert	11%	11%	78%
Degree	0%	31%	69%
Post grad	0%	27%	73%
None given	44%	11%	44%

We have seen there is some predictability in the correlations between social factors and confidence in apostrophe use; females demonstrate greater confidence than males, as do those in the oldest age group and those with the highest qualifications. Overall, though, there is considerable variation, indicating that while there are some trends demonstrated, social factors are insufficient to explain the variation in confidence with apostrophe use. In addition to this, confidence in use is not always reflected in actual use.

Of the seven respondents who claimed the highest level of confidence, only one demonstrated this by identifying all and only the standard functions, and using no non-standard forms in the correction task of the main questionnaire. A further two used only one non-standard form in the task. Others identified at least one nonstandard function and used several non-standard forms in the text. One, for example, regards contractions and plural nouns as the functions, and used six non-standard forms in the task, including no possessive apostrophes, some missed apostrophes in contractions and confusing *it's* and *its*.

The functions selected by the nine respondents claiming the second lowest level suggest uncertainty, with an assortment of functions being indicated. Only one selected both possessive and contraction and no others, two have selected only possessive and one possessive and abbreviation. Another two have indicated all functions with the exception of verbs, while one has selected only plural nouns and another only verbs, with the remaining respondent not answering this question. As may be expected, these respondents have used higher numbers of non-standard forms, with none selecting fewer than four.

Only two people selected the lowest level of understanding of apostrophe use, yet this lack of confidence is not totally supported by their understanding of functions and usage. They both see possession as the function, albeit the only function, and one has used four non-standard forms and the other five, which not only means that in at least ten instances standard forms have been used, but also that they selected fewer non-standard forms than one person who claimed the highest level of confidence.

Therefore, while overall we see some predictability in that greater confidence tends to be demonstrated in greater knowledge of the conventions of apostrophe use and in more standard usage, these findings also show that high confidence does not necessarily equate to consistently standard use, nor low confidence to total ignorance of standard apostrophe use. Perhaps an examination of where people's understanding of apostrophe use comes from will be useful in explaining some of the inconsistencies we have found in apostrophe use, understanding of its use and confidence in its use.

6.8 Summary

The findings in this chapter have brought to light a number of interesting aspects of apostrophe use in New Zealand today. Overall, they show not only that most participants recognised the apostrophe symbol, but also that apostrophes are still used according to the rules most of time. However, on an individual basis only eight questionnaire respondents and four students in the student paper survey, a very low eight percent in both cases, used standard forms consistently.

There seems to be a high tolerance for missing apostrophes in possessive nouns, with this occurring four-and-a-half times as often as the greengrocers' apostrophe which seems to attract so much more attention. The apostrophe has been lost from half our business names, so it is not surprising if new business owners do not even consider the need for an apostrophe. There is much less tolerance, however, for the missing apostrophe in contractions. Although much less common than missing possessive apostrophes, the intrusive apostrophe in plural nouns is widespread and where it may once have affected mostly vowel-final words, this is no longer the case, particularly in the marked student papers where it is almost 8 times more likely to occur in a consonant-final word. Apostrophes in third person singular verbs are also becoming more common. On the other hand, the apostrophe is sometimes used to clarify words that may otherwise be confusing, and they are sometimes used just for fun.

There were some interesting correlations with use and age which will be explored further and while educational level followed a predictable pattern, this pattern was not absolute and even a participant with post-graduate qualifications inserted an apostrophe in a third person singular verb. Overall, apostrophe use in the tasks proved to be inconsistent.

Inconsistency is also apparent in people's understanding of the conventions of apostrophe use with a significant number identifying both standard and non-standard functions. When compared with actual use of apostrophes we find even more inconsistency since the functions identified by respondents are not necessarily those adhered to. Similar

inconsistencies are seen when comparing reported confidence with actual use, where greater confidence does not necessarily mean accurate use. In view of the inconsistencies found in use and understanding of the apostrophe, the next chapter will explore the sources of people's understanding in an attempt to explain some of the inconsistencies uncovered in this chapter and to consider the possibility that apostrophe use is changing.

CHAPTER 7:

EDUCATION AND THE APOSTROPHE IN NEW ZEALAND

7.1 Introduction

Having examined the use of the apostrophe in New Zealand today and established that its use is inconsistent and does not always follow predictable patterns, I now attempt to expand on some of these findings. This chapter adds to the inquiry into research question 2, looking beyond actual apostrophe use to consider some of the factors that may be associated with its use and the understanding of its functions.

The first of these to be considered is the participant's educational experiences and how these might shape their understanding of the apostrophe, before moving on to consider the role of those who imbue our children with their knowledge – our teachers. An exploration of teachers' own knowledge and understanding of apostrophe use found much variation, and this has a major impact on whether, what and how they teach their students about apostrophes. The chapter then considers factors outside the classroom that also shape our knowledge and understanding of the apostrophe: personal attributes and interest in language; exposure to positive and negative models of apostrophe use and, of particular pertinence today, the impact of the digital world. Finally, this chapter examines how differences in learning experiences affect the decisions people make about apostrophe use in their everyday writing. The following chapter will then show how these different facets of education shape people's beliefs and attitudes, and how this in turn determines their behaviour around their own apostrophe use, as well as that of others.

The findings for this section will draw on the main questionnaire and the online teacher questionnaire, as well as the interviews with the main questionnaire respondents, the cohort groups, and teachers.

7.2 People's experiences of education in apostrophe use

As already discussed, there is a wide variation in participants' reported understanding of the functions of the apostrophe. Moreover, this understanding of the functions, and confidence in use, is often at odds with actual use. Perhaps by investigating how people learn about the apostrophe, we can come to understand some of the reasons behind these two findings.

Beginning with people's experiences of education, questionnaire respondents were asked to select one of the three options shown in table 7.1, below.

	Table 7.1. Respondents' education in apostrophe use <i>Question 2.2, Main questionnaire</i>						
	Gender		Total	Age group			
	Male	Female		16-25	26-40	41-55	56+
I was never taught (or I don't remember being taught) about apostrophes at school.	13%	9%	11%	7%	14%	15%	6%
I was taught about apostrophe use at school.	57%	69%	63%	63%	71%	50%	69%
I was taught about apostrophe use at school, but I've forgotten the rules.	30%	22%	26%	30%	14%	35%	25%

The vast majority of respondents claim to have been taught about apostrophes at school, with only 11% indicating otherwise. Females were more likely to claim to have been taught, but not significantly so. It is interesting though, that it is in the middle two age groups that the highest percentage of those who were never taught about apostrophes are found, while the youngest and oldest groups are similar. This is consistent with the changes in educational policy discussed in 4.4.2 in which the ban on the teaching of grammar in schools since the seventies has been relaxed in recent years.

The findings from the cohort interviews, however, highlight some differences between the two cohorts. While all participants in the youth cohort interviews remembered being taught about apostrophe use, they often reported that it was not reinforced throughout their education, yet by the time they were at high school it was expected that they would know.

Only Isla remembered being given tasks to complete on apostrophes at primary level "...so you might have like a picture of a group of dogs – and then a sentence like *the dogs are chasing the bone* and then you'd have to put in if there was one that fitted in". Other respondents have few memories of instruction. Isabel, for example, said "Uuumm I know we were taught - somewhere - in primary school and after that point it was just expected that you knew it. So I understand why uh people – forget about it and don't – pick it up again" and from Ivan "You got taught it once and then just expected to keep it which – not a lot of people [did]." Ivan mentioned one teacher at high school who would use a student's error as a teaching point for the class, "and so you keep relearning about all that – at a later stage but most of the time I feel like it was just expected that you were meant to know all the rules for it", but such reinforcement seemed to be the exception.

The older voices tell a very different story. For a start, unlike the youth cohort, several of them remembered specific things they were taught even all these years later. Ruth, for example, remembered being taught to break down the word *its* to *it is* to see if it needed an apostrophe, adding "I've always used that guideline... and apply it. And that's from a long time ago." Rita used the example of the word *city's* from the dictation task, explaining she was taught to ascertain whether it was singular or plural before placing the apostrophe, while Rona told me "We were always taught that the *shirts, singlets* and *polos* belong to the *men*, so the apostrophe comes after the *men*."

The recurring theme in the retired cohort interviews was that the use of apostrophes was "drummed into you", as the following quotations from two women in their seventies demonstrate:

In our day it was just you're in rows and rows of desks and everybody all learnt the same thing and it was sort of drummed into you at school you know I mean – it's just sort of been drummed into you when you're at school and you were tested on all this sort of thing and that was – it just sort of comes naturally, sort of, you know.
(Rona)

I can remember doing hours and hours of um capital letters for cities and full stops and commas and had apostrophes and italics and – I was taught by old

nuns and they were quite strict. But it's stayed with me. Yes, seventy years later I can still remember what to – mostly I can remember – sometimes I don't.

(Rosie)

Rona described it as almost like brainwashing. Thus, instruction in apostrophe use appears to have been minimal for the younger interviewees, whereas it was given in detail and constantly reinforced for the older group to the extent that for many it "comes naturally" or is "fairly automatic". While not all in this age group mastered the rules, fewer were able to slip through the net than seems to be the case today.

The use of correction of nonstandard use in school is another aspect to consider, since this is a form of continuing reinforcement. Questionnaire respondents were asked to select one of six options regarding frequency of correction (see appendix D) and these have been merged into the categories in table 7.2, below.

Table 7.2. Correction of nonstandard use at school
Question 2.3, Main questionnaire

	Gender		Total	Age group			
	Male	Female		16-25	26-40	41-55	56+
I got into trouble	2%	2%	2%	3%	0%	0%	6%
I was always / usually corrected	46%	54%	50%	53%	43%	46%	63%
I was never / sometimes corrected	20%	19%	19%	23%	25%	15%	6%
I do not remember / no response (1)	33%	26%	29%	20%	32%	38%	25%

While 29% of the respondents did not remember being corrected, half of them indicated that they were always or usually corrected, with more females (54%) claiming to have been corrected than males (46%). With regard to age, although the youth cohort reported not having apostrophe use reinforced, in the main questionnaire more than half of the youngest group claimed to be always or usually corrected. Nonetheless, almost a quarter of them said they were never or only sometimes corrected, in contrast to the oldest group's 6%. The

middle two groups again reflect the changes in educational ideology by showing the lowest percentages of those who were corrected more frequently.

The interviewees in the cohort groups were also unsure over whether they received correction. Ross, from the retired group, did not remember being corrected specifically for apostrophe use but he acknowledged that he probably was, and in my own memory, few grammatical errors escaped the teacher's red pen. Rona indicated an example of a nonstandard apostrophe, observing "if I'd made that, that would be counted as a mistake - that's a mistake – you weren't allowed to you know".

Isaac noted "Yeah it was only corrected if there was – some sorta – yeah issue with it I guess", while Ike's experience seems to discourage the use of apostrophes altogether "I think it was more like if you did do it and get it in the wrong space then it would come up but if you didn't do it at all – they didn't pick up on it". According to Ivan, he was "corrected when the teacher remembered, but even the teacher I feel would slip up a lot", indicating an awareness that the teachers were not always au fait with the conventions of apostrophe use either. It seems then, that while young people are corrected, this correction is at best inconsistent.

We are beginning to get a sense of some very different experiences in education between the different age groups and to explore this further I now turn to the sources of this education – the teachers.

7.3 The apostrophe and educational ideologies

In the previous section, some differences in the learning experiences of the two cohorts were revealed, with the older generation reporting having the rules of apostrophe use "drummed" into them at school, while the younger generation was less specific about what and how they learned. Education plays a major role in people's understanding of apostrophe use and therefore by examining teachers' experiences of learning and how that

influences their teaching, we can gain some insight into why there is so much variation and inconsistency in apostrophe use today. First, this section will discuss the impact of changing ideologies of teaching in New Zealand in order to provide a background to teacher's use and understanding of apostrophe use, before probing into attitudes and beliefs surrounding the teaching of apostrophe use. This discussion will draw on both quantitative and qualitative components of the teacher online survey and interviews with teachers.

7.3.1 Changing educational ideologies in New Zealand

It has been almost 50 years since grammar books disappeared from New Zealand schools (Gordon, 2005, 2010; see 4.4.2). Steph was a new teacher at the time:

Text books got thrown out when I first went teaching 1973 they – the head of English at *** High School was actually biffing all the grammar books ... and even when I went to teachers' college ... we were told that teaching of grammar was out...

Since then, children in New Zealand have received little instruction in grammar; as Robyn, an interviewee from the retired cohort who had also been a teacher told me:

For at least (inaudible) eighteen years there was absolutely no teaching [of grammar], Hilary, and so you're getting a lot of young teachers now – and teachers who are not that young who actually – don't know and they also – some of them feel cheated because they don't know.

Although New Zealand schools have since pulled back from the earlier stance of teaching no grammar, many teachers are products of this earlier ideology and have little or no grounding in grammar to call on in their teaching. The impact that changing teaching ideologies have had on teaching and learning will be discussed through findings gathered from the 64 responses to question 3g in the *online teacher survey*, which asked participants to comment on any differences they were aware of between the way they were taught about apostrophes, and their own teaching practices.

As we saw in the retired cohort, many older teachers in the online survey reported having apostrophe use “drilled”, “hammered home”, “ingrained” or “etched into my brain” at school through “rote learning” and “repetition” in “old school” fashion. They described doing “endless exercises in funny little books” or using “crusty old” text books and worksheets with long lists of exercises which were “...drilled and practised until we all had it perfected”. These teachers came mostly from the 56-plus age group with a few from the 41-55 group. They were also the ones who had witnessed the most changes in teaching practices throughout their teaching careers, with one noting that “I don't hit my students when they make mistakes!”. Another observed that teaching about the apostrophe “seems more ad hoc these days, left up to individual teachers”, and this is a theme I expand on below.

A number of teachers in the 41-55 age group noted the fact they were part of the generation that was not taught grammar. One wrote: “I went through the education system during the time of the whole language approach. This means that we were expected to pick up the grammar rules by osmosis”. Of course, not everyone could do this and some later regretted this gap in their knowledge, as another teacher in the same age group wrote: “I was not taught how to use apostrophes at primary school or secondary school, it was actually a history lecturer who jumped up and down about apostrophes. His outrage prompted me to teach myself how to use them properly”.

Not everyone would make the effort to teach themselves, and consequently, as another teacher explains, “this means there is a generation of teachers without grammar skills”. However, a small number of teachers in this age group reported that they were taught about apostrophes at school, possibly they were at the top end of the age range, or perhaps had teachers who continued to teach grammar in spite of the new thinking, as suggested by one teacher in the oldest age group “I teach what I've been taught!”. And perhaps the teacher in the same age group who wrote “I don't think there are any great differences really” was simply referring to her own teaching practices.

The 26-40 age group also report a range of learning experiences, one reporting “I don't remember being taught and didn't effectively learn it until I was 24 years old and did a

Teaching English as a Foreign Language Certificate (TEFL)”. Another was taught, but inadequately “I learnt which words they are in and didn't really know why they were there. This has meant there are times when I'm not sure if there should be one in a word or not”, illustrating the necessity of understanding the underlying grammar in order to be able to apply it effectively, as discussed in 4.4.2. On the other hand, another teacher in this age group seemed to have no problems “It's not actually difficult; people just need to know the rules and apply them. Being able to distinguish between regular and irregular nouns...”, and armed with a sound knowledge of how apostrophes work, this teacher was able to carry out the tasks set in the survey successfully.

Pip told me of a programme at her school: “last year at our school we had a real focus on grammar and punctuation and – SPaG we called – in spelling punctuation and grammar”, although she was still uncertain about apostrophe use. The three teachers in the youngest age group who answered this question all claim to have been taught about apostrophes at school, and interestingly two of them said they were taught through worksheets: “[We had] more worksheet activity when I was being taught at school”, in spite of the fact that many teachers saw worksheets as a feature of “old-school” methods. While there are some age-related trends, the findings seem to demonstrate a range of learning experiences for teachers even within age groups, and the next section will examine the impact of this on teaching practices.

7.3.2 Current practices in the teaching of apostrophe use

According to a secondary teacher in the 56-plus age group in the online survey: “I think there seems to be more emphasis again, maybe 15 years ago teaching of grammar/apostrophe was not as reinforced as say in the last 2-3 years.” Paula, in the same age group also believes that “grammar and things like that . . . seem to be coming back again”. Indeed, today it seems most teachers are teaching apostrophe use, with almost all teachers in the survey saying they believed apostrophe use should be taught before children reach high school, and that it should be reinforced throughout high school. Varying only by 2% across the four age groups, an average of 84% of teachers reported that they teach

apostrophe use, which includes all the primary teachers who responded to the question and all but 10% of the secondary teachers. Mike, though, as a parent seems to see it as a role for universities: “So, and they [his children] all’ve gone to Massey or uni, so one would assume that they will learn how to use it and they’ll get told off if they don’t”.

The perception among surveyed teachers is that methods of teaching today are very different from those used in the earlier part of the 20th century, with the recurring themes throughout the written comments being that apostrophe use is taught “incidentally”, “contextually” and through “teaching moments”. This means that rather than specific lessons on apostrophe use “it is introduced where a need is noticed”. As one primary teacher notes, this can take a number of different forms, focusing on the individual, a group of students, or the whole class: “Now [I] usually take the teaching moment and correct while conferencing individual writing, during group reading looking at punctuation, or whole class when editing using data projector.”, the data projector allowing the whole class to benefit by learning through each other’s mistakes. Other teachers prefer to treat it on an individual basis and “Teach the skill in context and as needed, rather than a 'whole class' drill.” Pam uses the big books she reads to the class to highlight apostrophes, asking the children where the apostrophe is or why it is there. She also compliments their standard use, rather than correcting, as well as using computer games on the class blog.

One primary teacher in the 26-40 age group passes on to her students some strategies used by “old-school” teachers: “I discuss with children about how to change sentences around so that they can see where the apostrophe for possession goes. For contracted words I teach them as spelling words.”. When marking, Steph takes the time to explain correct usage and sometimes even accompanies her comments with exercises, but she is often frustrated to find that

...they’ll resubmit and all of the things they had correct the first time will now be incorrect, and instead of learning from it . . . it’s absolutely twice as bad as it was before – and I don’t know why that happens.

Only a small number of teachers mentioned the word *rules* with regard to teaching apostrophes, one in the 41-55 age group commented: “I remember the rules I was taught at

high school and that has helped with my teaching” and another in the 26-40 age group believes that “If the rule exists, children should be exposed to it.” and continued “Some pick it up, some don’t, like many things”.

Steph had a suggestion for a fresh approach to teaching grammar – through the use of drama. She envisages spelling, sentence structure and punctuation being taught using letters and punctuation marks as characters with commentaries like “...the naughtiest piece of punctuation is the comma it’s far naughtier than the apostrophe which is really naughty but the comma is a pushy piece of punctuation... ”. The interactive and kinetic nature of such a lesson would engage children and perhaps arm them with knowledge they would always remember, but in a more “fun” way than the “old-school” methods.

Many teachers admit that apostrophe use is not taught as thoroughly as it once was, and several commented that time constraints and other priorities often make it difficult to teach in any depth, even though it is in the curriculum. Sue admitted that she does not spend much time on grammar “because it’s not in NCEA”. Some teachers are selective about which aspect of the apostrophe they will focus on. Ike, as noted above, commented that missing apostrophes tended to be overlooked while intrusive apostrophes were picked up, and this is reflected in a secondary teacher’s comment: “I am not too worried when they miss the apostrophe out in possession and contractions but when it is used in plurals I correct it”. Others admit they do not always know the rules themselves: “I do try to model correct use, but I am not always 100% sure myself”, while others are not concerned about apostrophe use at all as the following comments from teachers in the middle two age groups show: “I don’t reinforce any apostrophe use”, “It is optional and near non-existent as in my day” and “It’s a low priority to me”.

Overall the findings show that while the 56-plus age group frequently notes some features of learning apostrophe use that are not found in the other age groups, this does not mean that the other age groups did not learn to use apostrophes, nor that they cannot or do not teach it. What is evident is that teachers from the other age groups have had widely varied experiences in learning and that this is carried through into their teaching. Perhaps there has always been an inconsistent element to teaching apostrophes since it has always

depended to an extent on individual teachers, but in the past the teachers themselves had a better foundation in apostrophe use, and their knowledge was constantly reinforced through the use of grammars. Today the teaching of apostrophe use in context is more relevant and if done well will provide students with a sound knowledge and understanding. However, it is totally reliant on the individual teacher's knowledge, understanding and interest in apostrophe use.

7.4 Teachers' use and understanding of apostrophe use

This section examines teachers' confidence in apostrophe use, their actual use and their understanding of the prescriptive rules. These findings come from questions 1c in the *Online Teacher Survey* (see appendix G) regarding confidence, and from the tasks set in questions 1d and 2b, as well as interviews with teachers.

7.4.1 Teachers' confidence with apostrophe use

Teachers were asked to rate their confidence in their own use of the apostrophe on a scale from one to five, with five representing total confidence.

Table 7.3. Teachers' confidence with apostrophe use by age
Question 1.3, Teacher Online Survey

Level of confidence	Age				Total
	Up to 25	26-40	41-55	56+	
Low-neutral	0%	22%	13%	15%	14%
High	100%	39%	56%	26%	46%
Total confidence	0%	39%	31%	59%	40%
<i>Total + high</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>78%</i>	<i>87%</i>	<i>85%</i>	<i>86%</i>

Table 7.3, above, shows that confidence among teachers is generally high, with only 14%, selecting any of the lowest three ratings, which I have merged. This leaves 86% of the teachers in the survey reporting the highest two levels of confidence, 40% claiming total

confidence. There are some interesting patterns associated with age. All six teachers in the up-to-25 age group selected high confidence, while the 26-40 age group is more evenly distributed, with 22% selecting the lower three levels and 39% selecting each of the highest two levels. Most teachers in the 41-55 age group (56%) selected high confidence, while most of the 56+ age group (59%) selected total confidence, demonstrating that the older teachers feel more confident. The highest level of confidence, therefore, shows a marked contrast between no respondents in the youngest age group and 59% of the oldest. After exploring teachers' use of apostrophes, I will return to teacher confidence in order to determine whether or not this overall high rating of confidence is reflected in their understanding of apostrophe use.

7.4.2 Teachers and apostrophe use

The results from two tasks demonstrate teachers' understanding of the use of the apostrophe. Both tasks involved the rating of examples of apostrophe use on a scale from one to five, where one is totally acceptable and five totally unacceptable. The first task is from question 1d in the survey, in which the words were embedded in lists of phrases within the given context of a staff email, while the second task is from question 2b regarding the Warehouse sign (see appendix G).

Overall, 28% of the 83 teachers regard all standard forms as totally acceptable and all nonstandard forms as totally unacceptable, demonstrating a clear understanding of the rules of apostrophe use. Others found at least some of the forms to fall somewhere in between the two poles, which may indicate a degree of tolerance for nonstandard use, but may also indicate uncertainty of the rules. This discussion begins by examining the six words involving standard apostrophe use in the two tasks.

7.4.2.1 Teachers' recognition of standard apostrophe use

While these tasks are about acceptability and are therefore subjective, one would expect all standard forms to be found totally acceptable, so where teachers have indicated otherwise it would seem to suggest a limited knowledge of the rules. However, total acceptance of

standard forms does not necessarily mean the rules are understood either. One teacher, for example, has marked all examples as totally acceptable indicating tolerance for all forms, but also perhaps a limited knowledge of the rules.

Table 7.4 below shows the acceptability of the six standard forms that were provided in the two tasks. The results have been arranged under *totally acceptable* and *totally unacceptable*, with the middle three categories being grouped together because the differences between them are insignificant.

Table 7.4. Teachers' acceptance of standard forms <i>Questions 1d and 2b, Online teacher Survey</i>				
Examples	Totally acceptable	Middle-range	Totally unacceptable	No response
Children's	70%	18%	11%	1
Men's	60%	14%	22%	3
Shirts	86%	4%	8%	2
Pizzas	87%	10%	4%	0
enjoys	92%	2%	6%	0
It's	94%	1%	4%	1

At 29% and 36% respectively, a high number of teachers indicate uncertainty over the irregular plural possessive nouns *children's* and *men's*, by finding them less than totally acceptable. It also appears a number of teachers believe *shirts*, *pizzas* and *enjoys* require apostrophes, some strongly so. On the other hand, the contraction *it's* has the highest rate of acceptability, demonstrating a good understanding of this contracted form.

In order to examine the impact that changing educational ideologies may have had on teachers it is necessary to consider the results in terms of age groups. Grammars disappeared from the secondary classroom in the 1970s, so the teachers affected by these changes will be in the three youngest age groups. In table 7.5, below, the left column shows the number of standard forms that have been selected as anything less than totally acceptable by individual teachers, while the other columns show the percentage of teachers in each age group who marked that number of forms as unacceptable.

Table 7.5. Numbers of standard forms considered less than totally acceptable, by age.
Questions 1d and 2b, Online teacher Survey

Number std. forms unacceptable	Age				Total
	Up to 25	26-40	41-55	56+	
0	17%	44%	50%	41%	43%
1	17%	22%	28%	33%	28%
2	33%	11%	16%	15%	16%
3	17%	11%	3%	7%	7%
4	17%	6%	0%	0%	2%
5	0%	6%	0%	0%	1%
6	0%	0%	3%	4%	2%

The first row of data indicates those who found all standard forms totally acceptable. The percentage of these peaks at 50% in the 41-55 age group and drops off either side, with the youngest group showing the lowest at 17%. The percentages for those who indicated all but one as totally acceptable rise steadily with age, with the youngest group again having the lowest percentage. This reverses in the next three categories, where the youngest group is more likely to find standard forms less than totally acceptable in two, three or four instances, although due to the small number of teachers in the youngest age group (six) these findings are not necessarily typical of teachers in this age group. The last two categories are confined to small numbers, one each in the older three age groups and it is interesting that one teacher from the oldest age group considered all six standard forms to be totally unacceptable.

Given the changes in teaching practices, we may expect to see a sudden change in the results from teachers in the 41-55 age group, most of whom were in school at the time the changes were first implemented. According to the findings, this does not seem to be the case, with this age group showing the highest level of understanding of the standard-apostrophe examples. While the majority of teachers demonstrate that they recognise the standard forms, the number of those who do not is significant. And given that this research is unlikely to attract those with low interest in language, these small numbers are likely to represent a larger proportion in the wider teaching community.

7.4.2.2 *Teachers' acceptance of nonstandard apostrophe use*

It is not so easy to make conclusions about teachers' acceptance of nonstandard forms, since acceptance of nonstandard forms may indicate tolerance for the form rather than misunderstanding. However, acceptance of a nonstandard form may suggest some confusion as to its correctness and regardless of belief regarding correctness, if these teachers overlook nonstandard apostrophes in emails from colleagues they are likely to also overlook them in their students' work. For this discussion, *acceptable* refers to categories one and two while *unacceptable* refers to categories four and five. Overall the majority of teachers, between 70% and 96%, found each nonstandard example unacceptable, which indicates a good level of understanding. Nonetheless, this also means that not one of the nonstandard examples was deemed unacceptable by all teachers in the survey.

In the category of words with missing apostrophes, there was only one example of a singular possessive noun, *teachers*. Seventy-eight percent of teachers found the missing apostrophe to be unacceptable while a further 14% were neutral, indicating a tolerance for this increasingly common occurrence, while the 6% finding this acceptable is perhaps more indicative of uncertainty of the standard form. The misplaced apostrophe in the plural possessive noun *friend's* in *my two friend's houses* received the second highest rate of total acceptance at 11%, which suggests a degree uncertainty about the correct position for the plural possessive apostrophe. For the two examples of contractions, most teachers found both *dont* and *shes* unacceptable without apostrophes, at 82% and 81% respectively, but there were no other significant findings in the data.

The acceptance of apostrophes in plural nouns is more insightful. Presented in table 7.6 below, are the results of the two extremes of the scale, which provide interesting contrasts.

Table 7.6. Intrusive apostrophes in plural nouns – acceptability by age
Questions 1d and 2b, Online teacher Survey

	Up to 25	26-40	41-55	56+	Total
<i>Rated totally acceptable:</i>					
kiwi's	50%	22%	16%	11%	18%
polo's	0%	6%	9%	7%	7%
singlet's	0%	6%	6%	7%	6%
jean's	0%	0%	3%	11%	5%
<i>Rated totally unacceptable:</i>					
kiwi's	17%	56%	72%	78%	66%
polo's	83%	67%	87%	81%	81%
singlet's	83%	61%	91%	85%	82%
jean's	67%	72%	87%	81%	81%

The most accepted nonstandard word in the task was the plural noun *Kiwi's* in *Kiwi's like vegemite*, which was rated overall at 18% totally acceptable, well ahead of the other three plural nouns. It is more than twice as acceptable as the other vowel-final noun *polo's*, which at 7% patterns more closely with the consonant-final words. This contrast is also evident in the 66% who regard *kiwi's* as totally unacceptable compared with 81-81% for the other three words. This acceptance of *Kiwi's* over the other three words is difficult to explain.

A substantial 50% of the youngest age group regard *kiwi's* as totally acceptable and only 17% as totally unacceptable. In contrast, none rated the other three words as totally acceptable with 83% considering *polo's* and *singlet's* totally unacceptable and 67% in the case of *jean's*. This rate of total acceptance is considerably higher than all other age groups and may be a result of being exposed to such usage most of their lives, but this cannot explain why the word *kiwi's* is singled out by the youngest teachers.

The final two examples of nonstandard use are the verb *see's* and the possessive pronoun *it's*, shown in table 7.7 below.

Table 7.7. Intrusive apostrophes in verbs and prounouns – acceptability by age
Questions 1d and 2b, Online teacher Survey

Class	Word	Totally acceptable	Acceptable	Neutral	Un-acceptable	Totally un-acceptable
Verb	see's	4%	0%	1%	7%	88%
Possessive PN	it's	16%	1%	8%	12%	61%

The verb *see's* attracted the highest overall rate of total unacceptability at 88%, although 4% of teachers still rated this as totally acceptable all, interestingly, from the older two age groups. The possessive pronoun *it's* with an apostrophe, on the other hand, received a low rating of 61% total unacceptability and a relatively high rating of total acceptability, at 16%, indicating it is an area that still causes some confusion, in contrast to the findings for the contractive *it's*, as seen in table 7.4.

Overall, surveyed teachers seem to be able to distinguish the standard forms of the apostrophe from the nonstandard forms in the examples given. Small, but significant numbers see some standard forms as unacceptable and nonstandard forms as acceptable. And acceptance of nonstandard forms in a staff email is likely to mean acceptance in their students' work. Allowing for a degree of tolerance of nonstandard forms, this suggests there is still some uncertainty among teachers as to how apostrophes should be used. Uncertainty of use seems likely to be linked with low confidence in apostrophe use, and this is examined in the next section.

7.4.3 Confidence and understanding of apostrophe use

In this section, the findings from questions 1d and 2b in the online survey, as discussed above, are compare with the degree of confidence expressed in question 1c. There are some correlations, but also some surprising results and these are presented in table 7.8, below.

Table 7.8. Teacher confidence in apostrophe use by acceptability of use
Questions 1d and 2b, Online teacher survey

	Found all standard forms totally acceptable and nonstandard totally unacceptable	Found all standard forms totally acceptable	Found 1-2 standard forms less than totally acceptable	Found 3+ standard forms less than totally acceptable
Low confidence	0%	0%	100%	0%
Neutral	0%	29%	29%	29%
Confident	8%	26%	58%	16%
Total confidence	48%	67%	27%	65%

Table 7.8 shows that almost half (48%) the teachers who claimed total confidence demonstrated this in the tasks by rating all standard forms as totally acceptable, and all nonstandard forms as unacceptable or totally unacceptable. This is compared with only 8% of teachers who claimed high confidence, and none from the lower-confidence categories, demonstrating a correlation between high confidence and standard apostrophe use. However, this leaves a high percentage of the totally confident who have some tolerance for nonstandard forms. And if we consider the acceptance of the standard examples given in the two tasks, only 67% from the total confidence group found them all totally acceptable, leaving 33% demonstrating uncertainty of the standard forms.

In fact, two teachers who claimed high confidence in apostrophe use demonstrate little understanding of the conventions of apostrophe use. The first, a primary teacher in the 56-plus age group who claimed total confidence, rated all six standard forms as totally unacceptable. Missing and misplaced apostrophes were deemed acceptable while intrusive apostrophes were all totally acceptable, with the exception of *Kiwi's* which was totally unacceptable (contrary to the trend noted above). The second, a secondary teacher in the 41-55 age group who claimed the second highest level of confidence, rated five of the six standard forms totally unacceptable and one as neutral and was inconsistent in the other categories.

Of the three teachers who claimed low confidence, two rated almost all the examples according to their standard forms, with the exception of two non-responses in one case (implying uncertainty) and non-acceptance of the standard form *men's* in the other. This demonstrates quite a sound knowledge of apostrophe use. Furthermore, only five teachers claimed the two low confidence categories and since inconsistency of use is widespread among the teachers, it seems there is little correlation between low confidence and inconsistency of use. Although the findings show some correlation between confidence and apostrophe use, they also reveal that there is variation across all levels of confidence and indications of uncertainty among even the totally confident. This raises the question as to how well New Zealand teachers understand the functions of the apostrophe.

7.4.4 Teachers' understanding of the functions of the apostrophe

Rather than giving options as in the main questionnaire, teachers in the online survey were simply asked to explain what they saw as the functions of the apostrophe. Unfortunately, this resulted in a very low response rate, although this in itself provided some very revealing information about teachers' understanding of the functions. Only 16 teachers replied and some of these were somewhat vague: "Gives correct context meaning to sentences" and "To frustrate those who know how to use it and those who don't", for example. Another example was "to shorten a sentence appropriately but a lot of people use them incorrectly" which seems to illustrate a very vague understanding of the functions while at the same time implying that apostrophes should be used correctly.

In the end, only nine of the 83 teachers in the survey attempted to identify specific functions and of these only five identified both the functions of possession and contraction. While one of these five specified the distinction "to show possessives instead of plurals", another two also included use in plural nouns as a function. One teacher identified only possession as a function, while two gave unusual plurals such as *do's* and acronyms as the only function. The ninth teacher identified only the replacement of letters but commented "I realise there are other uses but am foggy on these".

The low response rate may be explained by the time factor, teachers are busy people and it is quicker to click on answers than write them. However, given the remaining six open-ended questions in the survey were answered by most of the teachers, often in some detail, it seems this is more a case of avoidance reflecting significant uncertainty as to the functions of the apostrophe.

Some comments from Penny, an ESOL teacher in a primary school, help to illustrate this further. When I first arrived for the interview, Penny seemed anxious to tell me something and as soon as the voice recorder was running she said:

Well I was just really amazed because you put – or the invitations were put into people's boxes last Wednesday – and I was amazed 'cos I showed up to a team meeting and they all kind of pushed it around and in the end threw it to me and said 'You're the academic you do this'. And so speaking to other people they were like, they were quite – they just weren't interested in doing it they weren't interested in – the apostrophe.

Penny seemed to be saying that it was the topic that they were not interested, in rather than the interview itself. The "You're the academic" comment is also telling since it implies, first that the teachers do not see themselves as academics, and second that they believe only academics need to know about the apostrophe.

This seeming lack of confidence the teachers have displayed, however, is in marked contrast to the reported confidence we saw above. Perhaps they reported the level of confidence they felt was expected of them as teachers, but the evidence suggests that even where teachers know how to use apostrophes themselves, they may not have the metalanguage to explain their use. Nevertheless, when asked to describe their observations of children's use in question 4a, most of the 73 who responded managed to explain children's nonstandard use clearly using the necessary terminology. Their reluctance to describe the functions, therefore, seems most likely to reflect a high degree of uncertainty of the functions.

It follows that if teachers cannot explain the functions of the apostrophe, they are unlikely to be able to teach this to their students effectively. Since 69% of primary teachers and 87% of secondary teachers claimed they were not taught about apostrophe use during their

teacher training, they must rely on what they remember being taught in school. Therefore, as Steph commented: “What we sent out the door at the end of secondary school – arrived back in the classroom”. Teachers rely on what they can remember from school and this is not always reliable, as student teacher Irena demonstrates: “I can’t remember the rules really to be honest with you which is probably really really bad considering that I’m studying to be a teacher”. Yet, considering the reported high level of confidence and satisfaction in their understanding of apostrophe use, teachers may not feel the need to supplement their knowledge, no matter how “foggy” it may be.

An example of this is English teacher Sean. He did not identify the nonstandard apostrophes in the images I showed him and seemed confused as to what he was looking at. When I pointed out a nonstandard apostrophe he said “I guess I’m more in tune with not noticing those problems if that makes sense”. He explained that his goal was simply to encourage his students to write and that “punctuation and grammar are not in my range”. Later he observed: “I’d love to be worried about apostrophes … it’s playing the hand that I have in front of me”, which suggests he sees his level of knowledge as being adequate for the children he teaches. It seems he would agree with the sentiment on the *Kill the Apostrophe* website (n.d., see 4.5.1) that content is more important than form and the fact he agreed to be interviewed perhaps demonstrates a degree of confidence in his stance. Yet he then went on to say that he had some students who wrote competently and used apostrophes correctly. Given his inability to identify nonstandard apostrophe use, though, it seems unlikely that he could provide positive models, or guidance for his more able students.

On the other hand, other interviewees did recognise this gap in their knowledge and took steps to fill it:

I’m also aware that I didn’t learn how to properly use apostrophes until I was probably in my early 20s and umm I had a copy of – oh what did I have? I had a grammar book – and I went through and taught myself how to use apostrophes.
Um and I kept at it till I got it right. (Sarah)

I really didn’t learn until I had to teach it. I was more than anything – sitting down and just having to teach myself. I’ve got a really cool book somewhere up

there actually it just quite a small book and it's got a lot of the things in it when I was first teaching a lot of grammar rules and spelling rules and things so that really helped finding that and reading through that and going 'Oh!'” (Penny)

It is interesting that they both resorted to the resource that had been removed from schools forty years ago. Pete also reported “making an effort to actually find out about it myself”. Another interesting point to make here is that Sarah teaches in the same school as Sean, which illustrates the inconsistency children experience in their learning. This will affect what children learn and we may gain some insight into this by investigating children’s apostrophe use today through the eyes of their teachers.

7.5 Teachers’ observations of children’s use of apostrophes

Question 4a in the survey asked teachers to comment on observations they have made of children’s use of apostrophes. There were a number of general comments which were mostly negative, for example “haphazard”, “poor”, “lazy”, “no clue”, “random”, ‘horrible’, “no idea” and “bad habits”. Secondary teachers tended to be more critical with 14 negative comments made by the 34 secondary teachers, compared with only three for the 39 primary teachers. And while there were some constructive comments, secondary teachers made only three, compared with primary teachers’ six. Most of these comments acknowledge that some children understand apostrophe use better than others, while one primary teacher observed that “Children enjoy knowing about [apostrophes] and using them – even five-year olds enjoy recognising and naming an apostrophe.” The secondary teacher who wrote: “No recent observation of misuse” was the only one of the 73 teachers responding to this question who did not report any nonstandard use.

While some comments were quite general, “They tend to use it without thinking” or “Quite random at secondary school” for example, most were specific as to the ways in which children use apostrophes, and the intrusive apostrophe in plural nouns was the most commonly cited. That 21 primary teachers noted this compared with only ten secondary

teachers is interesting, because a number of primary teachers seemed to see this in a positive light – as a “first step” in learning in which children are “experimenting” with apostrophe use and in which nonstandard use “prompts teaching”. As implied by several comments, the more able children will grasp this by the time they reach secondary school, while others will continue to struggle, which may explain the lower, but still present, occurrence of apostrophes in plural nouns reported by secondary teachers.

Two primary teachers reported intrusive apostrophes in third person plural verbs and five reported misplaced apostrophes in contractions, but since no secondary teachers reported either of these, it seems children have also improved in these areas before reaching secondary school. On the other hand, slightly more secondary teachers than primary reported children omitting all apostrophes, (10 compared with 8 respectively), which as noted above, is more likely to be ignored by teachers. Finally, when asked the same question, Pip said “I don’t know how many times I’ve seen a kid write like this” and proceeded to write *learn’t*. While this is the only mention of this form by a teacher, it seems to be well entrenched at Pip’s school, and as noted in 6.4.5, has begun to appear in university student papers.

Overall, the comments appear to paint a bleak picture of apostrophe use in schools. However, it must be remembered that it is nonstandard use that commands attention, and teachers may have been attracted to the survey by the opportunity to express opinions about what they observe in the classroom. This is evident in the comment: “This has been something that I have wanted to study for some time. Care for a hand?”. The same writer regards modern usage as “laziness” and when asked about what he thinks of people who criticise others for apostrophe misuse he replied “Well, that’s me!”. Another teacher wrote: “If taught correctly, [apostrophe use is] as good as it ever was.”, and it may be the case that a teacher who is enthusiastic about teaching apostrophe use can help struggling students overcome their confusion. But just as children will learn differently, so do teachers teach differently, and it is their beliefs about apostrophe use that will determine how they teach.

7.6 The influence of teacher beliefs on practice

To introduce teachers' beliefs around apostrophe use I will return to Sean and his colleague Sarah (see 7.4.4). They are close in age and so were educated in the period when there was little emphasis on grammar; they are also both teaching in the same environment, therefore these factors cannot explain the difference in their teaching practices, and neither can the fact they teach different subjects, as we shall see below. Yet, although neither of them were taught about apostrophe use, only one of them took steps to remedy this. Perhaps it is in their beliefs that we find the difference.

As discussed in 4.5, Garrett, Williams and Coupland (2003) and Gharibi and Seals (n.d.) see attitude as a multi-layered phenomenon which is initiated by *beliefs*. In the case of Sean, he believes that because of the demographic makeup of his school, his role as English teacher is simply to encourage the children to write, and that the finer details of written language are superfluous to most of his students' needs. Therefore, in the classroom his practice is to focus on content and ignore apostrophes. His own understanding of apostrophe use is minimal and although he told me: "Um give me a week I'd be fine – yeah just to knock the rust off", he chooses not to do this because he does not consider it necessary. However, since he acknowledges that there is "a wide – range of competency" in his classes, this belief ensures that in practice he cannot teach his more able students about apostrophe use effectively, because he does not understand it himself.

Sarah, on the other hand, "cringes" at the sight of the intrusive apostrophes that Sean failed to recognise. Unlike Sean, she made the decision to find out about apostrophes when she first entered the workforce because: "I just didn't want to look like a bit of a ninny in front of any future employers, so I taught myself of how to do it properly." This seems to reflect the belief that people who use nonstandard forms appear less intelligent and are therefore less competitive in the job market. It is also about how she sees herself and how she wants others to perceive her, and using English well seems to be an important part of Sarah's identity. This illustrates the affective elements in Garrett, Williams and Coupland's (2003) model of attitudes as she "cringes" and fears being seen as a "ninny", and she also reflects Gharibi and Seals' (n.d.) model by managing, or modifying, her behaviour to fit with her

belief that understanding apostrophe use is important. As a teacher, she believes children should be taught from a young age. Sarah also reported that students sometimes have questions about apostrophes prompted by spellcheck, which unlike Sean, she is equipped to explain.

We can see how these opposing beliefs lead to different practices in the classroom and inevitably to different outcomes for students. However, students are likely to encounter both teachers in this school and so what able students do not learn in Sean's English class they may pick up in Sarah's social studies class.

7.6.1 The importance of apostrophes and the need for rules

In Question 2a in the *Teacher Online Survey*, teachers were asked to rate how important they saw the apostrophe in English on a scale of one to five. Overall 80% selected the two *important* categories (see table 7.9 below). The percentages indicating *very important* increased with age from zero for the youngest age group to 56% for the oldest, but interestingly even teachers in the older two age groups rated apostrophes as *not important*, while none in the younger two age groups did.

Level of importance	Age				Total
	Up to 25	26-40	41-55	56+	
High	0%	44%	50%	56%	47%
Important	83%	44%	28%	19%	33%
Neutral	17%	11%	6%	9%	8%
Low	0	0	13%	11%	8%
No response	0	0	3%	7%	4%

Question 3c asked teachers to rate on a five-point scale whether they believed apostrophe use should be flexible or rule governed and 80% selected the two *rule-governed* categories (see table 7.10, below). The percentage rises with age from 50% in the youngest group to

85% in the oldest and the six youngest teachers are equally divided between a neutral stance and believing the apostrophe should be rule governed.

Table 7.10. Should apostrophe use be flexible or rule governed – by age <i>Question 3c, Online teacher Survey</i>					
	Age				Total
	Up to 25	26-40	41-55	56+	
Flexible	0%	11%	6%	4%	6%
Neutral	50%	11%	6%	7%	11%
Rule governed	50%	72%	84%	85%	80%
No response	0%	6%	3%	4%	4%

From these results, we see evidence of some widely-held beliefs among surveyed teachers, with 80% overall believing that the apostrophe is important and that it should be governed by a set of rules, but the holding of these beliefs rise steadily with age.

7.6.2 Teachers' beliefs revealed

The overall negative reactions to nonstandard use in signage expressed in question 2c.1 of the online survey illustrate the breadth of these beliefs regarding apostrophe use. Interestingly this question had the highest response rate of the written answers with 77 of the 83 participants responding. Sixty (78%) of these made negative comments, describing their reactions as “annoyed”, “irritated”, “angry” or “frustrated”, while others “cringe”, “sigh”, roll their eyes or find “It bugs me beyond belief!”. There is a lot of evidence here of Garrett, Williams & Coupland’s (2003) affective component of attitude.

Sarah feared others would think her a “nanny” if she made an apostrophe error, and this fear is justified because, as one teacher put it: “Rightly or wrongly people do get judged on the way they write as well as speak consequently using the correct style for the situation is important”. A number of teachers classified the sign writers as “lazy”, “ignorant”, “uneducated” or “illiterate”, with some commenting: “Don’t think much of them”, “They lose credibility in my eyes”, “They risk appearing stupid or uneducated” and “I think less of them.” It also is seen as a “Poor reflection on their business standard” and some teachers

noted they would not buy from businesses that allow such signage. Even Sarah herself, no longer an apostrophe “nanny”, has joined these ranks:

I cringe – there’s one in the tattoo parlour on Broadway – and it’s something about tattoos and it’s got an apostrophe and – my – daughter would dearly love a tattoo and I’m like you’re not going to that place because they can’t use apostrophes properly and if they can’t pay that much attention to detail to get that right – do you really want to get a tattoo off these people?

Some teachers are more forgiving when they see nonstandard use as the following comments show: “I just wonder why someone didn’t teach these people or why they don’t know how to use apostrophes” and “[the writer] may not have had as much emphasis on grammar as we did at school or may be English language learners”. Interestingly, interviewees tended to be more understanding of nonstandard apostrophe users than teachers in the survey, perhaps because the anonymity of an online survey affords freer expression. These comments still imply a belief in the importance of apostrophes, but the writers are more sympathetic towards those who, for whatever reason, don’t understand the conventions of its use.

Another belief that is evident in some of these comments would seem to support Crystal’s argument (2005) that standard use of the apostrophe today signifies *educatedness* (see 4.4), as indicated by labels such as “uneducated”, “ignorant”, “illiterate” and the comment “We need to show we are educated and educators and demonstrate correct practice ourselves”. This is discussed further in 9.2.2.

7.6.3 Beliefs in the classroom

Strong beliefs in the importance of apostrophes and of adherence to the rules are translated into certain behaviours, from simply expressing feelings to informing businesses of their errors, changing a sign or even avoiding patronising the business. However, there is evidence, when comparing the comments with the results from the tasks in the survey, that these strong beliefs do not necessarily mean the holders always adhere to the rules

themselves. One teacher, for example, who commented “It annoys me!! :-) I don't get angry nor would I do something about it, but I think if a sign is professionally written it should be correct” rated *kiwi's* as totally acceptable and *men's* as totally unacceptable. Similarly, Sue told me in her interview that nonstandard use “irks” her and that she actively corrects students' errors, yet she also found *men's* unacceptable and is therefore likely to ‘correct’ this in her students' work.

Teachers, or course, bring these beliefs with them when they walk into the classroom; those who believe strongly in the importance of standard use of the apostrophe are likely to want to pass this knowledge on to the children they teach, even if what they are teaching is less than perfect. As Robyn explained: “It's an additional thing you can do for children and it's helpful, but it makes them look literate”. Some teachers also try to pass on their belief regarding educatedness: “to show students that their portrayal of themselves and their writing reflects on themselves.” One teacher, rather than getting annoyed at signage, engages in it as part of her teaching: “Our local supermarket has an aisle sign that says Gravy's. Each year I tell my students that there is an error on one of their signs and offer a prize for the person that finds it”.

The findings show that although most surveyed teachers believe in the importance of apostrophes, some do not. Comments including “I don't [notice nonstandard use].”, “I can't say I spot every one”, “I don't mind. I can still understand the meaning.” and “Don't really care” suggest apostrophes do not really feature in these writers' belief systems at all. Pip told me that in spite of a school programme on grammar and punctuation the previous year, “there's also lots of cases where I'm not a hundred percent sure myself”. She feels she has “...enough of a knowledge to get by with this-aged kids [year 7-8]” and said she has never felt disadvantaged because of her uncertainty, yet she admitted that sometimes she will avoid apostrophes by changing the wording. Although she identified most of the standard and nonstandard forms in the acceptability task (appendix S), when looking at the menu headed *Freds Combo's*, she said: “Yep, so that one there - the combos belong to Fred, so that's fine I think – I don't see any issue with that” and did not seem to notice that the apostrophe was on the wrong word. Like Sean, she sees encouraging children to write as her main goal and believes that content is more important: “Technically if I can – get an

awesome impact from your piece of writing – doesn't really matter if every word's spelt wrong".

It would appear the writer of the following comment, in reply to the question on the functions of the apostrophe, has a similar belief: "While it's useful and I enjoy it myself, I don't for one moment mind the current trend to mangle, misuse or ignore it". Since he has found all the examples in task 1d to be totally acceptable he is unlikely to do otherwise in the classroom. Another teacher wrote: "A part of me sees it as a natural shift in written language use", indicating a belief that language change is inevitable, and while she may also believe that apostrophe use is important and teach the rules for standard use, it is likely the belief in language change is reflected in her teaching through greater tolerance of nonstandard forms.

Having previously demonstrated a wide variation in use and understanding of the apostrophe in the general population, this section has highlighted a similar variation in teachers. Teachers have their own beliefs about apostrophe use which will influence what they are prepared to learn about apostrophes, as well as whether and how they will teach it. While a good majority of surveyed teachers believe that standard apostrophe use is important, few were able to explain its functions, as we saw in 7.4.4. Moreover, the sample bias in the study is likely to mean there are considerable numbers of teachers in the community who believe apostrophes do not matter. Children are therefore exposed to a wide range of teaching practices. But as a number of surveyed teachers pointed out, some pick up the concepts of apostrophe use very quickly while others continue to struggle.

7.7 Other factors affecting apostrophe use

Changes in educational ideologies may predict better understanding and more accurate use of apostrophes by older participants, however the results seem to be more complex than this. Differing teacher beliefs mean that teaching practices in schools are inconsistent which may explain some of this, but teachers also reported a wide variation in uptake of what they

teach, which suggests that there are factors outside the classroom that affect developing understandings of apostrophe use in children. The three factors emerging from the data that will be examined in this section are personal attributes, exposure to apostrophe use and a factor that will have a major impact on our language into the future – the digital age.

7.7.1 Personal attributes

A natural ability in a subject tends to lead to an interest and enjoyment of that subject, which in turn leads to increased performance. Most of the interviewees in this study intimated that they enjoyed English, and this was spread across all age groups. In fact, this was the stated reason most of the youth cohort responded to the interview request. Max, in the 16-25 age group, said he and his group of friends enjoyed language, while Mimi in the next age group explained this was the reason for her being attentive at school and adhering to apostrophe rules – “I like being right” and Molly, in the 41-55 age group professed to have “a natural careful sort of personality – so if anyone’s going to care about the apostrophe it’s probably me”. Similar comments came from Robyn who explained “But then I did enjoy language – and I felt I was good at language”, Ruth who simply stated “I love English” and Rita: “I mean – you either get it or you don’t I think. Yes. It’s a bit like maths perhaps – you either get it or you don’t. I never got maths but I can get apostrophes”. These comments all seem to concur that interest in and aptitude for language made it easier for them to understand apostrophes, and in today’s classroom these are the students who are most likely to absorb what they are taught.

Those with enthusiasm for English are overrepresented in this study, with only a few not expressing similar sentiments. Rona, a personal friend, has told me many times how she hated school because of the negative attitudes of her “old-school” teachers: “I couldn’t get enthusiastic about it at all – I was bored”, yet she learned about apostrophes because it was “drummed in” and constantly reinforced, in effect she was forced to learn. Others, like my sister, simply “switched off” and failed to learn in spite of the persistent teaching.

In today's classroom, several surveyed teachers observed that those with the ability and interest in language will "get it" while others do not. The degree of interest individual teachers have in grammar will also influence children's learning. Pete, who taught himself about apostrophes, admitted that it took "not a lot of effort, I think I'm just naturally interested in that sort of thing" and he is likely to inspire some of his students. Ross remembered being taught by "teacher[s] who - showed an interest in language and were inspired by language and they encouraged that in us". An inspired teacher may be able to reach more students, but without such inspiration students with little interest in language are unlikely to learn.

7.7.2 Exposure to apostrophe use

7.7.2.1 *The linguistic landscape*

Children are also constantly surrounded by examples of apostrophe use in the linguistic landscape, and increasingly these examples feature nonstandard use. The images of nonstandard use in signage that I used in the interviews drew out some interesting comments about the influence this may have on people's understanding of, and confidence in, their own use of apostrophes.

Rita, for example, commented that "It must be confusing for young people because they see so many bad examples that they wouldn't really know what was the correct one if they saw it" and this is confirmed by a number of comments made by people who do, indeed, find it confusing. A teacher wrote "If I notice I get confused and think maybe I am wrong and don't know the rules" and Megan said "if I saw a sign like that round town I'd think that's how it's meant to be 'cos it's – like it's an official sign". Ike agrees, commenting: "people still use it [standard apostrophes] on and off so that you're not going to get a very good idea of how it actually works" while Isla observes that the patterns she sees in the linguistic landscape become imbedded in her brain "...kind of like signs and stuff I'd see in stores so it's like ... that's what I've seen so it's in my brain". Pam seems aware of the impact exposure has on children when she explains why they may put apostrophes in plural nouns: "'Cos they've seen it, they don't understand".

Myra is in the 41-55 age group and her comment “The more I see apostrophes used wrongly the harder I have to think about what is correct usage” resonated with me. Since starting this project, I have sometimes been shocked to find myself placing an apostrophe in a plural noun or even a verb. By not only being exposed to large numbers of nonstandard apostrophes, but also having to write them, it seems I now require conscious thought to do what once was second nature. With teaching methods today tending to support inductive learning, in which there is less emphasis on rules, young people are more reliant on what they see around them (see 7.8, below) in order to understand apostrophe use. And if these models are inconsistent, it is clear that exposure to them will have an impact on use because, as Penny pointed out, it “normalises” nonstandard use.

7.7.2.2 *Reading*

On the other hand, people may be exposed to positive models of apostrophe use through reading, since generally, apostrophe use in published items such as books, newspapers and magazines conforms with the rules. It was the interviewees from the youth cohort who linked reading positively with apostrophe use as the three following comments show: “I’ve always read so I would’ve picked up most of mine just – through seeing how [it’s used in books]” (Isabel), “Reading definitely – gives you a better – grasp on the whole concept of – punctuation especially apostrophes in general” (Ivan), and “Well I think like with anything you become better at literacy when you involve yourself more in reading ... Yeah so reading definitely helps enforce those rules I suppose” (Isaac). Some surveyed teachers also see this, Shona for example commenting: “I’d say that – in most cases, kids that you recognise as readers, uh, tend to be more accurate writers”.

None of the retired cohort made this link, however. While Ruth, Rita, Robyn, Ross and Rosie all claimed to be avid readers, none of them mentioned any impact of this on their understanding of apostrophe use. This may be because they learned the rules at school and did not need to rely on exposure to standard use from which to induce the rules. Rona, who had been so unhappy at school, reads very little yet still remembers the rules that were “drummed” into her.

This means that because young people rely more on inductive learning to supplement what they learn in school, they depend on the accuracy of the examples they are exposed to. The love of reading is likely to go hand-in-hand with an interest in language and the ability to grasp what is taught in school, but not all young people are avid readers. Those who struggle to understand apostrophes in class are less likely to read published materials, leaving them exposed only to the confusing models they see in the linguistic landscape – and of course – their digital devices.

7.7.3 Apostrophes in a digital world

Mike commented “Well a lot of schools now are starting to get those tablets so they’re hardly writing at all”. In fact, as we saw in 4.4.3, people today are writing more than ever, but they are writing on digital devices, rather than by hand. This section investigates the impact of digital devices on handwriting, and the implications for apostrophe use of texting, emailing and spellcheck. These findings come from the interviews, and also from the online teacher survey which asked teachers specifically about how they saw these aspects of the digital world affecting apostrophe use (question 5 a and b).

Email, texting and social media provide the means for more immediate and frequent communication, and they are likely to have an impact on the ability to handwrite. As one teacher observed “Japanese people using cell phones have forgotten how to write Kanji”, and I remember my Chinese lecturer back in 1999 lamenting the fact that young Chinese people were already losing the ability to handwrite the characters. Could this be the future of alphabetic systems like English? Many people reported that the only thing they handwrite now is shopping lists, and I usually do this on my phone. According to Isaac:

I write a lot of labels at work, in terms of handwriting – yeah not a lot maybe some – bookwork and stuff but apart from that like – ninety percent to ninety-five of my writing would be done on computer or – text.

One teacher commented that some teachers do not even teach handwriting.

7.7.3.1 Handwriting versus digital devices

As to the benefits of handwriting, almost half the teachers in the online survey (see table 7.11, below) said they believed less handwriting had a negative effect on apostrophe use, with 35% remaining neutral and 7% seeing it as having a positive effect.

Table 7.11 Effect of digital age on apostrophe use <i>Question 5a, Online teacher Survey</i>				
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	NR
Less Handwriting	7%	35%	48%	10%
Email	4%	5%	87%	5%
Texting	16%	43%	35%	6%
Spellcheck	37%	34%	17%	12%

A teacher commented “I don't think handwriting something or typing it makes much of a difference”, but most surveyed teachers believe that the act of handwriting has a cognitive effect. Myra, for example, remembered hearing that handwriting “connects with the brain in a different sort of way”, while the following comments from teachers show that they see handwriting as having an important role in learning and practice: “I think the act of handwriting is vital to process learning, so less handwriting impacts on the stickability of grammar rules” and “Handwriting is a good place to practise rules for the usage of the apostrophe”. Another teacher said that although computers are used, actual typing is not taught and so details like apostrophes do not become habitual. Most of the teachers who commented on this topic, therefore, believe that there are different cognitive processes at work with handwriting. While it is undeniable that young people are writing a lot more than in the past, what and how they are writing is very different and there are many aspects that affect apostrophe use, over and above these cognitive differences.

7.7.3.2 Texting and email

Texting has become a major means of communication between young people. The language used in texting, however, is vastly different from old-fashioned letter-writing, becoming according to one teacher “a totally different language” while another teacher observed that “texting is informal, thus it is more acceptable to not spell correctly or use correct punctuation”. As Baron (2010) suggests, it has become more like everyday conversation (see

4.4.3) and since texting has become ubiquitous among young people, it is likely to have some impact on writing in general, and on apostrophe use.

Thirty-five percent of teachers in the survey (see table 7.11, above) saw texting as having a negative effect on apostrophe use while 43% remained neutral, with 16% rating it as having a positive effect, although none of these went on to explain how texting could improve apostrophe use. The common threads throughout the comments were the necessity of speed and brevity – and laziness. Text conversations are often conducted almost at a talking pace, and since messages have character limits, where apostrophes are concerned “It’s easier to leave it out than to think where it goes” according to Ruth. Mimi (in the 26-40 age group) explained her own practice: “...even though I genuinely know where an apostrophe should go an apostrophe is the sort of thing I’m going to get rid of in a text message if it’s going to go over a hundred and sixty characters”.

In addition to this, using an apostrophe usually involves changing screens or multiple button pressing, as Ross explains:

See one of the things funny enough is that it’s not easy to text an apostrophe, now if it was very instant then it would happen more often but it’s not one of the characters in the row ... THAT technology is affecting our language.

One teacher cannot find the apostrophe on her phone, while Rona would rather write forms in full than omit apostrophes: “I write the words out - the two words *would not* or something like that rather than you know - rather than *wouldn’t* ‘cos I can’t find where the apostrophe is”.

Many surveyed teachers see texting as having a negative impact as seen in the following comments: “Texting is changing all aspects of spelling. It encourages incorrect spelling”, “Texting doesn’t teach children about the apostrophe and they can get into bad habits of not using it”, and “[Children’s use of apostrophes] has decreased with their use of texting and Facebook”. Some feared that the habits formed through texting “may drift into other writing” with one teacher opining “Texting has basically killed all grammar and punctuation”.

Robyn was a little more positive, noting it is still communication and that “as long as people know what you mean” it is successful communication. Some teachers also see these patterns in emails “but to a slightly lesser degree” and one noted that “email suffers from poor grammar (sic)”. In fact, few commented on the impact of email on apostrophe use at all, and yet, as can be seen in table 7.11, above, a much higher percentage of teachers, at 87%, saw emails as having a negative effect on apostrophe use than texts, at 35%, while only 4% saw it as positive compared with four times that many for texts.

The interviewees in the youth cohort, however, demonstrated a good understanding of the different language expectations in different contexts. Isla, for example, when asked about when she uses apostrophes told me:

Most of the time yup, definitely in a more formal setting, so writing and stuff like that usually text language and stuff I'll kind of be like, you know, a bit more slippery, but definitely with writing and stuff yep

Similarly, Isaac said “I often try and use correct language but sometimes there's obviously situations where I wouldn't bother”. Most people have some sense of what is appropriate where, but those who struggle with apostrophe use may well take habits formed from frequent texting to other forms of communication, such as email. Another aspect of email to consider, though, is that as one teacher observes: “Email spellchecks for you so you don't need to know how to use the skill like you would in handwriting tasks”.

7.7.3.3 *Spellcheck*

A few comments claimed that using spellcheck software had a positive outcome for students by way of helping with understanding apostrophe use. One teacher felt it would provide a good model for students and another that it “...can help students with their writing as it points out errors” while another commented that “A lot of schools are moving towards paperless classrooms, google docs. Children can use spell check instead of dictionaries etc.” Thirty-seven percent of the teachers in the online survey (see table 7.11, above) rated spellcheck as having a positive impact on apostrophe use while a further 34% were neutral, leaving only 17% seeing it as having a negative effect.

However, the comments about spellcheck were generally negative and a common thread throughout the comments was that spellcheck inhibits awareness of apostrophe use. Myra, who indicated a clear understanding of standard apostrophe use in the tasks, stated that:

Spell check can make me lazy 'cos I don't have to do the thinking – so I don't have to do the 'is this right is this wrong' – 'why do you thinks it's this?' And so, I'm not reinforcing my own knowledge of the rules ... and I think that's possibly why I struggle a bit more with some of them – just going – oh what does spell check say – and it must be right.

She makes a number of important points: first, that reliance on spellcheck removes the thinking from apostrophe use; second, that this erodes her own confidence in apostrophe use; and third that she accepts spellcheck as the authority on apostrophe use. Other teachers commented: "Spellcheck may highlight your mistakes but you don't have to do the thinking", "[it] takes the responsibility away from the writer", "it disengages the writer" and "they get out of the habit of remembering when to put it in".

A teacher wrote "Spellcheck does it for you so why learn to do it yourself". However, several teachers make the point that "You still need to know the rules of spelling and grammar to use spell check" so you "know which option to choose". In addition, several teachers noted that spellcheck and autocorrect are unreliable and inconsistent when it comes to apostrophes, with one teacher writing that "As a teacher of DGT I stress limitations of spellcheck". Some teachers said they use spellcheck as a learning tool to help, rather than hinder, their students' understanding of apostrophe use, as we saw with Sarah in 7.6. It seems, then, we are in a stage of transition in which computer use is widespread but not total, and spellcheck and autocorrect are useful tools, but not as yet reliable. We can only imagine what the future holds for electronic communication.

7.8 To use or not to use?

For now, though, we need some knowledge of apostrophe use if we wish to adhere to the rules, whether we are handwriting or using a computer, and this means there are times when we must make a decision as to whether to use an apostrophe or not, or where it

should go. As a number in the retired cohort noted, apostrophe use “comes naturally” and requires little conscious thought, although there are some for whom it is not so easy. Where application does require thought, older people call on rules and strategies learned at school, as Rona told me: “I just go through the ruling that I was taught. NO JUST THAT LITTLE RULE. Just taught the rule that you put the apostrophe between the <s> and the – after the owner – like that Barney’s, the café belongs to Barney”. Younger people, however, make no mention of rules or strategies like these and their decision making seems to be more haphazard. This may explain the retirees’ better performance in the dictation task, with apostrophes being applied automatically as they write, while the younger cohort needed to think about it.

On the other hand, in the correction task in the main questionnaire where there was little difference in results between younger and older respondents, correction requires more cognitive processing and is not as automatic for older people as writing, and this may have put the different age groups on a more equal footing. However, these cognitive processes are likely to be very different, considering younger people do not have the same rules and strategies to draw on as the older participants.

One possible explanation that was mentioned by a number of younger participants is that they simply go by how a word looks. A particularly interesting example of this is Max, who was in his last year of school at the time of his interview. A very articulate young man, he said he and his friends were probably not representative of his age group, because they are all interested in language. He reported that he and his friends do comment on the sort of signage in the images he was shown in the interview, and perhaps even joke about the writer. This is in spite of the fact that his own apostrophe use is rather inconsistent, a fact he readily acknowledged. In the tasks he indicated that apostrophes are acceptable in *menus*, *teachers*, *trees* and *shirts*, but not in *photos*, *letters*, *plants* or *nachos* and his decision whether or not to use an apostrophe is not based on reference to rules, but rather on how it looks: “I’m an aesthetic person so I like things to look nice”. Of the image containing *Kid’s love mince* he reasoned: “I probably wouldn’t put an apostrophe in there. It looks a bit messy” rather than noting that as a plural noun it does not need an apostrophe. Conversely, he found that *polo’s* “just looks better, looks cleaner” even though he seemed to be aware

that this was outside the rules. When asked about the possibility of changing the rules to accommodate changing usage he said “I think if it looks good – the problem is that’s very subjective isn’t it”, and again when asked what he thought of the sentences with no apostrophes he cited appearance as the main problem: “I think it makes it all a bit messy on the page”.

Comments from other young interviewees demonstrate that appearance is indeed a major factor in the decision whether or not to include an apostrophe. Isaac’s comment “I – try and use my best use of judgement yeah” implies he is judging from appearance rather than knowledge of rules. Isabel thought the word *combo’s* “...looks silly”, while Maddie thought “It looks, it looks better to have it” and a questionnaire respondent thought “*Polos* to me looks silly”. Isabel also said of missing apostrophes that some young people think “the word looks cooler written like this”. In the following quotation, Ike begins by discussing a sign with an example of the possessive *it’s* with an apostrophe:

I don’t know, yeah it looks – you know – as I say more presentable – from what I can see from that ... if you spelt can’t without the apostrophe it actually doesn’t look right – I just found out now – I look! ... Going through that one there like some of them look wrong and some of them actually look right with the apostrophe gone...

We can see that during this utterance, Ike comes to the realisation himself that he bases his decision making on the appearance of the word. There are no comments about appearance in the retired cohort interviews. This may explain why half the youngest age group in table 7.6 singled out *kiwis* as needing an apostrophe. Something about the appearance of the word sets it apart from *polos*, *singlets* and *jeans* and makes it look better with an apostrophe.

Another strategy used by younger interviewees is: “If in doubt, leave it out”, as quoted by Megan and an adage we saw in 4.6 being promoted by Bynington in 1945. According to Ian “I put them when I know they’re right and I don’t use them if I don’t know they’re right”. Isabel also commented that it is better to miss an apostrophe than put one in incorrectly and Irena and Isla echoed these sentiments. Ivan said he tries hard to use apostrophes correctly, but: “I still slip up on it – a lot – like there are places where I miss it or if I don’t

know when to use it – like before or after I usually just leave it out – which happens a lot”. Again, this strategy was not mentioned by retired interviewees, who would be unlikely to consider this an option; Ruth and Rona, for example, prefer to change the wording to avoid an apostrophe rather than miss or misplace it. As mentioned in section 7.3.2, a number of teachers also expressed a preference for missed apostrophes over misplaced or intrusive ones in students’ work.

A number of teachers commented that children leave apostrophes out, and/or use them before every -s suffix. While some primary teachers see this as a stage of learning, it is also likely to be habit forming for some children who will not pick up enough from current teaching practices to distinguish between the suffixes. Maddie, for example, told me when discussing the *Freds Combo*’s image: “But I guess people would be like ‘that’s wrong’ it should be plural because it belongs to Fred – it’s his combos”, demonstrates confusion over the terminology, although she does seem to recognise that *Freds* needs an apostrophe.

7.9 Summary

This chapter has highlighted some of the factors that contribute to the inconsistency affecting apostrophe use today. Teachers and children alike bring their own personal interest and aptitude for language into the classroom, and this affects both teaching and learning. Changes in ideologies around teaching English in New Zealand have seen the grammars that were once the backbone of teaching English “biffed” from schools. Grammar was no longer in the curriculum and teachers no longer needed an interest in grammar to teach English. As a result, teachers’ ability to teach apostrophe use is widely variant and even though grammar is returning to the curriculum, many teachers do not have the time, the interest or the knowledge to teach it. Many children are left to absorb what they can inductively, from increasingly inconsistent models. Without a knowledge of rules to draw on, they make decisions based on appearance or omit apostrophes altogether, and their constant use of digital devices will further influence their apostrophe use into the future.

Behind apostrophe use, however, are attitudes and beliefs, and having touched on this in relation to teachers, I now move on to explore attitudes in the general population.

CHAPTER 8:

ATTITUDES TOWARDS APOSTROPHE USE

8.1 Introduction

Up to this point, part II has explored how the apostrophe is used in New Zealand today, people's understanding of the rules governing its use, and the background against which people's understanding of apostrophe use develops. A teacher observed: "I think there probably has always been people who care about correct grammar, and others who don't see it as important". This chapter explores how personal attributes and educational experiences work together to create these individual beliefs around apostrophe use, and how this influences the way people feel and behave. It furthers the response to research question 2, but also addresses question 3 by considering the implications of these beliefs for the future of the apostrophe. The findings presented in this chapter are based on both quantitative and qualitative data which originated from all of the questionnaire and interview procedures used in this study, including material from the online teacher survey and teacher interviews.

The chapter divides attitudes into loosely defined categories. First, the sticklers and critics are discussed in section 8.2 through an examination of the three components of attitude: affect, behaviour and the beliefs behind these factors. Associations between attitude and identity are explored in 8.2.4. This is followed by a discussion of the more empathetic stickers in 8.3 and of those for whom apostrophes do not matter in 8.4. Attitudes around consistency are then examined in section 8.5, before moving on to consider people's beliefs about the future of the apostrophe and the implications of technology in section 8.6. I begin by reviewing the models of attitude that are useful for this part of the study.

As explained in section 4.5, Gharibi and Seals' model of attitudes (n.d.) consisted of concentric circles with belief at its core with practice surrounding it and management

making up the outer layer. In 7.6 we saw how Sarah's attitude fitted into this model, since she modified, or 'managed', her behaviour by teaching herself about apostrophe use in order to comply with her belief that being able to use apostrophes is important. Sarah, Penny, Pete and Irena are the only participants who illustrate this *management* component of attitude by actively seeking to improve their knowledge. However, this study revealed a strong affective element surrounding the apostrophe that this model fails to take account of. Sarah believes that incorrect use of apostrophes reflects negatively on the writer and she feared the embarrassment of being seen as a "nanny". It was due to this fear that she acted, by teaching herself about apostrophe use, and she now has confidence and pride in her image as an educated person. Therefore, Garrett, Williams and Coupland's (2003) model, in which attitude incorporates the three elements of belief, affect and behaviour, seems more appropriate when examining attitudes towards apostrophes. When it comes to the apostrophe, it is through examining the more overt elements of affect and behaviour that we can glimpse the beliefs behind them.

8.2 “Abominable errors!”

The title of this section, from a questionnaire respondent, expresses strong emotion towards nonstandard apostrophe use, but it also hints at the beliefs that are behind the emotion, as well as possible behaviours that may ensue. This section explores the attitudes of the sticklers, those for whom abiding by the conventions of apostrophe use is a must not only for them, but for everyone.

8.2.1 Affect

There is no shortage of comments expressing negative thoughts towards nonstandard apostrophe use and users and as discussed in 7.6.2, the online teacher survey seemed to allow teachers to express these thoughts without the restraint that might be felt in a face-to-face interview. We can hear the emotion behind comments like “abominable errors”,

“silly person”, “they’re nuts!” and “illiterate prat” but many participants express emotion directly, with words such as “annoyed”, “irritated”, “frustrated” and “disappointed” appearing repeatedly throughout the comments and transcripts. It also causes physical reactions such as cringing, sighing and rolling of eyes, all of which imply strong emotions. Isabel made repeated comments like: “You sort of look like a prat”, “I just get so angry; it really stresses me” and “They look like a dick”, while Max reported that: “I find it a bit frustrating to be honest..... I don’t really like bad grammar – like bad grammar and punctuation.” This is in spite of the fact their own use of apostrophes does not always adhere to the rules. Ian demonstrated a more light-hearted attitude when he referred to the writer as “a bit of a muppet”. The emotion driving these comments is clear.

8.2.2 Behaviour

Some people are driven to do more than simply express their thoughts and emotions. Proud punctuation vigilante, Lynne Truss (2003), explains the process:

For any true stickler, you see, the sight of the plural word “Book’s” with an apostrophe in it will trigger a ghastly private emotional process similar to the stages of bereavement, though greatly accelerated. First there is shock. Within seconds, shock gives way to disbelief, disbelief to pain, and pain to anger. Finally (and this is where the analogy breaks down), anger gives way to a righteous urge to perpetrate an act of criminal damage with the aid of a permanent marker (p. 1).

While the participants in this project are less extreme in their reactions, many agree with those who criticise users of nonstandard apostrophes, with comments from teachers including: “I don’t blame them”, “They have a point” and “Fine with it as it sort of bugs me too :). Participants’ reported behaviours include: commenting to a companion, informing the business, avoiding the business and sometimes even changing the offending mark.

At the milder end of the behaviour range, commenting to a friend is a common practice for some of the participants. Max, in particular, seems to enjoy this: “All my friends like English – and so you go round critique everything, critique everything, loads of stuff, that’s alright”.

Molly and Rita also noted that they would comment to a friend, with Molly adding that she “probably wouldn’t be very kind”. Mike’s comment: “When I’m with her and I see something like that I love showing her” seems to suggest that he points nonstandard use out to his wife purely for the emotional reaction it will provoke. For some participants, though, such emotion drives them to do more than just comment.

Many participants reported at least wanting to inform a business of their apostrophe failures, and a number of them do so, as these comments from teachers show: “I tell people when the signs are incorrect” and “I don’t exactly get angry, but I get a bit of an attitude! I try not [to] comment but I cannot help myself!” Shona reported that she has drawn business owners’ attention to misplaced apostrophes, but repeated several times that this was done “...only in the – friendliest of manners” and only when she felt it was appropriate. Isabel acknowledges that pointing out errors may not produce results:

There’s only so much you can do you can be like hey you know – that’s not actually how it is – and if they don’t know then maybe they’ll appreciate you letting them know they look like a dick and change it. But – otherwise they’ll go ‘Oh I don’t care’.

But she informs them nonetheless.

Ruth said she would “draw their attention to it”, and on asking me if I had contacted the public hospital regarding their erratic spelling of *Women’s Health*, was disappointed to hear I had not. Ian “might just like pointing things out that are wrong”, while Mimi told me: “it would just annoy me every time I went in – and I’d probably complain about it to them and they’d get annoyed with me – because I’d be like that sign is just still there and mocking me”. Mike was the only one who describe a specific instance in which he approached a business via email, informing them “you know your spelling is horrendous”, but added that he received no reply. But perhaps sometimes it does work. The images below show the recent addition of an apostrophe to one of the first images in my collection, carefully painted in between the raised lettering.



Figure 8.1a. Alexanders without apostrophe (2013)



Figure 8.1b. Alexander's with apostrophe (2018)

Some participants feel they have a role to play in educating people by “quietly giving them a lesson!!!!” as one teacher wrote. These comments from the main questionnaire also demonstrate this: “I really want to explain how to use apostrophes!” and “[I] would more want to help/correct rather than punish”, while one concedes that “It would be nice to explain and educate, although it’s not always welcome!” Mimi’s instinct is to offer her services as proof-reader:

I almost feel like going to the office and be like ‘look if you just want to email me anything you’re going to get printed out I’ll honestly check it for you in ten minutes and email it back to you’ – because that bothers me so much like it’s just so clearly wrong.

As we saw in the previous chapter, some participants would even avoid businesses that have signage with nonstandard apostrophes. Sarah considered that a tattoo parlour that did not pay attention to apostrophes was unlikely to put a lot of care into its art (see 7.6.2). One teacher wrote that: “[I] tend not to buy from these companies”, while another teacher has different priorities, writing that “It annoys me, but not enough to ignore a bargain”. Isabel did not mention avoiding businesses, although she did report avoiding texting certain friends because of their careless use of language: “Well – there are friends – that I just won’t text to be honest. I’ll talk to them but I won’t text them because it’s just too aggravating ... I might think ‘illiterate prat’”.

Another behavioural option when faced with nonstandard apostrophe use in signage is to correct it. When in the linguistic landscape, Truss (2003) advises arming ourselves with correction fluid, big pens, stickers in a variety of sizes, paint and brush, guerrilla-style clothing, medication for personality disorder, a loudhailer and finally a gun in order to do

just that. Pete does not carry a gun, but commented that: "Sometimes I wish I had a – a marker pen in my pocket" while Steve "had a grandmother that actually carried around a pen – in her handbag – she would go and alter the signs if she ever saw them incorrectly". Only a small number of participants, all teachers, admitted to actually changing signs: "I erase apostrophes on plural words on chalkboard signs" and "if I can reach, [I] change it!", for example. Penny describes an incident in which she changed a sign:

One time I went to the observatory in Wellington with my cousins – and in my defence I'd just like to say this was just on a computer printout – but yeah it was it was WRONG and so I said it was WRONG. And my cousins were going "Will you stop it?". I went "Has anyone got a pen?" and so one of them handed over a pen, not thinking it was related. So, I fixed it and then they were very cross with me. Luckily the people in the office didn't see. So, it just makes you cringe when you see those sort of signs. I think it's the teacher in me and it's the whole "I have to fix that".

It is interesting that she changed the sign in spite of the embarrassment to her cousins, yet she was relieved to be saved the embarrassment of being caught in the act by observatory staff. I return to Penny below.

Image 8.1, below is from outside a café in Nelson and is interesting because you can see that someone has attempted to remove the intrusive apostrophe in the word *gins*. They have not completely erased it, but perhaps this was intentional in order to get their message across. Even those who would not normally have noticed the intrusive apostrophe would now be aware that there was an error that has now been put right.



Figure 8.2. Corrected apostrophe, Nelson café

This all demonstrates that some people feel very strong emotions when they see nonstandard apostrophe use. They may feel compelled to take action, whether that be

commenting to a friend, informing the business, changing the sign or simply expressing these emotions through the internet or taking the opportunity to participate in a study such as this. These affective elements and resultant behaviours would seem to reflect some strongly held beliefs.

8.2.3 Beliefs

The emotions expressed and the physical reactions some noted suggest that sticklers hold the belief that using apostrophes according to the prescriptive rules, and by extension using written English correctly in general, is highly important. I noted in 7.7.1 that an interest in language is likely to result in a higher absorption of what is taught in the classroom. This is also likely to play a major role in shaping the beliefs about language that we carry into adulthood. However, for this group of people, not only do they believe that it is important for them to use English correctly, they also believe that all others should share this ideal – that “Right is right and people should use the correct punctuation”, as one teacher wrote. Isabel also alludes to this when she says: “No I think it is important – it should be used properly – you should at least know how to”.

As a consequence, when these beliefs are challenged by a stray apostrophe, sticklers feel strong emotions that compel them to protest in some way. Some see themselves as the guardians of language, as this comment from a teacher in support of the critics illustrates “They are trying to keep the standards of the English language to an acceptable level”. Penny’s compulsion to change the sign in the Wellington observatory, described above, seems to reflect the belief that as a teacher, she has a responsibility to keep the linguistic landscape free from nonstandard models of apostrophe use that may confuse young minds.

When asked about the importance of correct apostrophe use, Ruth gave a short, but vehement reply: “To me – important!” Rita explained that “They are really umm [important] – because I’ve grown up with it and I expect them to be there”, while Isaac replied: “Yeah I do. Like all things with language it just makes it more efficient so you can communicate what you’re trying to get across, it’s why it’s there for a reason I s’pose”. This implies that

Isaac sees clarity as an important function of the apostrophe and this was a theme Ross returned to repeatedly throughout his interview:

I spend about the last 10 years I was a technical writer being paid a lot per hour, to make sure language is right – and even before that I was doing a lot of teaching, teaching IT, and precision and language and clarity arising from precision helps my learners learn – learn more easily, so that's why the punctuation has mattered.

Isla also believes it is important for clarity in spite of it sometimes being confusing “It just makes things, you know, clearer, even though sometimes you get confused about where it should go and stuff I do think it has a pretty important purpose”. Some participants recognise that not everyone holds their beliefs and that some may see them as an “old fogey” (Robyn) or a “silly old bat” (Ruth) when they point out nonstandard use. And according to Rita “a lot of people seem to think that you're being pedantic if you want them to get it exactly right, and yet that's standard English isn't it”, the implication that all people should use “standard English” being clear.

Teachers' reactions to question 2c.2 in the online teacher survey, which asked “What do you think about people who get upset at the sight of a missing or misplace apostrophe?”, can also give some insight into beliefs around the importance of standard apostrophe use. Words like “Agree”, “That's me!”, “Understandable” and “Justified” were peppered liberally throughout the responses. Thirty-three of the 77 teachers agreed with the sentiments of those who get upset, with other comments including “I think they have a right to be upset” “Good to know that they have noticed!” and “They've been taught correct grammar”. This seems to imply that these participants believe that adherence to the rules of apostrophe use is important to them, that it should be important to all, and that therefore they have a responsibility to police the apostrophe use of those who do not comply with their belief in the prescriptive rules.

The following findings also reveal some interesting aspects of beliefs around apostrophe use. In question 5.2 of the main questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate agreement with a list of statements, the second of these being “The apostrophe is an important part of written English and we should keep it”. As can be seen in table 8.1, below,

74% of respondents agreed with this statement, with slightly more females agreeing and a decline with age until the oldest group, which has the highest rate of agreement by more than 10%.

Table 8.1. The apostrophe is important in English, by gender and age
Question 5.2/2, main questionnaire

Agreement	Gender		Total	Age			
	Male	Female		16-25	26-40	41-55	56+
	70%	78%	74%	77%	71%	65%	88%

The very first question in the main questionnaire asked respondents whether they thought it is important to write English correctly, with the options of *yes*, *sometimes* and *no*. As can be seen in table 8.2, below, some results are similar to those in table 8.1 above.

Table 8.2. Is it important to write English correctly? – by gender and age
Question 1.1, main questionnaire

	Gender		Total	Age			
	Male	Female		16-25	26-40	41-55	56+
Yes	70%	74%	72%	60%	71%	77%	88%
Sometimes	15%	15%	15%	30%	7%	12%	6%
No	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	4%	0%
NR	13%	11%	12%	10%	21%	8%	6%

Seventy two percent of respondents believe it is always important to use English correctly and this includes the same percentage in the oldest age group, at 88%. What is interesting here, is that the youngest group drops from 77% in table 8.1 to 60% in table 8.2, with 30% indicating *sometimes*, considerably higher than the other age groups. This seems to concur with the findings in 7.7.3.2 that young people employ a wider range of writing styles in different contexts.

Table 8.3, below, shows the contrast in use between an email to a friend and a job application, broken down into age groups.

Table 8.3. Correct apostrophe use in different media – by age
Question 3.3, main questionnaire

Age:	Medium:	Yes	Sometimes	No
16-25 (30)	<i>Email to friend</i>	33%	37%	30%
	<i>Job application</i>	100%	0%	0%
26-40 (28)	<i>Email to friend</i>	46%	25%	29%
	<i>Job application</i>	89%	0%	11%
41-55 (26)	<i>Email to friend</i>	46%	12%	31%
	<i>Job application</i>	85%	0%	8%
56+ (16)	<i>Email to friend</i>	69%	25%	6%
	<i>Job application</i>	94%	6%	0%

In the youngest age group, and only this group, all respondents believe that apostrophes are important in job applications. While the other age groups rated apostrophe use as important, it is interesting that small numbers from each group, including one from the oldest group, believe apostrophes are not important in job applications. Thirty three percent of the youngest group see apostrophes as necessary in emails to friends and this rises to 69% for the oldest group, who are, therefore, more than twice as likely as the youngest group to use apostrophes in informal emails. The youngest group also demonstrates the widest contrast between the two registers, again illustrating their sensitivity to appropriacy.

This is also illustrated by some comments from the young interviewees. The following comment from Isabel demonstrates a good understanding of the different styles needed for different media:

Well I misuse language all the time but I know why I do it so – I feel like it's, yes, it's that awareness – [rather] than just ignorance. I'm aware I'm doing it and I can also stop doing it should the situation require ... If I'm writing properly then I'll try and get my grammar and punctuation correct.

While Isabel commented that she is less careful with language in some contexts, she also observed that it is sometimes due to peer pressure that she omits apostrophes in texting: "Situationaly, when you're texting I quite often don't [use apostrophes] because my friends

tell me off so I just ignore it – unless I'm texting someone like my mum or something might not understand my gibberish". Here she takes into consideration not only the media, but the audience of her message in her choice of language style.

Not all young people omit apostrophes from texts. While Isaac described typical texting from his friends: "A lot of slang would be used, like including *like*, apostrophes would not really come into it all that much – yeah", he would usually use them himself: "but I still in most contexts would prefer it to be there". Ivan also prefers to use apostrophes in texting "You know, I usually try to, like I said, keep everything out in full so I do use apostrophes a lot even when texting". Irena realises that she also usually uses apostrophes in texts: "Another funny thing too, I only just thought of is um, I find I use them in texts like, in texting *like*", but she also observed that this is sometimes due to autocorrect. Again, we need to bear in mind that these interviewees are particularly interested in language and are, therefore, more likely than young people in the population as a whole to hold beliefs that apostrophes are important in all contexts.

Just as not all the young interviewees omit apostrophes in texts and emails, neither do older interviewees always include them. Ruth, when asked if she thought apostrophes were less important in some media than others, replied "It shouldn't be, it shouldn't be. I read what I've written and if autocorrect doesn't do it – I'll do it manually. I think it's still important..." and this included in texting. On the other hand, while Rosie does not text at all, Rita and Rona omit apostrophes in texts, but rather than reflecting the belief that they are unnecessary, this is simply because of the difficulty they have finding the apostrophe on their phones. Only Robyn sees texting as "Just about getting the message across", reflecting the belief that details like apostrophes are not important in texting. However, they all reported using apostrophes in casual emails, as Rosie explains:

I don't text at all. But I use apostrophes in my emails the same as I would if I was writing, uh I follow the same – rule of thumb for all my punctuation in my emails and I don't shorten or abbreviate words like my children do. I write the full – nine yards.

The findings demonstrate a divergence in beliefs between younger and older writers, wherein young people are more likely to consider apostrophes to be less important in some media than older people. It has also highlighted some divergence in use within each of the two groups, namely that young people do not always omit apostrophes from informal media such as texts while older people do not necessarily include them. The following section examines the link between attitudes towards apostrophe use, a sense of educatedness and identity.

8.2.4 Educatedness and Identity

Attitudes seem to go deeper than just how apostrophes should be used, to how people see themselves and want to be seen by others. In 7.6, Sarah's not wanting to be seen as a "nanny" reflects her desire to be seen as an educated person, so perhaps there is some truth in the arguments put forward by Crystal (2005) and Honey (1997) that a sense of *educatedness* is behind people's beliefs regarding apostrophe use. Participants would be unlikely to admit this, however, so perhaps some of the quantitative components can help to reveal people's perceptions of nonstandard apostrophe users.

In question 3.2 of the main questionnaire (appendix D), respondents were asked to indicate on a semantic differential scale where they saw the writer of the Warehouse sign sitting between the anchor pairs: *educated/uneducated, upper/lower class, careful/careless, not intelligent/intelligent, young.old and male/female*. They also had a *no opinion* option because I felt some would be uncomfortable with making such judgements, and this seems to have been the case. This option was selected by between 24 and 59 of the 100 respondents in the individual categories, which when added to those who did not respond at all, gives a high 34% to 73% non-response rate, as can be seen in table 7.4, below.

Table 8.4 Beliefs about nonstandard apostrophe users
Question 3.2, main questionnaire

Educated	Upper-class	Careful	Intelligent	Young	
3%	0%	2%	3%	8%	Male
13%	4%	5%	7%	18%	23%
24%	21%	15%	25%	18%	
13%	13%	26%	14%	9%	4%
9%	2%	18%	0%	0%	Female
Un-educated	Lower class	Careless	Not intelligent	Old	
No opinion or no response					
38%	60%	34%	51%	47%	73%

The findings show that questionnaire respondents saw the writer of the sign as slightly more likely to be uneducated, lower class, not intelligent and young, but a lot more likely to be male. The largest number of respondents rated each of the categories as neutral, apart from the *careful* category, where two thirds of those who responded considered the writer to be careless. It is interesting that this category had the highest response rate, indicating that respondents were more comfortable judging a personal quality over social factors. Where I had hoped this question would give some insight into the notion of *educatedness*, it instead shows that a large number of people are uncomfortable with making such judgements. However, this apparent unwillingness to judge is contradicted by the comments we have seen above, and will see below.

These same respondents were not so reticent in their comments regarding the Warehouse sign in question 3.1: “I think the people who wrote them are uneducated”, “How illiterate!”, “I find it ignorant to publicise something without it being accurate. Makes me cringe”, “I think it shows lack of knowledge”, “Poor English skills. [I] don't think much of them. I believe the change has come from being lazy with our English language”, and “They didn't listen during English lessons”. Ruth and Robyn also saw a lack of education as being behind nonstandard use, with Robyn blaming children's lack of concentration: “Lack of formal education. Children now don't do anything by rote, it's very difficult to sit and do these kinds of exercises because they find it boring, it's boring”.

Comments regarding the critics of nonstandard apostrophe users can also give some insight into people's attitudes. In question 4.2 in the main questionnaire, respondents were asked for their reactions to two negative comments made by critics of nonstandard users. The following comments attempt to justify the critics: "I am sure there are some amongst us that like to play on their superior education, but for the most part keeping a good standard of English I believe to be the reason behind the majority", "They are well educated and fair enough" and "They have been educated in the English Language and despair as much as me". These last two comments seem to suggest that the educated have the right, if not the responsibility, to criticise and that educatedness is an important identity marker for some.

Interviewees also seemed to see educatedness as motivation for the critics. Rona, for example, said: "They want to try and prove that they're more intelligent and show off their intelligence I think ... they want to show off, you know, that they've had a better education". Rosie also holds this view and has some sympathy for the targets of the criticism: "Yes, yes – one-up-man-ship. Yeah 'I'm very educated than you'. Mm – and putting people down – for something that's not really their fault a lot of the time – you know?" Penny expressed similar sentiments:

But what they're doing really is – is doing a power play – I'm better educated than you, I'm more intelligent than you, because somehow the ability to use this particular tiny skill makes me better than you ... [They think] this person must be an idiot because they've got something wrong and it's MY DUTY as a better educated person to tell them that they're wrong.

It's interesting that it was also Penny who changed the sign at the Wellington Observatory. Although she saw it as her duty to correct the sign, she did not want to be seen doing so, and this suggests she draws the line at correcting face-to-face. Robyn thought "It was very much – probably a form of snobbery too because you had your elite ... who sort of said this is the right way to do it you have to do it the right way – exactly the elite" – the only comment that hints of class distinction.

The belief that using apostrophes according to the rules portrays an image of an educated person seems to be widespread. These beliefs are closely linked with identity – that sense of who we are (see 4.5.2) and whether we fit into particular categories of educatedness

symbolised by our standard or non-standard use of the apostrophe. The overt expressions of emotion and behaviours that we have seen in reaction to nonstandard use seems to be an affirmation of this identity as an educated person. It seems the notion of educatedness has overtaken the earlier notion of politeness we encountered in 3.4.1, with some of the behaviours described above being anything but polite. Other participants, however, seem more understanding in their beliefs.

8.3 “Some people were just never properly taught”

These people may agree with the sentiments discussed above, but their attitudes are tempered by a degree of sympathy for nonstandard users, acceptance of change in language use, or in some cases – resignation. This is illustrated by the title quotation from a questionnaire respondent, and by this observation from a teacher:

I think we can feel justified in our reaction [to nonstandard use] but we also need to have a sense of humour and recognise that English, like all languages, is a living organism which changes over time, and sometimes we need to accept that not everyone knows or cares about apostrophe use as much as we do. :-)

This section will again examine the elements of affect, behaviour and belief in order to demonstrate how they differ from the less tolerant group of sticklers.

8.3.1 Tempered affect

Scattered amongst the expressions of anger and irritation, as described above, are comments from participants for whom the sight of a nonstandard apostrophe in signage produces a calmer reaction. Molly, for example said: “I mean I notice them, and I do sort of think ‘honestly’ – but I don’t think it should be a capital crime” while according to a teacher “I just think ‘Oh there is a mistake’” and she leaves it at that. Others, however, express a degree of sympathy for the writer and attempt to explain their nonstandard use.

Several participants seem to appreciate that with less emphasis on details like apostrophe use in schools today, it is inevitable that young people will not understand their use. As one teacher observed: “[It] usually passes as a thought in mind that someone doesn't have a strong understanding of their use”. Paula, while she admitted to “A bit of rolling your eyes a bit” acknowledges the impact changing educational ideology has had:

I guess when I see them I think well maybe [they] didn't have that as part of their education or they didn't – understand it when they were being educated. Depending on their age group it would depend on whether that's part of the education they've had or whether it's been actually left out, because there's been so many changes over time.

The following respondent also makes the point that we cannot really judge those who use nonstandard apostrophes: “I wouldn't know about person's education, interest in language grammar, opportunities to learn correct usage”.

For other participants, being understood is the most important aspect of a message, and if a missed or misplaced apostrophe does not hinder understanding, then they see no problem. As one respondent commented: “As long as I know what they are saying, it is all good”, although she conceded that accurate punctuation is important in some contexts. A teacher wrote: “Although the apostrophe may be in the incorrect place, I know what the sign means so I don't feel the need to do anything about it. However, I still notice it”. On the other hand, it is not necessarily the inaccurate apostrophe use itself that causes the breakdown in communication. As Molly explained:

Like we have a staff blog and a couple of times people have – you know – written a post on something and someone has commented. And the only comment they have put is a correction – and I just think that is really rude.

She felt that these people were “engaging with the grammar rather than the ideas” and that the message was lost, not because of the grammatical error, but because of people's attitude towards the error.

Still other participants react to such signage with “humour”, “amusement” and one teacher observed “It makes me laugh a little but I don't get too upset” while another's light-hearted

response was “That's Ok – whatever floats their boat”. Ross explains how he has come to sympathise with, and even enjoy, modern apostrophe use:

I sympathise with them actually. Initially when I saw these – accidents at first and then trends, I was irritated by them and righteous – but then – I think it evolved, maybe retirement has mellowed me, but I sympathise with them and I delight in following the change of language in this way ...

Unlike the participants in the last section, this group tends to show sympathy towards users of nonstandard apostrophes, but has little sympathy for those who criticise them. A number of questionnaire respondents see the critics as insecure or lacking empathy, while some “would more want to help/correct rather than punish”. Some comments from teachers include: “Pedants. Falsely superior. Insecure”, “Nit picking”, “Build a bridge – get over it. More important things to get your knickers in a twist over”, “No point in going over the top excessively. People don't actually know they are making a mistake if they were never taught. No point in getting angry”, “Just because someone misuses one, shouldn't upset a person so much. Some people were just never properly taught” and from Pip: “O my goodness – get something real to complain about”.

Penny noted that Facebook is often a “game of spot the error and embarrass people by their lack of knowledge ... It's quite rude isn't it ... it's derogatory to the person that's doing that, I mean I prefer the term arsehole”. Penny asked me “are you using the term *grammar Nazi?*” and later used a description of her view of why some choose to criticise that had obvious links to this term: “Well for some it's because they believe fanatically that they are right in the same way as any other fanatic believes that they are right and there can be no other way”.

With this group of participants the sight of a wayward apostrophe does not always conjure up emotion, and when it does it is often sympathy and understanding towards the writer, saving the anger for those who criticise. Some may still feel annoyed at the misuse but they are not stirred to action, as Ruth demonstrates: “I hate it when people misuse apostrophes but – I don't want to hit things”.

8.3.2 Curtailed behaviour

This more tolerant group of participants is less willing to act on their emotions, particularly in pointing out a misplaced apostrophe to a business or the writer. One teacher commented that “If I’m sure it is incorrect, I want to change them”, but something stops her doing so. The findings demonstrate that there are a number of reasons for people not engaging in the behaviour component of attitude.

Some participants are aware of the embarrassment their pointing out the nonstandard use of an apostrophe is likely to cause a business or writer. Mary told me she would avoid commenting even to a friend in case a staff member overheard, and we have seen how Penny did not want to be seen by staff when she corrected the sign at the Wellington observatory. Molly commented that people who do point errors out are “pretty rude” and are “Not thinking about whether the other person would be hurt or embarrassed”. She states the belief behind her stance: “I also have quite a strong belief that correcting people if you don’t have the right to do it, I mean you’re a parent, their teacher, their boss, is actually rude” although she admits that “on the other hand I do judge them”. Myra, though, in noting that she would not inform a business of a nonstandard use, wonders if perhaps this exacerbates the problem: “No – no – I don’t [point it out] – I’m guilty of letting it happen”.

Paula is also thinking of the writer’s feelings: “... no I wouldn’t just because – I guess I’m not that way where I would – be assertive enough to go up and tell them ... I wouldn’t want them taking offence at it – I guess is my concern”. In mentioning assertiveness, Paula illustrates that personal attributes may explain some of the differences between those who are driven to act on their beliefs and those who are more restrained. While the latter may have more empathy for the feelings of others, some may simply be too inhibited to act, even though their beliefs might mean they want to. Comments from teachers like “If I’m sure it is incorrect, I want to change them”, “I would like to correct them”, and “a strong desire to correct them” suggest the will, but perhaps not the courage, to do so.

A small number of participants seem to be more accepting of what is happening with the apostrophe today because they see it as part of natural language change. One teacher observes that English “is a living organism which changes over time” while another wrote: “A part of me sees it as a natural shift in written language use. ... Seeing grammatical mistakes out there prompts me to think about these sorts of things, but doesn't alarm me”. We also saw, above, that Ross had come to “delight in following the change of language” evident in apostrophe use. Another teacher suggests that the apostrophe critics do not consider language change, claiming that “They are too uppity about our imaginary and constantly changing human construct called language”. Molly acknowledges it could be language change, but makes the important point that it can be difficult to identify when actual change is occurring: “It's sort of really hard to tell when it's happening what the difference between mistakes are and language evolving”. Language change is revisited below in 8.6.2, and in 9.3.1.

For some participants who do not react to the sight of a misplaced apostrophe, this is because they feel they are so used to seeing them that they have become resigned to their existence and see no point in doing anything. This is evident in these teachers’ comments: “I accept them now because they are so common” and “There doesn't seem much point because grammar isn't really taught these days” even though she prefers correct use “because I'm from a generation which placed importance on surface features”. Rona also conceded: “Well I just sort of say ‘well that's probably the way the world's going’”, while another teacher’s reaction is “Just shrug and move on”. And while Isabel conceded that she might inform a business of an errant apostrophe, she recognises that “You can't force people to care about things they don't care about so – you just kind of have to chill”. Sally has also almost resigned herself to current trends: “I've just about given up, apart from in the classroom”, where she battles on to uphold her beliefs.

Others simply have more important things to do with their time. As one teacher wrote: “Life's too short to get worked up about minor trifles” and Robyn also commented “Life's too short to be really upset by a lack or not of an apostrophe – life's too short, there's more to worry about”. Isaac refuses to let examples of nonstandard apostrophe upset him:

Well I think on one hand – they're definitely doing something wrong but on the other hand if you're taking time out of your day you need to – let it go. It's not going to - physically harm you – just divert your eyes and we'll all be ok.

He observes that nonstandard use does not harm the reader, as does Ivan: "It's not going to affect me personally". Ivan sees it as the business's problem and not his, so while nonstandard apostrophe use in signage affects his perceptions of a business, he believes that "It's their own fault so I'd just let them have their own issues". These comments may reflect resignation, sympathetic tolerance, or simply a more relaxed personality – the antithesis of the teacher who commented "I am usually irritated that the grammar is incorrect. I tend to sweat over small stuff!".

8.3.3 The right to get it wrong

In the above comments, we can see some similar beliefs to those in we saw in 8.2. These are still the sticklers who see adhering to standard apostrophe use as an important value and who are likely to take care to do so themselves in most, if not all, contexts. However, this group of participants acknowledge that not all share their beliefs about apostrophe use, and that this is their right. They do not believe they have the right to impose their beliefs on others, nor to deliberately embarrass others.

It is interesting, then, that some sticklers admit to judging others based on their use of apostrophes, yet they vehemently oppose those who criticise nonstandard users. Molly, for example, admitted to judging but was at pains to reiterate several times during the interview that she considers pointing nonstandard apostrophe use out to the writer to be extremely rude. This seems to reflect a complexity of belief in which she values the correct usage of English, but also believes in the writer's right to his or her own beliefs and practices, free of criticism from others. Yet she also believes people's use of English is a reflection of their identity, and she judges them accordingly. Similarly, Ivan judges businesses that display nonstandard use in signage, yet does not see it as his place to enlighten them. Penny changed the sign at the Wellington observatory but did not confront the staff, and has made it clear what she thinks of the "grammar Nazis". These cases

illustrate a strong belief in correct usage of the apostrophe, but this is tempered by other beliefs that inhibit, rather than provoke, behaviour that is likely to embarrass or hurt.

What is evident in this chapter so far is that beliefs and attitudes around apostrophe use can be complex. Moreover, there is no clear division between the different attitudes, but neither is it strictly a continuum between the sticklers who criticise others and those who do not care. Attitudes are shaped by personalities, personal attributes and experience, they determine how different people feel and behave around apostrophe, and they seem to be largely idiosyncratic. In the next section, we will see that it is also difficult to draw a line between those who hold beliefs about apostrophe use and those who do not appear to hold any at all.

8.4 “I don’t give a monkey’s”

Those who do not care about apostrophe use are likely to be underrepresented in this study, nonetheless there are some participants who, like Mike Hosking on TV One’s *Seven Sharp* (Cronshaw, April 4, 2017), “don’t give a monkey’s”. There are a few participants who seem to express limited interest, as seen in comments like “Either way does not bother me”, “I don’t really have an opinion – each to their own” from questionnaire respondents and “Don’t really care” from a teacher suggest. A number of participants, as discussed above, believe that meaning is important as these respondents illustrate “I don’t really care. It doesn’t always affect the message so it isn’t a big deal”, “The ability to communicate supersedes the need to use correct English” and from a teacher: “I can still understand the meaning, so what’s the bother?” And Penny reported a general lack of interest in apostrophes from teachers in her school. It is difficult to pinpoint what the beliefs behind comments like these may be, although as is explained in 9.2.2, the author of the title quotation makes his beliefs quite clear.

8.4.1 Noticing nonstandard apostrophes

An indicator of low importance placed on apostrophe use may be whether or not people notice nonstandard apostrophes in the linguistic landscape. We have seen the strong reactions of the many participants who do notice, however only a small number have said they do not notice. When asked if he noticed signs like those in the images he was shown, Ike said: "Not really ... if I had a look at it today and I read it out those two things I would've just read it but not noticing the missing pieces" and Ian also said: "Um no I don't really notice. Yeah. If I read something and I'm like something's wrong - I'd probably have to think about that more". On looking at the image of *Freds combo*'s Maddie noted that her attention would be elsewhere:

See to me it's like I'd just read Freds as Freds and not really think about it. ... But if I walked in there I probably wouldn't really pay attention to the sign as much as – 'cos I'd be paying attention to what he's offering me.

Some said it might depend on the type of nonstandard use, Isla, for example, said: "[I would notice] A lot more with things like this [*Kid's in Kid's love mince*] this, umm, this just kind of goes over my head [indicating business names and *wings'* in *Ale House Wings'*]". And Megan observed "Not unless it's something really obvious. My husband would – he always points out stuff like that – but to me when I'm just reading through something like that I don't really notice". Maddie said:

I wouldn't notice them if I was like walking through town. I'd probably notice the *facility's* one I'd think that's not right. But the rest of them I'd just sort of look them over and say ooh yea. OK. And not take any notice of it.

It is interesting that all these participants are in the 16-25 age group, apart from Megan who is in the 26-40 group. Yet these are young people with an interest in language and therefore this is unlikely to reflect a more widespread belief that apostrophes are not important. Rita was the only older person to mention not noticing, but her comment: "...now it's so common – you hardly notice it" explains this is due to the frequency with which nonstandard use occurs, and this may also be the case with the younger participants.

We saw in 7.6.3 that even some teachers do not seem to regard apostrophes as important. Table 7.9 showed that while 80% of teachers believe apostrophes to be important, 8% see them as not important. Sean did not notice the nonstandard forms in the images he was shown, claiming that he was “more in tune with not noticing” because of the demographic of his students. Although these numbers are small, they are significant given the bias of the surveys and it is likely that a larger proportion than 8% of teachers see apostrophes as unimportant.

In question 2c, teachers were asked if they tended to notice nonstandard apostrophe use in public signage. As can be seen in table 8.5, below, 87% of teachers who responded to the question said they did.

Table 8.5. Noticing nonstandard use in linguistic landscape – by age <i>Question 2c, Online teacher survey</i>					
	Up to 25	26-40	41-55	56+	Total
Notice	33%	78%	91%	96%	87%
Do not notice	66%	22%	9%	0%	14%

When broken down into age groups, these results support the findings from the qualitative components above, in that 66% of the teachers in the youngest age group do not notice nonstandard use. Although there are only six teachers in this category, when compared with the other age groups this is quite significant, since only 22% and 9% of the next two age groups, respectively, said they did not notice. On the other hand, all of the older age group who responded to this question said they do notice such signage. This may reflect the influence of increasing exposure to nonstandard use in the linguistic environment on young people’s ability to recognise nonstandard use.

8.4.2 “I really don’t care”

Only a small number of participants in the questionnaires, like the teacher who wrote the title quotation, “really don’t care” about whether or how apostrophes should be used. As noted above, the bias of this project means it was difficult to recruit people who do not care

about apostrophe use. Sean was the only interviewee who came close to expressing this attitude (see 7.4.4 and 7.6) and without talking to people in this category it is difficult to speculate what their beliefs and attitudes may be. While this study may give the impression that most people believe in the importance of apostrophes, due to the sample bias it is likely that a significant proportion of New Zealand's population do not.

There seems to be ample evidence in the linguistic landscape that many do not care. It may be that writers of the signs we have seen in the images in this study hold the belief that details like apostrophes are not important in the delivery of their message, and they may not care what people think either. On the other hand, they may not hold any beliefs at all and it may not even occur to them that they are being judged – apostrophes simply fly beneath their radars.

8.5 Beliefs about consistency

In 6.5 we saw several examples of signage that displayed inconsistent use of the apostrophe. The Warehouse sign, for instance, has apostrophes in *polo's* and *singlet's*, but not in *shirts*. While the writers of these signs do not seem to notice these inconsistencies, many readers of the signs do. Inconsistency seems to be worse for some than the nonstandard use itself, as shown by these comments from Maddie: "It needs to be consistent", Myra: "Well he's not being consistent – no, he's not being consistent", Isaac: "If you're going to do it half one and then – half the other!" and Robyn: "It's the inconsistency, here we have it without the apostrophe and then we've got it with". Steph seemed dismayed that "They haven't even been consistent in their own mistake" and Rosie also commented that "They're not following their own rules". When looking at the hospital signs with the three forms of *Women's* in *Women's Health*, Irena observed: "I mean I wouldn't know which is right but I would've at least done one like the other one". It seems the inconsistency draws attention to the errors in a way that a nonstandard form used consistently would not.

Ivan in particular, found the inconsistency irritating and spoke at length on this topic:

Just no **consistency** here, like if *shirts* doesn't need an apostrophe why does *singlets* and why does *polos*? I just think the most important thing is probably just **consistency** – even individually like it doesn't have to be like everyone following the same rules with it that you yourself follow just like – I don't know . . . Like I said the biggest thing for me is just **consistency** – when there's no **consistency** – like this one – if there's an apostrophe in each place you'd be like – "Oh that could be right, oh yeah it makes sense" but when you see like there that there's two plurals right next to each other, one has an apostrophe one doesn't then I think – this just doesn't have **consistency**. It makes the place that's advertising it, makes the writer like look cheap. It just makes it like everything more – low budget.

He finds nonstandard use acceptable, so long as it is consistent, and he sees inconsistency as reflecting poorly on a business. He continued to express his thoughts on consistency for several minutes after this.

Even though they do not say it, we can feel the annoyance and frustration that underpins some of these comments. This seems to reflect the belief that consistency in the use of language forms is very important. For some, this comes hand-in-hand with the belief in using apostrophes according to the prescriptive rules. Rosie's comment above is interesting because it implies that she sees users of nonstandard forms as following their own idiosyncratic set of rules. It seems that the idea of rules is so entrenched in Rosie's belief system that she cannot imagine that anyone would use apostrophes arbitrarily.

Rosie would notice nonstandard apostrophe use regardless of whether it is consistent or not, with inconsistency just adding another layer of incorrectness. On the other hand, Irena and Ivan both said they may not identify nonstandard forms if they are consistent. It is inconsistency that stands out for them and as Ivan intimated, consistency is more important than the accurate application of rules. This seems to be a belief shared by many of the young interviewees, and it is the beliefs of these younger generations that will take the apostrophe into the future.

8.6 Beliefs about the Future of the Apostrophe

What do all these complex beliefs mean for the future of the apostrophe? Beliefs about this are as varied as the beliefs we have seen about apostrophe use. Some participants believe the apostrophe will be lost, but to the detriment of our written language, while others believe its loss would be of little consequence. Some believe its use will remain inconsistent, with Ike, for example, commenting:

Oh it'll just stay the same. As I say, I don't know anything about it um and I don't think it'll ever – anyone'll ever learn ... they'll just carry on – yeah and how it carries on today, how it carries on now I reckon.

And Irena shares this belief: "Mm like everyone will just throw it in somewhere, huh, like they already do". Some see apostrophe use as becoming increasingly "chaotic" while others believe that in the future the functions of the apostrophe will be different, and that perhaps the rules will change to reflect this. No one believes we can turn back the tide of nonstandard use, although some would like to see intensive educational campaigns for adults, as well as children, in order to do just that. One thing that most participants do agree on, though, is that digitalisation will shape the future of the apostrophe in one way or another.

8.6.1 Will the apostrophe disappear?

Some participants believe that the apostrophe may be lost, while others believe it should be abolished. I begin this section by examining this through some of the results from the quantitative strand. In question 5.1 of the main questionnaire, respondents were asked to mark on a scale whether they believed the apostrophe should be saved, or abolished. As can be seen in table 8.6, below, 70% of the participants believe that the apostrophe should be protected, almost half of them strongly so, while 10% believe the apostrophe should be abolished.

Table 8.6. Should the apostrophe be saved? - by age
Questions 5.1 and 5.2, Main questionnaire

Question 5.1	Age:	16-25	26-40	41-55	56+	Total
Strong yes	40%	32%	23%	44%	34%	
Yes'	37%	46%	27%	31%	36%	
<i>Total yes</i>	<i>77%</i>	<i>78%</i>	<i>50%</i>	<i>75%</i>	<i>70%</i>	
Neutral	13%	7%	19%	6%	12%	
No	10%	4%	23%	0%	10%	
No response	0%	11%	8%	19%	8%	
Question 5.2						
1. The apostrophe will be lost	17%	14%	19%	13%	16%	

The 41-55 age group stands out from the other three age groups, with only 50% believing in retaining the apostrophe and 20% believing that the apostrophe should go. This group is also the one to believe most strongly that the apostrophe will be lost in the future. The oldest group, with the highest rating under the *strong yes* category, is the only group to have no responses at all in the *no* categories and has the lowest rate of belief that the apostrophe will be lost.

8.6.1.1 “Do you really need them?”

Notwithstanding the fact that most of the oldest group in the main questionnaire do not believe the apostrophe will be lost, the interviewees in the retired cohort seem to view the loss of the apostrophe as inevitable. Ruth observes “I think it will go. Yes. And I think a lot of our – written English will go” while Rona thinks “It probably would be ignored – in the future it probably will go into misuse – yeah I think – eventually”. Rita also sees the loss of the apostrophe as a possibility, but also questions its usefulness in view of the current inconsistency of use:

Well I can see them just disappearing altogether. Yes. Because at the moment they're - they're free floating, they seem to go anywhere, anywhere, so do you really need them? You've got to ask yourself really do you need them?

Likewise, Robyn does not seem unhappy about the prospect of their loss: “Disappear, mmm I think it'll disappear. Providing the meaning is not lost – I think that the whole thing now, it's communication. And it's hardly a crime on the scale of things”.

A small number of teachers also see little harm in the loss of the apostrophe as these comments show: “I would like to think that these traditional conventions will last, but I don't think they will and we will probably still be able to work out what each other is trying to say” and “Life without the apostrophe would be ‘cleaner’ and no less understandable”. Another teacher puts the apostrophe into perspective: “These days there is so much else to learn that is more important, like how to solve world problems and look after each other with humanity, I don't think the world will fall apart without the apostrophe”.

8.6.1.2 A window into a future without apostrophes

To investigate some of the problems that may arise were the apostrophe to be lost, participants were set tasks through which they were given a glimpse into English without apostrophes. Main questionnaire interviewees were asked to read and comment on sentences with missing apostrophes (appendix J), while cohort and teacher interviewees were given a card with a different text on each side, side A having apostrophes included while on side B they were all missing. They were asked to read side A first, and then side B (appendix T).

Most participants found that the text without apostrophes posed some difficulty for readability. Mike, for example, said: “That's readable, but it takes a bit of work” and a little later: “you see sometimes I'll read it a couple of times before I pick it up”. Megan also found it took longer to interpret without apostrophes: “Yep I had to read a couple of times to get the context of it – so you can figure it out – but it would be so much easier with the apostrophes in there”. Max described the effort required as “Painful – but I can – I can understand them all – it's just – it's a bit you know – the understanding comes painfully”.

Some were aware of having to stop and go back in order to understand. Ian, for example, said:

Like I kept having to stop – um 'cos you have to keep, like, using the context to try and figure out – and like you have parts that are not actually really sure what's going on. ... You have to go back and correct yourself - yeah.

Isaac also found: “I had to stop a few times, I mean like what were they saying – so yeah I mean – definitely a lot more of a challenging read”. As Ivan read the text, he commented:

"Oh God. You have to think a lot more about it ... It does take a lot more effort to read" But he also noted that the side with apostrophes inserted "obviously takes more effort to write, you know, in the right place", an interesting comment since it shows he sees using apostrophes as requiring extra effort compared with the automaticity reported by older people, but an effort that "makes it so much easier for the reader to follow".

Robyn recognises that having to stop and reread affects the fluency of reading: "The message is inhibited because you pull back. It doesn't make sense and you've got to pull back and read again. As I said, this inhibits – fluency" and again later, "Yep I can understand what's happening there – [it] takes a bit longer and it impedes the fluency". Interestingly, Irena found side B a little more difficult to read, but was more concerned with appearance than fluency: "I think it just, oh like – that looks funny. Yeah like – *they'll* looks funny. ... Oh that looks a bit ugly – but I can still read [it]".

For most participants, some words with missing apostrophes hindered comprehension more than others. As Ike observes: "There are some words that do need the apostrophe there which you'd normally use one. ... Um but some – it's not necessary I don't think". One of two main areas of difficulty is where a missing apostrophe creates a word that resembles another. Mary, for example, explains: "If you're taking something out you're not sure what the word's meant to be. 'Cos if you took the apostrophe out of she'll, then it's shell". This was also noted by Megan: "If the apostrophe's missing it changes the meaning and doesn't make sense ... I mean I can read it and then get the context and read it again to know exactly what the word is meant to be" and Rona: "Actually it makes it hard reading doesn't it. It did make it harder to read actually – because there's – *shed go*, see that makes a different word altogether". Myra sums this up well:

Yea – so – some are confusing 'cos it's a completely different word – this becomes a completely different word. I have to stop and think about it. I can read them, but my flow in reading... I think with correct grammar is better ... Yes – it's the fluency of reading. And by the time I've got to here I just don't want to see any more.

Molly was quite specific about the problems these words cause readability:

No that's really got some readability problems ... Umm, the real problems are *she'd* and *he'll* because they just leap out at me as *shed* and *hell* rather than *she'd* and *he'll* – you have to read the sentences to know that that's what they are ... I think it's because – I read them first as the noun and I have to convert them into the – ah version that it should be

As she explained, she found herself having to stop and reanalyse the sentence because she first read the words as nouns, rather than as contractions. Max also found the fact these words looked like nouns problematic: "*Shed* is quite a strong noun and in the context of the sentence I find that my eyes are drawn to the nouns in a sentence – same with *hell*, it's quite a strong noun". This perhaps suggests that competent readers will have more difficulty because, as Hersch and Andrews (2012, see 4.3) suggest, they tend to be bottom-up readers, focusing on individual words first rather than relying on context for meaning.

Some found possessives and contractions formed with the name *Jess* to be particularly problematic, as Isaac observes: "...especially ones with the names like *Jessss*, *Jesses* – um where was the other one – *Jessll*, yeah, so those sort of ones yeah they kinda – you can't not have them [apostrophes]". According to Steve: "Jessssss, yes some of those could be a bit tricky" and Isabel: "Well I mean you just - it's normal things like that just looks completely wrong – Jess-s-s-s everything just looks wrong". A number of participants noted that reading required more effort, Ivan for example said: "Names ending in <s> like in *Jess new car*, you just have to think about it a bit more what they mean" and from Pip: "In a couple of places in particular – um this one here - *Jesses sister* I sort of had to reread that and think 'What is that about?' and again here *Jesss cars a red convertible...*". Isaac thought that without apostrophes people may just use full forms for contractions: "*Jessll bring her ipod* maybe they'll just say that *Jess will bring her ipod*".

Other words, however, were not so problematic. Molly notes: "Would've – again, it's missing its apostrophe but doesn't – I guess it doesn't affect readability – except to picky people". Mimi reflects similar sentiments:

Umm - I really think apostrophes should be used in the ones that would otherwise make a different word. So *dont* is OK – *shed* is no good *hell* is no good

and *were* and *we're* is – you know – yeah is annoying ... it's not that much of a hindrance but it just feels annoying you know.

Pip also noted that some words pose little difficulty: "Probably not so much the missing ones from the contractions *itd*, *wouldve*. I kind of, my brain read that easily enough", although unlike most others she also thought "*Shell* was alright".

Interestingly, it was two participants from the retired cohort who seemed to find little difficulty with side B. Rita, for example, said it was "Not that much more difficult. Not really", finding that "It's the words that are contracted like *we are* like *were*. *Isnt* is easy enough. ... That [were for we're] was the only one that really stumped me a little bit". Ross read side A and said "That looks alright to me" and of side B "That looks alright to me too". When asked if he had any problems with side B he said "Nah – quite good. So let's abolish the apostrophe then" He then went on to discuss some of the confusion that may be caused in some instances without apostrophes, but he reiterated emphatically that: "I am comfortable reading that" and noted that it is the sort of thing commonly seen in texts today.

Of course, in everyday written English words needing apostrophes occur much less frequently than in this text, which was designed to include the maximum number, therefore these hiccups to fluency would occur only occasionally. The task demonstrated, however, that there would be some areas of ambiguity and the text also highlighted some of the more problematic situations that would occur in an apostrophe-free English – just how would we spell "Jess's coat", for example: <Jess>, <Jesss> or will we revert to the old possessive form and spell it <Jesses>?

8.6.1.2 "*It does actually serve a point*"

While Maddie, in the youngest age group, believes the apostrophe will be lost: "...that's the reality that it is on its way out, when it shouldn't be", she clearly thinks it should remain. Max believes the apostrophe will be retained because "English teachers still use the apostrophe for ever and ever and ever so I don't think it's going to happen", but as we have seen, it is not always the case that English teachers know how to use apostrophes

themselves. Isabel, on the other hand, puts the onus on younger people and their parents, rather than teachers:

I think people will keep using it – because most people aren't that illiterate ... but there's enough of my generation that know how to write and spell words and punctuate properly, and they'll teach their kids so I don't think it's massively endangered and part of it's just that words – and language always has to evolve in the society that's using it.

Many see the apostrophe as serving a role that is still important. Ian, for example observed: "Umm – [I] can't see it just disappearing – because it does actually serve a point ... so I think it'll just stay there". A number of questionnaire respondents see the point of the apostrophe as adding clarity, as can be seen in the following comments: "Because they are important in clarifying meaning, I don't see their usage fading out anytime soon", "I think clarity in communication is important to be precise and avoid misunderstandings and mistakes. Correct apostrophe helps communication be clearer and easy to understand" and "Apostrophes can alter the meaning of text so it must be taught, children can grasp it". The last respondent sees education in apostrophe use as important for maintaining clarity, as does this teacher: "I think the humble apostrophe serves a distinguishing purpose and the rules for its use should still be taught as part of the punctuation curriculum in primary and secondary schools". Another respondent believes that not only children need such instruction, but that "Adults need re-education to include the reasons for, and correct use of, the apostrophe"

While Ross also believes that clarity is very important, he concedes that language changes:

Clarity is important and the way to be clear is to have a formal structure and syntax and grammar that is unchanged, does not change. But unfortunately, life is not like that – in the grand jungle of the universe – and language is a part of that, and it's always going to be changing.

8.6.2 “Language changes”

As discussed in 8.3.2, a number of participants in this study acknowledge the fact that language is constantly changing, and they see current trends in apostrophe use as part of this. According to one teacher, apostrophe use “is part of a language that is continually changing so I suppose we will have to wait and see what happens”. Another teacher’s response to apostrophe critics was: “Get a life, language changes, although the possession rule is useful because it helps with meaning, so I am a little understanding”. She acknowledges that the apostrophe adds clarity, but accepts that language changes. Others accept this with more reluctance: “Many adults don’t know, or care, about “correct” usage, so poor role models. We will need to accept change” while another teacher believes that language change may mean the eventual loss of the apostrophe: “I do understand that language is changing and as long as the message gets across then I will have to accept that the apostrophe may be no longer relevant”.

However, a number of surveyed teachers believe that in some contexts standard apostrophe use will continue to be important, as these comments show: “I really think that the apostrophe will continue to be used by educated people, for instance, serious authors, university professors” and “Any important, formal document needs words to be spelt correctly. The writer also needs to demonstrate a sound understanding of punctuation - otherwise they risk appearing stupid or uneducated”. Isaac believes context to be central to how the apostrophe will change in the future, explaining that he sees apostrophe use as unlikely to change in more formal contexts. However, in informal contexts: “Like I can’t say how far into the future but I think it’s definitely going to see less of a usage in social circles to the point where it’s not used much”.

Participants had differing ideas on what may happen to individual functions of the apostrophe. Rona intimates that apostrophes may be lost in some contractions: “I probably – where the words like umm – wouldn’t and couldn’t or something like that – they might disappear. And the ownership one um – I’d like to think that that would still stay around”. On the other hand, a teacher observed: “I think the apostrophe indicating possession will cease to be used before the apostrophe used in contractions” and we have seen evidence of

this happening in chapter 6. Another teacher sees contractions as undergoing more change than the simple loss of the apostrophe: “Some common contractions – won’t don’t – are likely to become absorbed as new words, rather than remain as contractions”.

Maddie picks up on this line of thinking: “I mean that’s one of those words that you just automatically learn – don’t – the word on its own, apostrophe or not, that’s how you’re going to read it”. She believes the apostrophe could be dropped from *dont*, *cant* and *wont* because there is no confusion as is the case with words like *we’re* and *she’ll*. Interestingly though, she had to think for some time before she could say what *won’t* was short for, and she commented that she did not think about it as two words. This demonstrates that the two-word origin of these words may well be forgotten in the future. When asked, Maddie was also quite unsure of what the <-d> stood for in contractions like *id* (*I’d*) and *hed* (*he’d*), in sentence 6 in the ‘readability’ task: *If id known hed forget his computer*. She guessed *could* and *did*, then after some thought *would*, but seemed surprised to learn it can also stand for *had*. If Maddie is typical of young people, then this seems to suggest that with or without the apostrophe, intended nuances of meaning are often lost. A teacher takes this a step further by suggesting that the spelling in words where the apostrophe has been lost should undergo change:

If we want people to understand what we are writing, then maybe spelling has to change if it is too hard to learn apostrophe conventions. For example, if we want to say *we’ll* we may write <weel>. Could make people happier. Makes more sense than *well*.

Perhaps it represents the phonology better than *well* and avoids the ambiguity created by the homonym, but it completely obliterates the origins of the word as a contraction of *we will*. Language change is discussed further in 9.3.1.

8.6.2.2 Views on the rules of apostrophe use

“Vive the apostrophe and I now feel like I should go and re-learn the rules I am unsure of.” As this comment from a teacher suggests, apostrophe use is governed by rules, once set

down as prescriptive rules in grammar books but now found in style guides that, as the name suggests, guide, rather than govern, use.

Ivan spoke at length about rules. He began by commenting that the apostrophe will remain, but that people would simply forget the rules:

I feel like people are just going to get more and more slack with it – I feel like – it's not being phased out – because people are still using apostrophes everyday but – the rules will start to get phased out, I feel, or just forgotten about.

On reading the text without apostrophes he then suggested that perhaps the rules could be simplified: “It is just not easy to read, so I feel like the apostrophe could get simpler in rules – or more convenient, but – definitely not eliminated”.

Later in the interview Ivan mentions the creation of new rules “So – I feel like there will be one point where – like I said no one will just remember the rules and – almost new rules will have to be created”. He noted that these rules would be official, and below he describes descriptive rules, based on how the apostrophe is used today, and he also questions who has the right to set rules:

But I feel like – there will be changes – official changes altogether to match what people are currently doing, instead of – trying to force everyone back into the old-fashioned way. 'Cos what's the point in that? What's the point of sticking people to rules that... It makes more sense to people this way, like it might not be correct but... Who – who gets to – decide what's correct and what's not? Just because it's been like this for years it doesn't need to stay that way – 'cos I mean spelling changes like – words have evolved – why can't grammar and punctuation evolve as well?”

According to this teacher, though, it seems the simple existence of a rule means it should be used and taught without question: “Why have a rule if it's not going to be used. If there is a rule, teach it and use it”.

Ross has gone as far as developing his own set of apostrophe rules that he feels would add further distinction to our language. He suggests a double apostrophe “as a new and emphatic and definite and distinct possessive” as in *Three house's door's were red*. He

hopes that “a PhD student is no doubt going to put it in her report – maybe it’s going to spread across the world and I want a 5% royalty on it”. However, while there may be some merit in the scheme, his written plan described the double mark as emphasising plural nouns, but this does not correspond with his examples. This would add to the confusion of those who struggle with one apostrophe.

8.6.3 “Let technology decide”

This discussion so far has considered how the apostrophe might change in the future without taking into account the impact that technology will have on written language. Most participants in the survey see technology as having a pivotal role in the apostrophe’s future – one respondent, rather than marking a statement in question 5.2 simply wrote: “Let technology decide”.

We saw some of the ways in which digitalisation may affect the development of people’s understanding of apostrophe use in 7.7.3, particularly that of the youngest in our communities who have grown up surrounded by digital devices. While many regret the loss of handwriting skills today, Mimi makes the important point that in fact young people are writing a lot more today, including young people who in previous generations would not have written much at all, echoing Baron’s belief (2010; see 4.4.3). Mimi continued: “...writing and printing is so easy that everyone is doing it – even people who mightn’t have possibly in the past ... including people who are, umm, I guess language isn’t an aptitude – you know”. This teacher makes some suggestions as to the impact this may have on the quality of writing:

I think these mediums have brought to the fore a lack of literacy that was always there. In generations past where communicating via written language was much less common, I imagine a fair portion of the population never remembered or applied the grammar lessons they were taught. Rather, they just didn't have to write much at work or at home. These days, nearly everyone sends emails and texts, i.e. nearly everyone writes! So, whether they're poor or great with grammar, they're sending messages...

Where once interpersonal communication consisted of talking face-to-face, telephone calls on a land line and letter writing, written language could easily be avoided if not required in the workplace. But today our cell phones and computers provide instant contact with anyone at any time, and social networks can no longer be maintained without written communication.

8.6.3.1 Technology will be detrimental to apostrophe use

Many participants see the use of digital devices as having a detrimental effect on apostrophe use, with some even seeing the loss of the apostrophe as a direct result. One teacher commented “The apostrophe will die as sentences in text messages etc., can be totally understood without it. It's just something else to add when writing notes etc.” and Mary also sees digitalisation as a threat to the future of the apostrophe: “I think the more as digital expands, the apostrophe is going to be non-existent. But then it's when you write something it's going to look not right. I don't think”. The difficulty some have finding the apostrophe on digital devices (see 7.7.3.2) may also discourage use, with one teacher commenting: “Use of iPad keyboards where you have to use more than one key to insert an apostrophe discourage their use. Probably same with phones. Unless email inserts them automatically I think very quickly their use will disappear”.

We saw in 7.7.3.3 that many participants believed that spellcheck and autocorrect have a negative effect on understanding apostrophe use because “it disengages the writer” and takes “...the responsibility away from the writer or texter”. This means young people are less likely to internalise the changes made and come to rely on spellcheck. One teacher also pointed out that “Sometimes people may know an incorrect spelling and add it to their spellcheck dictionary”, ensuring the nonstandard form will not be picked up.

8.6.3.2 Technology will improve apostrophe use

On the other hand, some participants see the use of digital devices as having a positive effect on apostrophe use into the future, and there seems to be two distinct schools of thought as to how this may happen. As we saw in 7.7.3.3, some teachers believe that features such as spellcheck and autocorrect can help children learn about standard apostrophe use because they "...will provide students with a model of what is correct". Molly also thinks that: "possibly it might also be another form of reinforcement – like when the predictive text comes up with *children's* with the apostrophe before the <s> then you think – oh yes – that's how it's supposed to look".

Others, however, believe technology will lead to better apostrophe use not because it helps writers understand the conventions of its use, but because it circumvents the need to understand the rules at all. Irena, for example, observes: "Now you've got smart phones now, and they've got predictive text on them and you're always going to have - it's always going to come up with ah the apostrophe there". Isaac is aware of the inconsistent use of apostrophes today "but at the same time – um – it's kind of with smart phones and stuff there's been a lot more – things like – autocorrect and that sort of stuff that's become very – unanimous throughout all sorts of phones" and he sees the possibility that this will mean apostrophe use will "come back round" as autocorrect takes over. Isla echoed these sentiments:

Yeah, I could see it [the apostrophe] going two different ways. I could see it kind of continuing on the way it is, and kind-of getting a bit worse with people just coming and – not really understanding and getting quite confused. But at the same time, I guess it's becoming more digital and stuff in society, there'll probably be more resources like spellcheck and things like that and it will kind-of make it easier for things like this not to happen, yeah.

This technology will only improve with time, as Ian commented: "Like, software will get better at recognising what it's supposed to be, like, what are the right ones supposed to be in a sentence and everyone just relies on that". And similarly, a teacher pointed out that "More complex algorithms will improve spelling and grammar check programmes, so

perhaps it is a non-issue longer term". This suggests there will come a time when people will not need to know the rules, because as Molly comments: "The machine's doing that for them".

8.7 Summary

The findings in this chapter have demonstrated that factors such as education and personal traits come together to produce a wide array of attitudes around apostrophe use. The emotions expressed and the behaviours described in this chapter reflect the strongly held beliefs of many participants that the correct use of apostrophes is of utmost importance. They may also have the expectation that others should share this belief, so the sight of a nonstandard apostrophe triggers strong emotions leading them to judge, to inform businesses or to even change signage. Others, with perhaps milder dispositions, may judge nonstandard users but are more empathetic towards the writers, while still others, including broadcaster Mike Hosking, "Don't give a monkey's".

We have also seen that young people tend to have a different approach to apostrophe use, a product of their different educational experiences and exposure to nonstandard use. This is illustrated well when we consider inconsistency. The older participants tend to believe that it is important to use apostrophes consistently and according to the prescriptive rules. On the other hand, young people tend to see these two elements as quite separate, and while they believe consistency is important, this consistency does not necessarily have to abide by the prescriptive rules.

Young people will be at the forefront of change into the future. They will continue to use appearance as their guide to apostrophe use, and they will become the educators of the future. They will also become the developers of the software that will autocorrect apostrophes all around the English-speaking world and eliminate the need for people to know. They will become the language authorities and whatever conventions they programme into word processing systems will become standard practice.

PART III BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

CHAPTER 9:

DISCUSSION: TWO THOUSAND YEARS OF APOSTROPHE USE

This chapter brings the two parts of the study together in order to answer each of the research questions in turn, discussing the findings in light of the literature discussed in part I and chapter 4. Beginning with research question 1, the chapter summarises the key findings of part I in which the history of the apostrophe, from its Greek origins to its prescriptive use in English, was examined. Section 9.2 responds to research question 2 by drawing on the different threads of discussion from the previous three chapters for further discussion. Finally, section 9.3 answers research question 3 by considering the implications of the present state of the apostrophe for the future.

9.1 Research Question 1: The history of the apostrophe

How did the apostrophe develop from its emergence in Greek to the prescriptive rules of apostrophe use in English?

9.1.1 The predecessors of the English apostrophe

Apostrophes appear frequently throughout the 2,000-year-old Bacchylides Papyrus, which not only shows that the apostrophe was in use at that time but it also suggests they had already been in use for some time. The existence of the Bacchylides Papyrus is indeed fortunate for this study, given that manuscripts from this period are so rare. Other extant writing from this period consists of stone inscriptions which, because of their formal styles, did not include apostrophes. My examination of the few early manuscripts available shows apostrophes in majuscule scripts to have been rare and it was not until the minuscule script was developed around the beginning of the ninth century that they became widely used.

The apostrophe was used exclusively mark elision. Nevertheless, its use was inconsistent throughout the middle ages, both between manuscripts and within individual manuscripts. Elision was marked in the spelling, sometimes with apostrophes and sometimes without. It is not until the modern texts that use becomes consistent and elision is either unmarked, or marked in the spelling with an apostrophe.

The apostrophe appears to have been used in Late Latin, but this was for a form of phonological omission other than elision. By the Middle ages, though, the apostrophe did not represent pronunciation, but functioned to save parchment and time, and it was this mark of abbreviation that was first used in Italian and French, although no examples were found in the English manuscripts examined in this study.

Accustomed to using apostrophes in his printing of Greek works, Aldus Manutius introduced the Greek-type apostrophe to Italian in 1501 and thirty years later the first evidence of its use in French is found in Dubois's grammar, and not in Tory's *Champ Fleury* (1529/1970) as many believe. The Latin-type apostrophe disappeared from Italian and French once the value of marking elision was recognised, and the Greek-type apostrophe quickly became obligatory. The apostrophe continues to indicate elision in these languages today.

9.1.2 The history of the English apostrophe

The apostrophe also indicated elision when it first emerged in English, in phrases such as *th'ime* and *th'end*. This was the Greek-type apostrophe borrowed from French, and Latin did not feature in its chain of succession. The earliest evidence of apostrophe use in English is in Hart's grammar of 1551, where he appears to describe the use of an already existent feature of English which he calls a "tourner". In 1559, Cunningham used 469 apostrophes marking elision in his *Cosmographical Glasse*, but otherwise few examples of elision were found in the texts examined, with or without apostrophes. Since elision was much less frequent in English than in French, the apostrophe was much less useful, and it wasn't until it was applied to other functions that the use of the apostrophe began to increase, towards the end of the sixteenth century.

The apostrophe marked the omission of sounds in a wide variety of environments, including medially in words such as *ne'er*, and *heav'n*, in suffixes as in *mark'd* and *mak'st* and in contractions such as *it's* and *he'll*. The possessive apostrophe is evident from 1600 with the example “Hero’s gentle heart” from Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander* (p. B2). In 3.3.2.3 I argue that the possessive apostrophe did not develop from the *his-genitive* as some believe, but from the final <e> still sometimes evident on the end of nouns. This also demonstrated that, contrary to Sklar’s (1976) claim of a 200-year gap, there was some overlap between the loss of this final <e> and the possessive apostrophe (see 3.3.2.1), as exemplified in “Hero’s eares” (Marlowe, 1606, p. B2v). It was because grammarians continued to view the possessive apostrophe as marking omission that the plural possessive remained problematic, since in -s' the apostrophe does not mark a missing element. But over time the apostrophe came to be seen as a mark of possession rather than omission, and the plural possessive became accepted.

In the early 18th century apostrophes no longer marked elision, instead indicating a wide range of other types of omission. It marked possession and sometimes vowel-final plural nouns, and more rarely consonant-final plural nouns and third person verbs. There were also creative uses including *hypotheses's*, *ha'it* for ‘have it’, and *'ro't* for ‘wrought’. Apostrophes were used erratically and grammarians argued about where they should be used – or whether they should be used at all.

At the same time, the rising middle classes in England were creating a demand for guidelines to language use. Grammarians began to standardise rules and to codify them in the plethora of grammar books that came onto the market. As a result, by the end of the 18th century apostrophes were being used more consistently to mark possession, with contractions and omission restricted to reported speech and verse. It was in the interests of the middle classes to abide by these prescriptive rules as a marker of an identity through which they would gain symbolic capital.

9.1.3 The English apostrophe: A continuum of inconsistency

Since education was the privilege of the middle classes until the twentieth century, there may have been a period in which apostrophe use was relatively stable, and the findings in the ECCO texts from the second half of the 18th century seem to point this way (see table 3.3). However, there are also signs that variation in use continued throughout the 19th century.

Several texts examined, including some of the prefaces to the 1765 version of LLL and Cook's (1772-1775) and Banks's (1768-1771) journals, demonstrate a high degree of inconsistency and it is probable that some variation in use continued well into the following century, particularly in handwritten texts such as letters and diaries. And we saw in 4.2.2 that there were inconsistencies towards the end of the 19th century in the UK, Lloyds Bank, for example, removing their apostrophe in 1889 due to the confusion it caused. This was also the case in New Zealand. As early as 1867, Dunedin business *Harraways* chose not to use an apostrophe in its name because it was "less pleasing to the eye" (see 6.4.1.1). It seems, then, that if *Harraways Oats* did not cry out for an apostrophe in the nineteenth century, standard use may not have been as deeply entrenched as many think. Inadvertent nonstandard use is also evident in a merit award headed *Waitaki Girls High School* found on their website, dated 1891. This seems to suggest that although apostrophe use may have been at its most stable in the 19th century, it remained part of a continuum of inconsistency that stretches from the apostrophe's emergence in the 16th century until today.

9.2 Research question 2: Use and attitudes

What are the current practices and attitudes of New Zealand English speakers regarding the prescriptive rules of apostrophe use; what shapes these attitudes and how do they influence practice?

9.2.1 Contemporary apostrophe use

Inconsistency remains the most salient feature of apostrophe use in New Zealand today. However, apostrophes are still used according to the guidelines most of the time and nonstandard usage remains uncommon in modern books, newspapers and magazines. In 6.2 we saw that in the correction task in the main questionnaire, standard forms were used 79% of the time, but nonetheless only 8% of participants used all standard forms. This suggests that while most people use standard forms most of the time, they also use non-standard forms at least some of the time.

As found in 6.7.1, knowledge of the functions of apostrophe use was variable, with only 60% of questionnaire respondents identifying only standard functions. Moreover, identifying functions did not necessarily equate with use. There were no clear patterns in which those who selected a particular function used the apostrophe for that function regularly, or vice versa. The use of apostrophes in possessive nouns, for example, was similar regardless of whether the respondent marked it as a function or not, and apostrophes were used in plural nouns by 19% of those who did not mark this as a function.

This seems to suggest that the identification of functions for some is quite random and does not reflect their actual understanding. This would seem to be supported by the results from the online teacher survey (see 7.4.4) where teachers were asked about functions, but without the benefit of provided options. Only nine of the 83 teachers offered specific functions, which is significantly low given their high response rate to all other open questions. It points to a lack of knowledge of the rules, in spite of their willingness to criticise and label nonstandard users. And if teachers cannot explain the functions of the apostrophe they will not be able to teach them to their students.

9.2.1.1 Apostrophe use with the s-suffixes.

The quotation from Hughes and Wallace (2010) in 4.2 claimed that the intrusive apostrophe is more common than omitted apostrophes. However, the findings in chapter 6 showed omitted possessive apostrophes to be far more prevalent. The collection of examples from the linguistic landscape does not include missing possessive apostrophes because they are so numerous. Well over half the non-standard apostrophes in the student assignments and exams examined were missing possessive apostrophes. In the correction task, 48% of the possessive apostrophes were missing compared with only 7% of plural nouns with apostrophes added (see table 6.2) and the student papers showed a similar distribution. Half the businesses in Palmerston North with possessive forms in their names do not have apostrophes.

Yet it tends to be intrusive apostrophes that attract the attention of sticklers, with 36 of the first 40 examples on the *Apostrophe Abuse* website (n.d.) involving intrusive apostrophes. Beal (2010) believes that “We notice it [the greengrocer’s apostrophe] because it appears on notices” (p. 62). We have seen, though, that possessive nouns with missing apostrophes also appear on notices and far more frequently, but they are not always noticed. In a *Seven Sharp* item (Cronshaw, April 4, 2017), most people on the street failed to notice them. It seems that when it comes to nonstandard apostrophes, presence is more noticeable than absence. And since business names are prominent in the linguistic landscape, exposure to them informs people’s understanding of apostrophe use and is likely to lead to increasing omission. Consequently, it may not even occur to new business owners to use an apostrophe in their names.

Now, according to Hughes and Wallace (2010), schools such as *Epsom Girls Grammar School* are dropping their apostrophes. In the late 1960s at my school, *Waitaki Girls’ High School*, teachers used the name as a teaching point for the correct placement of the apostrophe in plural possessives. Given that schools are seen as authorities on what is acceptable language use, the removal of apostrophes from their names is likely to add to the general confusion about apostrophe use.

In spite of the high rate of missing possessive apostrophes, and as we saw in 4.6, a number of researchers believe that they seldom cause ambiguity. As early as 1786, Ash commented “And though it may be said that the apostrophe has some Propriety as a Note of distinction, yet no one, I think, who has any Knowledge of Grammar, can well mistake the plural Number for the genitive Case” (p. 30). This is because the syntax usually makes the intention clear. Yet there is a small number of instances where the loss of the apostrophe could impede reading fluency, creating a *garden path sentence* for example, in which an initial interpretation proves incorrect. The image below is of a rural roadside sign.



Figure 9.1. Rural road, Manawatu.

Without an apostrophe, the phrase was initially analysed as a nonsensical plural noun meaning ‘strata’ and a verb, until I realised that *layers* refers to ‘laying hens’, and is a possessive modifying a noun. An apostrophe would have eased this interpretation, although those for whom the sign is intended are likely to understand regardless.

When it comes to possessive pronouns, however, the standard form does not have an apostrophe. This has always caused some uncertainty, as illustrated by Lowth in his 1775 grammar, where he presents some with and some without apostrophes (see 3.3.2.2). When the prescriptive rules dictated that pronouns had no apostrophes, this made pronouns an exception to the possessive rule. Yet indefinite pronouns were an exception to the exception and even though Fries (1928) has an explanation for this (see 3.3.2.2), it is far from straight forward. Lynne Truss (2003) shows those who violate these rules no mercy: “If you still persist in writing, ‘Good food at it's best’, you deserve to be struck by lightning, hacked up on the spot and buried in an unmarked grave” (p. 44). When criticised for her use of the possessive form *one's* she replied: “This is such rubbish that I refuse to argue about it” (p. 61). Yet she makes no attempt to explain that this is an exception to her previously given rule, that pronouns do not have apostrophes. Without a sound knowledge of the rules and what is meant by a definite and indefinite pronoun, it is not surprising that some are

confused. With the exception of *its*, though, possessive pronouns are uncommon in most contexts and nonstandard examples did not feature significantly in this research.

While apostrophes seem to be disappearing from possessive nouns, they are reappearing in plural nouns, and this reversal is demonstrated in the images below.



Figure 9.2. Outside Wellington café



Figure 9.3. Gisborne takeaway menu.

We saw in 4.2.1 that some researchers claim a historical precedent for apostrophes being used in plural nouns, particularly those ending in vowels (Barfoot, 1991; Crystal, 2006b; Truss, 2003). This study found only a small number of these, with none being found in the four Shakespeare editions and only a small number in other texts, such as Cook's and Banks's journals (see figure 3.6). This demonstrates that the apostrophe was used in this capacity, but not frequently. Nevertheless, it is feasible that today's plural apostrophe is a continuation of the historical one and that increased usage was triggered by the increased borrowing of vowel-final words into English such as *pizza*, *avocado* and *nacho*. Over time, as people became more accustomed to seeing the *greengrocer's apostrophe*, they began to associate the apostrophe with the suffix rather than the final vowel, and its spread to all plural nouns, perhaps, became inevitable. Today, apostrophes in consonant-final words are more common, even in the vowel-final-rich linguistic landscape, and at a ratio of 191:25 are overwhelmingly more common in the marked student papers (see 6.4.3).

Many teachers noted a tendency for children to overgeneralise and use apostrophes before any *s*-suffix, with some recognising this as a stage in their learning (see 7.5). Bryant et al (1997) also observed this and a study of 15 years olds found that "the more they used it correctly with the possessive words, the more they used it with the plural words as well" (p. 207). This demonstrates a lack of knowledge of the underlying grammar, but also that students are experimenting with apostrophes today in a way that would not have been

permitted in the past. Some may eventually induce the rules, but as Pam observed “some kids absorb everything and others don’t”.

Given this experimentation with apostrophes and s-suffixes, we should not be surprised to see them also appearing in third person singular verbs and there are 41 examples in the marked student papers (see section 6.4.5). This also has historical precedent with a small number of examples found in Shakespeare, and Mather (1727), who promotes a function of the apostrophe that distinguishes verbs from nouns, as in “he *Hide’s* himself amongst the *Hides*” (p. 12; see 3.3.1.2). Apostrophes were also commonly used in second person singular verbs, such as *call’st*, *gain’st* and *speak’st* for ‘callest’, ‘gainest’ and ‘speakest’ or ‘calls’, ‘gains’ and ‘speaks’ in Shakespeare’s LLL. The difference, of course, is that in Shakespeare’s time the apostrophe indicated the loss of the vowel sound, while today it is more likely to be an overgeneralisation of the possessive apostrophe.

Another interesting phenomenon today is the confusion over y-final words. This also has historic precedent and observations in early texts showed that even in singular forms, *y* and *ie* were interchangeable in words like *majestie* and *country*. These were also alternated when suffixes were added and as we saw in 3.4.3, Miege offered these as optional spellings in his 1688 grammar. The current conventions of orthography dictate that -y is used for uninflected forms but change to -ie when a suffix is added. Yet modern examples in 6.4.1 showed the plural noun form -ies being used instead of the singular possessive -y’s as in the *universities*, *societies* and *companies* (all possessive), while in 6.4.3 and 6.4.5 -y’s has been used instead of -ies in both plural nouns and third person singular verbs, as in *sticky’s*, *fry’s*, *vary’s* and *reply’s*. The confusion over these forms today suggests that many are not familiar with this simple spelling rule which was always taught during the prescriptive era.

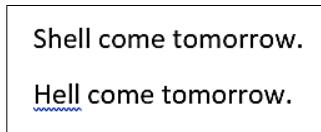
9.2.1.2 The apostrophe and contractions

While, as I noted in 4.2.3, there has been little written about contractions in recent years, they are currently undergoing some interesting changes. To begin with, after being banished from most written language by the prescriptivists in the second half of the eighteenth century (see table 3.3) contractions are making a comeback in the twenty-first century.

Contracted forms have become widely accepted in more formal styles of writing, including students' papers, although in the correction task, 5% of the questionnaire respondents still demonstrated an intolerance for this by changing the contracted forms to full forms. This trend towards informality, along with the digital age, is having a major impact on the use of apostrophes in contractions, as well as on how contractions are perceived morphologically.

The main questionnaire found a high degree of tolerance for contractions without apostrophes (see 6.4.2), with apostrophes missing between 27% and 37% of the time (with the exception of *they'll* at a low 5%). There was a similar rate in the handwritten exams in the student paper survey at 25%, while in marked contrast, the rate for the computer-generated assignments was a low 1.5%. This seems to implicate the influence of editing tools such as spellcheck and autocorrect. These tools tend to have a higher rate of accuracy with contractions, because the presence or absence of an apostrophe is less reliant on context than with possessive and plural nouns.

In fact, very few contractions with missing apostrophes are not picked up in some way. Autocorrect inserts apostrophes in all negative contractions except *cant* which, because it forms another word, has a grammar alert instead. Spellcheck alerts the writer to other contractions without apostrophes, unless the missing apostrophe creates a homograph, which is more problematic. While most homographs are picked up by grammar check, a small number are not. For example, a typed list of similar sentences using the contractions *she'll*, *she'd*, *he'll*, *we're*, *we'll*, *we'd* and *I'll* without apostrophes, found all but *shell* and *wed* were underlined in blue. This inconsistency is evident in the sentences below:



Shell come tomorrow.
Hell come tomorrow.

Figure 9.4. Editing tools and contractions.

In spite of the fact that *Shell* as a noun, or even a name, makes neither semantic nor syntactic sense, it is not queried. Nevertheless, apart from a few exceptions, autocorrect and spellcheck are highly reliable when it comes to contractions.

As a consequence, though, people are not forced to think about them, as several teachers commented in 7.7.3.3. And if people do not have to think about apostrophe use, then they are unlikely to think about what the contractions stand for either. In addition, where in the past it was necessary to know the full forms of contractions in order to write almost anything, for most people today there are few contexts in which full forms are used and this knowledge, therefore, is seldom called on. With or without apostrophes it seems likely that, like the children in the video (see 4.2.3), people will perceive *they'd* as a single unit and not even think about what the *-d* represents, with the nuances of meaning between *had* and *would* being lost.

This study found some indications of this happening. Maddie (see 8.6.2) said she does not put an apostrophe in *won't* because she thinks of it as one word, in spite of the fact that autocorrect will insert an apostrophe most of the time. It took some time for her to remember what it stood for. Palmerston North signs saying *Whats on* or *Lets Face It* and the commonly seen confusion of words like *you're* with *your* and *they're* with *their* or *there* demonstrate that many see these as single units of meaning. Shona pointed out that children write *should of* because they don't know what the spoken contraction stands for. Examples from student papers such as *do'nt*, *mean't* and *learn't* also show that the writers have little idea of what the apostrophe does or how these words are structured. The less need for thinking, the less these structures will be understood and the more likely that some contractions will be perceived as single morphemes.

Words like *dont* and *wont* without apostrophes caused minimal problems for most people in the readability test (see 8.6.2.1) because they were still easily recognised and interpreted. It was the contractions that become homographs with the apostrophe removed that caused fluency problems. While their position in the sentence would prevent ambiguity, words like *hell*, *shed* and *were* were shown to hinder the decoding process by initially leading the reader in the wrong direction. Other forms, such as *wouldnt* and *shouldve*, caused no difficulties with reading but were still disliked by some participants, perhaps because of the unwieldy final clusters or the single-syllabic pronunciation it suggests.

9.2.1.3 The apostrophe as a morpheme boundary marker

I will now consider these current trends in apostrophe use in light of Bunčić's theory (2004, see 3.3.4) regarding the apostrophe's main function having a morphological basis. We saw that this was not the case in Greek and that although the apostrophe began as a morpheme marker in English in phrases like *th' image* and *th' earth*, it was soon applied to omission within a single morpheme as in *tho'*, *ne'er* and *heav'n* where it did not mark the boundary. Nevertheless, most functions of the apostrophe in English today can be reanalysed as having a morphological base, as Bunčić claims. He comments, "Almost all omission apostrophes in fact mark a morpheme boundary" (p. 194) and he dismisses contractions such as *don't* and *wouldn't* as "mere 'transcripts' of colloquial speech" (p. 185) none of which "... ever appear in formal written text, i.e. a text obeying all linguistic norms" (p. 195). We saw in chapter 3 that this was not the case in the 17th and 18th centuries, when non-boundary examples such as *'tis*, *tho'* *ne'er* and *heav'n* were used frequently in prose as well as verse, and forms such as *goin'*, *fish 'n' chips* and *'74* still occasionally appear. And we have seen that contractions like *don't* and *wouldn't* are again appearing in more formal writing. Nevertheless, Bunčić's claim is that indicating morpheme boundaries is the main, not the only, function of the apostrophe and words contrary to this are very few in English.

Bunčić also claims that nonstandard apostrophe use reveals a "linguistic intuition" (p. 187) that the apostrophe marks morpheme boundaries. Perhaps this is what drives people to place apostrophes before all s-suffixes even though they may not understand this is what they are doing. Section 7.8 revealed a tendency among younger people to go by looks in their decision making regarding apostrophes. It is perhaps the suffix that makes a word look "a bit messy" (Max) and in need of an apostrophe.

Bunčić's theory could explain forms like *mean't* and *learn't*, where an apostrophe has been inserted into the morpheme boundary, although it is more likely an analogy of forms like *don't*, indicating a lack of knowledge of the morphology involved in both forms. The theory could also explain why 32% of respondents did not add apostrophes to *dont* in the correction task (see table 6.6). Participants were more accepting of apostrophes missed from these non-morpheme boundary forms than word-boundary forms like *she'll* and *we're*. The writers of *do'nt* and *are'nt* may believe the apostrophe should mark the morpheme

boundary, rather than the missing letter, although it is equally possible that they do not know there is a morpheme boundary or a missing letter, they just know there is an apostrophe in there somewhere.

Bunčić also associates linguistic intuition with the need for clarity: "...according to many writers' intuition the apostrophe has to indicate only those morpheme boundaries that are regarded as unclear" (p. 193). On the one hand, this may explain the increasing loss of the possessive apostrophe, as the meaning is almost always clear, but on the other hand it cannot explain the increasing use in plural nouns where meaning is equally clear. If there is "no apparent need" in "Ladies and Gents Hair Stylists" (*ibid.*), there is also no need in *Kid's love mince* on a meat pack in the supermarket. Nonstandard use, therefore, does not always aid clarity and can often increase confusion, as we have seen above.

This does not mean, however, that the need for clarity is not a motivator for using apostrophes and the theme of clarity came up several times in the interviews and questionnaires. There is a trend in which the apostrophe's function is clarity and that is in shortened and alphabetised words such as *spec'd*, *lol'd* and *cc'd* as well as examples like *photo'd*, *GPS'ing* and *X'd out* from Kellerman (2017), when an inflectional suffix is added. The addition of a suffix looks odd, and an apostrophe improves clarity by indicating the boundary, supporting Bunčić's (2004) theory.

To sum up, Bunčić's theory has little basis in history, but the evidence from this study shows that modern trends appear to support his argument. A linguistic intuition for morpheme boundaries does seem to drive the need for apostrophes in words like *spec'd* and *cc'd* and may be behind the insertion of apostrophes with -s suffixes regardless of function. Exceptions to Bunčić's theory today are few: a small number of omissions as in *goin'* and *'74*, abbreviations as in *In'gll*, and contractions such as *don't* and *won't* – the very ones that may be the first contractions to become apostrophe-less. Yet the apostrophe is far more likely to be missed from possessive nouns than inserted into other morpheme boundaries. No one in this study alluded to the marking of a morpheme boundary as a function of the apostrophe, which suggests the fact that apostrophes usually mark morpheme boundaries is more of a coincidence than a general perception.

9.2.1.4 Social factors: Age and Gender

The findings in this study for age do not seem to fit with expected patterns, although there are some interesting patterns nevertheless. As noted in 4.2.4, there are two possible associations with age that are worth considering in this study. The first is the assumption that changes in educational ideologies may put young people at a disadvantage when it comes to apostrophe use, while the second is Holmes and Wilson's (2017) suggestion that there is a tendency for people in the 30-55 age group to use fewer nonstandard forms, due to workplace requirements.

The dictation task in the cohort study demonstrated a significant difference in use between the two age groups (see 6.6.1). There was only one instance of nonstandard use of the apostrophe amongst the whole of the retired group, compared with an average of three per person in the youth group. This is a significant difference that may be attributable to the different teaching practices experienced by the interviewees. Yet these findings are challenged by those from the correction task of the main questionnaire. Here, contrary to expectations, it is the youngest age group that have employed the fewest nonstandard forms. And contrary to Holmes and Wilson's theory, the middle two groups (aged 26-55 years) have used the highest number of nonstandard forms. Nonetheless, with the average nonstandard use per person ranging from 3.1 to 3.8 there is only .7 separating the lowest from the highest use, therefore this is not a strong result.

However, it may be interesting to consider why these results are so different from those of the dictation task, and from the assumption made about the effect of education on apostrophe use. This study has shown that the learning experiences of the two cohort groups have been very different. Participants in the retired cohort are not only more used to handwriting, but they have had a more solid grounding in the rules of apostrophe use and the underlying morphology. They were exposed to less nonstandard use in the linguistic landscape and have lived most of their lives in the pre-digital age. As a result, the process of handwriting is more automatic for them and apostrophe use is a natural part of the spelling. When they do need to think about it there is always "that little rule" to call on. On the other hand, later generations, more used to digital devices and with a more haphazard grounding in apostrophe use, have been left to learn inductively from a linguistic landscape peppered

with negative models. Handwriting is less habitual requiring more explicit thought, as illustrated by Ivan's comment (see 8.6.1.2) that using apostrophes in handwriting "obviously takes more effort to write". More significantly, though, as shown in 7.8, young people often go by how a word looks when deciding whether an apostrophe is needed.

The correction task provides a 'visual' element that enables young people to look and decide whether the word "looks cool" or "looks silly" and amend it as they see fit. For older respondents, the automaticity of writing is lost in this task and they are called on to think explicitly about the rules they learnt more than 50 years ago. The dictation task, on the other hand, gives older writers an advantage because they include apostrophes almost instinctively as they write. It may be more challenging for young people without the rules to call on and without the visual aid provided by an already written text. Unlike the older group, they seem to need to write the word first, then consider the need for an apostrophe.

A likely implication of the visual strategy employed by young people, though, is that without the knowledge of morphology and rules to fall back on, they may be more susceptible to nonstandard use in their linguistic environment and through their digital devices because they are less able to discern nonstandard apostrophe use from standard. Nonstandard forms, therefore, are more likely to become entrenched as part of their visual repertoires and this is supported by table 8.5, which showed that younger people are less likely to notice nonstandard use.

While different strategies may explain the marked difference between the age groups in the dictation task and the youngest age group's low nonstandard use in the correction task, I am unable to explain why, contrary to Holmes and Wilson's theory, the middle age group used more, rather than fewer, nonstandard forms.

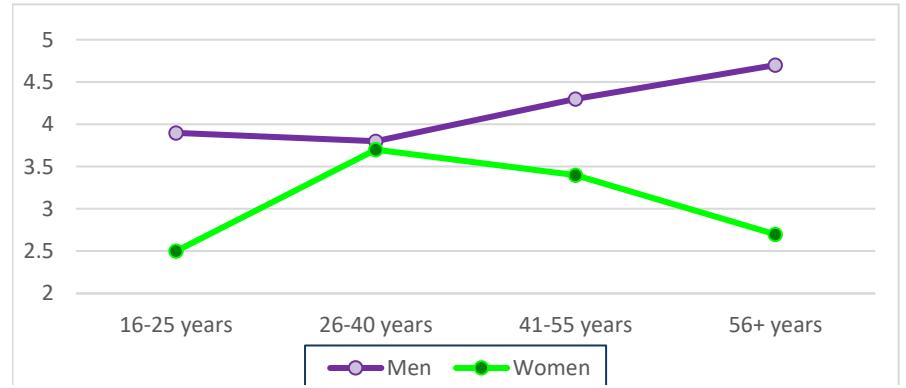
Turning now to gender, the findings for the correction task (see 6.6.1) showed that women used fewer nonstandard forms than men, although this was only where apostrophes were omitted, there was minimal difference for intrusive apostrophes. It seems unlikely, though, that in twenty-first century New Zealand this difference would be due to women's low symbolic capital (Trudgill, 1972). Holmes and Wilson's (2017) theory about the perception of

standard and nonstandard forms as feminine or masculine is interesting. They suggest boys may reject standard language because it is used by female teachers in schools. I would expand on this theory and suggest that an explanation for women's higher standard use where the apostrophe is concerned is that on average women have more of a natural interest in language. It is well known that on average girls develop language more quickly than boys; I noticed this with my own children and in the classroom when they started school. That females greatly outnumber males in linguistic classes at Massey University also points to a greater interest in language. This is likely to translate into greater attention paid at school and higher absorption of what they are taught. Boys may then associate standard usage with the girls and femininity, and consequently develop an indifferent attitude towards standard use.

Gender, however, becomes particularly interesting when considered alongside age, as we saw in 6.6.1. Figure 9.5, below, illustrates that the patterns of nonstandard apostrophe use associated with age vary considerably between men and women, with the two lines almost forming mirror images of each other.

Figure 9.5. Average nonstandard apostrophe use per person by age and gender

Question 1.2: Correction task, Main questionnaire



In the youngest age group, men have used 1.4 more nonstandard forms than women, but they almost converge in the next age group before diverging again until they are separated by 2 nonstandard uses per person in the oldest group. Neither line traces the pattern that would be expected if educational ideology had a strong influence on apostrophe use. Men's

nonstandard use falls slightly then increases with age, while for women it is lowest in the youngest age group then rises significantly in the second age group before falling.

In the youngest age group both men and women had the advantage of a pre-written text, but women's apostrophe use was more accurate. This may be explained by my suggestion above, that women are more interested in language and therefore absorbed more understanding of it from their education, and that men are more likely to be indifferent. In the next age group though, 26 to 40 years, the results almost converge – a slight decrease for men but a significant increase in nonstandard use for women. While the men's decrease may reflect expectations in the workplace, this does not carry through into the next age group. Women's increased use is a complete inversion of Holmes and Wilson's (2017) theory that nonstandard language use drops in the middle years, which is difficult to explain.

The 41 to 55 age group of interviewees is a mix of pre- and post-educational changes, with people in their late 40s or older having been taught 'old-school' while those younger were among the first taught without the benefit of grammar. This inclusion of the 'old-school' group may explain the decrease in nonstandard forms for women in this age group. This seems to have no effect on the men, though.

In the oldest age group, 56 years plus, the men demonstrate the part of Holmes and Wilson's (2017) theory that suggests that as people retire they move "into a more relaxed phase of their lives" (p186) when they no longer have the workplace motivation to use standard forms. The women, on the other hand, are using fewer nonstandard forms than they did in the middle years, perhaps reflecting adherence to 'old-school' traditions.

9.2.1.5 Education change and language authority

Children learn spoken language in their homes, but written language is largely the domain of schools. Schools were the authorities on standard language and teachers taught the prescriptive rules that were expected in most written contexts. Over the 20th century, changes in education have had a major impact on apostrophe use. Around the turn of the century education was becoming open to all throughout the western world, including New

Zealand. The use of standard language became expected of all social classes and, therefore, became associated with education rather than class. This was particularly so in New Zealand where class was never a strong divider. Many older participants described having the rules “drummed” or “drilled” in, and some became sticklers for the standards they were taught, or Beal’s (2010) “grumpy generations” (see 4.5.2).

Then, in the second half of the twentieth century the teaching of grammar was removed from schools. As Gordon (2005) noted, this change was abrupt (see 4.2.2), and while it is likely some teachers continued to teach grammar, over time fewer teachers had the knowledge to do so. Consequently, schools are no longer authorities on standard language, although they may still be seen as such by students who believe their teachers when they tell them that *men's* is incorrect (see 7.6.3). Yet, as we saw in 4.3 and 4.4.2, morphosyntactic awareness and knowledge of the rules are necessary for accurate apostrophe use. Today, however, teaching practices are widely variant with some teachers accepting any standard of written English, as we saw with Sean and Pip. This means that those, like Penny, Sarah and Pete who want knowledge of grammar, may have to pursue this knowledge elsewhere.

In the journalism programmes at Massey University, for example, it is recognised that students' understanding of grammar is limited and thus instruction in grammar is provided at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels (personal communication, December 19, 2017). The use of standard grammar is still important in journalism and traditionally a team of subeditors using books such as *Hart's Rules* (Waddington, 2014) for reference ensured the use of correct language in their publications. Media such as newspapers and magazines, as well as literature, still provide good models for readers and Steph believes it important for journalism to “uphold the rules of punctuation”. Perhaps this is the closest we have to an authority on language use today.

However, in the twenty-first century technology has seen the subeditors and their grammars replaced with editing tools such as autocorrect (personal communication, December 20, 2017) which, as we have seen, are not always accurate. In addition, journalism is becoming less formal, following the societal trend noted by Baron (2010), with

more contractions being used along with colloquial words such as *journo* and *busted*, seen in the Manawatu Standard (December 20, 2017). This is simply reflecting natural language change, but reliance on spellcheck may undermine journalism's role as a positive language model which may have an impact on young people's use of apostrophes.

As we saw in 7.7.2.2, several young people believe that reading helps their understanding of grammar. Shona also reported that the students in her class who were readers "tended to be more accurate writers". Since the retired interviewees did not report that reading improved their writing, it seems that accuracy in journalism and literature is of greater importance for younger people who have not had the benefit of grammar instruction. In 7.7.2.1, several young people commented that nonstandard apostrophes in signage make them doubt themselves and entrench these forms in their brains, because they assume "That's how it's meant to be". Nonstandard use in newspapers and literature may have a stronger effect, since the expectation is that they use standard forms.

9.2.2 Attitudes: Identity and educatedness

Children are products of their parents' attitudes and they enter the classroom with their own attributes and aptitudes for language. They are affected by the attitudes of educational policy makers both nationally and within individual schools, as well as the diverse attitudes of the teachers they encounter throughout their school years. They are further influenced by their peers, by what they see in the linguistic environment and by their increasing dependence on technology. They leave school, therefore, with a wide variation of attitudes, which continue to be shaped by their experiences as adults.

There seems to be ample evidence from surveyed teachers (see 7.6.2) and the general population (see 8.2.4) alike that some people perceive non-standard apostrophe use as signifying a poor education, which suggests that conversely, they believe that adherence to apostrophe rules reflects a good education. That they see themselves as educated is evident in the depth of emotion expressed and in the sometimes derogatory nature of comments aimed at non-standard users, including labels such as *illiterate*, *ignorant*, and *uneducated*.

No one labelled them *low class* or *working class* and only one participant, Robyn, hints at this when she describes the critics of nonstandard users as “elite”. This perception seems to support the notion that *educatedness* underpins these beliefs, even though this notion may not reflect the reality. This attitude is also evident in their support of the critics of non-standard users. Many surveyed teachers strongly defended the critics and sympathised with their desire to educate the ill-informed. They clearly see standard apostrophe use as a shibboleth, or an indicator of education and part of the identity they wish to portray.

Watt’s suggestion that educatedness is still about social status seems less sound in New Zealand where there have never been clear divisions between classes. New Zealanders are not generally impressed by status and are often accused of having *tall poppy syndrome* because we value humility and tend to cut down the pretentious. While Saville-Troike (2003) associates language attitude with group membership rather than individual choice, in New Zealand it seems adherence to standard apostrophe use has a more individual motivation, and is largely a matter of choice. Sarah, for example, chose to stand out from her peers by teaching herself how apostrophes should be used. This was not motivated by membership to a social group, but in order not to appear a “ninnny” – in other words, to appear an educated individual.

Educatedness is, of course, about perception. Labels such as *uneducated*, *ignorant* and *illiterate* applied to nonstandard users are seldom true and as we have seen, if they were the labels would have to be applied to many of our teachers too. It is about attitudes though, and the identities people forge for themselves, as well as their perceptions of others.

Based on their comments, the perception of most participants in the study is that writers using non-standard apostrophes do not know, rather than do not care. As noted in 8.4, Mike Hosking (Cronshaw, April 4, 2017) claimed on *Seven Sharp* that he does not “give a monkey’s” about apostrophe use. Yet he cares deeply about the distinction between *fewer* and *less*, explaining that this is his “little thing”. Perhaps this indicates that some people believe in what they know about, and dismiss what they do not know as unimportant. Hosking struggles with spelling and apostrophes, and as a consequence believes they do not

matter. But he does know the difference between *less* and *fewer* and he believes everyone else should too. He would feel irritated reading the sentence: “There are less apostrophe’s used today”, although he would be unlikely to notice the stray apostrophe.

This seems to demonstrate that attitude, knowledge and interest in language are closely linked. Interest in language creates the belief behind the seeking of knowledge, as we saw with Sarah and Penny in 7.4.4 when they made the effort to teach themselves as adults. Few young people today know the rules of apostrophe use and we have seen that they tend to go by how a word looks, rather than applying rules, when placing an apostrophe. Max would joke with his friends about use in signage they perceived to be incorrect, yet he would insert apostrophes into plural nouns in signage himself if he thought the word looked better. Max acknowledges a deep interest in language and believes in using apostrophes correctly, but his perception of what is correct is shaped by appearance, rather than rules. It seems that most of the young people in this study believe in using apostrophes correctly, but some have a different criterion for *knowing*.

9.2.3 Attitudes: The sticklers and the whateverists

Grammarians Lowth (1762) and Murray (1823) based much of their grammar instruction on the criticism of other writers. This illustrates the first of Milroy and Milroy’s (1999, see 4.5.1) three assumptions made by sticklers, “That there is one, and only one, correct way of speaking and/or writing the English language” (p. 33) – their way. We saw many similar sentiments expressed in chapters 7 and 8 “Right is right...” and several references to “keeping the standards” as well as Penny’s reference to the sticklers as fanatics who believe “that they are right and there can be no other way” (8.3.1). We also saw a wealth of comments expressing horror at deviations from standard forms, as in the second assumption. The third assumption, regarding attitudes towards the users of nonstandard apostrophes, is also amply demonstrated in comments expressing the expectation that everyone should adhere to the rules, in the labels given to those who do not, in the assertion of their right to judge, and in their support of others who criticise nonstandard users.

From the sticklers' point of view, though, older sticklers did what was expected of them at school and learned the rules that were "drummed" into them. Since education was universal they may not have believed this skill was a mark of educatedness, but rather a skill that everyone had, or should have. They are surprised, then, when faced with nonstandard use in the linguistic landscape and perhaps this is when they first begin to perceive themselves as being more educated than some. They may have little understanding that others' experiences have been different from their own – that they may not have the same interest in language, for example, that they may have struggled to keep up in class, or that, like my sister, they may have had teachers that "turned them right off learning". Then when grammar disappeared from schools and children were no longer taught the rules, the sticklers continue to judge them, as we saw in 8.2. The critics believe that everyone should be apostrophe experts and know all the answers. They fail to understand that those who do not understand apostrophes are not illiterate or uneducated, they have simply developed different beliefs about language and the importance of understanding and using apostrophes, based on their own experiences.

Contrary to Beal (2010) and Crystal's (2006b) predictions that the sticklers would die out with the older generations, this study found that not all sticklers belong to the "grumpy generations" (Beal, 2010, p. 63; see 4.5.2). This concurs with Burridge's (2010) study which found that some linguistics students in Australia were avid sticklers for standard apostrophe use (see 4.5.2). In this study young sticklers, including Max, Isabel and Ian, have demonstrated a readiness to take their place alongside the older sticklers, indicating that the "grumpy generations" may stretch much further than Beal and Crystal imagined. Because of their interest in language, they believe that standard usage is important and perhaps because they have had to take responsibility for their own learning about apostrophes, they have a heightened sense of pride in this knowledge. It becomes part of their identity, setting them apart from many of their peers and they bolster this identity by judging and commenting on nonstandard use. Steph makes an interesting comparison with reformed smokers:

It's the generation who were taught to use the things [apostrophes] who tend to notice them, or people who have just discovered them lately and are very . . . like

people who have given up smoking. You're always going to have advocates for getting the apostrophe right.

Not all sticklers attempt to project their beliefs onto others. As we saw in 8.3, some still experience affect, feeling angry or annoyed at nonstandard use, but they stop there. This may be because they lack the courage to act, but for many it is because they have some empathy for the writer. And unlike the sticklers discussed above, this group does not empathise with the critics, viewing them rather as unempathetic, insecure and fanatical.

Many people do not care, or even think about apostrophe use. We might refer to these as *linguistic whateverists* in light of Baron's (2010) term *linguistic whateverism*, since the word *whatever* seems to describe the attitude well. In 8.4 a number of people expressed sentiments like "each to their own" "it isn't a big deal" and "what's the bother" with several believing that conveying the message is more important than correctness. Student papers that are covered in ignored wriggly red lines signal a linguistic whateverist attitude. Many teachers share this attitude. In table 8.5 we saw that 14% of teachers do not notice nonstandard apostrophe use in signage, which suggests they are unlikely to notice them in their students' work either. It is inevitable that this attitude will be passed on to at least some of their students.

9.2.4 Summary

While apostrophe use may never have been totally stable, over the 20th century its use in New Zealand English has become increasingly inconsistent, with some still adhering to the prescriptive rules, while others are uncertain, and yet others do not care. Many factors lie behind such variation. With the removal of grammar from schools, teachers became less knowledgeable about apostrophe use over time, and students were left to learn inductively from an increasingly inconsistent linguistic environment. At the same time, society itself was becoming less formal, and casual writing styles more acceptable. Once mobile phone ownership became widespread in the 21st century, casual writing became an art and the apostrophe was often sacrificed to writing efficiency, although the young people in this

study had a good sense of when this was and was not appropriate. Young people's experience of learning about apostrophes, therefore, is widely diverse, which when combined with personal attributes, creates a myriad of attitudes towards apostrophe use. And these attitudes, in turn, are reflected in the inconsistent use we see today.

9.3 Research question 3: Predictions for the future of the apostrophe

What predictions can reasonably be made about the impact of current practices and beliefs and the future of the prescriptive rules for apostrophe use in New Zealand English?

9.3.1 Language change or just change?

Apostrophe use is changing and as we saw in 8.6.2, some participants see this as part of natural language change. But is it? Apostrophes have been employed to mark sound change in Greek, Italian and French and we saw in 3.3.5 that in English it indicated sound change, lexical change and sometimes morphological change. But the use of the apostrophe itself is also changing. It is omitted from possessive nouns and contractions and appears instead in plural nouns and sometimes verbs. As Aitcheson (2001) pointed out, language change is not regular and the present situation could represent a transition stage in which the apostrophe is becoming a marker of plurality rather than possession. This seems unlikely, though, because the sticklers will continue to abide by the current rules while the linguistic whateverists will always use them randomly, regardless of the conventions of use. While apostrophe use is changing, this is not language change because it is, and will remain, random and inconsistent and could only be described in the vaguest of terms.

This is not to say that the apostrophe has not undergone language change. We saw this in the last volume of Fowler's dictionary (Butterfield, 2015: see 4.3) where apostrophes are no longer required in words like *moustachioed*, but instead clarify modern words as in *OD'd* and *OD'ing*. This is language adapting to new situations – this is language change. However, it is interesting to note that this may be temporary change since it seems that once people become accustomed to new odd-looking forms, the apostrophe can be eliminated. This has

occurred in words such as '*flu*', '*phone*', *1980's*, *DVD's* and *moustachio'd*, which no longer require apostrophes. Perhaps one day, forms like *specd*, *ccd* and *ODing* will also look acceptable without apostrophes and the rules will adjust once again.

9.3.2 Where is the apostrophe heading?

Looking to the future, it seems the only constant where apostrophe use is concerned will be its continued inconsistency. Unless radical changes in educational ideologies intervene, schools will continue to teach it haphazardly and while young people have developed strategies to compensate for their lack of grammatical knowledge, these are likely to become less reliable as exposure to nonstandard use increases. Inconsistency in apostrophe use can only increase, unless something changes. Two possibilities for this are further change in educational policy, or the removal of the apostrophe altogether.

The easing of the no-grammar stance in schools in recent times has had little effect on apostrophe use because teachers cannot teach what they do not know themselves. Few would want to see a return to the 'old-school' teaching of split-infinitive-type rules – but there are other ways. For example, with ongoing support Gordon's (2005, 2010) comparative linguistics approach (see 4.4.2) would arm teachers and children alike with the morpho-syntactic awareness necessary for understanding apostrophe use, as well as providing a compromise in the current debate regarding the compulsory teaching of te reo Māori in schools. This could incorporate a variety of methods, including Steph's suggestion of using drama to illustrate structure (see 7.3.2), adding a kinetic element.

The second option would be to abolish the apostrophe altogether, as advocated by the *Kill the Apostrophe* website (n.d.; see 4.5.1). As the writer observes, missing apostrophes seldom make a semantic difference. However, as we saw in 8.6.1.2, they do sometimes hinder reading fluency by creating garden path sentences which then need to be reanalysed. We would become accustomed to these forms over time and the garden path effect would lessen, but fluency would still be affected. This would affect skilled readers especially, since as noted in 4.3 they tend to take a bottom up approach to reading, and

having to rely more on context would reduce fluency. It is interesting that the writer of the website claims that apostrophe use may impede reading for those who do not understand the rules, when it seems more likely that these people would just ignore them.

The argument regarding the time and money spent on proofreading seems weak since proofreading is not confined to apostrophes. We have seen that apostrophes do take extra time on some digital devices, but missing apostrophes are now acceptable in the context of texting, so this is no longer an issue. This study has demonstrated that the writer is correct in arguing that the apostrophe is often a “tool of snobbery” and something that many people waste time “fretting” over. This seems a poor basis on which to abolish the apostrophe though, since snobs will simply find something else to fret over.

While some researchers argue that we manage without apostrophes in spoken English (Barfoot, 1991; Crystal 2006b; Sklar, 1976), without the cues of fact-to-face language such as body language, intonation and physical context to aid interpretation, apostrophes play a role in reducing ambiguity. This is particularly so in examples such as *cc'd* and *OK'ing* which in spoken language are clear because *cc* and *OK* are pronounced using the letter names while the suffixes are pronounced as the sound, giving [sisi:d] and [ookeɪŋ]. The apostrophe could be seen as marking the break between these two types of pronunciation. Furthermore, a sweatshirt advertised on Facebook in 2014 has a map of the UK on it, under which is proudly stated: *WERE #1*. If spoken, this would be clearly understood, but written without an apostrophe the meaning becomes almost the opposite of what was intended.

It could also be argued that English managed to survive for over 1,000 years before apostrophes, and its slow uptake in English could indicate it was not seen as particularly useful. However, its slow uptake was because elision was not a common feature in English, but once it was adapted to other functions it was seen as useful and its popularity increased. It was used because it was seen as being useful, although since then spelling has become standardised, decreasing the need for extra clarity. Appropriately applied apostrophes are an aid to reading fluency, but they lose this advantage when they are used erratically. It seems that today we could manage without apostrophes most of the time.

Abolishing the apostrophe would not be easy to achieve, though, since we have no language authority with the power to do so. Campaigns to end its use would fail because the sticklers would insist on using them and inconsistency would continue. And as noted in 8.5, for many inconsistency is worse than nonstandard use itself.

9.3.3 Technology – a new authority on written language?

Perhaps computers with their built-in editing tools will provide another option. Now the sub-editors and their rule books have gone from newsrooms and publishing houses, the last authorities on language use are becoming increasingly reliant on computer editing tools. However, as yet these tools have limited reliability.

Children are attracted to digital devices from a very young age and are highly motivated to use them as they get older and this is going to have a major impact on writing. Those who once would have avoided writing now write, so more people are writing and writing more. We are replacing much of our spoken language, as well as handwritten language, with digitally produced language.

Almost half the teachers in the online survey (see 7.7.3.1) believed that less handwriting has a detrimental effect on apostrophe use, the consensus being that handwriting helps internalise the rules. On the other hand, most teachers saw editing tools as taking away the need to think (see 7.7.3.3). Editing features may be beneficial for some who use them as learning tools; we saw in 7.6, for example, that spellcheck often prompted questions from Sarah's students. It seems more likely, though, that these editing features will decrease awareness as people come to rely on the computer to do their thinking for them. Most teachers who commented on this believe that spellcheck has a negative effect on students' awareness of apostrophe use, while a number of other participants in 8.6.3.2 saw removing the thinking as a positive feature.

Editing tools are not yet accurate enough to rely on and as a number of teachers pointed out, some knowledge of grammar and apostrophe use is often needed to select the correct

option in spellcheck. For example, we saw in figure 6.12 that spellcheck is inconsistent in alerting to apostrophes inserted into plural nouns, marking some but not others. The images below illustrate the problems caused by Word's inability to analyse syntax accurately.

Deductive teaching practices have been replaced by inductive, yet this benefits neither deductive nor inductive learners. In the past, the disadvantage to inductive learners was

Figure 9.6. Spellcheck and syntax example 1.

reflection of their identity, and she judges them accordingly. Similarly, Ivan judges businesses that display non-standard use in signage, yet does not enlighten them. Penny changed the sign at the Wellington observato

judge's
judges'
Ignore Once

Figure 9.7. Spellcheck and syntax, example 2.

In the first example, the verb *benefits* has been interpreted as a noun and therefore the preceding pronoun is expected to agree with it. In the second, the verb *judges* has been interpreted as a noun and the word *businesses* as a possessed element rather than a verbal object. This example also demonstrates the confidence needed in order to override spellcheck's erroneous advice.

It is difficult to measure the impact of texting on omitted apostrophes in other writing contexts, including student assignments. Baron (2010) and Grace et al. (2015) observed in 4.4.3 that many of the features that technology is blamed for would probably have happened anyway – and texting cannot be blamed for intrusive apostrophes. Nonetheless, as the balance moves from handwriting to computer writing, it seems spellcheck and autocorrect may only increase confusion over apostrophe use for all but those who consciously choose to use it as a learning tool.

In 2010, Kemp had observed the tendency for missed apostrophes to cross from texting to other forms of writing (see 4.4.3), and in 7.7.3.2 some teachers also expressed the fear that textisms would pervade other writing. Yet I have only rarely seen 'text-speak' in students' papers, in particular the word *txt* which some seem to think is spelt that way. Generally, students demonstrate a strong sense of appropriacy, although it is likely that since this

project has attracted people with an interest in language, there may be less of a sense of appropriacy in the general population. I noted in 4.4.3 that Crystal (2008) and Baron (2010) stated the need for a good sense of appropriacy in writing today and we saw in 7.7.3.2 that most young people do understand this. Young people have a greater sense of appropriacy than older people because they employ a wider variation of styles. They understand that different language is needed in texts and emails depending on the recipient, and that a more formal style is called for in university assignments and job applications. Table 8.3 demonstrated that the oldest age group was more likely than the youngest group to use apostrophes in emails to friends, reflecting the more formal style of handwritten letters in the past. On the other hand, texting is a way of life for young people and it is natural that some of the casual conversational forms will cross into emails to friends, but not to parents.

In 8.2.3, Isabel demonstrates a sense of style when she omits apostrophes from texts to her friends because they “tell me off” for using them, yet she uses them in texts to her mother. This illustrates accommodation theory in which she seeks to identify with her peers as in *similarity attraction theory* (Beebe, 1988; see 4.4.3). Isabel also demonstrates *social exchange theory* identifying with the wider culture when she forgoes writing fluency in spite of the extra cost of time and money, in order to produce the style that is expected, and that can be understood, by her mother.

Where the apostrophe was once required in all contexts, there are contexts now in which it does not matter. As we have seen in previous chapters, contexts in which the apostrophe does not matter sometimes include the classroom, and this is more likely to spread nonstandard apostrophe use into other contexts than the use of technology, because school is still regarded as an authority on language.

In future it is likely that technology will become the authority on written language. Accurate apostrophe use will depend on the ability of software to interpret sentences like those in figure 9.7, above, correctly. If word processors become sophisticated enough to analyse such sentences accurately, they will be able to apply apostrophes accurately. Then, although people may not understand how apostrophes work, autocorrect will ensure their written text is accurate. In addition, as voice recognition systems such as ‘Siri’ develop their ability

to interpret and transcribe spoken language perhaps one day we will not need to write at all, and knowledge of apostrophe use will indeed be superfluous.

Ultimately, the rules we use will depend on the beliefs of the consultants involved in developing the software for word processing programmes. As interviewee Ross puts it: "...the democratisation of language, it's been taken out of the hands of teachers as the rule-makers and it's gone out there – into the cyberspace...". The programmers may choose to follow the conventions set down in style guides or to invent their own, they may choose to omit apostrophes from some possessive and contractive forms, or they may believe that apostrophes are not important and eliminate them altogether. These consultants will have the power to determine apostrophe use in the future and autocorrect will become the new authority on language for the whole English-speaking world. The continuum of inconsistency may end as apostrophe use finally becomes stabilised, in spite of the fact that few people will fully understand its functions.

CHAPTER 10:

CONCLUSION

This chapter offers a reflection on the journey this inquiry has taken in tracing the apostrophe from its origins in Greek to its erratic use in English today, and also on the implications for its use in the future. The aim of this chapter is to highlight the new ground that this project has undertaken and to offer ideas for areas of further inquiry. The following section presents the contributions this research has made to the pool knowledge of the apostrophe. The chapter then moves on to the methodology, highlighting its strengths but also considering possible limitations before noting some of the opportunities for further research on the apostrophe. The thesis then concludes with some final thoughts.

10.1 Contributions of the study

This research contributes significantly to the body of knowledge on the history of the apostrophe. It is the first research to put the fragments of information from other authors together into a comprehensive historical account of the apostrophe, incorporating evidence from manuscripts and early printed books. The Bacchylides papyrus, for example, was cited briefly by only one author back in 1984, but this is significant evidence that the apostrophe was in use before the current era. I have also uncovered evidence in Tory (1529), not found elsewhere, of apostrophes marking phonological omission in sixth-century Latin. The Medieval Latin manuscripts examined, however, showed only an apostrophe-like mark that was part of an abbreviation system and which had no part in the transmission of the apostrophe into Italian, French and English during the 16th century.

I have also investigated some areas of debate and found, for example, that contrary to the claims of several authors, Tory (1529) makes neither mention nor use of the apostrophe with regard to French. In English, my evidence shows that it is unlikely that the possessive apostrophe emerged from the his-genitive as is often claimed, and that rather than Sklar's (1976) 200-year gap between the loss of the final-nominal *e* and the emergence of the

apostrophe, there is some overlap. This study also demonstrates that while the English apostrophe usually occurs on a morpheme boundary, this is more coincidence than a general perception of its function as Bunčić (2004) argues.

In investigating the modern apostrophe, as noted previously, I have found no other studies in which qualitative methods have been used in research on the apostrophe. These methods have allowed me to delve deeper than apostrophe use itself to examine attitudes and how they influence apostrophe use. In particular, the findings pertaining to young people and their knowledge of apostrophes, their strategies for use and attitudes towards the apostrophe is an important addition to the pool of knowledge. Their teachers' voices have also been heard, revealing that children experience a wide variation in teacher beliefs and practices within their New Zealand classrooms.

The study has shown that because young people tend to use visual strategies when using apostrophes, they are more vulnerable to exposure to nonstandard use and this becomes embedded in their visual repertoires. Apostrophe use, therefore, seems set to become increasingly erratic in the future, at least until computer software brings greater consistency.

10.2 Methodology: Strengths and opportunities

10.2.1 Strengths and implications of the methodology

The overall research design has resulted in comprehensive coverage of a range of historical and sociolinguistic aspects of the apostrophe. In the historical section, the research of the literature alongside manuscripts and early printed books procured invaluable data that could not have been possible with one method alone. The literature often provided important leads that I was able to follow up, Levin (1984) for example, who led me to the Bacchylides papyrus. Manuscripts and early books provided corroborative evidence, or sometimes challenged the claims of other writers which prompted further investigation.

The second part of the study has demonstrated that the mixed methods design was essential for this study. The integration of data from observations, questionnaires, and interviews along with the multiple question types and the varied tasks has elicited a wealth of material. In particular, the qualitative elements have proved essential to this enquiry. For example, the dictation task alone would have led to the conclusion that young people use substantially more nonstandard apostrophes than older people. However, the correction task strongly challenged this, suggesting that different cognitive processes may be involved. The explanation that the older participants use rule-based strategies while the younger ones use appearance-based strategies could only have been arrived at through qualitative methodologies. Furthermore, the qualitative segments of the online survey gave free voice to attitudes that were more inhibited in the face-to-face questionnaires and interviews, adding an extra layer of insight into attitudes.

It seems reasonable to suggest, therefore, that a mixed-method approach would be valuable to a wide range of other research projects, since data is more useful if it can be explained. The value of online surveys in collecting qualitative data has also been demonstrated. Moreover, the overall design of this project, in which an historical investigation precedes a more conventional research design, is innovative and could provide a useful model for other studies of language, and also other disciplines where there are historical as well as contemporary elements.

10.2.1 Limitations of the study and opportunities for further research

The main limitation to this study is the sample bias towards those with a degree of interest in language. This meant that those with low interest in language were underrepresented, since without coercing participation, people with low interest in language have little incentive to participate. Nonetheless, the small number of people in this category who did participate provided valuable insight into the attitudes of the linguistic whateverists.

Apart from this, there are a number of research opportunities which for practical reasons could not be undertaken in this project and which are now left open for further research. An in-depth study of nineteenth century New Zealand texts, for example, would provide a more

accurate indication of the consistency of apostrophe use in New Zealand English during this period.

This study uncovered some interesting findings regarding the social aspects of age and gender and apostrophe use and there are three aspects of this that warrant further research. The first area is the mirrored patterns between male and female participants in the correction task, as seen in table 9.5, and in particular the fact that the youngest female group used the fewest nonstandard apostrophes. Second, these patterns contrast with the suggestion from Holmes and Wilson (2017) that nonstandard use drops during the middle years. The third aspect worth investigation is the findings regarding the different cognitive processes used by the younger and older groups. Further quantitative and qualitative research would be useful to consolidate and expand on these findings.

Another opportunity for further research would be to investigate apostrophe use in other varieties of English and other languages. Some interesting languages to investigate might include other Germanic languages, because of the close linguistic relationship with English and degree of contact with French and Italian speakers. It would also be interesting to examine how Pacific languages and Roman transliterations of Asian languages have employed apostrophes.

10.3 A final word

This project has been challenging, but it has taken me on a fascinating journey almost from the moment the topic was first suggested. There were so many exciting discoveries along the way: 2,000-year-old apostrophes, that the apostrophe did not come into English via Latin, that the apostrophe marked elision when it first arrived in English, as well as incidental learning about writing before and during the Middle Ages. It was also interesting to examine the sociolinguistic aspects and how the motivation for correct language use has changed over the centuries from one of conferring symbolic capital to one marking educatedness. I have found the collection of examples of apostrophe use fascinating, but most of all I enjoyed talking to people about their thoughts on apostrophes, and learning

that young people hold a wide range of attitudes towards apostrophe use, just as the older generations do.

Apostrophe use has been inconsistent throughout most of its history in English, therefore what is happening today is part of a continuum, rather than being a new phenomenon. Apostrophe use is essentially rule driven, yet with over 30 points in *Hart's Rules* (Waddington, 2014) its use is clearly not straight forward. While many participants associated nonstandard apostrophe use with the uneducated and illiterate, these findings have demonstrated that this is simply not the case. Even educated young people with a passion for language, like Isla who was taught about apostrophes at school (see 7.2), might “...put one in sometimes when there's not supposed to be – sometimes”.

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greate belly, greate legges, large fete. And yet that whiche was worse, he was dombe and coulde nat speke: But nat withstandyng this he hadde a singuler wytte, and was greatly ingenious and subtil in cauillacions, and pleasant in wordes, after he came to his speche. London, England: Wylliam Powell. Gothic.

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Appendices

Appendix A MUHEC documentation



9 August 2013

Hilary Laracy
[REDACTED]

Dear Hilary

Re: Apostrophe's

Thank you for your Low Risk Notification which was received on 9 July 2013.

Your project has been recorded on the Low Risk Database which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committees.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

Please notify me if situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your initial ethical analysis that it is safe to proceed without approval by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:

"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research."

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director (Research Ethics), telephone 06 350 5249, e-mail humanethics@massey.ac.nz".

Please note that if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish requires evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to provide a full application to one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. G. O'Neill".

John G O'Neill (Professor)
**Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and
Director (Research Ethics)**

cc Dr Peter Petrucci
School of Humanities
PN242

Assoc Prof Kerry Taylor, HoS
School of Humanities
PN242

Dr Arianna Berardi-Wiltshire
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Appendix B Pre-survey evaluation of main questionnaire

Thank you for evaluating my questionnaire.

Hi - my name is Hilary Laracy and I am a doctoral student at Massey University. I am researching *The Apostrophe* and as part of this research I need to collect data on apostrophe use. This research is not interested in right and wrong usage, but is simply looking at HOW the apostrophe IS used, rather than how it should be used. Another very important aspect is to look at attitudes towards its use. The attached questionnaire will be used to collect data from the Massey Campus, the PN Library and public places such as the Plaza or The Warehouse, and I need a small number of people to evaluate, or 'pre-pilot', my questionnaire.

I am asking you to please complete the questionnaire as you would if stopped in one of the above venues, then to complete the attached evaluation form. It is important that you give an honest evaluation so that I can improve it before taking it to the public. I would greatly appreciate it if you would do this and return the EVALUATION SHEET ONLY to me at the email address below.

Some notes before you start:

- Please note your STARTING TIME at the top of the questionnaire, as this is an important part of the evaluation.
- The questionnaire will be comprised of 3 separate sheets as follows:
 - Part 1 will be on a separate A5 size sheet, with Q 1.4 on the reverse side.
 - The main questionnaire will comprise four sides of a folded A3 sheet of paper.
 - There will be a separate sheet provided for extra comments on each section of questions.
- Part 1 is an 'experimental' phase, and in the actual survey the specific topic will not be disclosed until Q 1.4. This sheet will be collected before the main questionnaire is handed out.
- For Q 1.3 – the respondent will be asked orally to circle the apostrophe.
- You can write extra comment on the back of the evaluation form if needed.

Thank you again for taking the time to evaluate my survey.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at: Email: [REDACTED]
Phone: [REDACTED]

Evaluation of questionnaire:

1. How long did it take to fill in the questionnaire? minutes
Was this too long? yes a little no

2. Was completing the questionnaire: (Mark X on the scale)

easy ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ difficult?
interesting ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ boring?
confusing ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ straight forward?

2. Does the questionnaire look:

attractive ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ unattractive
inviting ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ off-putting

4. How could this be improved?

5. Please comment on the page format – are the separate pages a problem? How do you think it could be improved?

6. Are the instructions clear? Please specify any instructions that are unclear, and why.

7. Do you think any of the wording is ambiguous or difficult to understand (please specify)?

8. Were there any questions you found difficult to answer (please specify)?

9. If I stopped you in the shopping mall and asked you to fill out this questionnaire – would you be:
(Mark X on the scale)

happy to oblige ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ annoyed.

10. Is there anything you can think of that would make this questionnaire more user-friendly?

11. Please write any other comments or suggestions about this questionnaire on the back of this sheet.

Thank you so much for your help; it is a valuable contribution to my research 😊

Appendix C Information sheet – main questionnaire



My name is Hilary Laracy and I am a doctoral student at Massey University. I am researching language change, so I am interested in HOW language is used, rather than how it should be used. As a native speaker of English, your own use of English and your opinions on its use are very important for this study.

By completing the questionnaire, you are consenting to the information you give being used. You have the right to decline to answer any particular question.

Your information will remain anonymous, unless you wish to take part in further questioning; in which case I will be the only person who will have access to your information, and your name will not be used in the study.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at: Email: [REDACTED]
Phone: [REDACTED]

On reverse side:

The supervisors for this research if you wish to contact them are:

Dr Peter Petrucci: P.R.Petrucci@massey.ac.nz

Dr Arianna Berardi-Wiltshire: A.Berardi-Wiltshire@massey.ac.nz

Appendix D Main questionnaire

Part 1 Introduction

Survey#

- 1.1 Do you think it is important to write English correctly? (Tick ✓ONE)
 yes sometimes no

- 1.2 Task 1: Please correct any mistakes you see in this text:

Johns new restarant opens on Friday Its
called Barneys and its menus feeature New
Zealands best produce Theyll have quality
beers wines and specialty coffees Dont miss
Tuesdays happy hour or brunch on Sundays
Every ones welcom

- 1.3 Task 2: Please circle the symbol you think is the apostrophe:

: , / . ?
! ' " ; >

Questionnaire

Survey#

Part 2 Your use of the apostrophe

2.1 Which statement best describes your confidence with apostrophe use?

(Tick ✓ ONE)

- I don't know where apostrophes should and shouldn't be used.
- I have an idea of where apostrophes go, but I'm not too sure.
- I know most of the time, but sometimes feel a little confused.
- I usually feel confident about my use of apostrophes.
- I always know where apostrophes should and shouldn't be used.

2.2 Which statement best describes your education in apostrophe use?

(Tick ✓ ONE)

- I was never taught (or I don't remember being taught) about apostrophes at school.
- I was taught about apostrophe use at school.
- I was taught about apostrophe use at school, **but I've forgotten the rules.**

2.3 When you used apostrophes 'incorrectly' at school:

(Tick ✓ ONE)

- I got into trouble
- I was sometimes corrected
- I was always corrected
- I was never corrected
- I was usually corrected
- I don't remember

2.4 Which statement best describes your use of apostrophes?

(Tick ✓ ONE)

- I never use apostrophes.
- I don't really care – I just put them in wherever.
- I usually try to use them correctly but I'm not always sure if I've got it right.
- I don't really think about it – I use them where I think it looks like one is needed.
- My rule is - if in doubt, leave them out.
- It depends on what it is I am writing.
- I always abide by the rules of apostrophe use.
- Other

2.5 What do you see as the main functions, or purposes, of the apostrophe?

(Tick ✓ ALL that apply)

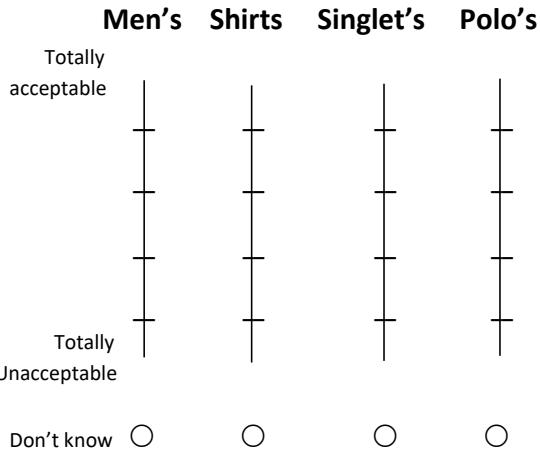
- missing letters when words are joined together: don't, he's, we'll, let's, o'clock
- when there is more than one: menu's, Sunday's, shirt's
- ownership or possession: John's car, his father's house, the ladies' toilet
- general abbreviation: comin'; fish 'n' chips;
- with verbs ('doing' words): he run's, he see's, he enjoy's
- other

Part 3 Other people's use of apostrophe s



3.1 Task 3: How acceptable do you think these words in the sign are?

Mark 'X' on the scale:



Additional comments on this sign (optional)

3.2 Do you think the writer of this sign is: (Mark X on the scale)

educated	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	uneducated	<input type="radio"/> no opinion
upper class	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	lower class	<input type="radio"/> no opinion
careful	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	careless	<input type="radio"/> no opinion
not intelligent	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	intelligent	<input type="radio"/> no opinion
young	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	old	<input type="radio"/> no opinion
								<input type="radio"/> male	<input type="radio"/> female
									<input type="radio"/> no opinion

3.3 I think apostrophes should be used correctly in:
(Write down the number) →

- an email to friends on public signs
..... a job application a handwritten letter
..... a text message an email to a business

1 = yes, always
2 = yes, usually
3 = sometimes
4 = don't care
5 = no, it's unnecessary.

Part 4 The apostrophe critics

4.1 If someone (co-worker, customer) points out a mistake you have made:

(Tick ✓ ONE)

- I don't care I feel really stupid
 I find it amusing I feel grateful
 I feel embarrassed I think that person should get a life.
other

4.2 Some comments made about people who 'misuse' apostrophes:

1. "I hate, hate, HATE it when people misuse apostrophes. It drives me WILD and I just want to hit things" (Internet blog page)
 2. They "...deserve to be struck by lightning, hacked up on the spot and buried in an unmarked grave" (Lynne Truss from her book *Eats Shoots and Leaves*.)

(Mark 1 and 2 on the scale)

I strongly agree : : : : : I strongly disagree

Additional comments (optional)

4.3 What do you think of people like this who criticise other people's mistakes?

(Tick ✓ ALL the statements you agree with)

- They want to show off their superior education.
 - They just believe in keeping a good standard of English.
 - They are judgmental and intolerant people.
 - I agree with them, but they shouldn't comment about it.
 - They think they belong to a superior social class.
 - I say – good on them!
 - They are stuffy and old fashioned.
 - other

Part 5 The future of the apostrophe

5.1 Should we promote the 'rules' of apostrophe use, or get rid of it altogether?
(Mark X on the scale)



_____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____



(Save the apostrophe!)

5.2 Tick ✓ ALL the statements you agree with:

- I think the loss of the apostrophe will happen no matter what we do.
- The apostrophe is an important part of written English and we should keep it.
- I think that without apostrophes it would be more difficult to understand written text.
- Electronic devices will cause the end of the apostrophe.
- I think the functions of the apostrophe will just be different in the future.
- Children need to receive a proper education in correct apostrophe use.
- I think there are some places where the apostrophe is unnecessary.
- Other

Part 6 Demographics

And finally, could you please tell me a little about yourself as this will help make sense of the data you've provided. All information will, of course, be treated with complete confidentiality.

6.1 **Sex:** male / female

6.2. **Age:** 16 – 25 26 – 40 41 – 55 56 – 70 71+

6.3 **Language:** My first language is: English Other

6.4. **Education:** In what country did you receive most of your **schooling**?

Highest level of education completed:

Study in progress:

6.5 **Occupation:** student not working or

If not working – what is/was your usual occupation?

Thank you for helping with my research, your answers to these questions are very important for my study. If you would be willing to be interviewed, or to answer further questions via email, would you please provide your name, email address and/or phone number. Name (first name will do)

Email

Phone

THANK YOU ☺

Appendix E Participation request email – online teacher survey

Dear Sir/Madam

I would be very grateful if you would be kind enough to forward this email on to your teaching staff.

My name is Hilary Laracy and I am a doctoral student at Massey University researching *The Apostrophe*. Do you think apostrophe's have outlived their usefulness? Did reading that last sentence make you cringe? Or perhaps you think the use of the apostrophe should be left to individual preference? Whatever your view, I would love to hear from you. I am interested in language change, and therefore in learning about what is happening to the apostrophe today and what this may mean for the future.

I would therefore like to survey teachers about their observations, teaching practices and attitudes towards apostrophe use through an online survey, which will take about 20 minutes and is completely anonymous. I have attached an introductory letter which gives more detailed information about my research, and the link to the survey is below.

Teacher survey: <http://apostrophematters.com/survey/index.php/453277/lang-en>

Thank you

Kind regards
Hilary

Appendix F Information sheet – online teacher survey

SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE STUDIES
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North
New Zealand
T 64 6 356 9099
F 64 6 350 2271
www.massey.ac.nz



INFORMATION SHEET

My name is Hilary Laracy and I am a doctoral student at Massey University researching *The Apostrophe*. I am interested in the historical development of the apostrophe and how its functions have changed over time, as well as in attitudes towards its use.

This research is not about right and wrong usage of the apostrophe, but is simply looking at HOW it is used today and what the implications for the future may be. Your experiences of apostrophe use are important to this study because as a teacher you both observe and shape the next generation of English users. I am therefore interested in your own understanding of apostrophe use and your attitudes towards its use in the classroom.

I invite you to complete the online questionnaire by following the link in the accompanying email. The questionnaire consists of 35 questions including multiple choice, scales and written answers. Feel free to write as much as you wish and the last question gives space to write about any other aspects that may not have been covered.

Completion and submission of the survey implies consent to use the information you give, and you have the right to decline to answer any particular question. All results from the survey are completely anonymous.

The findings of this study will be written up in a final report (thesis) and a summary of my findings will be available if requested.

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher named above is responsible for the ethical conduct of this research. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher, please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director, Research Ethics, telephone: 06 350 5249, email: humanethics@massey.ac.nz

The research is supervised by: Dr Peter Petrucci P.R.Petrucci@massey.ac.nz

Dr Arianna Berardi-Wiltshire A.Berardi-Wiltshire@massey.ac.nz

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at:

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Appendix G Online teacher survey¹⁴

Teachers' survey

This survey is investigating change in apostrophe use through the observations and experiences of teachers.

Thank you for taking part in this survey. My focus is on language change, so I am interested in a descriptive view of apostrophe use (i.e. how it IS used) rather than its prescriptive use (i.e. the rules, or adherence to the rules). Therefore, in order to reflect the reality of apostrophe use **it is very important that you do not google or consult grammar sources** in the completion of this survey.

Note - there is a section at the end where you can write any further comments you have about any of the questions, or any other aspects of apostrophe use.

There are 35 questions in this survey.

A note on privacy

This survey is anonymous.

The record of your survey responses does not contain any identifying information about you, unless a specific survey question explicitly asked for it. If you used an identifying token to access this survey, please rest assured that this token will not be stored together with your responses. It is managed in a separate database and will only be updated to indicate whether you did (or did not) complete this survey. There is no way of matching identification tokens with survey responses.

Load unfinished survey

Next

Exit and clear survey

¹⁴ The format of this printout is not exactly as it was in the actual survey

Your use of Apostrophes

Which statement best describes your own education in apostrophe use?
Choose one of the following answers

- I was never taught (or I don't remember being taught) about apostrophes at school.
- I was taught about apostrophe use at school, but I've forgotten most of it.
- I was taught about apostrophe use at school and usually remember how to use them.
- I was taught about apostrophe use at school and always remember how to use them.
- No answer

When I used apostrophes 'incorrectly' at school I was:

**Always corrected = 1
= 5**

Never corrected

- 1 2 3 4 5
- No answer

How confident do you feel about your own use of apostrophes?

**Not confident = 1
confident = 5**

Totally

- 1 2 3 4 5
- No answer

Please indicate how acceptable you would find these phrases and sentences in a staff email, for example:

1

**Totally acceptable =
Not acceptable = 5**

Please indicate how acceptable you would find these phrases and sentences in a staff email, for example:

1

Totally acceptable = 1
Not acceptable = 5

Can you please explain what you see as the functions of the apostrophe?

Attitudes Towards Apostrophe Use

How important are apostrophes in the English language?

Very important = 1

Not important = 5

1 2 3 4 5
No answer

A sign in The Warehouse says: Men's basic T-shirts / Singlet's / Polo's.

How acceptable do you find each of the following words?

1

Totally acceptable =

Not acceptable = 5

	1	2	3	4	5	No answer
Men's	<input type="radio"/>					
Shirts	<input type="radio"/>					
Singlet's	<input type="radio"/>					
Polo's	<input type="radio"/>					

Do you tend to notice non-standard apostrophe use in public signage?

Yes No No answer

If you do notice such signs - how do you react to them?

What do you think about people who get upset or angry when they see a missing or misplaced apostrophe?

Teaching Apostrophe Use

This survey investigates change in apostrophe use through the observations and experiences of teachers.

Were you taught about the use of apostrophes in your teacher training?

- Yes No No answer

Is teaching the functions of the apostrophe part of your school curriculum?

- Yes No No answer

Do you think apostrophe use should be flexible or strictly rule-governed?

Flexible- 1

Rule-governed= 5

- 1 2 3 4 5

No answer

Do you, as an individual teacher, teach children about the use of the apostrophe?

- Yes No No answer

Do you think children should know how to use apostrophes before they go to high school?

- Yes No No answer

Do you think the rules of apostrophe use should be reinforced throughout high school?

- Yes No No answer

Can you please explain any differences between how you remember being taught about apostrophe use at school and your own teaching practices today?

Children's apostrophe use

Could you please describe some of your observations of children's apostrophe use?

How do you usually correct missing or misplaced apostrophes in children's work?

Choose one of the following answers

- I don't correct apostrophes.
- I correct apostrophes without comment.
- I correct the apostrophe and explain why.
- No answer

How acceptable do you find the use of contractions (don't, we'll etc.) in children's writing?

Totally acceptable = 1

Not acceptable = 5

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
-

No answer

The Future of the Apostrophe

How do you think the following aspects of the 'digital age' may affect apostrophe use in the future?

**1 Positively =
Negatively = 5**

	1	2	3	4	5	No answer
texting	●	●	●	●	●	●
email	●	●	●	●	●	●
spellcheck	●	●	●	●	●	●
less handwriting	●	●	●	●	●	●

Can you please explain why you think this?

**What would you most like to see happen to the apostrophe in the future?
Check any that apply**

- I would like to see the apostrophe gone from the English language.
- I think there are some functions of the apostrophe that are unnecessary.
- I think the rules should change to accommodate modern usage.
- I think people should be free to use apostrophes as they see fit.
- The rules should stay as they are and people should learn to use them properly.
- I don't care.

Other: _____

About You

Could you please tell me a little about yourself as this will help make sense of the data you have provided.

- Female Male No answer

Age:

Choose one of the following answers

- 25 and under
 26 - 40
 41-55
 56 and over
 No answer

My first language is:

Check any that apply

- English
 Other: _____

In what country did you receive most of your schooling?

In what country did you gain your teaching qualification?

What category of school do you teach in?
Choose one of the following answers

- State school
 Integrated school
 Private school
 Other
 No answer

Appendix H Consent form for all interviews.



The Apostrophe

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

This consent form will be held for a period of five years

I have read the Information Sheet and the details of the study were explained to me. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and to decline to answer any particular question. I also understand that I can ask questions at any time.

I agree to give information to the researcher, but understand my name will not be used without my permission.

I agree to the conversations with the researcher being tape-recorded.

I agree to the tape recordings, and any transcripts of the recordings, being kept by the researcher.

I understand I can ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time.

I agree to take part in the study under the conditions described in the Information Sheet.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

THANK YOU

Appendix I Information sheet for Main Questionnaire follow-up interviews

SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE STUDIES

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F 64 6 350 2271

www.massey.ac.nz



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA

INFORMATION SHEET

Thank you again for helping me with my questionnaire – and thank you for now agreeing to this interview. Just to recap - my name is Hilary Laracy and I am a doctoral student at Massey University. As you know, I am researching language change, focusing on the apostrophe and how it is used and perceived in New Zealand English today.

This interview will take the form of an informal and relaxed conversation in which I would like you to feel free to express any thoughts and ideas about your use and attitudes towards apostrophe use. Remember, my research is not about what is right and wrong – it is interested in how language IS used, rather than how it SHOULD be used. Therefore, as a native speaker of English, your own use of English and your opinions on its use will be an important contribution to this study.

With your consent, this interview will be recorded and you retain the right to:

- discontinue your participation at any time
- decline to answer any particular question
- ask for the recording to be stopped at any time
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation

All information gathered will be kept confidential and your name will not be used in the study. I will be the only person who will have access to your information and it will be kept in a safe place. The findings of this study will be written up in a final report (thesis) and a summary of my findings will be available if requested.

This research is supervised by Dr Peter Petrucci and Dr Arianna Berardi-Wiltshire.

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher named above is responsible for the ethical conduct of this research. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher, please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director, Research Ethics, telephone: 06 350 5249, email: humanethics@massey.ac.nz"

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at:

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Appendix J

Sample interview guide for follow-up to Main Questionnaire

Intro: Thanks f Qr - v helpful and also v interesting. What has come across is that most people see using the ap correctly as important, but at the same time most people seem quite unsure of how the ap should be used. However, you seem to be pretty clear about its use.

Can you explain what you see as the **functions** of the apostrophe?

Do you ever have to stop and think about where apostrophes should go?

Education:

You said you were **taught** about ap use at school - what do you **remember** about this?
Primary/secondary? Can you remember any specific things the teacher said?

Warehouse sign: [see below]

You may remember this in the Qr - I wonder if you could indicate here which forms you think are **OK** - put a circle around the ones you find acceptable.

- Why do you think the writer has put an apostrophe in here? What do you think he/she may have been thinking?
- You indicated you thought the writer of the Warehouse sign was **male** - why do you think this?

The grid: [see below]

Now I have a list of phrases - grouped by functions or uses of ap.
Can you please use a tick to indicate whether you see the large print words as acceptable.

Please 'think out loud'...

- What **purpose** do you think the ap serves here?
- Can you explain why you think an ap is **needed here - but not here**?
- Where there any that you had to stop and think about?

'Signs' card:

1. I've got some pictures of signs here - mostly from around PN - can you please have a look at them and just **share any thoughts** that come to mind.

- Which ones are **acceptable/not acceptable** - why?
- What **function** does the ap play here?
- Can you think of **why the writer may have put an ap in here**?

2. When you're out and about - **do you notice** signs like this? →

- (Yes): What do you think - How do you **feel**?
- Would you point it out to a friend? To the business?

- Have you ever pointed it out to the business? Reaction?
- What do you think of the people responsible for signs like these?

You indicated that you think people should use **aps correctly in signage** - but many people are unsure of how to use them today - should they **consult grammars** when producing a sign?

If you were writing something important - **would you consult a grammar** if you weren't sure?

'Rule sheet'

These are the rules of ap use - I'd like you to just read through it - and tell me if anything surprises you in there.

Is there anything missing- anything **confusing or inconsistent**?

Do you think the 'rules' need to be **revised** at all? How/why?

Future:

(5.2) Most people agreed with you here - and you feel strongly that the ap should be kept.

Do you think there are any factors that may make this difficult or even impossible?

Egs: lack education, forgetting, digital, inconsistent use in signage etc

Do you think we can **stop this tide** of confusion and get back to using rules? How?

Missing ap sentences: [see below]

Do you think reading will be more difficult without apostrophes?

In what way? Why not?

Do you see any problems with these?

Do you think reading may be more ambiguous? Slower or less fluent? Reanalyse?

Do you have to think a little more?

Circle the ones you think are most problematic.

Do you have any other thoughts about aps that you would like to share before we finish?

Tasks included in follow-up interviews:

1. Warehouse sign task:

<u>mens</u>	men's	<u>mens'</u>
shirts	shirt's	shirts'
singlets	singlet's	singlets'
polos	polo's	polos'



2. Missing apostrophe task

1. I dont think shed come if she knows hell be here.
2. Were tired, we were up late last night, were going to bed early tonight.
3. Were happy to help you.
4. Johns cars in the garage, its lost its bumper.
5. Shell come if it isnt raining tomorrow.
6. If id known hed forget his computer I wouldve brought mine.
7. Marys mothers cats broken leg isnt healing.
8. Theyve invited us to Peters wedding, wed like to come.

3. Acceptability task

Apostrophe examples:

Look at the words in **large font** – How ACCEPTABLE are they to you? Tick ✓ in the square

	Acceptable	Some-times	Unaccept-able
1. with joined words:			
a. I'm coming			
b. <u>Dont</u> wait up			
c. Were ready!			
d. When <u>your</u> ready			
e. He can't cook			
f. He's here already!			
g. You'll need these.			
h. You <u>shouldnt</u> worry.			
i. <u>She'll</u> be here soon.			
j. Id like to come.			
2. with Plural (more than one)			
a. 2 menus			
b. 3 teacher's			
c. Some photo's			
d. 3 tree's			
e. 2 letters			
f. 5 plants			
g. 2 shirt's			
h. a plate of nachos			
3. with verbs (doing words)			
a. He <u>enjoys</u> music			
b. He <u>walks</u> every day			
c. He <u>wear's</u> old jeans			
d. He <u>see's</u> ghosts			
e. He <u>knows</u> everything.			
f. He <u>dyes</u> his hair			
g. He <u>annoys</u> me			
4. with possessives (ownership)			
a. John's car			
b. Its function			
c. The school's principal			
d. The baby's bottle			
e. The <u>childrens'</u> toys			
f. Last <u>weeks</u> class			
g. Marys daughter			
h. It's name			
i. The Ladies chess Club			
j. The women's hospital			

Appendix K Interview request sheet – retired cohort

INTERVIEW REQUEST



My name is Hilary Laracy and I am a doctoral student at Massey University researching language change, focusing on a particular point of language. I am interested in its historical development, current usage and attitudes towards its use, as well as implications for the future.

As part of this study I am interested in talking to people from different age groups in order to gain insight into differences in usage, as well as attitudes towards its use. Since young people tend to be at the forefront of language change, your input as a retiree will be invaluable in helping to build an understanding of what is happening today.

I would like to invite you to participate in an interview, conducted by me, at a time and place that is convenient for you. The interview will take about one hour and will take the form of an informal and relaxed conversation. If you are interested in helping me with my research or have any questions, please contact me as per the details below. I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you.
Hilary Laracy

Contact details: Email: [REDACTED]
Phone: [REDACTED]
Mobile: [REDACTED]

Appendix E Interview request sheet – youth cohort



Language is always changing and the digital age is having a major effect on language today – particularly written language.

My name is Hilary Laracy and I am a student at Massey University researching language change, focusing on a particular aspect of written language. I am interested in talking to young people because they tend to be more creative with language and to use it in new and interesting ways.

If you are between 18 and 30 years old and would like to help with my research, I would love to talk to you about your use of written language. This would take the form of a friendly informal interview at a time and place to suit you, and I expect it would take twenty minutes or so. I would really appreciate your help and there would be a small gift to say thanks for your contribution to my research. Please contact me if you are interested at:

Thank you.
Hilary Laracy

Contact details: Email: [REDACTED]
Phone: [REDACTED]
Mobile: [REDACTED]

Appendix M

Information sheet – retired cohort

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MASSEY UNIVERSITY

TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA

INFORMATION SHEET

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is Hilary Laracy and I am a doctoral student at Massey University researching language use and language change, focusing on a particular point of written English. My interest is not in what is right and wrong, or in how language SHOULD be used, but in how language IS used and in how it may develop in the future. As a retiree your thoughts and opinions are an important contribution to this study that will provide a basis for examining change.

This interview will take the form of an informal and relaxed conversation in which I would like you to feel free to express any thoughts, ideas and attitudes towards language use.

With your consent, this interview will be recorded and you retain the right to:

- discontinue your participation at any time
- decline to answer any particular question
- ask for the recording to be stopped at any time
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation

All information gathered will be kept confidential and your name will not be used in the study. I will be the only person who will have access to your information and it will be kept in a safe place. The findings of this study will be written up in a final report (thesis) and a summary of my findings will be available if requested.

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher named above is responsible for the ethical conduct of this research. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher, please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director, Research Ethics, telephone: 06 350 5249, email: humanethics@massey.ac.nz"

This research is supervised by:

Dr Peter Petrucci P.R.Petrucci@massey.ac.nz

Dr Arianna Berardi-Wiltshire [A.Berardi-](mailto:A.Berardi-Wiltshire@massey.ac.nz)

[Wiltshire@massey.ac.nz](mailto:A.Berardi-Wiltshire@massey.ac.nz)

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at:

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Mobile: [REDACTED]

Appendix N

Information sheet – youth cohort

SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE STUDIES
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North
New Zealand
T 64 6 356 9099
F 64 6 350 2271
www.massey.ac.nz



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA

INFORMATION SHEET,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is Hilary Laracy and I am a doctoral student at Massey University researching language use and language change, focusing on a particular point of written English. My interest is not in what is right and wrong, or in how language SHOULD be used, but in how language IS used and in how it may develop in the future. As a young native speaker of English, therefore, your thoughts and opinions are an important contribution to this study, since young people are often at the forefront of new trends in language.

This interview will take the form of an informal and relaxed conversation in which I would like you to feel free to express any thoughts, ideas and attitudes towards language use.

With your consent, this interview will be recorded and you retain the right to:

- discontinue your participation at any time
- decline to answer any particular question
- ask for the recording to be stopped at any time
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation

All information gathered will be kept confidential and your name will not be used in the study. I will be the only person who will have access to your information and it will be kept in a safe place. The findings of this study will be written up in a final report (thesis) and a summary of my findings will be available if requested.

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher named above is responsible for the ethical conduct of this research. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher, please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director, Research Ethics, telephone: 06 350 5249, email: humanethics@massey.ac.nz"

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If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at:

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Appendix O Sample interview guide – retired cohort

Read info letter / complete consent form / demographic details

1. Introduction:

1a To begin, as I've mentioned, this study is about how language changes over time - I just wondered if you are aware of this happening? Any egs?

1b Task 1. Explain:

The city's restaurants offer kiwis many varieties and styles of food. Mary's mother says the lunch and dinner menus at Barney's café can't be beaten, and its children's menu is great. It's bright and funky and you'd love the café's friendly waiters.

1c Photos: – show the first two photos for impressions – note reactions
I have couple of signs here to look at and I would like you to share any thoughts that come to mind.

Reveal topic – probably guessed!

2. Own use of apostrophes

2a How important do you think apostrophes are in English? Why?

2b Thinking back to when you were at school – do you remember learning being a positive or negative experience? Can you tell me about that?

Do you remember being taught about aps at school?

Prompts: 'The rules'?

Anything in particular stick in your mind?

Do you remember being corrected – how? How often?

2c i) Reading: Do you read much – what sort of things? Did you when you were young?

ii) Writing: Do you write much – " " " " "

Do you: handwrite or type letters? text - email - chat - blog...?

2d How confident do you feel about your own use of apostrophes?

What do you put your confidence / lack of confidence down to?

- 2e** Task 2: Now I have another little task - [see below]
- Imagine you receive a Christmas letter from a young relative
- which forms would you find acceptable? (might find > 1 acceptable)
- 2f** Do you think you are more conscious of how you use aps in some media more than others - eg texts, emails, letters to friends, bus & formal letters...?
- 2g** What do you think the main functions of the apostrophe are?
- 2h** Do you see the use of the apostrophe as being governed by a strict set of rules?

Yes:	No:
So would you say you (always) try to use it according to these rules?	So would you say that the use of aps is quite flexible?
Do you sometimes feel unsure? Can you think of an example of where you feel unsure?	How do you decide where to use an ap? Guess? Where it looks right (or wrong without it)? Random?
When you are unsure - how do you decide whether to use an ap?	Don't really think about it? Don't care?

3. Attitudes towards apostrophe use

- 3a** What are some differences you've noticed between the written language of your generation and that of young people today? Egs?
- 3b.** Do you think apostrophes are less important in some **media** than others?
Which media / why/why not?
- 3c** **Sign cards:** I have some more pictures for you to look at:
Again, Id like you to share any thoughts you have on each one
- Do you tend to notice non-standard apostrophes in public signage?
- How do you react / feel when you see them? Why?
- Why do you think an ap might have been put in here?
- What do you think of the person who wrote this?
- Would you comment to a friend? Why? How does this make you feel?
- Would you tell the business owner? Have you? What happened?
- 3d** What do you think about people who get upset at the sight of a missing or misplaced apostrophe? Should they criticise? Why do you think they feel so strongly?
Show the **quotation card**: What do you think of these comments?

3e Has someone - say a work colleague/stranger - ever commented on, or criticised your use of aps? What happened? How did you feel?
How do you think you would feel? What did/wd you think of that person?

3f In 18C the correct use of language was seen as a marker of class - do you think this is still the case in NZ today? Why/why not?

Some people suggest that today it is more about 'educatedness' - do you agree?

3g Apostrophe's excerpt: ex grammar book dated 1658 - does this surprise you?
Th'ime how ap was first used in English " "

4. The Future:

4a What sort of things do you think might have an effect on ap use in the future?

Prompts: digital devices, spell-check etc

children not learning rules

children not writing much by hand

children exposed to non-standard use...

4b So in view of this - What do you think WILL happen to the apostrophe in the future?

Prompts: Loss - or some uses lost

Rules changed

Flexible - re individual style

Random use - no longer serves a useful purpose.

Continue as it - most people using it according to the rules.

4c Would it be a catastrophe if the apostrophe was lost?

Would you care? Why/why not?

4d 'Readability' text. Read side 1 first - (time if possible) [see appendix O below]

Read side two -

Was it different - in what way?

Why more difficult / more time?

Were some words with missing aps easier than others?

4e What would you like to see happen to the apostrophe in the future?

How could we achieve this?

5. Additional comments:

Do you have any additional comments on any aspect of apostrophe use?

Task 2

Apostrophe examples

Look at the words in **large font** - Tick the ones you find ACCEPTABLE

Cross the ones you find UNACCEPTABLE

Christmas letter from young relative			
1	I'm coming		Im coming
2	Don't wait up		Dont wait up
3	I wouldn't know.		I wouldnt know.
4	She'll be here soon.		Shell be here soon.
5	It's raining		Its raining
6	She collects old radio's		She collects old radios
7	How many teacher's?		How many teachers?
8	Always use apostrophe's.		Always use apostrophes.
9	Wash your hand's		Wash your hands
10	John's car		Johns car
11	The school's principal		The schools principal
12	Next Tuesday's meeting		Next Tuesdays meeting
13	It's name		Its name
14	Is it your's?		Is it yours?
15	For everyone's safety		For everyones safety
16	He know's everything.		He knows everything.
17	He see's ghosts		He sees ghosts
18	He annoy's me		He annoys me

19	Three dogs' bowls	Three dog's bowls	Three dogs bowls
20	Mens' socks	Men's socks	Mens socks
21	A baby's bottle	A babie's bottle	A babies bottle
22	The ladys' husbands	The ladies' husbands	The ladies husbands

Appendix P Sample interview guide – youth cohort

1. Introduction:

Read info letter - complete consent form - fill in demographic details

1a Task 1. I have a little task for you to do for me.

I'm going to read a short passage, and I would like you to write down what you hear in this box. I want to compare this with a group of older people to see what sort of things are changing. (imagine writing a letter to your aunt)

The city's restaurants offer kiwis many varieties and styles of food. Mary's mother says the lunch and dinner menus at Barney's café can't be beaten, and its children's menu is great. It's bright and funky and you'd love the café's friendly waiters.

1b Identification: Now - can you show me which mark you think is the apostrophe? (show the punctuation mark card)

2. Own use of aps

2a Learning: Do you remember learning about how to use apostrophes at school?

Were you taught 'the rules'?

Does anything a teacher said stick in your mind?

Do you remember being corrected - how? How often?

2b Use: Do you use apostrophes? No: Why not?

Yes: Always - sometimes? When - when not?

Can you tell me what you understand the apostrophe is used for?

How you decide when an apostrophe is needed?

2c Importance: Do you think apostrophes are important in English? Why/not?

2d Writing practices:

Do you do much **handwriting** - what sort of things?

Do you do much writing on **digital devices** - what sort of things? A lot??

Do you think you use more/fewer aps in handwriting? Why?

When do you tend to use aps? In texts? Emails? Letters - formal/informal?

Do you use **spellcheck**? Do you change errors indicated by SC?

Do you ever look at the change and think about it?

Do you think it helps you learn to spell - or perhaps makes you lazy?

3. Attitudes towards apostrophe use

3a Task 2: [see below]

Now I have another task. I want to find out a little about what you think is OK in writing.

(Explain how to fill in the grid - including supposed context of egs).

Please 'think out loud' as you go.

Can you explain **why there is an 's' on: (2nd set) cat's, pandas, knows...**

3b Sign cards: I'm going to show you some pictures and I'd just like you to share any thoughts and feelings

Would you do anything different if you were writing these signs?

Why do you think the ap has been put in here?

Noticing: Do you tend to notice apostrophes in signs that look wrong to you?

How do you react when you see them?

What do you think of the person who wrote this?

Would you comment to a friend - business? Have you? What happened?

3c The critics: What do you think of people who get very upset when they see a missing or misplaced apostrophe? Why do you think they feel so strongly?

3d Been criticised? Has someone - say a work colleague/stranger - ever commented on, or criticised your use of aps?

What happened? How did you feel? / How do you think you would feel?

What did / would you think of that person?

4. The Future:

4a Future? What do you think is going to happen to the apostrophe in the future?
Stay as is; disappear; random...

4b Influences: What are the things that will cause this to happen?

Digital; not taught; not writing by hand; spell-check; exposure to NS use....

4c Attitude: Do you care? Why/why not?

What do you think should happen?

4d Reading task: - how easily do they read side 2? [see appendix O below]

5. Any additional comments?

Task 2

Apostrophe examples:

Look at the words in large font - Tick ✓ the ones you find ACCEPTABLE
 Cross ✗ the ones you find UNACCEPTABLE

A. Letter or email from friends/family	
1 I'm coming	I'm coming
2 Don't wait up	Don't wait up
3 John's car	Johns car
4 He see's ghosts	He sees ghosts
5 They farm emu's	They farm emus
6 I wouldn't know.	I wouldnt know.
7 Three Christmas do's	Three Christmas dos
8 It's raining	Its raining
9 Next Tuesday's meeting	Next Tuesdays meeting
10 The schools principal	The schools principal
11 How many teacher's?	How many teachers?
12 She always say's that.	She always says that.
13 Three new shirt's	Three new shirts
14 It's name	Its name

B. A business letter or wedding invitation	
1 She'll be here soon.	Shell be here soon.
2 He can't cook	He cant cook
3 The cat's tail	The cats tail
4 He annoy's me	He annoys me
5 Always use apostrophe's.	Always use apostrophes.
6 You should've told me.	You shouldve told me.
7 I love panda's	I love pandas
8 It's time to go.	Its time to go.
9 Last week's class	Last weeks class
10 The library's hours	The librarys hours
11 All his letter's	All his letters
12 He know's everything.	He knows everything.
13 Julie collects hat's.	Julie collects hats.
14 It's purpose	Its purpose

Mens' socks	Men's socks	Mens socks
A baby's bottle	A babies bottle	A babies bottle

Childrens' toys	Children's toys	Childrens toys
Lady's jackets	Ladies' jackets	Ladies jackets

Appendix Q

Interview request sheet – teachers



INTERVIEW REQUEST

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA

Do you think apostrophe's have outlived their usefulness? Did reading that last sentence make your blood boil? Or perhaps you think the use of apostrophes should be left to individual preference? Whatever your view – I would love to talk to you.

My name is Hilary Laracy and I am a doctoral student at Massey University researching *The Apostrophe* and I am interested in its historical development, current usage and attitudes towards its use, as well as implications for the future. This is a descriptive study, meaning it is concerned with how the apostrophe is used today, rather than how well its use adheres to the rulebook. Your experiences as a teacher are important to this study since you both observe and help shape the next generation of English users. I am therefore interested in your own understanding and observations of, as well as attitudes towards, the use of apostrophes in the classroom.

I invite you to participate in an interview, conducted by me, at a time and place that is suitable for you. The interview will take about thirty minutes and will take the form of an informal and relaxed conversation. Please contact me if you have any questions, or if you are interested in helping with my research. I would appreciate it if you could give an indication of when and where would be convenient for you. I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you.
Hilary Laracy

Contact details:
Email: [REDACTED]
Phone: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Appendix R

Information sheet – teachers

SCHOOL OF LANGUAGE STUDIES
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North
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T 64 6 356 9099
F 64 6 350 2271
www.massey.ac.nz



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA

INFORMATION SHEET

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is Hilary Laracy and I am a doctoral student at Massey University researching the *apostrophe*. I am interested in its history, how its use has changed over time and how it is used today, as well as in what this may mean for the future of the apostrophe. Your experience with written language is important to this study because as a teacher you both observe and shape the next generation of English users.

This interview will take the form of an informal and relaxed conversation in which I would like you to feel free to share your thoughts on of apostrophe use, as well as your observations of its use in the classroom.

With your consent, this interview will be recorded and you retain the right to:

- discontinue your participation at any time
- decline to answer any particular question
- ask for the recording to be stopped at any time
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation

All information gathered will be kept confidential and your name will not be used in the study. I will be the only person who will have access to your information and it will be kept in a safe place. The findings of this study will be written up in a final report (thesis) and a summary of my findings will be available if requested.

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher named above is responsible for the ethical conduct of this research. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher, please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director, Research Ethics, telephone: 06 350 5249, email: humanethics@massey.ac.nz"

This research is supervised by: Dr Peter Petrucci P.R.Petrucci@massey.ac.nz
Dr Arianna Berardi-Wiltshire A.Berardi-Wiltshire@massey.ac.nz

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at:

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Survey No.

Thank you for taking part in this interview ☺

Demographics

Could you please tell me a little about yourself as this will help me make sense of the data you have provided? All information will, of course, be treated with complete confidentiality.

1. **Sex:** male / female
2. **Age:** 16 - 25 26 - 40 41 - 55 56+
3. My first language is: English Other
4. In what country did you receive most of your **schooling**?

Teaching:

5. In what country did you gain your teaching qualification?
6. Primary teachers - what year do you teach?
7. Secondary teachers - what subjects do you teach?
8. Do you teach in: a state school an integrated school a private school
9. What is the decile rating of your school?
10. How many years have you taught in NZ?

1b **Warehouse sign** 1 = totally acceptable 5 = unacceptable.

Men's shirts singlet's polo's

Intro: Read info letter - complete consent form - fill in demographic details

1. Introduction

1a. I'm going to show you a couple of **photos** and I'd just like you to share any thoughts that come to mind. (Warehouse; Bob Parker; Gossips; Freds Combo's)

Prompts: Are there any problems with any of them? What? Why put up here?
Is meaning affected (esp. gossips)?

Do you tend to **notice** signs like these?

What's your **reaction** when you see them?

Would you **tell business** - have you?

1b. **Warehouse sign:** [see above]

i) How **acceptable** do you find these words (1 totally; 5 not): (see demo form)

ii) What do you think of the writer of this sign?

iii) Any thoughts as to **why** the writer may have put an apostrophe in here?

iv) Some people get quite **irate** when they see things like this - do you?

What do you think about people who do?

2. Teacher background.

2a. **Were you taught** how to use apostrophes? When? How?

Does anything stick in your mind?

Do you remember being **corrected** at school /uni - in assignments?

2b How **confident** do you feel about your own use of apostrophes?

What do you put this down to?

Are there any areas you are **unsure** of? its/it's; women's.....

How do you feel about the fact you were not taught about the apostrophe?

Angry? cheated? Not bothered?

2c **ACCEPTABILITY TASK** [see below].

2d Can you please explain what you see as the functions of the apostrophe?

3. The teaching of apostrophe use

3a Is teaching the functions of the apostrophe part of your school **curriculum**?

3b How important do you think it is to teach children the rules of apostrophe use?

When - at what age/stage? Do you? How? Can you give examples?

- by the time a student gets to high school?

- 3c What are some **observations** you have made of **children's** apostrophe use in the classroom? Where do they omit them? Where do they insert unnecessary aps? Why?
- 3d How important is it that children **learn to use** apostrophes correctly? Do you **correct** apostrophe errors in children's work? How? Examples?
- 3e What about **other teachers** - have you observed any different ways of thinking regarding the teaching of aps? Why do you think this is?
- 3f Do you think correct use of apostrophes is more important in some **subjects** than others? Can you tell me about this?
- 3g Do you think correct use of apostrophes is more important in some **media** than others - eg newspapers, emails, texts, letters etc? Can you tell me about this?

4. The future of the apostrophe

- 4a What impact do you think the 'digital age' will have on apostrophe use?
 Prompts: Email - Texting - Spellcheck - Less handwriting
- 4b What do you think may happen to the apostrophe in the future? Why?
 Prompts: Loss - or some uses lost Ambiguity? egs he'll, she'll, she'd, we're
 Rules changed
 Flexible - re individual style
 Random use - no longer serves a useful purpose.
 Continue as it - most people using it according to the rules.
- 4c What do you think **SHOULD** happen?
- 4d. Readability: I'd like you just to read these quickly - side A then side B
 How did no aps affect readability? What think problems are?
 Does it affect meaning?
 Are there some words that are more difficult? Do you think we'd get used to it?
- 4e Apostrophe's card: Just to finish off I'd like you to have a look at this, It is from a grammar book printed in 1658. - does this surprise you?

5. Additional comments:

Do you have any additional comments on any aspect of apostrophe use?
 How acceptable would you find these forms in students' work?

Acceptability task

	totally acceptable	totally unacceptable			
1. I <u>dont</u> know. I <u>don't</u> know.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. He <u>see's</u> ghosts. He <u>sees</u> ghosts.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. The <u>teachers</u> advice The <u>teacher's</u> advice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Try our <u>pizzas</u> . Try our <u>pizza's</u> .	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. <u>Children's</u> footwear <u>Childrens</u> footwear <u>Childrens'</u> footwear	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. <u>It's</u> raining. <u>Its</u> raining.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. My two <u>friend's</u> houses My two <u>friends</u> houses My two <u>friends'</u> houses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. <u>Shes</u> not interested. <u>She's</u> not interested.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. <u>It's</u> impact is huge. <u>Its</u> impact is huge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. Cheap <u>jean's</u> Cheap <u>jeans</u>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. Joe <u>enjoys</u> rugby. Joe <u>enjoy's</u> rugby.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. <u>Kiwi's</u> like vegemite. <u>Kiwis</u> like vegemite.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Excerpt from Coote (1658)

apostrophe's.

English School-Master.

et. for and so forth. In written hand there be many other.
An so a word ending in a vowel, doth lose it sometime
when the next words begin with a vowel, as intent for the
iment, whiche easly should be written thus * th intent.

27

Lastly, you must write the first letter of every proper name and of the first word of every sentence and verse, with
those that are in them. * Called apostrophe's.

Edmund Coote, 1658

Readability task

A.

I'm nervous about tonight's party at the Jones' place. John doesn't like Mr Jones' wife and I've never met John's boss's husband. We'd better go though, because she'd invited us last time and we didn't go – she wasn't very happy. John hopes he'll get a promotion soon so we'll have to go. I've made tiramisu so I hope that's ok and no one's worried about dieting. Perhaps I should've made a salad but I thought it'd be good to make something I'd enjoy. I hope John's friend's coming so I'll have someone to talk to. We're going fashionably late but I can't wait till it's over and we're out of there.

B.

In a weeks time were going to Napier in Jess new car for a girls weekend. Jess sister Hannas coming too, shes 19. Jesss cars a red convertible shed got through TradeMe. If its sunny – itd be such fun to drive with wind-tousled hair. Id love to drive too, so well share. Hanna said shell bring some DVDs and Jessll bring her iPod. I wouldve brought mine but it isnt working. So theyll provide the entertainment and Ill bring nibbles. Were nearly organised - weve booked a motel but havent booked restaurants - Hannad like to go to a winery, so wed better book that. Im so excited – I cant wait!