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Clarissa Stincone

USAGE LABELS IN BASNAGE'S *Dictionnaire universel* (1701)

Abstract Basnage's revision (1701) of Furetière's *Dictionnaire universel* is profoundly different from Furetière's work in several regards. One of the most noticeable features of the dictionary lies in his increased use of usage labels. Although Furetière already made use of usage labels (see Rey 1990), Basnage gives them a prominent role. As he states in the preface to his edition, a dictionary that aspires to the title of "universal" should teach how to speak *in a polite way* ("poliment"), *right* ("juste") and making use of specific terminology for each art. He specifies, lemma by lemma, the diaphasic dimension by indicating the word's register and context of use, the diastratic one by noting the differences in the use of the language within the social strata, the diachronic evolution by indicating both archaisms and neologisms, the diamesic aspect by highlighting the gaps between oral and written language, the diatopic one by specifying either foreign borrowings or regionalisms.

After extracting the entries containing formulas such as "ce mot est ...", "ce terme est ..." and similar ones, we compare the number of entries and the type of information provided by the two lexicographers¹. In this paper, we will focus on Basnage's innovative contribution. Furthermore, we will try to identify the lexicographer's sources, i.e. we will try to establish on which grammars, collections of linguistic remarks or contemporary dictionaries Basnage relies his judgements.

Keywords Historical lexicography; *Dictionnaire universel*; Basnage de Beauval; 17th century; usage labels

1. The dual role of quotations and usage labels in Basnage's *Dictionnaire universel*

Henri Basnage de Beauval is the reviser of Antoine Furetière's monumental *Dictionnaire universel* (1690), the second monolingual dictionary published in France. Basnage's *Dictionnaire universel* (1701) is profoundly different from Furetière's work in several regards. Two essential elements in the revision lie in his increasing quotations and usage labels. Quotations are marginal in Furetière's dictionary and "y répond avant tout à des intentions littéraires" (Lehmann 1995, p. 49). On the contrary, in Basnage's dictionary they play a prominent role, being in all the entries for which the lexicographer was able to find them.² Usage labels, on the other hand, are used by Furetière more extensively than quotations (see Rey 1990). However, they appear to be extremely few when compared to the amount of usage labels recorded by Basnage. Both elements have the role of illustrating the *bel usage* of words. This had already been the main purpose of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*. Its lexicographers, although they chose not to quote, had taken the effort to mark those words "qui commencent à vieillir, & ceux qui ne sont pas du bel usage, & que l'on a qualifié de bas ou de style familier" (Preface to the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie*, 1694). On his part, Furetière had set out to create a universal dictionary that would contain terms specific to

¹ The .txt files digitised with Transkribus and subsequently analysed with BBEdit are flawed (incorrectly separated words, confused or missing letters, etc.). It is possible that some usage labels may have escaped analysis.

² Most terminological entries lack quotations because terms are rarely used by writers.

arts and crafts without giving much weight to the *bel usage*³. Basnage tries to bring together the two lexicographical visions. While maintaining Furetière's universalist spirit,⁴ Basnage depicts the *bel usage* of the French language by means of quotations and usage labels. However, "les nombreuses marques d'usage fournissent une multitude d'informations qui dépassent une conception uniquement puriste" (Gemmingen-Obstfelder 1982, p. 131). As shown elsewhere (see Stincone 2021), Basnage's lexicographic work could be regarded also as a proto-learner's dictionary since it guides its reader in understanding all aspects of the language. Indeed, while illustrating the *bel usage* of words, Basnage takes the reader by the hand, suggesting which words he can use without hesitation and at the same time warning him about the words to keep from being used. He accomplishes both purposes by means of a well-organised architecture of quotations and usage labels.

In principle, quotations and usage labels are mutually exclusive: if a word is in general use and it is in the texts of good contemporary authors, its status does not generate perplexity and quotations guarantee its *bel usage* while providing illustrative examples of the headword as well as syntactic models to reproduce for the reader. The presence of one or more usage labels, on the other hand, indicates that the word cannot be found in the texts of good contemporary authors, that not all language experts approve of the word or that for some reason it is excluded from the *bel usage*. The reader should therefore be careful not to use it. Some entries contain both, usage labels and quotations. This is the case with the entries referring to the burlesque, comic and satirical literature. Furthermore, if Basnage is aware of a single good author who used the word, his quotations can be preceded by formulas such as "[Auteur] (l') a employé", "[Auteur] s'(en) est servi", "Ce mot se trouve dans [Auteur]". This last one, in which the author's name designates his work by metonymy, is also used to indicate the lexicographer⁵ who records the lemma when it is not present in the works of contemporary writers. These formulas accomplish the primary goal of ensuring the existence of the word. Finally, when Basnage is dubious about the *bel usage* of a word for which he cannot find attestations in the works of contemporary authors or in his reference dictionaries, he inserts a usage label, introduced by "On doute que", which explains his doubts.

2. Quotations

Quotations, almost exclusively from works of the second half of the 17th century, accompany the dictionary's definitions. They are extracted from various types of works, primarily literary texts but also historical and religious ones, correspondence, scientific and informative treatises, informative journals.

Basnage is not the first French lexicographer who used quotations. Before him, Pomey had used them in his bilingual French-Latin dictionary (see Girardin 1995) and Richelet (see Lehmann 1995) in what is to all intents and purposes the first monolingual French dictionary. Basnage takes quotations from both. Olivier Patru, jurist and writer but also academi-

³ The very rare occurrences of "bel usage", "beau langage" and "beau stile" in Furetière's *Dictionnaire universel* are mostly found in definitions or illustrative examples rather than in usage labels while Basnage uses them in twenty-seven, eighteen and six usage labels respectively.

⁴ In addition to integrating the descriptions of almost all the dictionary entries, Basnage introduces new ones belonging both to the common lexicon and to specialised languages.

⁵ Basnage, in his revision, systematically consults the monolingual French dictionaries of Richelet (16932 [1680]) and Académie française (1694) as well as the bilingual French-Latin dictionaries of Nicot (1606), Pomey (1671), Danet (1673) and Tachard (1689).

cian, clarifies Richelet's working method in a letter to Maucroix where he asks him to strip his texts and those of Balzac while "Richelet va dépouiller tout d'Ablancourt" (Livet 1858, pp. 50 f.) and Patru himself will look for quotations in his pleas. Patru reports Richelet's idea that at least five or six living authors for the sake of being quoted themselves, would also provide quotations from others. Richelet's dictionary is therefore a collective work containing quotations identified by several collaborators. In addition to the forty-nine authors mentioned in the alphabetical table at the beginning of the dictionary, "il faut y ajouter les auteurs vivants tels Patru, La Fontaine, Benserade, Dépréaux et d'autres encore" (Lehmann 1995, p. 41). All these authors' quotations in Basnage's dictionary are very often a clue allowing easy access to the source from which Basnage transcribes his examples, i. e. Richelet's dictionary. Most likely, Basnage, in addition to taking up Richelet's quotations, also takes up his working method and gets help from some collaborators in stripping the texts of contemporary authors in order to identify the appropriate quotations for each entry. Basnage's quotations are very numerous and extremely varied. They will not be treated in this article.

3. Usage labels

Many different types of usage labels in Basnage's *Dictionnaire universel*, although appearing distant and unrelated to each other, are part of a vast and coherent project.

The usage labels allow Basnage to point out which senses deviate from what he considers to be the correct way of speaking and writing, relying on the opinions of language experts and grammarians who had expressed their views on words' usage. In the 17th century there is the proliferation of the "genre grammatical des réflexions et remarques sur la langue" (Leroy-Turcan, 1998, p. 90). In particular, Vaugelas's *Remarques sur la langue française* (1647) inspired the works of Boisregard, Bouhours, Corneille, Ménage and Tallement, which are incorporated in the second edition of the *Dictionnaire universel*. These lexicographers, grammarians or language enthusiasts are so reputable that they can *approuver* or *desapprouver*, *admettre* or *condamner* the use of a word in the same way as Richelet and the lexicographers of the *Académie française*. Some are purists, others are liberal with regard to words and constructions to be admitted or banned. Since the French language is in the process of being defined, the approval of one language expert does not imply that of another. In general, Basnage records all the positions of which he is aware, expressing his preference from time to time. The above-mentioned verbs are found in 78 usage labels of Basnage's edition, which often devotes entire paragraphs of the entry to linguistic disquisitions.

The usage label is called NOTTE by lexicographers of the classical age. As we read in the two editions of the *Dictionnaire universel*, "dans un Dictionnaire on doit mettre une *notte* à un mot, quand il est vieux, ou particulier à quelque art ou science. Quand il est dans l'usage commun, il n'y faut point de *notte*." (NOTTE, DU1690 and DU1701).⁶ This entry shows that the usage labels adopted by both Furetière and Basnage are of two types: the usage labels that, placed after the headwords, detect the specialised languages by indicating the domain to which the entry belongs, and the usage labels that, placed at the end of the entry, refer to the dimensions of linguistic variation. Basnage significantly increases the ones and the others. Although indicated by means of various formulations, the domain is mostly introduced by "(en) terme(s) de [name of domain]". On the one hand, Basnage introduces a large num-

⁶ We reproduce Basnage's spelling for sentences appearing in both editions.

ber of headwords and sub-headwords, marking them as specialised lexicon if it is the case while, on the other hand, he adds the domain to which already existing entries belong. In this article we will not consider domain designations⁷ and we will focus on linguistic variation. Although the entry NOTTE mentions only archaisms, Basnage's *Dictionnaire universel* describes a much wider spectrum of the linguistic variation. The lexicographer does not neglect the description of any dimension of language, namely diachronic, diatopic, diastratic, diaphasic, and diamesic. Unfortunately, the description of the different dimensions is not systematic and uniform. An attempt has been made to identify recurrent patterns in order to extrapolate significant data. Usage labels are introduced by "ce mot" in a certain number of entries, by the personal pronoun "il" in others, by impersonal periphrases such as "on dit" or "on s'en sert" in still others. Sometimes, they refer to all senses of the word, sometimes to the last sense only. In some cases, Basnage specifies it by means of the complement of limitation "en ce sens", in some he does not.

The discourse on the usage labels is extremely complex and cannot be covered in one article. For instance, we are not going to deal with usage labels referring to pronunciation, syntactic constructions, words' figurative and connotative meaning, to the lexicographer's opinions on frequency of use, to experts' doubts about words' usage, to popular common mistakes, to the type of texts and contexts adopting certain words, to words' collocations and so on⁸. Furthermore, the various dimensions are often intertwined. For the sake of discussion, we have chosen to analyse separately the five axes of linguistic variation in Basnage's *Dictionnaire universel*, whose data are always compared with those of Furetière's edition.

3.1 The diachronic dimension

The diachronic dimension refers to the linguistic variation linked to time.

One of Furetière's illustrative examples of VIEUX ("Ce mot est *vieux*, il n'est plus du beau langage", VIEUX, DU1690), is the prototype of a very frequent usage label in the dictionary. It shows that the "age" of the word is a parameter which establishes its exclusion from the "beau langage", elsewhere designated as "beau stile" or "bel usage". In the 16th century, Malherbe, in his quest for linguistic purity, launched a war against archaisms that was not yet over by the 17th (see Brunot 1909). In spite of the opposition of authoritative linguists to the censorship of archaisms, purity is a shared aspiration. As an example, Bouhours "compared 'beautiful language' to pure, clear water that had no taste, in other words, it contained no archaisms" (Cormier 2008, p. 164).

Basnage considerably increases the number of usage labels referring to archaisms⁹ in his edition compared to the previous one. Furetière's usage labels marking archaisms are 150 while Basnage's 314. Specifically, Furetière states that a word "est vieux" in 86 entries and that "vieillit" in 62. He uses the periphrasis "commencent à vieillir" only once referring to a specific sense of a couple of headwords and his only use of the past participle "vieilli" concerns non-lemmatised words. The range of formulations used by Basnage is wider. The lexicographer introduces a kind of degree of word's "ageing". He marks 137 archaisms by

⁷ Domain designations of Basnage's *Dictionnaire universel* are partially analysed in Galleron/Williams (in print).

⁸ Some of these issues are partially treated in Stincone (2021).

⁹ The number of archaisms does not coincide with the number of usage labels marking archaisms. This article does not take into account the numerous definitions opening with "Vieux mot".

means of the adjective “vieux” in predicative function after the verb *être*, for instance “Ce mot est vieux” (SEMANCE, DU1701). The verb *vieillir*, conjugated exclusively in the present indicative by Furetière, is flexed 177 times by Basnage, both in the past and in the present indicative, within 21 and 133 usage labels respectively which indicate that the word has already been banned from use or that the banning is not yet concluded, e.g. “Ce mot a vieilli” (PARFAIRE, DU1701) and “Il vieillit, & ne se dit guere qu’en riant” (LARMOYANT, DU1701). Plus, a periphrastic construction used in 23 entries by Basnage projects the decay into the future, like in “Le mot d’*indice* en ce sens commence à vieillir” (INDICE, DU1701). Sometimes, Basnage marks the intensity of the verb by means of adverbs or adverbial locutions such as *absolument*, *fort*, *un peu* and *trop* which further define the expressive climax. All of these usage labels are inspired by those contained in Richelet’s and *Académie*’s dictionaries as well as by the remarks of language experts.

Basnage does not just report archaisms. In an effort to provide a tool that is as inclusive as possible, he welcomes newly formed words into his dictionary. Furetière marks only three words as neologisms.¹⁰ One of them gives the date of introduction of the word into the French language: it is 1684 (see SURTOUT, DU1690 and DU1701), six years before the publication of the *Dictionnaire universel* which Furetière had finished in 1688. It is, therefore, a word of only four years old when Furetière compiles his dictionary. Basnage does not suppress the indication continuing to consider “nouveau” a word coined fifteen years before and marks other nineteen words as neologisms. Some of them are not well integrated into the language system since the lexicographer states that they are not yet established, e.g., “Ce mot est nouveau, & n’est pas encore tout-à-fait établi” (RHETORICATION, DU1701). Sometimes, a neologism can only be used in low or familiar styles, sometimes it is even “trop nouveau pour s’en servir” (INVESTISSEMENT, DU1701). The usage labels of a few entries, inspired by Danet’s dictionary which is explicitly mentioned, concern the lemmatization of the newly conceived feminine equivalents of masculine nouns, formed by means of a Latin-derived suffix (CONDUCTRICE, CONTEMPLATRICE, CORRECTRICE). Maybe in the circles of the *Precieuses*, derided by Molière in the *Precieuses ridicules* (1659), the all-modern need was felt to endow the language with feminine designations.

3.2 The diatopic dimension

The diatopic dimension refers to the linguistic variation linked to the geographical location of the speakers. It is described at a broad level already by Furetière, who is aware that “par toutes les Provinces le peuple parle un *jargon* différent de la langue des honnêtes gens” (JARGON, DU1690 and DU1701). In this sentence two linguistic axes overlap, the diatopic one and the diastratic one being the language of “provincial people” opposed to that of “honest people”. In fact, the language described by both lexicographers is that of the more literary and educated milieu of the court and those who have relations with it, not that of common people¹¹. The Paris region, essentially because of the presence of the *Académie française* and of Versailles, was the area to which most of the literati converged. It is as if the

¹⁰ This does not mean that Furetière does not record neologisms. According to Rey (2006, pp. 162 f.), Furetière’s *Dictionnaire universel* contains almost all the 17th century neologisms listed by Brunot (1909) in his list of “mot nouveaux”.

¹¹ Basnage absorbs and makes his own the thought of Vaugelas whose definition of “bon usage” is: “C’est la façon de parler de la plus saine partie de la Cour, conformément à la façon d’écrire de la plus saine partie des Auteurs du temps” (Vaugelas 1647, p. 18).

court at Versailles exudes an air of politeness around it, so that “quand ce provincial aura *humé* l'air de Paris, il sera plus poli” (HUMER, DU1701). The provincial, i. e. the one who comes from the province or who lives in the province, “c'est un homme qui n'a pas l'air, & les manieres de la Cour ; qui n'est pas poli ; qui ne sçait pas vivre ; qui n'a point vu le monde” (PROVINCIAL, DU1701). Basnage recognises the existence in France of “12. principales Provinces” (GOUVERNEMENT, DU1701) but he does not give a list of them¹². Nevertheless, plenty of entries contain references to the language spoken in one or more of the French provinces such as Anjou, Bourgogne, Bretagne, Champagne, Normandie, Picardie, Provence, etc. which are not equally represented in the dictionary.

Specifically, the contrast between Paris and the province emerges in eight entries, two of which are already in Furetière. Three of them state that the word is in use in the province rather than in Paris while the remaining five provide two different variants, one for Paris, one for the province. More often, Basnage refers generically to the language of the province without mentioning Paris. The reference to the language of the “province(s)” is contained in 85 sentences, 38 of which are already used by Furetière. These occurrences are of two types: 16 of them record the province variant as opposed to the word used in Paris while the remaining 69 contain a usage label which restricts the word's usage to the province(s), for instance: “On ne se sert de ces mots-là qu'en certaines Provinces” (ADMODIER, DU1701).

Sentences referring to borrowings will not be analysed here as the etymological notations do not direct the reader on the word's usage.

3.3 The diastratic dimension

The diastratic dimension refers to the extraction and social status of the speakers.

As previously seen, Basnage's *Dictionnaire universel* essentially describes the language of the “honest people”. In general, the reference to the language of the people is sufficient to mark a deviation from the *bel usage*. Basnage emphasises that a word is used by the “honnêtes gens” only to point out some contrasts with the language of the “peuple”, e. g., “Ce mot ne se dit ordinairement que par le peuple de Paris; car les honnêtes gens disent un Vendeur de melons” (MELONNIER, DU1701). The diastratic dimension is indicated in the dictionary in many ways. The most recurrent adjectives referring to people's language are “bas” and “populaire” which characterise the style “dont use le peuple” (STILE, DU1701).

Of the 411 entries in which one or more usage labels containing references to the “bas” style appear, only 70 are already in Furetière's dictionary. If we exclude the 82 entries associating the adjective with burlesque, comic and satirical literature and the 57 entries associating it to the familiar register, which will be discussed later, 272 entries still remain. Sometimes, Basnage inserts a usage label which relegate all senses or, more often, only the last one to the low style immediately after the illustrative examples provided by Furetière, e. g. “Il a mangé tout son crevé saoul. Cette dernière expression est basse.” (CREVER, DU1701).¹³ In these cases, the usage label is based on the lexicographer's perception of the language. In other occasions, Basnage introduces a new sense specifying that it belongs to the low style: “On dit, Ruer en *cuisine*, pour dire Goinfrer. Il est bas.” (CUISINE, DU1701). In these cases,

¹² Both lexicographers mention “Normandie, [...] Bretagne, [...] Anjou” (PROVINCE, DU1690 and DU1701).

¹³ The underlined text is already in Furetière's edition.

the sense as well as its usage label is generally taken from Richelet's or the Academy's dictionaries.

Moreover, 235 entries contain references to the "populaire" (often associated to "bas") character of a word. Furetière's dictionary already records 150 of them. Generally, Furetière opens his definitions by specifying that the word is a "terme populaire" while Basnage's usage labels are mostly placed at the end of the entry and refer to the last sense described by Furetière, e. g., "Il lui a tant corné aux oreilles cette maxime, qu'enfin il l'en a persuadé. Il est bas & populaire" (CORNER, DU1701). Furthermore, in 64 entries, 47 of which are already in Furetière's *Dictionnaire universel*, an entire paragraph is introduced by formulas such as "On dit populairement" aimed at describing uses of the word interdicted to the *bel usage*. It should be noted that Richelet never uses the adjective *populaire* or the adverb *populairement* in his dictionary in order to describe a linguistic usage. Only eight times these usage labels are taken from the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* while, generally, Basnage comments on Furetière's examples relying on his own linguistic awareness.

The language of the "(petit) peuple" is also described in 179 entries, 111 of which are already in Furetière's dictionary. As was the case in the previous section, they are not all usage labels. On one side, there are sentences containing the popular variant of the word, which is often a scientific term, while on the other side there are full-fledged usage labels containing a usage restriction to the "peuple" or even the "petit peuple" (in 39 entries). In particular, there are 67 entries recording popular variants, most of which (49) are already in Furetière's while a usage information is contained in 112 entries, over half of which (60) are in Furetière's. As an example of usage label, "Ce mot [...] n'est en usage que parmi le peuple" (BAGARRE, DU1701). These usage labels are often taken from Richelet's, more rarely from the Academy's dictionary. In some cases, they are Basnage's formulations.

3.4 The diaphasic dimension

The diaphasic dimension refers to the linguistic variation associated with the change in style and expressive register. The expressive register varies depending on the communicative situation. One can say something "par ironie", "par plaisanterie", "par mépris", all uses recorded by Basnage. Also, the adoption of a specific literary genre implies diaphasic variation. Basnage does not seem to perceive the difference between the diastratic dimension and the diaphasic one since he considers the low or popular style to be "celui dont use le peuple, ou dont on use dans le comique, ou le burlesque" (STILE, DU1701), thus equating lower social classes language with the language of writers who imitate common people's language. It seems appropriate to distinguish here the "low" language of illiterate people who have no alternative in expression from the one of authors who consciously choose to adopt a certain literary genre. In his edition, Basnage greatly increases references to burlesque, comic, and satirical literature.

Although they designate different literary genres, the adjectives *burlesque*, *comique*, and *satirique* are often used together and in conjunction with *bas* which confirms their belonging to the same style. The frequent reference to the *figuré* style is not surprising if one considers that the search for ambiguity and double meaning is the base of burlesque, comic and satirical production. A word does not belong to the *bel usage* to Basnage's eyes if it is exclusively found in works of one of the three literary genres. As previously said, entries containing a reference to one of them present a peculiar feature: they contain both usage labels and author quotations. Since "seuls les genres burlesques, comiques et satiriques peuvent

s'accomoder du mauvais usage" (Brunot 1909, p. 50), the adoption of one of them implies the use of the entries discarded by the purists.

Furetière uses the adjective *burlesque* and the adverb *burlesquement* in 85 entries, the adverb *comiquement* in only one, and never refers to satirical literature. Basnage, for his part, refers to burlesque literature in 322 entries, to comic literature in 149, and to satirical literature in 37. Generally, Basnage's numerous usage labels pertaining to the three genres are placed after the definition and any illustrative examples, but before quotations – which illustrate the genre – and the etymological note. As an example, "BROUET, se dit aussi d'un mechant potage: mais dans le stile comique & burlesque. Le Galant, pour toute besogne, avoit un *brouet* clair. LA FONT." (BROUET, DU1701). The few quotations by Furetière come from Colletet, Corneille, author of *L'Illusion comique*, Desmarests de Saint-Sorlin, author of the *Visionnaires*, Mairet, author of the *Sylvie*, Marot, author of the *Epigrams*, Molière, Pasquier, Regnier, Scarron, author of the *Virgile travesti*. With the exception of Desmarests, whose citation is suppressed, Basnage retains Furetière's quotations, adding others. Molière (most often "Mol.") is the most frequently cited author, followed by La Fontaine (most often "La Font." or "La Fon."), Scarron (most often "Scar."), Voiture (most often "Voit."), Saint-Amant (most often "St. Am." exceptionally "Saint Amand"), Boileau (most often "Boil." or "Boi."), Sarazin (most often "Sar."), Ablancourt (most often "Ablan."), Mainard (most often "Mai.", exceptionally "Main."), Regnier (most often "Reg."), Gombaut (most often "Gon." or "Gomb."), Benserade (also "Bens.")¹⁴. Basnage does not bother to read Molière or Scarron in order to find their quotations, almost all of them are extracted from Richelet's dictionary¹⁵. While Richelet often indicates his sources in a very precise way, providing in addition to the name of the author also that of the work and the page, Basnage is much hastier and, at the same time, systematic providing only the abbreviation of the author's name. Even though the tendency to downgrade the burlesque¹⁶ takes hold as early as the 17th century, French authors seems to use it without hesitation. If Sarazin and Scarron are mentioned among the representatives of the burlesque genre (see BURLESQUE, DU1690 and DU1701), Molière among those of the comic (see COMIQUE, DU1690 and DU1701) and Boileau among the authors of satires (see SATYRE, DU1690 and DU1701), perhaps one might be surprised by the numerous quotations of Ablancourt, La Fontaine, or Voiture, elsewhere welcomed by Basnage among the "bon auteurs" of the French language, whose quotations guarantee the *bel usage* of the words. Basnage, therefore, does not condemn those authors for having used a low style, he only recognises that they have consciously chosen to use it.

3.5 The diamesic dimension

Closely related to the diaphasic dimension is the diamesic one, which concerns linguistic variation related to the physical-environmental medium through which communication takes place. Basnage greatly increases the number of usage labels that restrict the adoption of the word to the oral rather than the written.

¹⁴ Molière is mentioned 70 times, Benserade 6. Other authors, mentioned in an occasional way, are not reported here.

¹⁵ Although the spelling of Richelet and that of Furetière do not always correspond, Basnage can easily identify and then transcribe the quotations because Richelet adopts a labelling system which makes use of diacritical signs (see Bray 1990).

¹⁶ See Nédelec (2004).

Out of the 80 usage labels containing a reference to “conversation”, only five are already used by Furetière. About twenty of them are inspired by Richelet’s and Academy’s dictionaries while the remaining ones, formulated by Basnage, are based on the work of Boiregard, Bouhours, Caillières, Corneille, Ménage, Tallement, Vaugelas, whose surnames are often abbreviated at the end of the usage label. For instance, “Ce mot ne doit guere sortir de la conversation. CORN.” (ENTACHER, DU1701). The noun *conversation* is followed by the adjective *familier* in no less than eleven usage labels. As stated in the two editions of the dictionary, “le stile familier, est celui dont on se sert en conversation” (STILE, DU1690 AND DU1701). Therefore, the two words are strictly connected. The occurrences of *familier* are very numerous. Out of the 182 usage labels containing the adjective *familier*, only 20 of them are already used by Furetière. The remaining 162 are partly inspired by Richelet’s and Academy’s dictionaries, by some collections of linguistic remarks or are formulated by Basnage himself. Finally, the four usage labels containing the adverb *familierement* are all introduced by Basnage.

4. Conclusions

Basnage strongly increases the number of usage labels in his *Dictionnaire universel* (1701) by taking into account all aspects of linguistic variation. Usage labels have a dual role in the dictionary. In addition to illustrating the *bel usage* of the French language, they also clarify the linguistic doubts of users who are guided in choosing a word rather than another depending on the dimension related to the linguistic act. Prescriptivism and descriptivism seem to merge in Basnage’s dictionary. On the one hand, the lexicographer feels the need to provide the prescriptions of the purists as well as the linguistic norm dictated by the *Académie française*. On the other hand, he feels the need to provide a tool that describes the language as it is, in every possible communicative situation and context. The lexicographer is sometimes inspired by the usage labels of Richelet’s and Academy’s dictionaries, sometimes he relies on the collections of remarks of French language experts of his time. He often trusts his own linguistic awareness as well while creating his usage labels.

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