"People incorrectly correcting other people": (Re-)Correcting comments as a means of stance-taking in digital communication

Literate communities feel strongly about 'their' orthographies, claiming ownership of them and demanding the right of co-determination. A context in which it becomes strikingly apparent that orthography is a form of social action (cf. Jaffe et al. 2012) is social media. On the one hand, everyday digital communication is itself often at the core of debates of linguistic criticism centering on, among other things, correctness and creativity, norms and deviations from them, and writing competence(s) or the lack thereof. Linguistics has made contributions through both the empirical study of linguistic phenomena (such as norm deviations) and the analysis of the mentioned debates. On the other hand, adopting a user perspective shows that norms are habitually negotiated within certain communities of practice: For example, comments on Facebook, etc. including deviances from linguistic norms are frequently corrected (by people sometimes colloquially referred to as grammar or spelling nazis) (cf. Hammel 2013; Albert/Hahn 2015; Bahlo/Becker/Steckbauer 2016). Interestingly, in such contexts, the development of entire chains of corrections can sometimes be observed as (incorrect) corrections are iteratively re-corrected or commented on. These chains reveal different speech acts or actions (including criticism or appraisal) and pose challenges in distinguishing between them. They also demonstrate an awareness of linguistic norms, which are made reconstructable through users' implicit or explicit references to them. Pragmatically, corrections are often not performed neutrally but in a manner that degrades and invalidates (the opinion of) the person who made the mistake. We call this phenomenon orthographic shaming. At its center are people interpreting linguistic knowledge (primarily of orthographic norms) as power: knowing something others do not – and pointing it out publicly by displaying expertise – validates their superiority. Our talk focuses on the sociopragmatic aspects of orthographic shaming and resulting (re-)correction chains as we analyze how referencing linguistic norms can serve as a means of (often humorously framed) stancetaking (cf. Arendt/Kiesendahl 2014). In an exploratory approach, speech acts within orthographic shaming comments and reactions to them are identified. Conclusions are drawn as to the pragmatic behavior surrounding orthographic shaming as well as the stances towards this behavior, showing that orthographic shaming is a form of negotiating power through commenting, which points to a gradual change of discussion culture.

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