

Critical metaprescriptivism

An exploratory analysis of attitudes towards
grassroots prescriptivism in a pertinent
Facebook group



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Overview

1. **Motivation and research questions**
2. **Theoretical preliminaries:** Corrective practices and (attitudes towards) grassroots prescriptivism
3. **Data:** Facebook group *People Incorrectly Correcting Other People*
4. **Methods:** From guerilla ethnography to critical computer-mediated discourse analysis
5. **Analysis and discussion** of select examples
6. **Conclusion and outlook**

Functions of recorections (Frick & Meletis submitted)

recorection post

Recorector

Of course it's 'you're'.
Can you believe the gall
of some people?

Correctee

Haha you're funny!

Corrector

*your

screenshot
(de-/recontextualized
discourse fragment)

recorections as (mostly other-)corrections of (incorrect) corrections

- can be actual corrections or only comments that (implicitly) refer to a deviance
- (1) factually **correct a perceived mistake**/misconception, and (2) **subject the (incorrect) corrector to the same negative effects of an FTA** they had wanted to bring upon the addressee(s) of their initial correction
- thus mitigate effects of **attempted FTAs (for the initial correctee)** – by acting as FTAs themselves (for the incorrect corrector)
- function also as **(implicit) criticisms of the practice of correcting** including the smugness and supposed superiority ascribed to correctors
- not only mock a mistake but also the mocking practiced by correctors, with which those aim to position themselves as superior; thus, recorectors may implicitly **challenge standard language ideologies** by exposing the hypocrisy of prescriptive practices but also (hypocritically) **position themselves as (morally) superior** with respect to prescriptivism

PRELIMINARY DEFINITION:

metaprescriptivism

(critical) metapragmatic **ideologies** and **discourse** *about* prescriptivism that may themselves carry prescriptive undertones, or even **practices** that subvert prescriptivism but may themselves be prescriptive

Research question(s)

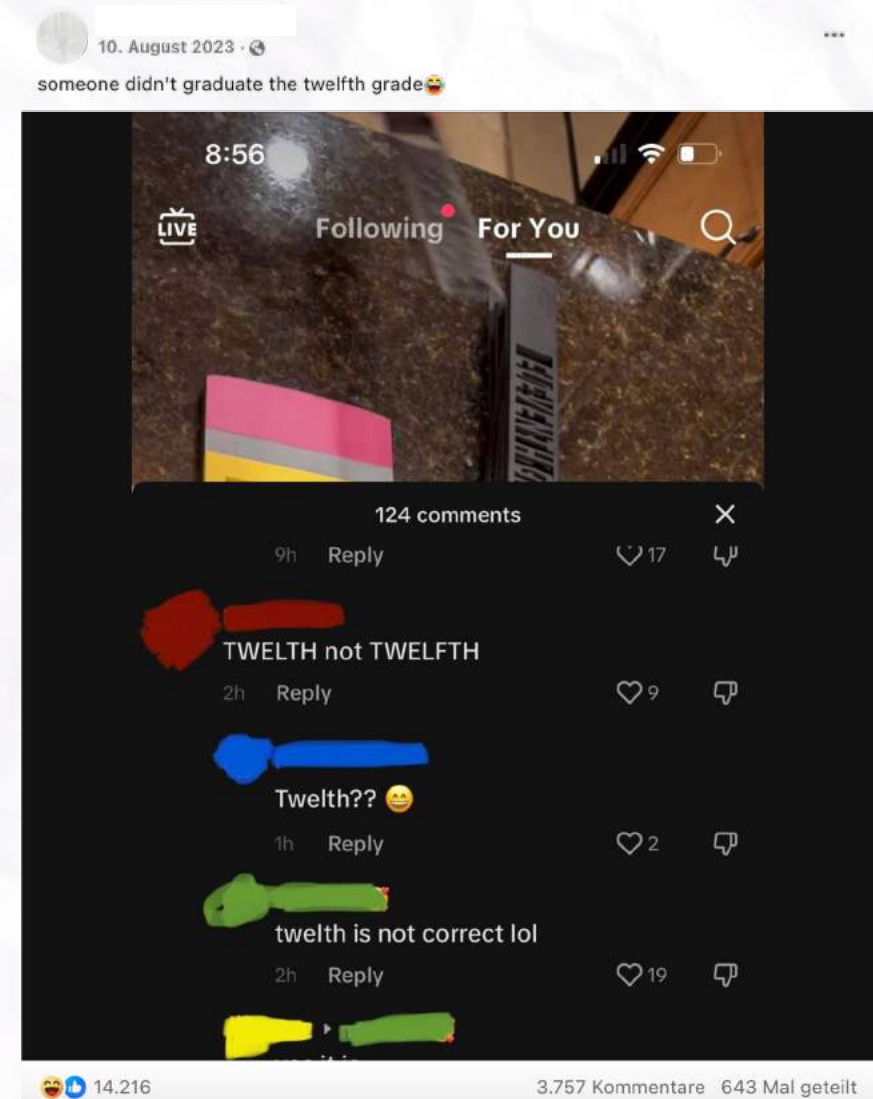
- How is metaprescriptivism **critical of prescriptivism/subversive** while being a **prescriptive practice itself**?
 - Which attitudes can be deduced towards corrections and prescriptivism?
What are the different **levels of awareness of prescriptivism** among users?
 - What role does **humor** play?

Attitudes towards digital grassroots prescriptivism

- grassroots prescriptivism (Lukač & Heyd 2023: 230)
 - (1) associated with members of the general public, (2) produced, received, and reproduced at the level of the individual, of small groups or communities of practice, (3) marked by participatory practices, (4) associated with (though not necessarily bound to) digital environments and practices
- the public's attitudes towards prescriptivism (Straaijer 2016)
 - “**Everyone has attitudes to linguistic prescriptivism**, ideas on whether usage ought to be prescribed in the first place, and if so, how this should be done, and to what extent. These ideas drive out **reactions towards prescriptive actions** when we encounter them. Whether it is with compliance, indifference, or **defiance**, we all react to the normative efforts around us.” (233)
 - “for the average language user, prescriptive rules are important because they matter” (237)
 - “**members of the public usually do not seem to question the validity or necessity of prescriptivism**” (237)

People Incorrectly Correcting Other People

- **public** Facebook group
- created in July 2020
- currently 2,8 million members
- 4 administrators, 12 moderators
- 7 **rules** for posting, among them: censor names, add context to posts, entertaining posts get priority
- **posts**: anonymized and decontextualized screenshots of incorrect corrections
- **practices**: prescriptivism responses; collectively being entertained by someone being wrong (prescriptive sociability)
- **data**: 14 posts (7 linguistic, 7 non-linguistic)
 - total of 12,582 comments (as of 19 June 2024)



Preliminary: **A mixture of methods and approaches**

- qualitative methods
- from exploratory **guerilla ethnography** (e. g., Giaxoglou 2020), i. e., informal, rapid, and adaptable ethnographic approach often used in unpredictable or fluid environments, to **grounded theory**
- **thematic analysis**: development of coding scheme still ongoing
- leading up to **computer-mediated (critical) discourse analysis**

Criticism of linguistic prescriptivism



User 6.1

What's terrifying is the unforgiving needle nosed assholes social media has turned us all into.

You understood it, right? Shut the fuck up then.

2 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen



User 6.2

If you are intelligent enough to correct then you should be intelligent enough to know you only do it to prove you're better than someone else. Seems like adding substance to conversations is lost on majority of humans when any grammatical error occurs tho.

2 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen



User 7.1

It was made with copper. It is made of copper. It was and is made from copper. This is the epitome of pedantry. They're both correct. Both past and present tense is correct. It was made with copper. That did not change, which means it is still made from copper.

5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen

157   



User 7.2

Things like this will always spur arguments because language is plastic and its meaning is determined by what we collectively decide. When it was made, it was indeed made with copper (and steel and iron), and it is also still made of those things. Both of these are correct statements and the intent of the statement is clear either way.

All of that being said, the pendants of arguing which is MORE correct almost always comes from a place of Let Me Take Any And Every Opportunity To Show That I'm So Much Smarter Than Everyone Else, and honestly, it's so fucking tiresome.

5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen



User 14.1

linguistic prescriptivism is stupid and you should feel bad ***

43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen

General criticism of prescriptivism in/and this group

The image shows a screenshot of social media comments. On the left, a vertical thread of comments is visible, with the first comment being the most prominent. On the right, there are two separate comment boxes. The background is a light blue crumpled paper texture.

User 1.1
Do people really not have anything better to do with their time?
21 Std. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 10 👍 😂

User 1.2
@User 1.1 | I mean, look at us, all here in these comments, commenting. Don't we all have something better we could be doing?
21 Std. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 19 👍 😂

User 1.3
@User 1.1 | that's literally what this page is for...so, no.
20 Std. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 6 👍

User 1.4
Whoever steps in those kinds of conversations (on either side) needs to reconsider their life priorities and do something useful with their life. ***

User 1.5
@User 1.4 - slightly ironic given the page you posted this on... 😏 ***

User 9.1
This group is for pedantic freaks I want to leave
5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 😂

User 14.1
Oh for Pete's sake this group is unhinged
15 Std. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen

Topics, degrees, and pedantry: Negotiating legitimacy

 **User 1.1**
This group is turning into grammar debate instead of factually wrong information debate and it's getting so annoying

20 Std. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen



 **User 1.2**
@User 1.1 But...grammar is factual information?


59 Min. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen

 **User 1.3**
Grammar corrections are the boringest

8 Std. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen

 **User 7.1**
Ffs, this is one of the most pettiest ones I've seen.
This didn't even deserve a post.

5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 3  

 **User 7.2**
Pedantic comment is pedantic

5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen

 **User 7.3**
I keep being surprised by how trivial a thing ppl will argue about in order to "correct" someone else.

5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen

 **User 7.4**
This level of pedantry never works out for anyone.

5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen

Naming (unfitting) practices: Alternative group names

The image shows a screenshot of a social media thread with four posts. Each post includes a user profile picture, a name, a text message, and interaction options like 'Gefällt mir', 'Antworten', and 'Teilen'. The posts are as follows:

- User 5.1**: i know how it's spelled. You clearly don't get the joke. Now you are People Unnecessarily Correcting Other People Because They're Not Wrong. (21 Std., 1 reaction)
- User 14.1**: People incorrectly correcting people correctly correcting incorrect correctors?! (43 Wo., 1 reaction)
- User 14.2**: Someone incorrectly correcting someone who is correctly correcting someone who was incorrectly correcting them. (43 Wo., 1 reaction)
- User 12.1**: People AGGRESSIVELY correcting incorrect people (44 Wo., 20 reactions)

Pro-prescriptivist stances

User 5.1
Why do people scrub out the names?
I would name and shame, perhaps they'll improve their grammar game.
6 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen

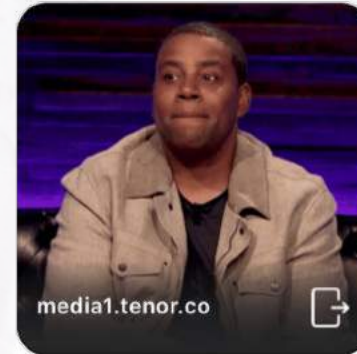
User 5.2
@User 5.1 the group rules require names to be removed.
5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen

User 14.1
bloody love this, people correcting people,
on a post about someone correcting someone. Grammar Nazi porn!!!
43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen

User 10.1
Now I wanna see the person who sent that tweet getting attacked
43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 36

User 10.2
@User 10.1 wait.. you want to see someone get verbally attacked for not knowing something?
43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 17

User 10.1
@User 10.2






43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 55


User 10.3
@User 10.2 Yes? Have you not been on the internet before? That's like 99.9% of it's purpose besides porn
43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 20



User 14.2
This is what I joined this group for!! So bad it's good!
43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen


Standards for correctors: Who is allowed to correct?

 **User 7.1**
Why is this guy arguing over semantics when he doesn't even know how to use your/you're? ...

5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 7  

 **User 7.2**
@User 7.1 this is the bigger crime imo

5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 2  

 **User 7.3**
Green was so close... Correct explanation, incorrect you're*

4 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen

 **User 14.1**
I mean if you are going to correct someone's grammar, you should at least use correct grammar yourself. ...

43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 7 

Mocking, other in-group humor, and solidarity

User 7.1
The comments here are probably going to be in tense.
5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 189 🤔👍

User 7.2
@User 7.1 was tense. 🤔🤔🤔
5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 26 🤔👍

User 7.3
@User 7.2 IS tense
5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 5 🤔

User 7.4
@User 7.3 will be tense!
5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 5 🤔👍

User 11.1
The way this made me actually forgot how to spell twelfth
44 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 137 👍🤔

User 11.2
@User 11.1 me too! Five minutes before this it wouldn't have been a problem 🤔
44 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 11 👍🤔

User 11.3
@User 11.2 me too 🤔🤔🤔
44 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen

User 14.1
This was a train wreck from start to finish. ***
43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 58 👍🤔

User 14.2
@User 14.1 reck* ***
43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 2 🤔

User 14.3
@User 14.2 I thought it was reque ***
43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 🤔

User 12.1
sure it's an intentional incorrect correction, but everyone is having fun with it, so I'd consider that a fit. ***
44 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 2 👍

Linguistic prescriptivism within the group


User 7.1
"Made with" and "made of" have different meanings in their uses.
5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 39

User 7.2
this
5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen

User 14.1
They do need to put the period inside the apostrophe though.
43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 15

User 14.2
@User 14.1 I need to brush up on my punctuation, but I thought that rule only applied to writing a spoken sentence. I think period outside the quotation marks is correct in this scenario.
43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 28

User 14.1
@User 14.2 in this case it is a quote so it is inside. I'd need to see the reference for outside with a source to really see what you mean.
43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 7



User 14.3
Purple is missing a semicolon after wrong.
43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 26

User 14.4
@User 14.3 and it's also *your.
43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen Bearbeitet

User 14.5
@User 14.4 you used it's correctly (it is) but then incorrectly correct the correct use of you're (you are). Classic...
43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen

User 14.4
@User 14.5 no. Purple used "you are" when it should be possessive. Specifically speaking of "your mother" not "you are mother".
43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen Bearbeitet

Als Dimitri Solettis antworten

User 14.6
@User 14.3 this isn't the grammar nazi sight, chill
43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen

User 14.3
@User 14.6 *site
Also, that comma should be a semicolon.
43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 8

General prescriptivism within the group

User 9.1
If this post isn't the definition of irony.. then I must not know what irony is.. 🤔



5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 2 👍

User 9.2
OP... do you have a humiliation kink that you're involving all of us in?
5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 6 😂 👍

User 9.3
You're wrong tho? Why would you do this to yourself? Why wouldn't you even Google if you were right before posting here?
5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 1 👍

User 9.4
You still have time to delete this...
5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 79 👍 😂

User 9.5
Awkward to see the incorrect gloat,
5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 54 👍

User 9.6
I love when this happens.
5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen

User 9.7
Lol what a meta post right? This is a joke post?
5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen

User 9.8
Lol nice job OP
5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen

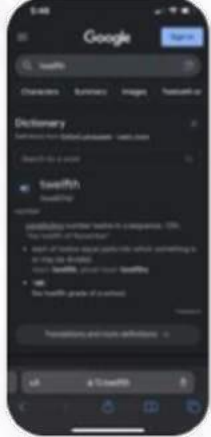
Resorting to authorities

User 2.1 <https://letmegooglethat.com/?q=royalties+definition>



16 Std. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 😄

User 11.1
Just come here to drop this. ...



44 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 24 🍌❤️

User 6.1
As someone who is unsure, and reading much of the varying levels of verbal (or written) diarrhoea and opinion pieces, I have consulted The Oracle: Chat GPT.

Question:
Which is correct and why? "Physics are terrifying" or "Physics is terrifying"? And does it matter where you live in the world as to its correctness?

ChatGPT
The correct phrase is "Physics is terrifying."

Here's why:

Subject-Verb Agreement: In English grammar, the verb must agree with its subject in number (singular or plural). "Physics" is considered a singular noun. Even though it ends in "-s," which typically denotes a plural form, it is treated as singular because it refers to a singular field or subject of study.

Usage: "Physics" is an academic discipline or field of study, similar to subjects like mathematics, chemistry, or biology. When referring to such subjects as a whole, we use a singular verb. For example:

Mathematics is challenging.
Biology is interesting.
Chemistry is complex.
Physics is terrifying.

Universal Rule: This rule applies universally in English, regardless of the region or dialect. Whether you're in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, or any other English-speaking country, the singular verb "is" is used with "Physics" when discussing it as a subject.

Therefore, "Physics is terrifying" is correct because "Physics" is treated as a singular subject in English grammar. This rule holds true globally and is not influenced by regional variations in English usage.

2 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 49 🍌❤️

Fact-checking, fear, and shame

The image shows a screenshot of a social media thread with four comments. The comments are arranged in a vertical list on the left side of the screen, and one comment is shown in a larger, more detailed view on the right side. The comments are as follows:

- User 13.1**: You need to do some research 🤔😬 commenter couldn't even do a Google search to make sure they're right lmao
44 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 55 🗳️😬
- User 13.2**: @User 13.1 i do this so much out of fear of ending up on here
44 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 37 🗳️😬
- User 13.3**: @User 13.2 so do !! I fact check pretty much everything, even if I'm absolutely positive!! 🤔
44 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 10 🗳️
- User 14.1**: it was too funny to not, this group will 🤔 you if you even make one error. I reread everything 3x and pray to the dyslexia gods. 😬
43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 8 🗳️😬

The larger comment on the right is from **User 14.2** and contains the following text:

bluffing, my written English is dogshit.
I misspelled "grammatically" which is particularly shameful, as I would never ever type "gramar" and think it's correct.
43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 4 🗳️😬

Other phenomena: tag groups, ascriptions, alleging performative deviance



User 9.1

Why was this screenshot taken by the person who sent these messages

5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen

18



User 9.2

People Incorrectly Correcting Other People

That's this group but I'm tagging it for extra emphasis.

5 Tage Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen Bearbeitet 13



User 13.1

If this wasn't a Facebook comment I would guess it was a teen. Nobody does incorrectly correcting like a teenager! Teensplaining. ...

43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen



User 13.2

Let's play "guess the nationality of the person who wrote that" ...

43 Wo. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen 2



User 1.1

I refuse to engage in these kind of comments on videos because the entire reason they spell something wrong is to get comments.

20 Std. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen Bearbeitet



User 1.2

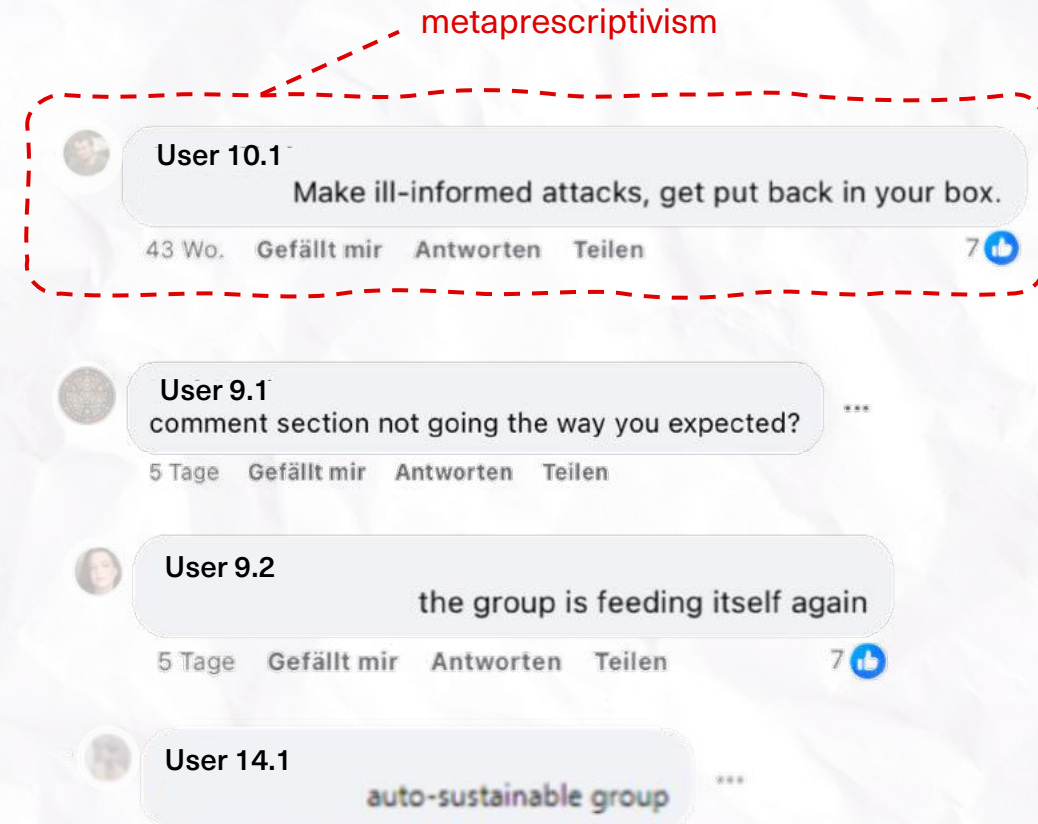
You know, I heard someone once say they misspell things on purpose because then people will correct them in the comments and it gets more comments and engagement 🗨️

13 Std. Gefällt mir Antworten Teilen



Preliminary synthesis

- there *is* critical metaprescriptivism: **users express negative attitudes towards corrective practices** that have a **morally prescriptive** character
- but **awareness of prescriptivism varies**
 - may be related to the differing motivation for being a member of/being active in the group
 - unironic reproduction of prescriptive practices within the group (pro-prescriptivist) vs. criticism of them
 - negotiations through different humorous practices (like mocking), which serve both pro- and critical metaprescriptivist purposes
- there is a lot of **negotiation of legitimacy**, which is **gradual**
 - what deviance is worth being corrected
 - who is allowed to practice prescriptivism
 - what prescriptivism is justified vs. pedantic



Open questions/issues

- **theoretical questions**

- What do the attitudes tell us about (language) ideologies and power hierarchies? How do they reflect the role and status of prescriptivism in society?
- How does the expression of attitudes serve stancetaking and alignment?

- **ethical issue(s)**: can available demographic information be used (carefully) – with (what) consent? Is it a problem that users could potentially be identified?

- **data selection issues**

- What should systematic criteria for selection be?
- Is it justified to also consider non-linguistic examples? What do the discussions there tell us about (linguistic) prescriptivism? From an interdisciplinary perspective, what are the other disciplines and perspectives that need to be considered here? Philosophy, sociology, ...?

Thank you for your attention!

Literature

Frick, K. & D. Meletis (submitted): People incorrectly correcting other people: The pragmatics of (re-)corrections and their negotiation in a Facebook group. *Discourse, Context & Media*.

Giaxoglou, K. (2020): *A narrative approach to social media mourning: Small stories and affective positioning*. London, New York: Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315268675>

Lukač, M. & T. Heyd (2023): Grassroots prescriptivism. In J. C. Beal, M. Lukač & R. Straaijer (eds.), *The Routledge handbook of linguistic prescriptivism*, 227–245. London, New York: Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003095125-16>

Straaijer, R. (2016): Attitudes to prescriptivism: an introduction. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 37(3): 233 – 242.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2015.1068782>

Links of analyzed posts

1. You're parents: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2502328646536341/posts/6894601053975723/>
2. Royalties: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2502328646536341/posts/6897641817004980/>
3. Affect vs. effect: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2502328646536341/posts/6892764614159367/>
4. Oceania: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2502328646536341/posts/6869816743120821/>
5. Rabbit: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2502328646536341/posts/6900227573413071/>
6. Physics 'is' terrifying: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2502328646536341/posts/6887350641367431/>
7. Statue of Liberty: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2502328646536341/posts/6867024366733392/>
8. Gravity: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2502328646536341/posts/6938397439596084/>
9. Public space: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2502328646536341/posts/6867941186641710/>
10. Lady Gaga: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2502328646536341/posts/5736114503157723/>
11. Twelth: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2502328646536341/posts/5710899849012522/>
12. Flying fish: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2502328646536341/posts/5715556945213479/>
13. Picasso: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2502328646536341/posts/5719115444857629/>
14. Flat earther: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2502328646536341/posts/5722813941154446/>