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Correcting correction as social action: Critical metaprescriptivism in online interaction

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on a qualitative analysis of 14 comment threads from the Facebook group *People Incorrectly Correcting Other People*, this article examines correction and recorrection as forms of social action in online interaction. It shows how participants respond to misguided corrections along multiple dimensions: linguistic accuracy, tone, motive, and social legitimacy of corrective acts. These responses frequently rely on humor and playful reframing, through which users position themselves, (dis)align with others, and manage face. To capture this reflexive dimension, the article introduces the concept of *critical metaprescriptivism*, defined as second-order metapragmatic practice that scrutinizes the social acceptability of prescriptive logic in the very act of reproducing it. The analysis demonstrates how (re)corrections function as stance-taking practices shaped by shared moral expectations and affective norms within the interactional context. These practices reconfigure prescriptivism as an interactional resource through which authority is claimed, performed, contested, and parodied. The study contributes to research on metapragmatics, stance, as well as norm enforcement by showing how prescriptive orientations are negotiated in interaction and how correction operates as a socially and morally embedded practice in online discourse.

1. Introduction

In online interaction, language correction has become a salient form of social action. On platforms such as Facebook, Reddit, TikTok, or X, grassroots prescriptive practices are routinely enacted by lay users in public, participation-oriented contexts, where utterances are immediately evaluated and responded to by others (Lukač and Heyd, 2023). In these settings, correction operates as an interactional move through which users assess prior turns and position themselves, negotiating the social appropriateness of intervening in the first place. The Facebook group *People Incorrectly Correcting Other People* (PICOPP)[1] offers a particularly rich site for observing these dynamics: users share screenshots of misguided corrections and engage in extended comment–thread interaction that evaluates both what is "wrong" and whether correcting was warranted in the first place. Such groups function as *folk-linguistic landscapes* – visualized sites of bottom-up norm enforcement – where stance-taking through evaluative commentary and strategies such as mockery together produce digital enregisterment (Heyd, 2014).

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[1] https://www.facebook.com/groups/2502328646536341/ (accessed 4 December 2025).

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Participants assess multiple dimensions: linguistic accuracy, tone, motive, tact, and legitimacy. Through these interactional moves, users manage face, signal affiliation or distance, and calibrate claims to epistemic authority in a space where visibility and uptake are immediate and consequential. Correction thus emerges as a socially saturated practice, shaped by shared expectations about civility and relevance as much as by rules.

This article examines these practices through the lens of *critical metaprescriptivism*, understood here as a metapragmatic stance practice in which participants evaluate the act of correction itself – often in a prescriptive manner. Thus, in responding to misguided corrections, users engage in second-order evaluative discourse that scrutinizes both correctness and the very social acceptability of correcting in a given context. Such responses frequently invoke alternative normative orientations – such as empathy or humor – while at the same time reproducing prescriptive logics in a (more or less) reflexive form. Critical metaprescriptivism thus captures a pattern of interaction in which prescriptive authority undergoes recalibration through stance-taking and (dis)alignment work – a process more complex than simple endorsement or rejection (Milroy and Milroy, 2012; Pajunen, 2024; Fulst, 2024).

Based on qualitative analysis of 14 PICOPP threads, this article asks:

1. How do users respond interactionally to what they interpret as misguided[2] corrections?
2. How are correctness, tone, authority, and legitimacy negotiated through stance and alignment?
3. How does (meta)prescriptivism function as a participation genre in online interaction?

The study contributes to pragmatic research on metapragmatics, stance, digital language ideology, and normativity by showing how prescriptive orientations emerge through interactional negotiations. It argues that prescriptivism in online contexts is not dissolved but reconfigured as a reflexive, socially embedded mode of participation shaped by uptake, affect, and moral evaluation.

2. Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in sociolinguistic and discourse-analytic approaches to language as social action and draws on insights from research on digital interaction (Jones et al., 2015). It conceptualizes prescriptivism as a socially distributed practice whose force lies in its affective charge and in the reflexive ways it is taken up and contested in discourse. In participatory online settings such as Facebook, language norms become sites of play: users enforce, violate, mock, moralize, rebrand, reject, and recursively perform them through interaction (Sherman and Švelch, 2014; Porras, 2022; Pajunen, 2024).

These practices are fundamentally interactional. They involve positioning with respect to norms, to other participants, and to the very act of correction itself. Correction is thus approached here as an affective and social form of stance-taking – a dialogic process that links evaluation, (self-)positioning, and (dis)alignment (Du Bois, 2007). Through such stance-taking practices, participants index social positions and negotiate the legitimacy of normative claims, mediating how language norms are invoked, challenged, and recalibrated in interaction (Irvine and Gal, 2000).

2.1. Grassroots prescriptivism and the public life of norms

The point of departure is *grassroots prescriptivism* – bottom-up language policing by non-experts. Unlike institutional norms codified in style guides, grassroots prescriptivism operates informally and gains momentum through affective investments and active participation. It emerges in communities of practice where users perform or challenge authority – or both (Lukač, 2018; Lukač and Heyd, 2023). In the Facebook group *People Incorrectly Correcting Other People* (PICOPP), users evaluate correctness but also evaluate the act of correction itself (Frick and Meletis, 2024), turning prescriptivism into a shared object of discursive negotiation and play in interaction.

This is not simply top-down authority democratized and turned on its head. Instead, it channels vernacular (standard) ideologies tied to class, education, linguistic insecurity, and cultural capital (Milroy and Milroy, 2012). This is supported by various case studies: Fulst (2024) shows how correctness and standard ideologies are circulated and contested through multimodal Instagram posts and comment–thread interactions, while Pajunen (2024), in analyzing Finnish Facebook groups, frames online language policing as a form of 'biopower' in the Foucauldian sense, i.e., a participatory mechanism of moral control. PICOPP users embody this tension: they mock what they see as misguided corrections, debate their social value, and produce recursive jokes that at once destabilize and mirror prescriptivism. Prescriptivism, thus, becomes both the object and the medium of discourse – a tool for debating beliefs about language, indexing social identities, and calibrating moral or affiliative stances through interaction (Heyd, 2014; Niedzielski and Preston, 2000).

[2] Throughout the paper, references to "misguided" or "incorrect" corrections reflect participants' evaluations as displayed and ratified in interaction, not an independent linguistic assessment by the analyst.

2.2. Language ideologies and the contradictions of normativity

These dynamics unfold through the lens of language ideology – beliefs and assumptions about language (use) that shape linguistic behavior and judgment as they are enacted, oriented to, and evaluated in interaction (Silverstein, 2003; Woolard and Schieffelin, 1994). The ideology of 'Standard English', for example, casts correctness as a marker of education and civility, often extending it to broader judgments about intelligence (Lippi-Green, 2012). Users in PICOPP often reproduce this framing by citing grammar rules or dictionaries, invoking schooling, or drawing on other familiar sources of linguistic authority as resources for stance-taking. Just as often, however, such behavior is rejected as interactionally inappropriate: as pedantic, embarrassing, aggressive, etc.

Ideologies are not coherent systems. Rather, they are often contradictory (Verschueren, 2012). As Silverstein (2003) shows, speakers often navigate conflicting normative expectations by invoking overlapping indexical orders that coexist within a single utterance or sequence of interaction. For example, users may reject grammar policing while reproducing its tone ironically; they may disavow rules but cite them for comic or moral effect. This multitasking produces discourse that is ambivalently normative – rejecting and performatively reconfiguring norms in the same breath through metapragmatic evaluation and stance calibration (Irvine and Gal, 2000).

2.3. Correction as social action: interactional organization, metapragmatics, face, and reflexivity

Correction is best understood as a metapragmatic act – an evaluation of both linguistic form and interactional propriety, insofar as corrective behavior is displayed and responded to in interaction (Silverstein, 1992, 1993, 2003; Agha, 2007). In this broader pragmatic sense, metapragmatics encompasses reflexive commentary, evaluative stance-taking, and participant orientations to meaning, authority, and appropriateness as they unfold across turns (Verschueren, 2012). This evaluative reflexivity is explicitly foregrounded in critical and metapragmatic sociolinguistics (Spitzmüller, 2022, Chapter 7), where ideologies and (categories of) correctness are approached as interactionally mobilized resources rather than as coherent belief systems.

Recent conversation-analytic work further substantiates this view of correction as a socially consequential action rather than a neutral response to error. Focusing on *other-initiated other-repair*, Bolden (2024) shows that correcting others in ordinary conversation is a rare, marked practice that suspends the progressivity of interaction and is finely calibrated in its design. Crucially, corrective turns vary systematically in format and action orientation: minimal corrections tend to serve intersubjective goals such as securing mutual understanding, whereas expanded or "over-exposed" correction formats often accomplish additional social actions, including instruction, teasing, reprimanding, or the policing of normative expectations.

Complementing this account, Jefferson's (2007) analysis of *abdicated other-correction* demonstrates that normativity is also managed through restraint: recipients may deliberately "pass" an error, allowing self-correction and subsequently minimizing its interactional relevance through repeated acknowledgment tokens. Such practices show that both the *production* and the *withholding* of correction are socially meaningful actions, oriented to face, accountability, and the relative importance of the trouble at hand. While these analyses are grounded in face-to-face interaction, they provide an important interactional baseline for understanding why corrective acts – and decisions not to correct – so readily become objects of evaluation themselves in digitally mediated contexts. The practices examined in this study can thus be understood as extending this logic: rather than merely contesting the content or accuracy of a correction, participants reflexively evaluate the *social legitimacy* of correcting as an action, thereby shifting correction into a site of second-order, metapragmatic norm negotiation.

This interactional markedness of correction is already built into the organization of repair itself: as Schegloff et al. (1977) show, conversational repair is structured as an ordered system of opportunities that strongly privileges self-repair, rendering other-correction a constrained and socially accountable action that is frequently mitigated, delayed, or treated as oppositional when it occurs – a baseline that helps explain why acts of correction so readily invite reflexive scrutiny and moral evaluation in publicly visible, digitally mediated interaction.

As correction regulates social behavior, it invokes face (Goffman, 1967), especially in persistent, semi-public spaces such as Facebook, where uptake is visible, publicly ratified, and sequentially consequential. In such environments, corrective acts are routinely recontextualized through responses, giving rise to second-order metapragmatic practices in which participants evaluate both what is said and the act of correcting itself. It is in this sense that *critical metaprescriptivism* is theorized here (see Section 2.5): as a reflexive mode of engagement in which prescriptive behavior is challenged, recalibrated, or mimicked through situated interactional moves, rather than accepted or rejected as a stable ideological position. In the process, correctors and recorrectors alike become socially recognizable personae – such as the arrogant know-it-all, the annoying pedant, the ironic outsider, or the linguistic underdog.

These identities emerge dialogically through sequential stance-taking. Du Bois' (2007) stance triangle – involving evaluation, alignment, and (self-)positioning – offers a framework for analyzing how users manage affect and authority across turns. Kiesling et al. (2018) expand this model to include investment, accounting for how strongly stances are held or strategically softened. PICOPP interactions frequently rely on such calibration: sarcasm and related ironic or mocking practices may signal disalignment and high affect while masking strong epistemic investment, whereas gentle humor may indicate soft alignment and low interpersonal threat. Together, these patterns reflect broader forms of reflexive, audience-

oriented positioning and community membership marking accomplished through interaction in online settings (Biri, 2021; White, 2019).

2.4. (Re)Corrections and the layered nature of norm negotiation

A central mechanism in PICOPP are (re)corrections – corrections of corrections, often ideologically motivated (Frick and Meletis, 2024). These can be playful or pedantic; they are, in any case, performative acts that challenge epistemic positioning and stance legitimacy through sequential uptake and evaluative response. They redistribute authority and turn face-threatening acts back on the original corrector, reframing prior turns, and introducing competing expectations about what counts as an appropriate response, often emphasizing kindness or a more context-sensitive interpretation. In this sense, (re)corrections are second-order stances that index not just correctness but the very ethics surrounding correction itself as an interactional problem.

In other words, (re)corrections exemplify metaprescriptive reflexivity as they operate within sequences of interaction, constituting judgments about the act of judgment itself. They surface ideological conflicts and invite new affective investments that are displayed and negotiated publicly. As Kupor et al. (2018) suggest, correcting – even incorrectly – can bolster credibility if accompanied by self-awareness. In PICOPP, this often unfolds as mockery with moral undertones or disciplinary play disguised as levity (Phillips and Milner, 2017), where moral stance and affective positioning are accomplished through response design.

2.5. Critical metaprescriptivism

To capture these layered, ambivalent forms of discourse, I propose the concept of *critical metaprescriptivism*, defined here as a metapragmatic stance practice that scrutinizes the social acceptability of prescriptive logic in the very act of reproducing it (see the reflective and normalizing types of language policing in Pajunen, 2024). It includes:

- explicit critiques of correction as arrogant or antisocial;
- ironic corrections that parody prescriptive tone;
- (re)corrections that reveal inconsistency or hypocrisy;
- and appeals to alternative norms of "reading the room", including empathy and entertainment as interactionally relevant expectations.

Crucially, critical metaprescriptivism is not an internally coherent or non-contradictory belief system. It is context-sensitive, socially reflexive, and in most cases deeply affective in that affect is either displayed, taken up, or responded to in interaction. It indexes who may correct, following which norms, for what purposes, and to what social effect through sequential stance-taking – a pattern Papacharissi (2015) links to the work of affective publics, where sentiment organizes participation.

3. Data and methods

3.1. Research design, data, and positionality

This study follows an exploratory qualitative design grounded in digital ethnographic sensibilities (Hine, 2015; Caliandro, 2018), combining small-scale observational data with reflexive thematic and discourse analysis (Franz et al., 2019) to examine interactional practices and metapragmatic evaluation. Researching algorithmically mediated and socially curated spaces like Facebook raises methodological and ethical challenges, particularly around observing third-party content and maintaining contextual integrity (Stepnik, 2024; Zhao, 2024).

I positioned myself as a non-participating observer-analyst in PICOPP, a *public* Facebook group (see Frick and Meletis 2024 for more information on the group). I did not disclose my presence or research intent to group members, as the study relies on observational analysis of publicly accessible interaction rather than on participation or elicitation. This choice aligns with established approaches in digital ethnography that treat non-intervention as methodologically appropriate in large, public, interest-based online communities where interaction unfolds independently of the researcher's presence (Hine, 2015; Caliandro, 2018; Pink et al., 2016).

Though not engaging directly, my academic orientation toward normativity and linguistic ideology undeniably shaped data selection and interpretation. This reflexive stance aligns with Zhao's (2024) argument that on platforms like TikTok, researchers never fully operate as external observers: visibility and algorithmic circulation as well as user-facing affordances actively configure who researchers appear to be as well as what they see. Thus, even without direct engagement, researcher identity on social media becomes part of the interactional ecology.

The dataset consists of 14 posts with accompanying comment threads (totaling 12,582 comments). While post content is acknowledged, analytical attention centers on the sequential interaction and metapragmatic discourse within the comment sections, which is also the reason the posts themselves are not presented in this paper. This choice also reduces ethical

concerns around identifiability: whereas the incorrect correctors highlighted in posts are often not members of the group and cannot respond to their portrayal, commenters are aware of the group's norms and actively participate in its discourse.

For analytic clarity, each thread was internally assigned a number (Thread 1 to 14), which is used throughout the analysis. These numbers index entire interactional threads rather than individual comments and are therefore referenced non-sequentially in the text depending on which interactional practice is being illustrated. Notably, these labels are not tied to reproduced posts; full screenshots or links to posts are *not* provided to maintain contextual integrity and reduce identifiability, in line with AoIR guidelines (franzke et al., 2020).

Because the analysis focuses on comment–thread interaction, a brief clarification of how evaluations function differently in posts and comments is necessary. In posts, recorrectors frame and assess an absent other, the corrector, mostly an 'outsider' (i.e., not a member of the group) who issued a misguided correction (see Fig. 1). Adhering to the group's rule, these correctors are presented in anonymized and decontextualized ways, reduced to their prescriptive failure, and invoked primarily as ridicule objects (Murumaa-Mengel and Lott, 2023), mirroring processes described by Heyd (2014), where mocked linguistic tokens – and their authors – become stylized social types through repeated visual circulation and commentary. By contrast, comments in the comment threads represent ongoing, turn-by-turn intra-group interaction: users (dis)align with each other, contesting and negotiating norms with other identifiable community members, including the recorrector. These higher–stakes interactions demand participatory boundary work that hinges on sensitivity to tone, irony, and group norms (Gal, 2019) and highlight how online language policing is affectively and morally charged in interaction.

Of the examples, half involve misguided linguistic corrections (e.g., "your" vs. "you're", Thread 1) while others concern factual claims (such as whether Chipotle is a public space, Thread 9). Crucially, these cases unfold similarly in terms of stance-taking and norm contestation – pointing to a broader logic of correction as social and ideological action shaped by interactional stance-taking and boundary work (Bartsch et al., 2025; Gal, 2019). The overlap also reflects how language policing mobilizes ideological logics across interactional domains.

Posts were selected for their popularity (in terms of engagement, i.e., number of likes), ideological complexity, affective tone, or humor – what Patton (2002) calls "information-rich cases". This logic resonates with recent calls for qualitative, thick-data approaches in online research (Latzko-Toth et al., 2017).

3.2. Group rules, normative infrastructure, and post format

Group rules form part of the site's ideological architecture as they are invoked and enforced in interaction.[3] Beyond basic moderation (e.g., banning hate speech), the group enforces specific norms. Three rules are especially central:

- Rule #3: "Censor names"
- Rule #5: "Add contexts to posts"
- Rule #7: "Entertaining posts get priority: Submissions that are original and humorous will have priority for posting. A post may be declined if too similar to other recent posts, even if not identical. This includes your/you're, there/their/they're, British vs American spelling, and other common group archetypes."

These rules do more than guide posting – they operate as a communal metric for deciding what is epistemically defensible within interaction and for calibrating the emotional and social tone expected in the group. They frame prescriptivism as an accuracy project and a participatory genre (Lukač, 2018; Heyd, 2014) shaped by multimodal and comment-driven practices that circulate and stylize correctness ideologies through uptake and response (for Instagram, see Fulst, 2024). In this sense, they operationalize language ideology by structuring participation and evaluative uptake via platform affordances, echoing the view of platforms positioning themselves as open, neutral infrastructures even as they impose selective curatorial regimes (see Gillespie, 2010).

Users also frequently cite these rules in metadiscursive debate – e.g., when disputing whether a correction is legitimate or funny and thus worth posting. That way, rules become part of the group's recursive normativity, showing how community-based language regulation and corrective metalinguistic practices contribute to local language policy as it is negotiated in interaction (cf. Heuman, 2020).

3.3. Data format and screenshot method

Data was collected via screenshots in May and June 2024. I employed a curated "media diary" approach, manually archiving content that emerged through feed browsing in order to capture interactional sequences as they were encountered *in situ*. Thus, data were not scraped but captured reflexively, then transcribed and annotated for interactional and metapragmatic analysis.

The typical PICOPP post consists of a user-uploaded screenshot capturing an "incorrect correction" made elsewhere. These screenshots are accompanied by commentary that engages with the correction, such as mimicking or critiquing it. As

[3] See https://www.facebook.com/groups/2502328646536341/about (accessed 4 December 2025).

shown in Fig. 1, this layered structure includes the context of the original misguided correction and a metacommentary from the poster which in most cases sparks further recursive evaluations across turns in the thread.

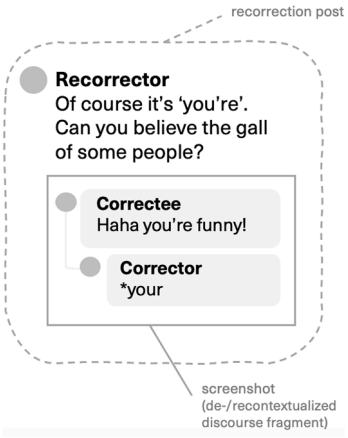

Fig. 1. Example of a typical post in the Facebook group *People Incorrectly Correcting Other People*.

All images were anonymized. Usernames and photos were removed. Consistent with Nissenbaum's (2004) framework of contextual integrity, I treated data as public-yet-situated – visible to members but framed by shared expectations that participants demonstrably orient to in interaction, resonating with critiques of big data epistemologies (cf. boyd and Crawford's 2012), which emphasize the need to examine context, power, and ethical framings rather than assuming that visibility equals consent or analytical neutrality.

3.4. Ethical considerations

The project adopts a critical-ethical stance informed by AoIR guidelines (franzke et al., 2020), treating PICOPP as a semi-public space governed by community norms. While content is public, quoting is sensitive. Accordingly, while personal or identifying information has been removed, most comments are quoted verbatim. This decision rests on the analytic importance of linguistic form for examining interactional practices of correction and metapragmatic evaluation central to this study. Although literal comments are, in theory, findable, their visibility to external search engines depends on privacy settings and (unlike posts) not easily traceable within Facebook's own infrastructure. As such, and in line with ethical arguments advanced by Pink et al. (2016), Tagg et al. (2017), as well as Zhao's (2024) emphasis of the need to treat digital interactions as situated and unpredictably participatory, I prioritize case-by-case contextual evaluation grounded in participant orientation over blanket anonymization or default non-disclosure.

3.5. Analytical approach

The analytical focus draws on Frick and Meletis's (2024) concept of (re)corrections – second-order responses to norm enforcement. For each case, I documented stance markers, types of ideological positioning and tensions, as well as discursive role performances across turns. Following work on reflexive metadiscourse in social media (Biri, 2021), I treat users' references to prior comments and other participants as key sites of stance calibration within sequential interaction. Analytically, the study adopts a pragmatically oriented perspective, examining how corrective and (re)corrective actions are performed, taken up, and recontextualized across interactional turns, and how their social consequences emerge through stance, affect, and participant orientation in platform-mediated discourse. The approach foregrounds language as action: users do not just react to norms; they remake and reframe them.

Research on repair and error correction in conversation analysis has long emphasized correction as an interactional resource rather than a purely linguistic operation (Jefferson, 1974, 1987, 2007; Schegloff et al., 1977; Bolden, 2024). These studies provide a foundational vocabulary for understanding how correction organizes social relations, epistemic authority, and preference structures in interaction. Building on this insight, the present study examines how corrective and (re)corrective actions are recontextualized and evaluated in asynchronous, platform-mediated interaction.

I employed an abductive analytical process, combining reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019) with constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2017), situated within a digital ethnographic approach (Murthy, 2008; Pink et al., 2016). Codes were both inductive and guided by theory, particularly:

- Metalinguistic evaluation (Agha, 2007; Frick and Meletis, 2024)
- Stance and alignment (Du Bois, 2007; Spitzmüller, 2013, 2022; Kiesling 2022)
- Affective tact and epistemic legitimacy as interactional accomplishments (Papacharissi, 2015; Bartsch et al., 2025)
- Interactionally consequential platform-mediated visibility (Gillespie, 2010)

This interpretive approach echoes Biri's (2024) corpus-pragmatic analysis of stance in interest-based online communities, particularly her emphasis on how stance markers both reflect and construct community norms and interactional expectations in use. Thus, the goal of this study was not typological but exploratory: to trace recurring discursive strategies, especially contradictions and ambivalences in (meta)prescriptive participation. Prescriptivism is theorized as a situated interactional mode of participation – invoked, enacted, questioned, and moralized in ways that foreground its social stakes.

4. Results and analysis

The analysis is organized around four recurrent interactional practices through which participants police, contest, and recalibrate correction in situated interaction. These practices are analytically distinguished for expository purposes, but they are not mutually exclusive: they frequently co-occur, overlap, or build on one another across turns. The analysis foregrounds how specific actions are accomplished sequentially and taken up by co-participants. This action-oriented organization aligns with the focus on correction as a social practice rather than an abstract evaluative stance.

The four practices examined are:

1. Challenging correction as socially illegitimate through critical metaprescriptivism and moral problematization;
2. Evaluating the necessity and proportionality of correction, commonly framed as pedantry-as-performance;
3. Managing uptake and alignment affectively through humor, shame, and epistemic (dis)alignment;
4. Authorizing and disauthorizing correctors by invoking legitimacy, exposing hypocrisy, and negotiating the 'right' to correct in recursive norm enforcement.

Taken together, these practices reveal prescriptivism as a discursively constructed, interactionally negotiated, and socially unstable practice that emerges through sequential stance-taking and participant orientation rather than a fixed ideology or stable evaluative stance (Woolard and Schieffelin, 1994; Lukač and Heyd, 2023; Phillips and Milner, 2017).

4.1. Challenging correction as socially illegitimate: critical metaprescriptivism

This section examines how participants challenge corrective acts as socially illegitimate, reframing correction as moral misconduct rather than epistemic contribution. These challenges are accomplished through evaluative stance-taking, motive attribution, and, sometimes, affective escalation, often in the form of recursive (re)corrections. What is at stake here is whether correcting constitutes an appropriate social action in the first place.

This is a core insight: prescriptivism in PICOPP is not simply accepted or rejected – it is reflexively problematized, especially in its moral dimensions. This is critical metaprescriptivism: users toggle between affective evaluation and shifting alignments across turns, producing layered stance complexity (Frick and Meletis, 2024).

Many users critique prescriptive behavior not on linguistic grounds but on relational or moral terms as part of an interactional response. In Thread 6, one user responds to a subject–verb disagreement debate ("physics are" vs. "physics is") with the exasperated: "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." This includes negative evaluation (of the correction), disalignment (with the corrector), and high affective investment that is publicly displayed and sequentially consequential. The user reframes correction as social misconduct, implicitly prioritizing norms such as intelligibility and empathy over grammatical precision (Phillips and Milner, 2017; Pajunen, 2024).

A similar move appears in the same comment thread: "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." Here, the critique targets the motive ascribed to the corrector, aligning with findings that corrective acts carry interpersonal costs beyond their epistemic value (Kupor et al., 2018). Correction becomes an act of symbolic aggression when it is interpreted through attributed stance rather than as a neutral contribution (see Heuman, 2020 for examples from Jodel, and Angouri and Tseliga, 2010 for Greek forums).

The object of critique, then, is the affective stance of the corrector – often described as smug, joyless, aggressive, or tone-deaf by other participants. Importantly, such critique frequently takes a prescriptive form itself (e.g., "you shouldn't correct [like this]"), illustrating that critical metaprescriptivism does not reject norms but recalibrates them through recursive stance-taking (Irvine and Gal, 2000; Lukač and Heyd, 2023). This logic is dramatized in Thread 14, where a user bluntly states: "linguistic prescriptivism is stupid and you should feel bad". Here, the stance performs a recursive (re)correction – prescriptively condemning prescriptivism within the same interactional sequence. In Pajunen's (2024, p. 36) typology, this counts as normalizing language policing, which includes "overt or covert refusal to participate in norm-affirming, self-

regulation practices". The tone is explicit, echoing what Murumaa-Mengel and Lott (2023) describe as recreational shaming – humor-based group correction performed more for entertainment and belonging than for disciplinary seriousness, and enacted as a form of alignment work, a core social strategy within PICOPP culture.

4.2. Evaluating the necessity of correction: pedantry-as-performance

While Section 4.1 focused on challenging correction on moral or relational grounds, this section examines a closely related but analytically distinct practice: evaluating whether a correction was necessary at all. Here, participants primarily contest the relevance, proportionality, or interactional warrant of the corrective act. In this context, accusations of pedantry function as judgments about *social judgment*, positioning corrections as excessive, trivial, or status-seeking rather than helpful (Lukač, 2018; Heuman, 2022; Fulst, 2024). While tone and delivery may influence interpretation, the core issue here is whether a correction was warranted.

The clearest articulation of this appears in Thread 7, in a dispute over whether the Statue of Liberty "was" or "is" made of copper:

> 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.
>
> Ffs, this is one of the most pettiest ones I've seen. This didn't even deserve a post.
>
> 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 pedantry 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.
>
> Pedantic comment is pedantic
>
> I keep being surprised by how trivial a ting ppl will argue about in order to 'correct' someone else.

And another comment from Thread 9, which reads: "This group is for pedantic freaks I want to leave".

Here, users reject the correction – not just its phrasing – as an instance of epistemic overreach or status-seeking ascribed to the corrector (Kupor et al., 2018; Lukač and Heyd, 2023). The label *pedantry* becomes a normative judgment that delegitimizes the move, framing it as misaligned with platformed expectations of tact, proportionality, and purpose as oriented to by participants.

Thus, these critiques often attend to interactional stakes. In Thread 1, one user laments: "This group is turning into grammar debate instead of factually wrong information debate and it's getting so annoying". Another adds: "Grammar corrections are the boringest". And in Thread 2: "are we really going for typos on this page?" Such utterances reflect uptake shaped by affective calibration and community alignment – the evaluation of stance based on emotional or social payoff within the ongoing interaction. Similarly, Bartsch et al. (2025) note that epistemic authority in digital publics is often judged by relevance and resonance as much as by formal accuracy. In other words, a correction may be accurate yet feel illegitimate if it disregards the group's (explicit and implicit) norms, a dynamic consistent with the observation that recreational shaming groups discipline members through alignment with the community's affective and moral expectations (Murumaa-Mengel and Lott 2023).

As these comments show: when corrections repeat well-worn tropes (e.g., "your" vs. "you're"), they lose novelty and symbolic capital in interaction. As Heyd (2014) suggests in her work on visual folk-linguistic landscapes, patterned recognizability and stylistic repetition shape how language ideologies are circulated and evaluated. In PICOPP, humor and creativity are valued more than rigid adherence to norms – consistent with Rule #7's priority for "entertaining posts".

These affective filters also operate as mechanisms of in-group norm regulation. Users who dismiss pedantic comments as tiresome or unnecessary are not merely critiquing grammar policing – they are constructing a shared meta-frame of participation. Such moves index affiliative stance calibration (Georgakopoulou, 2015; Gal, 2019), signaling who "gets" the group's ironic tone and who violates its preferred balance of humor, irony, tact, and critique.

These dynamics help account for the prominence of recursive humor, especially via group name parodies. In Thread 14, after a chain of (re)corrections, one user quips: "People incorrectly correcting people correctly correcting incorrect correctors?!" This recursive stance reflects what Du Bois (2007) conceptualizes as the sequential positioning of stance – positioning oneself in relation to prior evaluations and stance moves (see also Biri, 2024).

In sum, the practice of evaluating the necessity of a correction illustrates how prescriptivism is filtered through socially situated criteria. To correct something not seen as needing correction – or to do so without attending to affective or contextual norms – is to risk social disapproval.

4.3. Managing uptake through humor and shame: epistemic alignment in correction

The practices discussed so far hinge on explicit evaluation of correction. This section shifts attention to how uptake and alignment are managed affectively, particularly through humor, irony, and shame. In PICOPP, correction is rarely dispassionate but deeply entangled with group-affiliative affect: while the group ostensibly mocks misguided prescriptivism, participants routinely perform corrective acts themselves, often couched in irony, sarcasm,[4] memes, or layered stance maneuvers. Users here regulate correction indirectly by calibrating tone, softening epistemic asymmetries, or disciplining misalignment through playful or semi-deniable ridicule. Humor thus functions both as a resource for alignment and as a mode of epistemic regulation, enabling participants to navigate affect and authority while reinforcing interactional norms (Gal, 2019; Papacharissi, 2015).

In Thread 11, a post about the spelling of "twelfth" prompts a flurry of humorous comments that invoke solidarity:

> The way this made me actually forgot how to spell 'twelfth'.
>
> OK I don't feel so stupid after reading comments 😂
>
> I'm now spiraling into an existential crisis …

Here, humor becomes a resource for stance softening and affective co-presence. Users signal solidarity by performing confusion, self-deprecation, and shared insecurity. This affective play enacts what Kiesling et al. (2018) call low-investment stance – engaging without superiority. These are "small stories" of alignment (Georgakopoulou, 2015) used to bond and defuse the asymmetry of correction, echoing the kinds of reflexive, audience-oriented metadiscourse practices of dialogic online discourse (Biri, 2021).

This affective tact also coexists with what Kupor et al. (2018) demonstrate as the interpersonal impact of correction: the desire to assert competence while avoiding alienation. In PICOPP, the risks of overperformance are clear. In Thread 13, a confidently wrong correction about Picasso's birth date draws affectively charged evaluative replies, often framed through irony or mockery:

> Like … congratulations! You just bullied yourself with that one 😭
>
> You need to do some research 😂😂 commenter couldn't even do a Google search to make sure they're right lmao
>
> Why are the most ignorant people also the most confident and arrogant?

These replies disqualify epistemically but veil the attack in humor. Emojis and exaggeration offer plausible deniability – users can claim to "just joke" while performing affectively loaded face-threatening acts (Goffman, 1967). The disciplining force is visible in meta-comments: "i do this [note: fact-checking] so much out of fear of ending up here" (Thread 13), or: "(…) this group will 💀 you if you even make one error. I reread everything 3x and pray to the dyslexia gods. 😜" (Thread 14). This aligns with Murumaa-Mengel and Lott's (2023) accounts of platformed publics as spaces of recursive visibility and affective risk. Users internalize the risk of exposure, and this shapes how they participate in public-facing interaction (Zhao, 2024). PICOPP operates under a very similar dynamic: the possibility of becoming a screenshotted object of ridicule calibrates how members position themselves and negotiate prescriptive legitimacy. This invites participation while enforcing vigilance.

These dynamics also extend to the uptake of humor itself: the group's humor depends on both content and calibration. When a user misreads a joke or fails to recognize ironic or satirical framing, others may "correct the recorrection" through mock exasperation; see these comments from Thread 5:

> You clearly don't get the joke. Now you are People Unnecessarily Correcting Other People Because They're Not Wrong
>
> That's not an incorrect correction. That's someone who doesn't understand the joke.
>
> oh good lord, you deserve your own spot on this group 🤣 🤣

Or from Thread 12: "I love it when people don't know a satire post"

White (2019) argues that such stance cues function as implicit markers of community affiliation: by adopting recognizable stylistic or affective patterns, users display alignment with the group's communicative norms. In PICOPP, users are expected to be witty but also to recognize layered cues of irony and satire – an index of the kind of ambient, practice-based norm formation Heuman (2020) describes as emerging from repeated interactional encounters.

4.4. Authorizing and disauthorizing correctors: legitimacy, hypocrisy, and the right to correct

This section foregrounds practices through which participants authorize or disauthorize correctors, explicitly negotiating who has the right to correct and under what conditions. In PICOPP, correction is a positioning move within a shifting

[4] In this section, terms such as *sarcasm*, *irony*, *mockery*, and *joking* are used descriptively to refer to a range of evaluative and disciplining interactional practices, which frequently overlap and co-occur rather than constituting discrete or mutually exclusive categories.

landscape of legitimacy and social tact. Users contest and recalibrate epistemic authority through stance-taking and response design, exposing hypocrisy, invoking external authorities, and leveraging platform-specific evidential resources to redistribute or revoke corrective legitimacy. These practices recursively perform and resist epistemic power, rendering authority precarious, interactionally achieved, and continually open to challenge.

One strategy for negotiating epistemic legitimacy involves platform-calibrated fact-checking as an interactional resource. Despite the group's ironic tone, users frequently mobilize external authorities to settle disputes. In Thread 6, one participant invokes ChatGPT to resolve a subject–verb disagreement, met with approval (as evidenced by responses such as "Fantastic" or "this reply should be bumped up"). In another, a Google-search screenshot is offered with the caption "Just came here to drop this" (Thread 11). These are performances of epistemic alignment – gestures that signal knowledge and mitigate face threat without fully inhabiting the role of the 'pedant'.

Such moves reflect what Kiesling et al. (2018) identify as indirect stancetaking: users present authoritative information while softening its interpersonal force through calibrated participation. This calls for platform-aware reflexivity – an understanding of how visibility and audience shape the legitimacy of epistemic moves. Correcting "without being that guy" exemplifies a core logic of critical metaprescriptivism: the dual capacity to know *and* to mock the knowing.

This strategy of exposing the corrector's own errors serves to dismantle the process of mystification essential to the language subordination model (Lippi-Green 2012). Under this model, prescriptive authority is often maintained by claiming that language is so complex that 'mere native speakers can never sort things out for themselves'. By highlighting the corrector's failure to follow their own rules, PICOPP users effectively 'unmask' this manufactured expertise, thereby revoking the corrector's right to enforce norms within the community's moral economy.

A frequent means of delegitimizing corrections is to expose perceived inconsistency or incompetence in the corrector. In Thread 14, a user remarks: "Why is this guy arguing over semantics when he doesn't even know how to use your/you're?" This metapragmatic move exemplifies grassroots prescriptivism (Lukač, 2018) – vernacular language policing tied to correctness and social credibility as constructed through stance attribution. This dynamic reflects what Bartsch et al. (2025) theorize as mismatches between claimed, recognized, and objectively justified epistemic authority, with PICOPP users frequently exposing such misalignments to delegitimize corrective attempts. By highlighting contradiction, the user delegitimizes the corrector's stance through evidentiary contrast. They undermine the incorrect corrector's authority through inconsistency by exposing a contradiction – what Irvine and Gal (2000) would identify as a semiotic move of fractal recursivity. Such recursive judgments reflect the logic of prescriptivism turned inward.

This reflects a broader expectation that epistemic authority must be consistent and interactionally earned over successive turns. Building on Du Bois' (2007) stance triangle, Kiesling et al. (2018) frame these moments as high-investment stances: speakers align morally with correctness while distancing themselves from "bad" prescriptivism through contrastive positioning. The critique is not of normativity per se, but of how it is performed – hypocritically, without tact, or, worst of all, incorrectly, i.e., illegitimately (Heyd, 2014; Fulst, 2024). The PICOPP community negotiates authority and belonging through subtle stance cues: alignment or disalignment with dominant norms becomes a way of positioning oneself as an insider, an independent norm-setter, or a challenger.

This tension culminates in excessive recursivity. In Thread 14, a user observes, "This group is feeding itself again" – a moment of meta-affiliative disalignment (Georgakopoulou, 2015) that dramatizes PICOPP's recursive genre logic. As members correct those who over-correct, the group morphs into a loop of stance policing, iteratively performing the very prescriptive impulses it satirizes across interactional cycles.

In Thread 9, the original poster becomes the target of backlash for submitting a recorrection that misfires, as evidenced by these reactions:

> OP [= original poster, DM], do you have a humiliation kink that you're involving us all in?
>
> You still have time to delete this …
>
> Awkward to see the incorrect gloat

Here, the presumed authority of the poster is revoked through shame and ridicule – a performance of platformed reflexivity realized through collective response. As Tagg et al. (2017) and Gal (2019) suggest, correction in digital publics is evaluative but at the same time theatrical – an affective spectacle that turns epistemic failure into social entertainment through uptake and repetition.

Another mode of delegitimation involves tag group ascription. Users comment evaluatively on posts by tagging groups such as "This group is about you, not for you" or "People Incorrectly Correcting Other People", followed by the tag "That's this group but I'm tagging it for extra emphasis" (all from Thread 9) to ridicule epistemic missteps. These indexical cues function as stance markers that rely on shared interpretive competence and require no elaboration. They point to what Heyd (2014) calls digital enregisterment: the process of turning (in this case digital) linguistic behaviors into recognizable social types through repetition and naming (see Agha, 2007).

Interestingly, some users speculate that mistakes are strategically staged to bait corrections, like here in Thread 1:

> I heard someone once say they misspell things on purpose because then people will correct them … it gets more comments

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

This aligns with how platforms construct themselves as neutral hosts while actively shaping what becomes visible through ranked lists, recommendation, and algorithmic demotion (Gillespie, 2010). In contemporary social media environments, visibility is closely tied to engagement, which is often fueled by controversy and affective friction (Papacharissi, 2015; Phillips and Milner, 2017; Murumaa-Mengel and Lott, 2023). Deviance and, in turn, correction become forms of epistemic clickbait – engineered to provoke (dis)alignment, ridicule, or shame to accrue likes, shares, and comments.

In sum, legitimacy in PICOPP is a performative currency: precarious, provisional, and deeply affective. To correct is to risk being corrected; to claim knowledge is to submit to recursive scrutiny by co-participants. Prescriptive authority is not abolished, but redistributed – through humor, irony, calibration, and genre-savvy social performance.

4.5. Synthesis: (Re)correcting as reflexive and recursive performance

Taken together, these interactional practices illustrate how correction in PICOPP is accomplished through overlapping but analytically distinguishable action formats, rather than through discrete attitudes or ideologies.

Across the practices, correction in PICOPP emerges as a recursive, affectively charged social practice accomplished in interaction. Users evaluate the act of correcting through sequential turn-taking, turning (re)correction into a site where stance, affect, and platformed expectations intersect. In this ecology, prescriptivism becomes a mode of participation – its authority negotiated through (dis)alignment, irony, and the constantly shifting performative rhythms of the group across turns and response sequences (Irvine and Gal, 2000; Heuman, 2020).

It is worth noting that PICOPP is not the only space devoted to critiquing misguided corrections. Frustration with posts perceived as insufficiently "incorrect" led to the creation of a newer, more narrowly defined group, *People Really Incorrectly Correcting Other People* (PRICOPP),[5] founded in 2022, with approx. 226,000 members. Its rules explicitly foreground evidential clarity: Rule #1 requires a screenshot of a demonstrably incorrect correction, and Rule #4 discourages simple spelling-error posts unless exceptionally amusing. This shift reflects an intensification of genre expectations and an attempt to curb pedantry through interactional gatekeeping. While this article focuses on PICOPP, PRICOPP illustrates how even meta-prescriptive communities undergo recursive norm-policing, functioning as a form of social gatekeeping in platform-specific environments (Murumaa-Mengel and Lott, 2023).

5. Discussion

Taken together, the findings presented above address the three guiding questions of this study: how users respond to what they believe are misguided corrections, how correctness and authority are negotiated, and how (meta)prescriptivism functions as a genre of platformed participation through interaction. Correction in PICOPP emerges not simply as a reaction to linguistic error but as a socially embedded practice accomplished through sequential stance-taking under conditions of platformed visibility and reflexive norm management. What initially appears as entertainment organized around "incorrect corrections" reveals itself as a field in which users negotiate *who* may correct *what*, *how*, and *to what social effect* in interaction. PICOPP makes visible the ways prescriptivism is mobilized, reworked and, crucially, morally evaluated by co-participants in a digital public shaped by audience expectations and the conditions of platformed visibility.

At stake in these negotiations is, along with accuracy, what Silverstein (2003) describes as the indexical ordering of social meaning as it is enacted in interaction. Corrections in PICOPP routinely operate across multiple levels: they signal knowledge, display affective stance, and invoke recognizable social types. Through repetition, these types gain stability within the group's moral economy. Users respond both to the content of a correction and to the persona it performs, and in doing so reproduce these personae through (dis)alignment. This circulation reflects a broader process of social enregisterment (Spitzmüller, 2013). Metalinguistic behaviors crystallize into familiar figures – the earnest rule-citer, the ironic insider, the overconfident miscorrector – and participation requires calibrating one's moves to these enregistered expectations across turns. A correction that appears overly serious, pedantic, or inattentive to tone risks misalignment with the group's affective regime. Epistemic authority becomes provisional and interactionally negotiated rather than presumed.

Platform dynamics intensify these processes by shaping interactional conditions. As work on digital publics has shown (boyd, 2010), visibility is never neutral: users perform for networked audiences under conditions of potential 'screenshotability', exacerbated by algorithmic amplification and context collapse (Zhao, 2024). In PICOPP, the "fear of ending up here" circulates as an affective shorthand for these risks and is explicitly invoked by participants. This heightens the stakes of corrective participation: users aim to appear knowledgeable without seeming arrogant, humorous without seeming cruel, aligned without appearing overly earnest within the same interactional sequences. (Re)corrections and ironic disclaimers all function as risk-management strategies in a space where epistemic moves are immediately exposed to communal scrutiny.

[5] https://www.facebook.com/groups/1112704236272752/ (accessed 4 December 2025).

These dynamics help explain why humor figures so centrally in the group. Humor softens disalignment and mitigates face threats, allowing users to perform epistemic authority while maintaining social affiliation through recipient-oriented response design. At the same time, it functions as a disciplinary mechanism: sarcasm, exaggeration, emojis, the linking of tag-groups, and meme-based responses are used to shame overzealous correctors or highlight hypocritical moves. This dual role reflects broader patterns described in research on ambivalent internet cultures (Phillips and Milner, 2017) and recreational shaming groups (Murumaa-Mengel and Lott, 2023), where entertainment and norm enforcement intertwine.

Underlying these interactions is a persistent question of epistemic legitimacy as negotiated moment by moment. Users routinely challenge corrections perceived as pedantic, unfunny, misplaced, or socially tone-deaf. Hypocrisy – pointing out that a corrector has made an error of their own – is a powerful and recursive delegitimizing device, functioning as a form of evidentiary stance-taking. Following Bartsch et al. (2025), these conflicts illustrate how digital publics evaluate authority through expertise as much as through contextual appropriateness, performative alignment, and uptake. A correction's legitimacy thus depends on whether it matches the group's affective and stylistic norms as ratified by co-participants, not merely on its factual accuracy.

Taken together, these patterns suggest that (meta)prescriptivism in PICOPP is best understood as a digital participation genre. It is a mode of interacting that blends linguistic or factual evaluation with moral judgment and involves affective calibration as well as platform literacy. Users police both correctness and participation: who gets the joke, who oversteps, who violates expectations of tone, who performs epistemic humility or arrogance *in situ*. This reinforces Lukač and Heyd's (2023) account of grassroots prescriptivism through the domain of recursive, screenshot-mediated publics, where bottom-up norm enforcement is entangled with entertainment and risk.

What emerges is a dynamic public in which prescriptivism is reflexively reassembled. Through the layered indexicality of corrections and (re)corrections, users enact a participatory politics of linguistic accountability: one where authority is repeatedly claimed, contested, revoked, and parodied. PICOPP thus exemplifies how, in digital environments, prescriptive practices become affectively charged identity work, turning into sites of social registration and ideological negotiation.

6. Conclusion

This article has argued that correction in PICOPP serves primarily to navigate a platformed environment through interaction, where stance and persona shape the meaning of intervention as it unfolds sequentially. Rather than diluting prescriptivism, the group reshapes and redistributes it. Users evaluate corrections through their affective tone, their fit with genre expectations, and the social type they evoke in interaction, drawing on shared repertoires that have become recognizable over time. These dynamics illustrate prescriptivism as an indexical order enacted through stance-taking, where corrective acts signal knowledge and expertise as well as (dis)alignment with enregistered community personae.

The concept of critical metaprescriptivism offers a lens for understanding this reflexive work as a pragmatic phenomenon. Participants recalibrate prescriptive behavior through (re)corrections, ironic uptake, and context-sensitive delegitimations; users position themselves turn by turn within a shifting moral economy that prizes not primarily knowledge and correctness but virtues such as wit and tact in combination with platform literacy. Authority to correct remains provisional because it must be continually earned through interactionally attuned performance rather than through formal expertise.

These findings also show that digital normativity relies on responsiveness: on how users take up prior turns, on how they manage the risks of visibility, and on how platform infrastructures invite recursive scrutiny that participants orient to in interaction. In this setting, prescriptivism becomes a genre of participation realized through repeated interactional practices, blending entertainment with judgment and tying linguistic policing to identity work.

Further research should examine how similar metaprescriptive practices operate across different platforms, especially where correction intersects with politics, expertise, controversy, or misinformation. What is clear is that prescriptivism online persists not as a static ideology but as a distributed, affectively charged practice through which people orient to norms and present themselves to others, ultimately negotiating the terms of belonging in digital publics one interaction at a time.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Dimitrios Meletis: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Software, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

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