



universität
wien

MASTERARBEIT

Titel der Masterarbeit

“#GrammarNazi: The Interplay of Politeness and
Language Ideologies in Internet Forums”

Verfasserin

Sophia Bayer, BA BA MA

angestrebter akademischer Grad

Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2014

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:

A 066 812

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:

English Language and Linguistics

Betreuerin:

Dr. Małgorzata Fabiszak, PhD

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who have supported and inspired me throughout my studies, as well as those whose criticism has advanced my learning process. Special thanks go to Prof. Dr. Małgorzata Fabiszak, the supervisor of this thesis, for her helpful advice and her many encouraging words during the last few months.

Furthermore, I would like to thank the English and American Studies Library and especially Mag. Karin Lach for her unhesitant assistance.

Many thanks also go to all the selfless Grammar Nazis proofreading this thesis – it is to your credit that I dodged some epic language fails!

Most of all, I want to thank my mother and father who are truly the kindest, most loving and supportive parents anyone could wish for. I cannot begin to express how grateful I am for their unfaltering support and encouragement. Moreover, I also dedicate this thesis to my little, genius brother of whom I expect great things.

Finally, I want to thank my phenomenal partner who has assisted me the most during the writing process. He bravely endured countless hours of linguistic-themed monologues and angsty anticipation. Thank you for bearing with me!

Many thanks to all of you - This thesis could not have been written if I had not received all of your kindness, support and encouragement!

Hinweis

Diese Masterthesis hat nachgewiesen, dass die betreffende Kandidatin befähigt ist, wissenschaftliche Themen selbstständig sowie inhaltlich und methodisch vertretbar zu bearbeiten. Da die Korrekturen der Beurteilenden nicht eingetragen sind und das Gutachten nicht beiliegt, ist daher nicht erkenntlich, mit welcher Note diese Arbeit abgeschlossen wurde. Das Spektrum reicht von sehr gut bis genügend. Es wird gebeten, diesen Hinweis bei der Lektüre zu beachten.

Note

This thesis has proven that the candidate is qualified to work on scientific topics independently and that the contents, as well as the methods used were ethical. Since the supervising professor's corrections and comments are not publicly available, it is not detectable which grade this thesis received. The range spans from very good to sufficient. It is thus advisable to pay close attention during the reading process.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Structural outline	1
1.2	Context.....	2
1.3	Aims and motivation.....	7
1.4	Methods and scope	8
1.5	Material	10
1.6	Data sources	13
1.6.1	AnandTech	13
1.6.2	Reddit	13
1.6.3	Something Awful.....	14
1.6.4	YouTube	15
2	Theoretical background: concepts, models, theories	16
2.1	Politeness	16
2.1.1	Face.....	18
2.1.2	Positive and negative politeness	20
2.1.3	Maxims	21
2.1.4	Impoliteness.....	26
2.2	Language ideology	30
3	Empirical project	38
3.1	Politeness	45
3.1.1	Face, politeness strategies and FTAs	45
3.1.2	Non-observance of maxims	50
3.1.3	Impoliteness.....	56
3.1.4	Summary	62
3.2	Language ideologies	64
3.2.1	Linguistic ideology and Grammar Nazis	67
3.2.2	Political ideology and Grammar Nazis.....	71
3.2.3	Summary	75
4	Conclusion.....	77
8	Bibliography	80
5	Index.....	89
6	English Abstract.....	91
7	German Abstract	92
8	Curriculum Vitae.....	93

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Structural outline

Presenting the theoretical background and empirical findings in an ordered manner is one of the main tasks of a thesis. In order to help the reader navigate the present work, I will briefly present the structure and general topics found in the next few chapters.

The thesis commences with a contextualizing comment about the role of the Internet in our society, the impact the Internet has on language in general and how ideology plays a role in online language interactions. This section is followed by brief subchapters on the aims, motivations, methods and scope of the present thesis. The last two parts of the introduction present the material for the empirical section and give some additional information on the four forums used for data collection.

In chapter two, the theoretical concepts, models and theories used for the empirical study will be introduced. The first subchapter elaborates on politeness theory and concepts such as face, politeness maxims and their non-observances, as well as impoliteness. The second subchapter discusses the role of ideology in connection with language and provides links between political ideologies and language ideologies.

The third part of this thesis is devoted to the analysis of the data corpus. In agreement with the structure of the literature review of this paper, the first section will discuss findings connected to politeness features such as face, positive and negative politeness, Face Threatening Acts (FTAs), non-observances and impoliteness. The second chapter is subdivided into a section on attitudes towards Grammar Nazis and a segment on political/historical/social ideologies in the comments. Each chapter in the empirical part is followed by a short summary comprised of the main findings of each subchapter.

Finally, the conclusion enumerates the limitations, as well as implications of the present study and provides an outlook for further research.

1.2 Context

The Internet is one of the most remarkable things human beings have ever made. In terms of its impact on society, it ranks with print, the railways, the telegraph, the automobile, electric power and television (Naughton 1999: 21).

From its development in the 1960s to its ongoing vast expansion nowadays, the World Wide Web has revolutionized communication unlike any other medium to date. Its greatest strength is its escalating interconnectivity, speeding up information exchanges and thus making it the largest corpus of data in the world – an infrastructure of unheard-of dimensions (Crystal 2011: 10).

Today, people do not only access the web through home computers, but also through devices such as cell phones, gaming consoles and tablets. This means that the number of people who now have access to the Internet has increased from 360 million by the year 2000 to an estimated 2.8 billion¹ in 2013, with the large majority of users living in Asia (Internet World Stats 2014: no page numbers²). Given these numbers, it becomes clear that the Internet functions largely through intercommunication, meaning that more and more people seek contact and maintain relationships with others online. This development is also reflected in a move away from self-centered journal-like blogs to social platforms (Crystal 2011: 11).

On average, adults in Europe and North America spend more time on online devices during their recreational time than with any other medium (radio, TV, print) (eMarketer 2013: npn). Therefore, it would be no wonder if technology were also to influence our reading habits and thus language in general (Crystal 2011: 55). These changes have not gone unnoticed and even print newspapers frequently offer articles on online language, for example “On Internet Slang, IMHO” (Wayne 2014: npn) in *The New York Times*, or “This awesome dissection of Internet hyperbole will make you cry and change your life” (Brooker 2014: npn) in *The Guardian*. Naturally, by the time mainstream media have

¹ The world population is estimated at 7,181,858,619 of which 2,802,478,934 were Internet users by December 31st 2013 (Internet World Stats 2013: npn).

² “No page numbers” is used for online resources without page numbers and will be abbreviated henceforth as “npn”.

caught on to phenomena like leetspeak³ and widely used abbreviations, they have most certainly already gone out of style. Currently, a large extent of online communication is picture-based (Crystal 2011: 35), for example *Instagram*, and we will doubtlessly see various technological evolutions (among them perhaps the Semantic Web, an alleviated technological singularity, etc.) in the near future, inducing yet new ways to communicate.

Tim Berners-Lee (1999: 110) writes that people should seize the opportunities offered by Internet technology and empower themselves by keeping informed, exchanging information and making themselves heard, thus using the social strength of technology. This trend towards social uses of the medium can also be seen in the significant increase of social networking sites, blogs, forums and comment sections in recent years (Crystal 2011: 11). These outlets offer a unique and easily accessible form of data open to any researcher with Internet access. Barton and Lee (2013: 15) state that in terms of data collection, being tech savvy is quite rewarding, and they go on to name ten reasons for studying language online. In my opinion, the most interesting points are the last four: Internet as a massive space for “reflections upon language and communication”, particularly “language practices are becoming more public and circulate more widely”, language as the central tool to form new knowledge and formulate innovative enquiries, and finally, new research methods (Barton & Lee 2013: 15).

As was mentioned above, language adapts to new media much faster than is generally noticed. Often, innovations are the result of enormous traffic on one popular site, for example the predominance of abbreviations due to the limit of 140 characters on Twitter. Crystal (2011: 16) writes that the first linguistic aspect to change is vocabulary. Furthermore, much of the Internet is a multimedia experience and thus visually enhanced and linguistically reduced (Crystal 2011: 61). However, this does not mean that creativity may run wild since there are

³ *Leet* (or *1337*) is a term derived from the word *elite* and was first used in gaming communities (Wired Magazine: Geekipedia 2014: npn). It employs various combinations of the ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange) to replace letters of the Latin alphabet (Wired Magazine: Geekipedia 2014: npn). One of the most interesting aspects of leet is that it intentionally uses misspellings, and that members are often more highly regarded for inventing deviating variations (Wired Magazine: Geekipedia 2014: npn). Given the widespread international reception of leetspeak, it is quite common to encounter non-standard phrases from language learners or wrong translations, for example “All your base are belong to us” which gathered quite a cult following (Wired Magazine: Geekipedia 2014: npn).

certain guidelines to be followed and in interactive forums and chats such guidelines are called netiquette (Crystal 2006: 51). Netiquette varies from forum to forum, but in its most basic form it is comparable to politeness guidelines and often reminds the reader of Grice's maxims.

There is always a fear of the new, and while innovation has a positive connotation, media outlets are often critical of changes. Some people worry that languages as we know them, especially major varieties of English, are endangered by "ruinous" online features and writers' neglect of "proper grammar" (Crystal 2008: 23). At one point, it has even been argued that online language is an entirely new dialect of American English (Crystal 2006: 16), which was reasoned because of the predominant online traffic of the US, but can no longer be supported due to the fast growing markets in populous developing countries. Another criticism is that "Netspeak" threatens Standard English, which Barton and Lee (2013:11) dismiss because vocabulary has only changed minimally and basic grammatical structure remains the same. Generally, recent studies, for example Plester and Wood (2009: 1108 ff.), attempt to discount myths of language destruction on the Internet and instead identify advantages for school children.

One reason for the change from innovative styles and experimentation in the early years of the Internet to large communities of prescriptive rules in language use online was explained by Crystal (2011: 11) in the following way:

The consequence is that the original colloquial and radical style of emails (with their deviant spelling, punctuation, and capitalization) has been supplemented by more conservative and formal styles, as older people introduce their norms derived from the standard language.

This can be one possible reason, but the fact is that so-called "silver surfers" are still a minority⁴ and that, especially in social media outlets, the number of users below the age of thirty poses the large majority. Furthermore, most Internet phenomena are no longer new and can be described as fads such as leetspeak, lolspeak and kitty pidgin, the latter two of which enjoyed enormous popularity a few years ago, but have since begun to fade rapidly (Zimmer &

⁴ According to a the Pew Research project (Pew research internet project 2014: npn) from January 2014, only 57% of 65+ US-Americans have used the Internet at least once and only 49% have tried social networking (Pew research social media 2014: npn).

Carson 2011: 455). Leetspeak was quite common among gaming communities and as part of nerd-culture widely spread online, but through the propagation of games to more varied audiences, the community has expanded dramatically and thus lost most of its reclusiveness. Some leet-debris can still be found from time to time, but it is quite rare to encounter exclusively leet comments.

Certain types of language use are associated with particular views about language. Barton and Lee (2013: 24) write that:

[a] prominent aspect of how people make meaning online is expressing *stance* towards what they are saying, including views about language. When using language people act in relation to other groups and communities in many ways, including the *affinity groups* in which they participate.

Furthermore, they explain that there is a difference between epistemic and affective stance (Barton & Lee 2013: 31). Epistemic stance is taken to assert beliefs, knowledge and conviction, while affective stance occurs when speakers express feelings or attitudes (Barton & Lee 2013: 31). Both kinds of stances (usually expressed through verbs) are encountered frequently in the data corpus of this thesis.

The wish to belong to a group is often manifested in ideological remarks – identifying with a certain set of mind and defending one’s ideological group against “attacks”. This can be seen quite regularly online in discussions about correct language. Although *Grammar Nazi*⁵ is a rather recently coined term, the ideal of correct language has long persisted among prescriptivists. Usually, the term is employed in a humorous fashion, for example when referring to *Teabonics* i.e. “[s]pelling and grammatical errors on signs at Tea Party protests” (Zimmer & Carson 2011: 478). However, discussions between self-described *Grammar Nazis* and other users can develop into outright online warfare.

With the wide-spread use of the Internet, areas of life that were usually connected with offline activities, for example voting, have seized the opportunity to easily reach larger masses of people online, for example through soliciting and registering voters. Rohrer (2001: 189) argues that the optimism of the Internet has begun to fade as financial gains are foregrounded and it has turned from “a

⁵ A Grammar Nazi is “[a] person who habitually corrects or criticizes the language usage of others” (Wiktionary 2014: npn).

conduit for global information exchange into an advertising driven commercial marketplace". People are becoming more critical towards an all-encompassing commercial web and users "don't like it when companies try to approximate the self-replicating, emergent energy of the Internet from the top-down, instead of the bottom-up" (Zimmerman 2014: npn). Rohrer (2001: 190) further explains that capitalism has become the main ideological driving force and the "hidden ideology of the Internet" – in other words a cybermarketplace catering to a particular target audience (Rohrer 2001: 208-210):

When most people write about the ideology of the internet, they typically mean that because historically the demographics of Internet users in the United States has been predominantly white, male, well-educated and high-salaried professionals with Libertarian and Republican leanings, many internet news sources have shamelessly catered to their political beliefs.

This target audience is a strong commercial force with an enormous spending capacity; however, in recent years there has been a shift towards tapping into young women's spending power (Krotz 2012: npn). This change also had an effect on the language used online and it has been argued that commercial sites concentrate too much on political correctness while Gurak (2008:74) argues that these sites only emphasize traditional gender roles and the sexual appeal of women's bodies.

To discuss online exchanges, the linguistic term *computer-mediated communication* (CMC) has been coined. The concept stands for an exchange of information through technological means and often a distinction is made between synchronous and asynchronous CMC (Locher 2010: 1). Baym (1996: 320) explains that CMC is "oral, written, interpersonal, and mass communication". However, Crystal (2011: 75) observes that online language is still quite like offline language. Generally, both offline and online language should be taken equally seriously since both "are used for real communicative purposes" (Locher 2010: 2). Moreover, this lack of clear distinction between online and offline has also erupted in a discussion and divides the public over how much prescriptivism applies to online communication – a topic which is central to this thesis.

Androutsopoulos (2006: 420) explains that there have been three waves of CMC research. The first one can be described as "computer determinism" since

it largely focused on how a certain technology influenced language, arriving at the conclusion that genre-languages like e-mail-speak and chat-language existed in limitations (Androutsopoulos 2006: 421). In a second wave, the focus shifted towards the interplay of social and technological aspects (Androutsopoulos 2006: 421). The individual was much more foregrounded and CMC was seen as context-dependent (Androutsopoulos 2006: 421). In more recent, third wave studies, an emphasis was placed on “the role of linguistic variability in the formation of social interaction and social identities on the Internet”, stressing the heterogeneity and social diversity of online language use (Androutsopoulos 2006: 421).

Currently, user-centered approaches are en vogue and, along with ideological interaction, will be the focus of this thesis. While CMC is a useful general term encompassing many different technologies, narrowed down, the following paper is mostly concerned with what can be described as Internet Linguistics. All data was obtained online and the focus is clearly placed on the specificity of interactions in online forums. In the following subchapters, the aims, motivation, methods, scope and data sources for this research project will be discussed in more detail.

1.3 Aims and motivation

The aim of the present work is to investigate the use of politeness strategies in ideological language contexts online. This is attempted in stages through recourse to the following research questions:

1. How do people react towards deviations from standard varieties in online forums?
2. Which politeness or impoliteness strategies are employed in user comments?
3. Do certain strategies correspond with particular ideological expressions?

My hypothesis is that reactions towards mistakes are largely negative and connected with on-record FTAs. Furthermore, I predict that mainly comments associated with positive face and the violation of Grice's and Leech's maxims will be found. Additionally, these face-threatening strategies will correspond with a prescriptivist view of language in those cases where the user mentions any form of ideological affiliation, for example being a Grammar Nazi. Whether these initial

predictions are valid, will be shown in chapter three – the empirical part of this project.

According to Barton and Lee (2013: 5-6), a language researcher may take three different directions by either looking at structural features, social variation or metalanguage. This thesis aims to take all three into consideration in order to paint a clearer picture of one particular section of online language. It is designed as a hybrid of a social and ideological framework investigated through mistakes. Crystal (2011: 48) explains that this pragmatic view is crucial because it helps us clarify the many different user-opinions.

The main motivation behind this thesis is highlighting the connections between politeness theory and ideology in Internet discourses. In this endeavor, I aim to fill a research gap in the field of Internet linguistics by joining politeness theory and metalinguistics. On a personal level, the topic sparked genuine curiosity after I had encountered many “Grammar Nazi”-comments online throughout different blogs, forums, websites and platforms during my research on literary reading strategies for my first MA-thesis. Furthermore, over the last few months, articles concerning online language, as well as other cultural Internet phenomena were increasingly featured in renowned news sources including *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker* and *The Guardian*. This means that the public is taking a heightened interest in the connection of language and the Internet, and it is high time that researchers do too.

1.4 Methods and scope

One of the most pressingly important features of this thesis is methodological transparency. Thus, the utmost attention is paid to disclose all sources and material used in the empirical research section. This material is quoted only partly in the third chapter, but included in a full Excel version as a CD-attachment at the endpaper on the back cover. Additionally, the Excel spreadsheet includes hyperlinks to the various online sources, the anonymized usernames of the interactants and dates of publication.

The differences between qualitative and quantitative research are often overstated binaries, however, this thesis concentrates on qualitative methods. Firstly, the data collection was an open-ended, non-numerical procedure where

large amounts of texts were scanned and sorted according to relevance. Secondly, the analysis did not involve statistical methods and was largely content-centered. Thirdly, the research design was of an emergent nature since it was kept open and fluid in order to permit new findings or adapt to a lack of data in any single section. Finally, the data comes from a natural setting and is interpretatively analyzed in the empirical chapter.

Although it can be argued that a questionnaire or interviews might have been useful for the purpose of finding out more about the users' linguistic ideologies, it could not have possibly been valid in the light of the other data. The reason for this being that, since these forums are anonymous, the chance of appealing to exactly the same people whose comments have been chosen, would have been practically non-existent. Furthermore, I have consciously chosen a non-intrusive style of data collection in order to prevent any form of observer's paradox. This is also in line with Verschueren's (2012: 17) statement that since implicitness plays an important role in ideological thoughts, responses to a questionnaire "can never be taken at face value in the search for ideology". Furthermore, frequently people do not want to admit to a certain mindset even though it might actually be an accurate version of what they are thinking – a paradox which can be observed all too often in polls before elections.

In the first step, a list of data sources was compiled. These forums were investigated to fit certain criteria: comparable size, open accessibility, mix of different nationalities, sexes and age groups. Thus, the list was limited to four websites: AnandTech, reddit, Something Awful and the comment section on YouTube. In the next step, the sites were searched for topics related to correct grammar and spelling online, using the following search terms: *grammar nazi*, *spelling mistakes*, *grammatical correctness*, *grammar*, *orthography* and *spelling*. This approach was chosen to narrow down the results, treating these forums as unedited corpora. Then the analytical reading process was initiated where I scanned through countless pages of comments and replies, trying to pick out these examples relevant to this thesis' research questions. All in all, twenty-five comments and replies were chosen from each forum (fifty in total for each page and two-hundred for all four pages combined), spanning in length from one word or symbol to several paragraphs. Next, all the useful material was compiled into an

Excel spreadsheet and analyzed in terms of linguistic politeness and ideological features. The results of this process can be found in chapter three.

Taking time constraints and word limitations into consideration, the scope of this MA-thesis is limited to a first glimpse into the vast data presented in larger online forums. However, I hope to spark an interest in this rather new field of research which still has much to offer. While a truly optimal sample size might have been much larger given the bulk of material available, this thesis concentrates on a more detailed analysis of a representative sample which was carefully chosen to include as much variation as possible for a close-reading. It is thus clear that this thesis does not claim absolute validity or generalizability beyond its minimal area of research.

1.5 Material

This thesis will be dealing with what social scientist call “naturally occurring data” (Silverman 2013: 132). What is meant by this phrase is that the examples I collected are in no way prompted or influenced by me and have been collected from people in non-artificial settings. This method is much more laborious because large quantities of data had to be sifted through and only a small proportion was valid for this thesis. However, it also guarantees that I did not influence the users’ comments with loaded questions or other unintentional linguistic cues. Nevertheless, it is clear that no research project can be 100% objective since it is still the writer’s decision which examples to choose and which to neglect. That being said, I have tried to the best of my abilities to include varied examples from comparable sources and to not bias my research in the direction that supported my hypotheses most.

Initially, this final paper started out with the aim of comparing three different linguistic phenomena: mistakes, abbreviations and, what I first believed to be innovative forms. However, during the process of compiling the data, I noticed that while abbreviations, for example *lol* or *omg*, and aspects of leetspeak, such as *w00t* (interjection to express excitement) or *h4x0r* (hacker), are used (abbreviations significantly more often), I was unable to find even close to a relevant number of examples where people directly reacted towards them. In the few comments that could be identified as a reaction towards abbreviations or code,

the most common question was just what exactly they meant and no evaluation of these phenomena took place. One possible explanation could be that abbreviations and leetspeak are no longer seen as especially innovative or unfamiliar. Another plausible reason could be that I was simply unable to find the material because there were just too many recent comments which did not feature the phenomena. Curiously, spelling and grammatical mistakes like confusing *your* and *you're* still garner a lot of attention. Therefore, it was decided to concentrate exclusively on the issue of mistakes and the reaction towards them in online forums.

Online data presents a number of difficulties. Firstly, since a very large number of people can access the Internet any time of the day and there are usually no longer any restrictions on data transfer and length of comments (except on Twitter on which one can, however, post as many tweets as one likes), the majority of websites and forums have too much text to be read by an individual during his or her lifetime. Secondly, many posts and even whole websites are short-lived because they are either deleted, for example due to server constraints, or become part of the Deep Web⁶. Thus, if data is not collected immediately, it faces the chance of being lost, and even if collected, the possibility exists that it cannot be retrieved at a later date. It is true that all data, if not expertly disguised, is time stamped in some way, but for the layperson there is no way of finding data once it has exited the surface web. A third aspect one must consider when conducting online research is ambiguity which is often the result of ellipses and anaphora, but also trails such problems as incoherence, inaccuracy and irrelevance.

However, there are also many aspects which support the use of online data in linguistic research. One such point is the anonymity of users, which guarantees them that others will not be able to easily identify them (except in the case of crimes, where the administrators must provide such data to prosecutors) and thus results in uninhibited contributions. Such data can be very interesting, but it

⁶ The Deep Web or Hidden Web is the content of the Internet which cannot be accessed through standard search engines (Pagliery 2014: npn). It is approximately five-hundred times bigger than the Surface Web (a rather low estimate – some say the Surface Web is only 1% of the Internet) and includes government data, non-standard scripted pages (encoded other than HTML), private sites requiring logins, pages without links to any other website and the Darknet (illegal activities) (Pagliery 2014: npn).

can also prove difficult to identify without additional data, whether all of these comments were made in earnest. Another feature adding to the fascination of online data is multimodality (Barton & Lee 2013: 29). Arguably, features such as pictures, logograms, different fonts, and so on, can also be found in offline writing (or speaking if one translates them into paralinguistic cues). However, in online discourse they are massively employed. Website designers will even argue that the features do very much influence the content of a site and on commercial websites especially multimodality is carefully planned and usually cannot be controlled by users. Other visual features in comments are rebuses, emojis, graphic euphemism (for example f***) and logograms, which are all deployed discursively and thus important to an analysis.

Susan Herring (2007: npn) has provided an extensive classification list for data in CMC. This list serves to give all information available about the data used in this thesis:

Synchronicity: the activity operates synchronically in the forums, but depends on Internet speed and the conversation is not necessarily synchronous due to different typing speeds and replies to previous comments

Granularity: the posts vary from words, abbreviations and sentences to simple emojis or other symbols

Persistence: the comments stay on the different boards, but are hard to find as they fall further back in the forum when new posts are made

Length: there are no word limits by the system (although it is stressed in the separate netiquettes that precision is encouraged)

Channels: users may post text, videos, pictures or hybrids like GIFs⁷

Identity: Messages are usually posted under registered usernames, but can be seen as anonymous because only the website administrators have the power to identify a user's real name or contact data (which if done cleverly can also be hidden through different email addresses, etc.)

Audience: comments are publicly and easily available except on Something Awful readers also have to register and pay to access the forums

Adaptation: content can be quoted, users can be tagged in posts and messages can generally be modified after they have been posted

Format: posts appear in boxes one after another where the most recent one is at the top of the page. Users can choose to post underneath particular posts or make their own thread. The arrangement is dependent on the time of posting

⁷ GIFs (graphics interchange format) are animated pictures (Crystal 2011: 35).

Herring (2007: npn) also identifies a number of social facets, but these will be discussed in more detail in the empirical chapter since they center on questions of norms of social interaction and language.

The posts collected from the four forums range in their timespan from 2003 to late 2014 and are therefore fairly recent. Around 90% of the data is from 2014 because posts are usually arranged synchronically from the most recent to the earliest and I therefore started with reading the latest posts. Typical online conventions include *+name* (or *@name*) of *addressee* to speak directly to another user or ***, as well as *edit:* for corrections of any form.

1.6 Data sources

1.6.1 AnandTech

AnandTech was founded on April 26th 1997 by Anand Lal Shimpi and was first called Anand's Hardware Tech Page hosted by now defunct Geocities (AnandTech About 2014: npn). The website has since developed from a computer components review site into a large technology forum that includes many general topics as well (AnandTech About 2014: npn). Today, the website hosts approximately 12 million unique readers per month and although it is financed entirely through advertisement, it is not dependent on any particular company (AnandTech About 2014: npn). In order to gain a wider user-base, AnandTech removed a loose profanity filter and added new sub-forums in 2007 (AnandTech About 2014: npn). Similar to reddit, Something Awful and YouTube, AnandTech also employs moderators and has detailed forum guidelines (Team AnandTech 2014: npn). However, the demographic is more extreme with the percentage of male user greatly over-represented in comparison with other Internet forums and 49.9% of its traffic comes from within the United States of America (Alexa 2014: npn).

1.6.2 Reddit

Reddit is a social networking and entertainment news website on which registered members can submit and vote on content (Reddit About 2014: npn). Founded by Steve Huffman and Alexis Ohanian in 2005, it has contributors from over 186 countries and supports philanthropic efforts such as Médecins Sans Frontières (Reddit About 2014: npn). Last month, 174 million unique visitors ac-

cessed the website which has, according to its own statement, only fifty-one employees (Reddit About 2014: npn). Reddit has a number of controversial communities, for example */r/niggers* or */r/beatingwomen*, but it is far more edited than most other forums and content can also get deleted by the website's administrators (Shaer 2012: npn). One feature which makes reddit especially interesting is the possibility to up- and down vote other users according to whether one likes their statements or not (Reddit About 2014: npn). Furthermore, users can collect points or gold as presents from other users if they especially appreciated a comment (Reddit About 2014: npn).

1.6.3 Something Awful

This site sports the slogan "The Internet makes you stupid", pointing to its topical focus – comic, ironic or satirical posts (Something Awful 2014: npn). Housing various blogs, articles and reviews, image boards and forums, Something Awful has been crucial in perpetuating Internet phenomena including the "all your base are belong to us"-meme (Johnston 2001: npn). It was launched by Richard Kyanka, known as Lowtax, in 1999 (Johnston 2001: npn), making it the longest-running website investigated in this thesis. The website charges around \$10 in a one-time activation fee and explains it in the following manner (Something Awful Forum Rules 2014: npn):

We here on the Something Awful Forums are very elitist and strict assholes. We pride ourselves on running one of the most entertaining and troll-free forums on the internet. This is accomplished by charging a \$10 fee to filter out folks not serious about adhering to the rules, and banning those who manage to slip through and break them. We are very serious about keeping our forums clean and troll-free, so please consider your account an investment and treat it accordingly. Read the rules, use common sense, and help keep the SA Forums the best message board on the internet!

Users identify themselves as *goons* and moderators manage the forums (Something Awful Forum Rules 2014: npn). Although Something Awful does not release its own user statistics, it is listed as the fifth largest forum worldwide, with an estimated 58,000 visitors a day (Quantcast 2014: npn). The demographic is similar to that of AnandTech, with the largest percentage of users being 18 to 34 years old, college-educated males (Quantcast 2014: npn).

1.6.4 YouTube

YouTube is the world's largest video-sharing website and was bought by Google in 2006 (Gillette 2014: npn). Its founders Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim launched the site in 2005 and it has grown since to host the upload of one hundred hours of video every minute (YouTube Press 2014: npn). According to its website-statistics, it has more than a billion unique users every month and 80% of YouTube traffic comes from outside the US (YouTube Press 2014: npn). Similarly to the other three websites mentioned-above, the number of comments in each forum section is simply too large and rapidly changing to estimate in any meaningful way. Users must register in order to comment below a video but while the commenting system is easy to handle, anonymity is harder to maintain on this website. In contrast to the other pages, the reader is not primarily confronted with text, but must instead choose to scroll down to the comment section – video being the most significant outlet of the platform.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: CONCEPTS, MODELS, THEORIES

In the following two subchapters, the theoretical background used in this thesis will be introduced. In the first section politeness theory will be presented in a condensed way. The research project will present a number of useful concepts and definitions from the works of Lakoff, Leech, Grice, Goffman, Brown and Levinson, and critique by Bousfield. The main concepts treated in this thesis are face, negative and positive politeness, various maxims and different forms of non-observance, as well as impoliteness.

Following this chapter, the overlap of the historical, philosophical, political concept of ideology and linguistic theory will be discussed. Specifically, how ideology plays a role in metalinguistic discourse and what users perceived as correct or incorrect language.

2.1 Politeness

Politeness theory as one particular subject of pragmatic research can be defined as the “choices that are made in language use” and “the linguistic expressions that give people space and show a friendly attitude to them” (Cutting 2008: 43). These choices are of course culturally dependent (what is viewed where as polite or friendly?) and rely on a speaker’s knowledge of social norms or etiquette. While this definition seems rather vague, Fraser (1990: 219) points out there is little common ground in understanding the concept and much struggling over a unifying concrete formulation even forty years after the framework was first introduced. As Watts (2003: 63) explains “[t]he fact remains that only Leech and Brown and Levinson have elaborated their positions in sufficient detail to allow them to be tested through application to real-language data”.

Apart from the seminal works of Leech, Brown and Levinson, a number of other names instantly come to mind when thinking about politeness research: Lakoff, Grice and Goffman. The significance of their contributions can be seen in the number of studies that have been published to test their categories and frameworks. Furthermore, Bousfield in his recent works on impoliteness has done an excellent job in developing upon some of these theories, especially the dualistic

model of face, and will be cited repeatedly due to his excellent summary of the most useful models.

Robin Tolmach Lakoff's 1973 work *The logic of politeness; or, minding your P's and Q's* is often cited as the first book on linguistic politeness (Bousfield 2008: 9). However, even up to the early 2000s, most theoretical frameworks about politeness had not been empirically tested extensively and only more recently, with the rise of new media, did politeness theory established a wider research spectrum (Bousfield 2008: 3).

The most successful and widely applied models of politeness research are the social norm view, the conversational maxim standpoint by Lakoff and Leech, and the face management strategy by Brown and Levinson (Bousfield 2008: 44). While Brown and Levinson's view is arguably most widely used in academia, all three models have a number of useful characteristics. The social norm model, which basically concentrates on laypersons' views of politeness, is often associated with etiquette and has been rather unpopular since the 1990s (Bousfield 2008: 44-45). However, the concept of politeness is necessarily a socially oriented one and in some way all major politeness approaches follow a social perspective (Bousfield 2008: 46). The conversational maxim standpoint concentrates on the Cooperative and Politeness Principle, thus, a normative view of politeness (Bousfield 2008: 52). Brown and Levinson's face management framework establishes a duality between negative and positive face as the basic units of politeness (Bousfield 2008: 56). Critique of Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness comes especially from scholars who are not primarily researching Western languages. Watts, Ide and Ehlich (1992: 3), for example, write that politeness is a negotiation of norms, which vary from culture to culture. While each of these approaches is limited to a small number of phenomena on its own, the following empirical chapter will take useful aspects of all three frameworks into consideration.

Politeness is largely a contextual phenomenon because it does not lie in linguistic forms, but rather their function and intended meaning (Cutting 2008: 43). It depends on the situational context in which the level of formality and the size of the imposition play a crucial role (Cutting 2008: 44). Furthermore, the social context determines the power relations and distance between the interlocutors

(Cutting 2008: 44). Additionally, the cultural context needs to be considered because issues of politeness vary from one community to another around the world (Cutting 2008: 44).

An important distinction also has to be made between politeness and deference. While politeness is much more varied, deference is only a polite form of expressing distance usually towards people of a high status or older age (Cutting 2008: 45). Many languages have certain markers built in, but in English it is mostly present in honorifics (Cutting 2008: 45). Graham (2008: 283) further makes a distinction between polite and politic behavior where politic behavior is seen as the appropriate behavior in a situation constructed by the participants, but not necessarily polite. There are also incidences where politeness seems insincere when hypercorrection, or over-politeness, is used.

In this thesis, I will concentrate on micro-level politeness, meaning not so much the conventionalized views on politeness at large, but rather on which politeness strategies are used to voice language beliefs in a very particular online community. The focus is very much a postmodern one in the tradition of Watts (2003: 8-9), as it concentrates on how users evaluate and apprehend the social norms used in conversations.

2.1.1 Face

Face, according to Brown and Levinson (1987: 62), is the fundamental category of politeness. They (1987: 62) explain that in order to build and maintain relationships, one must acknowledge the self or public image of another person. In other words, a speaker's face is his or her territorial personality that is carefully guarded and either asserted or defended through politeness strategies. The linguistic term *face*, however, should not be confused with identity, which is largely a psychological notion comprising much more than a public self-image (Upadhyay 2010: 106).

Bousfield (2008: 34) summarizes Brown and Levinson's notion of positive and negative face in the following manner: "Negative face: the want of every 'competent adult member' that his/her actions be unimpeded by others" and "[p]ositive face: the want of every member that his/her wants be desirable to at least some others". The word *want* is stressed in their analysis (Brown & Levin-

son 1987: 62) because it should not be confused with norms or values, as the underlying main motivation is to fulfill desires. However, apart from fulfilling a person's face needs, face can be enhanced, maintained or damaged all within one utterance since it is a highly subjective and dynamic category (Thomas 1995: 169).

Face-work, or relational work, is "the work people invest in negotiating their relationships in interaction" which cannot be paused and therefore is always involved in any communication (Culpeper 2008: 21). Usually, face-work is done by trying to show respect for another person's face and avoiding FTAs. However, as Thomas' (1995:169) remark above shows, face is not a static category. Indeed, the dichotomous character described by Brown and Levinson can hardly ever be observed in authentic conversations and O'Driscoll (1996: 28) stresses that while the terminology can be misleading, it is a scalar classification where positive and negative face orientation can co-occur within one utterance. Face is not only scalar and dynamic, but can also be collective. To illustrate this point, Goffman (1967: 10) introduces the notion of "group face" which is built on cooperations and the merging of various face-dyads. This collective view of face is especially interesting for the investigation of group dynamics in online forums.

Another contested aspect of face is that both negative- and positive face are always of equal prominence in every culture (Bousfield 2008: 37-38). Clearly, if both are seen as points on a scale or blurred areas, they can also overlap and need not be mutually exclusive or of equal weight in every culture, discourse or context. To illustrate this point, Bousfield (2008: 38) gives examples from Japan, Great Britain and the US where different faces are said to dominate.

Terkourafi (2007: 45) sees face as an externally constructed category which cannot exist without "an Other" and only within interactions. However, this view is contested by Bousfield (2008: 39) in whose opinion every interactant also brings certain expectations into a conversation. These expectations are grounded in feelings of confidence, understanding of the context and experience. Thus, face-work is an act of balancing perceptions of both internal and external character.

This thesis supports the view that face is both internally and externally constructed and neither mutually exclusive within an utterance nor necessarily stat-

ic. Thus, the theoretical basis coincides with Bousfield's innovative model of dynamic face.

2.1.2 Positive and negative politeness

The two concepts, positive and negative politeness, are entwined with FTAs. Positive politeness is representative of one's positive face which expresses the need to be part of a group, be accepted by others and generally liked, associated with an extroverted self (Cutting 2008: 43). Negative politeness with a negative face image should not be confused with impoliteness, but rather be seen as a speaker's need to be independent, to not be imposed on by others, and it is associated with introverted behavior (Cutting 2008: 43).

When FTAs cannot be avoided one has to address either the introverted or extroverted self. However, there are different strategies: off-record, on-record, on-record with negative politeness or on-record with positive politeness (Cutting 2008: 44-47).

Off-record means to do something indirectly, for example in the form of an indirect speech act, "It's rather cold in here!" instead of directly asking someone to close the window (Cutting 2008: 45). On-record then means to express one's needs directly (Cutting 2008: 45). Suggestions, offers, requests and open invitations are seen as bald on-record moves. These speech acts often incorporate imperatives without mitigating devices which makes bald on-record speech "the most face-threatening mode of action" (Cutting 2008: 44). However, there are cases when bald-on-record behavior can be used to save someone's face, for example in an invitation such as: *Have some more curry*. Thus, the firmer an invitation is, the more likely it is to be perceived as polite.

On-record with negative politeness shows the speaker's attention to the hearer's negative face (Cutting 2008: 45). The utterance distances the interlocutors from each other in order to show respect for the hearers' territory and give them space to reject an offer or invitation. "[T]he greater chance that the speaker offers the hearer to say 'no', the more polite it is" (Cutting 2008: 45). Features used in this context are hedges, nominalization and tag questions.

On-record with positive politeness, in contrast, aims to show attentiveness by establishing solidarity and closeness (Cutting 2008: 45). Thus, it displays

awareness of someone's positive face and common goals. This is often practiced in a gossiping situation, by using a shared dialect or slang, or using in-group markers like nicknames.

2.1.3 Maxims

2.1.3.1 Grice

Grice's four maxims are founded on the Cooperative Principle (CP) which states that in interaction one should make contributions as they are required, when they are required, with a purpose and relevance to the present communication (Grice 1981: 185). According to Grice (1981: 185), this basic principle must be observed in all meaningful conversations, prompting people to follow the maxims naturally. Bousfield (2008: 29) explains that the CP should be viewed as "a model of linguistic cooperation" because it concentrates on language use "in such a way that [the] interlocutor can understand" what is being stated, presupposed or implied. This view stresses that the main goal is the transmission of information and not social goal sharing because the CP "makes no claims about the good intentions of the speakers" (Thomas 1995: 181).

The maxims Grice envisioned are by no means prescriptive rules given their relatively loose definitions. Bousfield (2008: 30) explains that "[t]hey are relative to the situation, the context and perhaps more importantly they are relative to the individual persons engaged in a communicative event". These maxims are idealized representations of what might be observed in conversations, but naturally they are often not adhered to.

The first maxim is that of quantity which states that a comment should be as informative as required – no more or less than that – and therefore adhere to a certain length (Grice 1989: 26). If this maxim is not observed by the speaker or writer, the audience might be confused by too little, or annoyed by too much information (hence the often quoted abbreviation *TMI* (too much information), characteristic of teenagers who do not wish to know certain things in detail).

The second one of Grice's guidelines is that of quality which states that comments must be truthful and backed by evidence (Grice 1989: 27). What is being said must be sincere and can be proven at any time. Often people do not com-

ply with this maxim by backing out through phrases like *as far as I know*, or *I can't be totally sure if this is true* (Grice 1989: 27).

The maxim of relation is linked to the relevance of a statement and the basic question whether an utterance makes sense (Grice 1989: 27). It states that everything that is being said must be appropriate and valid for the conversation (Grice 1989: 27). Sperber and Wilson (1995: 3ff.) developed this maxim further in their Relevance Theory (RT).

The last maxim is that of manner which underlines that all contributions must be made orderly and clearly without ambiguity (Grice 1989: 27). It is also the only maxim that does not concentrate so much on *the what* of a statement, but rather *the how*. Thus, this maxim can also include paralinguistic information (Bousfield 2008: 22).

Grice is often criticized for the fact that a cooperative conversation is a social behavior and thus culturally dependent which means that his principle and maxims cannot be universally applied (Bousfield 2008: 34). Yet, it might be argued that Grice only spoke of the maxims as relevant to events where the CP is observed and thus excludes ritualistic behavior that values non-cooperation or etiquette.

Another problem is that Grice's maxims often overlap within a single speech act. Sperber and Wilson (1995: 193) even go as far as saying that all maxims can principally be reduced to just the maxim of relation. They (1995: 193) explain that quantity is basically giving enough relevant information, quality is giving sincere relevant information and manner is giving transparent relevant information. Their RT proposes that any hearer will understand conversational implicatures by searching for relevant information and having found information relevant to them, they will stop processing (Sperber & Wilson 1995: 193). Of course, their theory is also contested because it says nothing about the cultural and social dimensions of conversation, and because relevance becomes so encompassing that it "loses its explanatory force" (Mey 1993: 81) – everything can imply something and every utterance incorporates associations. Another point of criticism is that relevancy theory "does not take the perspectives of both the speakers and the hearers into account in the way required" (Bousfield 2008: 32).

Kent Bach (2005: 5-6) writes that Grice did not design his maxims to be absolute guidelines (as they are rather vague), but to develop these categories in order to explain how speakers' and listeners' presumptions work during conversations:

[W]e need first to get clear on the character of Grice's maxims. They are not sociological generalizations about speech, nor are they moral prescriptions or proscriptions on what to say or communicate. Although Grice presented them in the form of guidelines for how to communicate successfully, I think they are better construed as presumptions about utterances, presumptions that we as listeners rely on and as speakers exploit.

Therefore, the four maxims depict assumptions and generate conversational implicatures which are the meanings "conveyed by speakers and recovered as a result of the hearers' inferences" (Cutting 2008: 35). Furthermore, Grice found the flouting or violating of maxims to be the rule and generally much more interesting because the CP can also be observed when a maxim is openly violated.

2.1.3.2 Non-observance of maxims

Politeness strategies by which a speaker is showing awareness of negative or positive face often conflict with Grice's CP (Bousfield 2008: 22). If maxims are not observed, however, this does not mean that the speaker is less polite or uncooperative, but rather stresses the contextual significance of utterances (Bousfield 2008: 23). The two main strategies by which maxims are not observed are flouting or outright violation.

Flouting a maxim is often a question of implicit meaning because flouting occurs when a speaker does not observe a certain maxim (often in order to save face), but expects the hearer to understand his or her motivation for doing so (Grice 1989: 32). If the maxim of quantity is flouted then it seems as if the speaker is giving too little or too much information (Grice 1989: 33). However, depending on the situation, the important information can be obtained through reading the statement's implications. Flouting the maxim of quality usually occurs when the speaker unintentionally says something that is not true or uses rhetorical devices, such as hyperbole, metaphor, euphemism, irony and so on, which obscure the truth value of the statement (Grice 1989: 34).

If I ask my friend “How do I look in my new dress?” and she answers “Your hair looks really nice tonight”, then she did most likely not mishear, but flout the maxim of relevance in order to spare my feelings and thus be polite. The example above can be read as flouting the maxim of relation because the answer to the dress-question seems irrelevant at first glance. The maxim of relation is flouted when implicatures are used to the extent that the speaker expects the hearer to make the connection by him- or herself (Grice 1989: 35). For someone who is just listening in to a conversation between other people, the flouting statements by the speaker might not be immediately clear and might seem irrelevant because they are knowledge- and context-dependent. The maxim of manner is flouted when a speaker is trying to be obscure (Grice 1989: 35). This often has an excluding effect on a third party similar to the flouting of the maxim of relation. The use of code words and euphemisms can also be observed in this category.

Now, violating a maxim is generally more extreme than flouting because the speaker knows that the hearer will only understand the surface meaning of the utterance and not the underlying statement (Grice 1989: 30). In order to deceive the hearer, the speaker will generate misleading implicatures while the hearer assumes they are still cooperating (Grice 1989: 30). Thus, the main difference to flouting a maxim is that the violation is done intentionally and often for the speaker’s benefit. Violating the maxim of quantity is achieved by not giving the hearer enough information because one does not want him or her to know everything (Grice 1989: 32). The maxim of quality is violated if wrong information is given (Grice 1989: 32). However, in many cultures it is acceptable to use so-called white lies, i.e. lies with good intentions, to protect the hearer and in order to follow politeness requirements (Cutting 2008: 39). Often the maxim of relation is violated when someone tries to distract the other interlocutor. This can occur, for example, when the speaker wants to change the topic because the current one is not agreeable to him or her (Grice 1989: 32). Violating the maxim of manner takes place when the utterance is not clear and orderly, but deliberately obscure (Grice 1989: 32).

Other forms of non-observance of Grice’s maxims are infringing, opting out, suspending and clashing (Bousfield 2008: 23). Infringing, which is the failure to

observe a maxim because of the speaker's imperfect linguistic performance, for example a child's or language learner's, is not always due to lack of knowledge, but can also occur during situations when the speaker is nervous, excited or drunk, and thus can happen to native speakers of a language as well (Bousfield 2008: 23). Opting out is another way of failing to comply with the maxims. According to Cutting (2008: 40), it signals an "unwillingness to cooperate" although the speaker does not want to seem uncooperative. This technique is frequently seen in legal and political contexts. Suspending occurs when the interlocutors have no expectation to fulfill certain maxims, for example in emails when the maxim of quantity is suspended because in order to achieve a higher degree of functionality, brevity is key (Bousfield 2008: 23). Finally, clashing means that in order to observe one maxim, another must be violated (Bousfield 2008: 23). These six strategies of non-observance already illustrate that the maxims are rarely perfectly observed and that their violation is often the rule. As Bousfield (2008: 25) explains:

Grice has unequivocally stated (Grice 1981: 185) that the ostentatious non-observance of a maxim at the level of what is said (i.e. a flout) in no way contravenes the CP [...]. Indeed, a flout of a maxim is the very mechanism that is required in order to generate a conversational implicature.

2.1.3.3 Leech

The Politeness Principle (PP) states that the expression of impolite beliefs should be minimized while the articulation of polite statements should be maximized (Bousfield 2008: 47). Geoffrey Leech's corresponding six maxims frequently conflict with Grice's cooperative maxims. However, Leech's and Grice's maxims are not mutually exclusive and it is useful to take both into consideration. Leech lists six politeness maxims: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement and sympathy (Cutting 2008: 47). The first and second, and third and fourth maxims form pairs (Cutting 2008: 47). Furthermore, Leech (1983: 107) stated that tact might be "the most important kind of politeness in English-speaking society", clearly showing that these politeness maxims are culturally determined.

Tact implies that the speaker should minimize the imposition on the listener, but at the same time attend to his or her interests or needs (Leech 1983: 107).

Generosity means that the speaker should maximize the cost to him- or herself and further absolutely minimize their personal benefit (Leech 1983: 133). Approbation signifies the minimization of dispraise of the other person while at the same time maximizing the praise (Leech 1983: 135). This is often done through showing solidarity and avoiding disagreement. The modesty maxim is the flip-side of the approbation maxim. It states that the speaker must praise him- or herself as little as possible and try to actually maximize self-dispraise (Leech 1983: 136). This is typical of situations where the speaker tries to downplay his or her achievements or to adopt a self-deprecating manner.

The last two maxims seem to be less stressed in Leech's writing and also do not form a pair like the first four (Cutting 2008: 48). The fifth maxim, agreement, is rather self-explanatory – it expresses the need to maximize agreement and minimize disagreement between the interlocutors (Cutting 2008: 48). The last maxim, sympathy, stresses compassion and minimizes antipathic behavior (Cutting 2008: 48). Examples are giving condolences or congratulating someone.

It has been argued, cf. Cutting (2008: 49), that one could add a new maxim "for every new situation that occurs". Cruse (2004: 23), for example, proposes a maxim of consideration, and Cutting (2008: 49) herself states that a patience maxim which minimizes urgency for the hearer might be useful. Thus, it becomes clear that there are endless gaps and no list of maxims can ever be complete. Brown and Levinson (1987: 4-5) further state that the PP and CP are altogether of a different make and cannot be united. However, this thesis disagrees with this position because as stated above the principles are not mutually exclusive and it can be useful to take both into consideration in a comparative and contrastive analysis to see whether they yield different results.

2.1.4 Impoliteness

Impoliteness can be broadly described as "a form of face-aggravating behavior" or "face-attacking" that causes offense because of its violation of "certain socially accepted norms of behavior within a given interactional context" (Upadhyay 2010: 107). However, according to Bousfield (2008: 132) the face-threatening act has to be performed deliberately and is therefore not mere forgetfulness or

ignorance of Grice's conversational maxims. Furthermore, the intention to offend on part of the addresser is recognized by the addressee (Bousfield & Locher 2008: 4). Therefore, impoliteness is not simply non-politeness, or absence of politeness, (although it can be in contexts where, for example, an apology is socially expected), but a purposeful face threat (Bousfield & Locher 2008: 4). It is even more extreme than violating a maxim because violations are only perceived by the initiator and not the hearer. Culpeper (1996: 355) states that impoliteness can be regarded as a kind of parasite of politeness because all approaches to impoliteness are nurtured from existing work on politeness. This thesis will follow Bousfield's (2008: 261-262) comprehensive definition of impoliteness:

I define impoliteness as being the opposite of politeness, in that, rather than seeking to mitigate FTAs, impoliteness constitutes the issuing of intentionally gratuitous and conflictive verbal FTAs which are purposefully performed unmitigated, in contexts where mitigation is required, and/or, with deliberate aggression, that is, with the face threat exacerbated, 'boosted', or maximized in some way to heighten the face damage inflicted.

As with all other politeness work in general, impoliteness is also highly context-dependent. The question is always: What is regarded as impolite by whom? It comes as no surprise that a person's and researcher's socio-cultural and even political background influence how utterances can be regarded, often leading to severe misunderstandings (Bousfield 2008: 261). Therefore, it is crucial to always keep in mind the communicative principles of the discursive community which is under investigation. Furthermore, some researchers, for example Culpeper (2008: 18), argue that there are differences between concepts such as rudeness, uncouthness and impoliteness. However, in this thesis rudeness, uncouthness, unfriendliness, etc. are seen as different points on a spectrum, or different manifestations of the same intentions, and will be treated as near synonyms of impoliteness.

Bousfield (2008: 9) regards power as a necessary aspect of impoliteness because an intentionally face-threatening utterance limits the response options of an addressee. Therefore, the speaker or writer has power by limiting the discourse, but this power is dynamic and negotiable. This is expressed by Wartenberg's (1990: 85) explanation of power relations: "A social agent A has power

over another social agent *B* if and only if *A* strategically constrains *B*'s action-environment". However, power play can be reversed and is not always on the side of the person who is socially or financially more powerful in life. Essentially, hearer and speaker must participate in the conversation and must recognize it as impolite. The channel of communication is kept open either by want or force due to the imbalance of power (Bousfield 2008: 10).

There are a number of features which make impoliteness online somehow more likely than what can commonly be observed in offline discourse between strangers. Firstly, Goffman's rule of considerateness does not necessarily work in the anonymous context of the Internet because users often lack the motivation to observe maxims, given the fact that the negative outcomes are less impactful than in face-to-face communication (Upadhyay 2010: 124). Secondly, both trolling⁸ and flaming⁹ are widespread behavioral patterns. Smith (1999: 160) explains that the explosive nature of impolite discourse online is largely due to "wide cultural diversity; disparate interests, needs and expectations; the nature of electronic participation (anonymity, multiple avenues of entry, poor reliability of connections [...]); text-based communication; and power asymmetry". However, I would argue that the biggest proponent of impoliteness is anonymity because it protects the offender and there are seldom steps taken to investigate or punish them other than expel rude individuals who can then enter under a different pseudonym.

To summarize, the theoretic position this thesis is going to take is largely Griceian. Although, Lakoff, Goffman, Leech, Sperber and Wilson also propose valid theoretical foundations, Grice's CP and corresponding maxims seem to be more easily applicable despite reasonable criticism thereof. Although, I have tried to include the best-known takes on politeness, it is also clear that I cannot include a comprehensive list of all theories concerned with this pragmatic phenomenon. Nevertheless, it is my opinion that Leech's PP can be useful in explaining certain social politeness strategies. Therefore, this thesis' position is in-

⁸ A troll intentionally sows discord in online communities by starting arguments or ridiculing other users (Crystal 2011: 70). This is often achieved by posting off-topic messages or provoking statements.

⁹ Flaming is using insulting or threatening comments (often riddled with profanity) to target specific individuals (Crystal 2011: 70).

clusive, usefully eclectic and necessarily open to innovative ways of applying different concepts.

Before turning to the empirical work of this thesis, the concept of ideology and especially language ideology will be explained in more detail in the next section.

2.2 Language ideology

Our ideas about language(s) are [...] not neutral; we believe what we believe for reasons which have to do with the many other ways in which we make sense of our world, and make our way in it (Heller 2008: 506).

From a sociolinguistic point of view language is neither neutral nor equally accessible for everyone, but reveals power relations and ideological undercurrents (Fairclough 1989: 1). Other schools, like generative grammar, however argue that language should be seen as a set of syntactic rules free of social influences (Yule 2006: 86). The difference between these extremes lies in two distinct views of language – language as cultural practices, or language as a system of rules. While some people believe that grammar books and dictionaries present these supposedly internalized rules objectively, it becomes clear that they are merely codifying one variety of language, usually of the dominant social class, and are in no way neutral or free of social influences. This conflict between what people believe to be neutral or correct, and what they believe to be incorrect or less desirable is expressed through language ideologies. Thus, ideologies can illuminate language as a social structure through people's usage of norms and rules. Woolard (1992: 236) described linguistic work on ideology as “the much-needed bridge between work on language structure and language politics, [...] linguistic and social theory”. This thesis seeks to illuminate this metalinguistic discourse happening on a daily basis in Internet forums.

The modern concept of ideology is deeply rooted in political discourse. In this sphere it is closely connected to negative concepts such as propaganda, manipulation and societal pressure (Koerner 2001: 253). Nowadays, ideological comments leave a sour taste of unconscious indoctrination, but the expression underwent a significant change through the centuries.

The term itself was coined by Antoine Destutt de Tracy during the political debate of the French Revolution (Mannheim 1936: 63). It denoted a “science of ideas” and formed an independent academic discipline (Mannheim 1936: 63). The early task of the science of ideology was to study the processes of ideas and consider the formation of beliefs (Mannheim 1936: 63). Later Hippolyte Taine described it as teaching the Socratic method in highly accessible ways by using simple language (Mannheim 1936: 64). However, with Napoleon Bonaparte a shift in meaning occurred and it was primarily used in a negative way to

ridicule liberal republican politicians such as Destutt de Tracy, Cabanis or Madame de Staël (Mannheim 1936: 65).

According to Williams (1976:126), the noun's (*ideology*) first appearance in English was in 1796 as a direct translation of Destutt de Tracy's concept. Much later the term was revived again and became popular with the 19th century philosophers and socialists. Karl Marx situated ideology within his concepts of hierarchy (i.e. superstructure) and class struggle (Mannheim 1936: xii). In this framework, ideology came to denote "false consciousness" (Schäffner 1996: 1). Gramsci's view of ideology was all-encompassing as inherent aspect of art, law, economy and society (Schäffner 1996:1). Following the Marxist rendering of ideology, Louis Althusser made a distinction between individual ideologies which have a personal history and the ideological state apparatus which is the external, universal form of ideas (Koerner 2001: 255). These ideas then manifest themselves in social practices like language and rituals (Koerner 2001: 255). Thus, Fairclough (1989: 17) writes that ideologies are "tied to actions, and [...] are judged in terms of their social effects rather than their truth values".

Today, scholars are usually quite critical of the term, which is often associated with Marxism, for example Christian Duncker who called it "a system of presentations that explicitly or implicitly claim absolute truth" (Duncker 2006: npn). In Terry Eagleton's (2007: 20) words:

Ideological statements, then would seem to be subjective, but not private. [...] On the one hand, ideology is no mere set of doctrines, but the stuff which makes up uniquely what we are, constitutive of our very identities; on the other hand, it presents itself as an 'Everybody knows that', a kind of anonymous universal truth" and thus, it is rarely questioned.

Although a number of scholars have voiced the opinion that with the 21st century a post-ideological age has arisen because ubiquitous ideologies have been abandoned, the term is widely spread and definitions are manifold (Duncker 2006: npn). Some scientific theories conceived in the last 100 years have even been so dominant that they were raised to the status of an ideology, among them communism, social Darwinism and ecology (Bell 2000: 393). However, as Eagleton's quote above shows, ideology is no longer purely political, but has also become an individualistic term transcending the lines of self and other.

If ideology is defined as a purely systematic phenomenon, unconscious on the part of the recipients, conscious on part of the class in power, and thus a site of social struggle (Povinelli 2006: 196), definitions fail to accentuate the individual's benefit, or possibly, a person's conscious role in ideological processes. According to James and Steger (2010: xii):

[i]deologies are patterned clusters of normatively imbued ideas and concepts, including particular representations of power relations. These conceptual maps help people navigate the complexity of their political universe and carry claims to social truth.

This underlines the notion that ideology is a necessary element of integration, functioning in society and constituting social identities. Therefore, it can be used to help people understand others' motivations and to react towards them with more compassion. However, Armstrong and Mackenzie (2013: 23) also write that "individuals tend strongly to regard their own worldview as objective or neutral, indeed may not notice it, while perceiving bias in that of others". Ideology need not be stable, but because of its normative nature, it is often immune to observations that contradict it (Verschueren 2012: 13-14) and can lead to social conflicts.

Wodak (1989: xvi) writes that ideologies can also be a status symbol. Language standardization processes are often linked to the language used by the dominant political and social group (Armstrong & Mackenzie 2013: 1). It is a majority vote which solidifies a certain norm which is then cited in dictionaries and grammars (Taylor 1990: 24). If one wants to belong to the group held in high esteem, one has to adapt to the standard language variety and with it a certain linguistic ideology of what is wrong and what is right. Therefore, it is clear that ideologies become imbued "with a history [...] that members of a wider community appeal to in order to be persuasive" (Verschueren 2012: 8). A key term is *persuasion* which Sornig (1989: 95) explains is naturally "communicative behavior". He (1989: 95) mentions that there is no such thing as an unbiased statement because "the process of verbalizing thoughts and transmitting ideas involves the simultaneous signaling of purpose, aims and wishes along with the message itself". Therefore, language ideologies can reveal social identities and power relations along with opinions, as well as through seemingly insignificant statements.

Dirven, Frank and Ilie (2001: 1) make a distinction between overt and covert ideologies. While overt ideologies are openly expressed, covert ideologies work in the darkness of the subconscious. Eagleton (2007: xvii) writes that “[i]deology is always most effective when invisible” and thus most powerful. Power, which is both relational and situational, is intrinsically linked to the social self and thus, the underlying value systems (Jourdan 2006: 147). Every individual moves through systems of power in their everyday lives, but it is often deemed too uncomfortable to talk about because it implicates covert ideas about who controls powerfulness (Liu 2014: npn). Ideologies reflect those struggles that reveal asymmetrical power relations and injustice. On the one hand, there are dominant ideologies which are attributed to powerful social groups and are usually propagated through institutions, and on the other hand, there are submissive ideologies which are represented by those less powerful (Simpson 1993: 5). These are in a constant struggle and lead to ever new circles of adoption and rejection.

In an analysis of ideology, one also has to factor in language as the defining medium of transportation, i.e. the spreading of ideas. Therefore, a linguistic perspective on ideology can advance a systematic study thereof by adding detailed insights of the features used to relay them. While the essence of the social, political and cultural ideology defined above is the same as language ideology on a basic level – value systems and sets of beliefs – the primary focus of the later is on linguistic items (Eagleton 2007: 8). Therefore, an investigation of language ideology concentrates on these structures, whereby it tries to reveal what people think about a language. It looks at the manifestations of ideologies through language and is often associated with anthropological or sociolinguistic studies. Eagleton (2007: 9) explains that

ideology is a matter of ‘discourse’ rather than ‘language’. It concerns the actual uses of language between particular human subjects for the productions of specific effects. You could not decide whether a statement was ideological or not by inspecting it in isolation from its discursive context, any more than you could decide in this way whether a piece of writing was a work of literary art

However, one needs to be careful in the investigation of language ideologies. Taylor (1990: 25) mentions that even descriptive linguistics is often “just another way of doing normative linguistics”, and further: “[i]f, in language, our situation is

one in which there is no escape from the mechanisms of power, then it is better that we be aware of our situation". Therefore, research into ideology is inevitably subjective to some extent and necessarily comparative and contrastive because "form-function relationships are never absolute" (Verschueren 2012: 119).

Paul Kroskrity (2004: 496) explains that language ideology can be viewed as a "cluster concept, consisting of a number of converging dimensions" with several "partially overlapping but analytically distinguishable layers of significance," having "no particular unity, [...] no core literature, and a range of definitions". This highlights that *language ideology* itself is a flexible term which can be seen from different perspectives according to which linguistic school one uses for an analysis. This idea of language as *Weltanschauung* is also deeply rooted in a Whorfian concept of the power of language (Flaitz 1955: 52). According to Raymond Williams (1977: 21) "a definition of language is always, implicitly or explicitly, a definition of human beings in the world". In line with this argument, Woolard's very basic notion (1998: 3-4) of linguistic ideologies as a user's sets of beliefs and opinions about languages, including implicit and explicit assumptions, emerges. Through looking at these linguistic ideologies, one can make observations about their superordinate cultural and social systems.

However, it is questionable whether language ideologies are really always unconscious streams of ideas planted into a user's cognition without them realizing, or whether ideologies are not, to at least some extent, consciously formed. Michael Silverstein (1979: 193) defines language ideologies as "sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use". This definition gives the user more power and underlines the notion that ideologies can be handy in meaning-making processes. Judith Irvine's definition (1989: 248) of the concept as "the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests" goes hand in hand with Simpson's explanation of language as a reproduction mechanism for ideology which can never be used in a "contextless vacuum" (Simpson 1993: 6). Therefore, it is the linguist's task to reflect upon the ways in which language is operationalized and in which it facilitates ideology.

Language ideology in this thesis unifies the above definitions by Silverstein and Irvine as a language user's voiced ideas about what a particular language should or should not be, which might, but must not, reveal his or her political, social, cultural or moral beliefs. This definition develops from the data environment which can be observed online, but which does not offer other ideological insights than those which have been consciously and voluntarily offered by the users themselves. The emphasis is on language attitudes as there is no way to guarantee that political or other ideas have been included openly as well and it is crucial not to mis- or over-interpret comments.

The user is a strong actor online whose ideologies compete with a mass of other ideas and interests enabled by power through anonymity and the vastness of the medium. This competition frequently leads to power struggles as the Internet's heterogeneity is maximized. Furthermore, the instantaneousness of posting makes the process from thought to language to reality easier than it has ever been before. In the group of linguistic features investigated in this paper, it became clear that orthographic systems carry cultural and political meaning, leading to passionate discussions of rules and freedom. This is especially relevant in the formation process of a standard language which often functions as an ideal many users refer to. The view of a correct language is a historical one where contemporary speech is evaluated negatively for its slovenliness while earlier forms are seen as pristine, logical and correct in line with a prescriptivist ideology (Lucy 2005: 300).

Linguists can play an important role in exposing rhetorical strategies, for example nukespeak¹⁰, because although some ideologies are consciously acquired, others undergo naturalization processes which are hard to detect (Simpson 1993: 6). Apart from rivaling language ideologies like prescriptivism and descriptivism, and political euphemization, the formation of standard languages and their ideological processes are becoming increasingly important. This is most apparent online in discussions of English as the domineering language of the Internet. While some view it as an easy alternative for a large number of users with different language backgrounds, others abhor it as the language used

¹⁰ Nukespeak denotes the euphemistic language used by politicians to conceal the serious consequences of nuclear wars (Schiappa 1989: 253).

by former colonizers, thus making the study of English in the world ideology-led (Crystal 1997: 10). It is quite obvious that feelings run hot when it comes to the expression of identity through language and opposing ideologies are often irreconcilable. After all, language ideologies “describe the ways in which what we say and think interacts with society”, painting a clear picture of our self-identity (Simpson 1993: 5).

According to Van Dijk (1996: 7), ideologies have both cognitive and social functions in the interest of sustaining a certain group. Therefore, “[i]n discourse and interaction, social members make use of ideologies in order to orient, legitimate, or justify their actions” while “[c]ognitively, ideologies organise and monitor [...] shared mental representations” (Schäffner 1996: 3). Upadhyay (2010: 106) also explains that people tend to reveal their ideological views by identifying their group membership. This is especially true of online discourse where people identify with the denomination *Grammar Nazi*. As mentioned in the introduction, the group ideology generally has nothing to do with National Socialist tendencies, other than the questionable association of *Nazi* with strictness and diligence in a positive light. This is illustrated by numerous comments of users identifying themselves as members of this particular linguistic ideology, i.e. as a person who deeply cares about prescriptive rules of grammar and orthography. Descriptive approaches are often associated with liberal ideologies which stem from the language philosophical thoughts of the 18th century philologist John Horne Tooke who wanted to “free speakers from linguistic dogma” (Taylor 1990: 16-17). Taylor (1990: 20) explains the thought process behind this view:

To the extent that we reject the authoritarian and obfuscating arguments of [...] grammarians, we will finally come to see that language is a public institution which, because of its very independence, exists as a common good over which no individual or group can exercise any authority or control.

Verschueren (2012: 8) writes that “[t]ypically, ideology – and hence its discursive manifestation – balances description and prescription” because “it involves theories of how things are in combination with theories of how things should be”. It will be interesting to see whether language ideologies are really balanced in online discourses.

An analysis of ideology can be seen as meta-ideology where the structure and form of coherent ideas is studied. It is necessarily critical about the struggles over meanings and norms of which identity, stereotyping and prejudices are emergent elaborations. There are two ways to go at this. Firstly, one could look at what speakers think about the language they are using, for example what they think constitutes a correct language and about languages in general. Secondly, one could examine broader ideologies, for example political views, and how these are manifested through language. The former would be a study of language attitudes while the latter could be, for example, an article on the language of politicians. In the empirical chapter of this thesis, the former kind of meta-ideology will be used in order to shed light on users' language ideologies in connection with politeness strategies. Van Dijk (1996: 7-10) argues that ideologies can only be inferred from more directly observable structures and names the expression of opinion as one possibility. Opinions are defined as evaluative beliefs, while attitudes are larger compounds of opinions, which are in turn organized by ideologies (Van Dijk 1996: 8). Thus, language ideologies will be examined in the form of opinion expression in forums.

In the following empirical chapter, I will focus on representative examples of the data collected from AnandTech, reddit, Something Awful and YouTube. The response posts from comment sections were first divided into whether they were appealing to a writer's positive or negative face, then whether they recognizably breached one of Grice's or Leech's maxims, whether they showed clear impoliteness and then at last if they also openly expressed language ideological views.

3 EMPIRICAL PROJECT

Before turning to the analysis of individual politeness categories and ideological aspects, some general linguistic findings contributing to the analysis will be discussed. As mentioned before, the data corpus includes comments and their replies. The comments are comprised of deviations from standardized English and the replies present the reactions towards them. Since all of the posts are erroneous in terms of spelling, grammar or punctuation (often a combination of multiple mistakes), I have chosen to omit the commonly used [sic!]-symbol in order to guarantee better readability. In longer comments, the part that is relevant to the analysis is underlined. Furthermore, as mentioned in the introduction, the data was anonymized in order to prevent any possible retrieval of the users' offline identities, as I was unable to ask them individually for the right to use their intellectual property. The names have been replaced by letters from the alphabet (alternately in lowercase and capitalized form) and the entries go from a to aaaa in the Excel list.

The three research questions from chapter 1.2 clearly establish that the main focus of this thesis is on the analysis of the replies:

1. How do people react towards deviations from standard varieties in online forums?
2. Which politeness or impoliteness strategies are employed in user comments?
3. Do certain strategies correspond with particular ideological expressions?

However, replies cannot be properly understood in isolation, therefore, features of the comments which contributed to the analysis are also included in the following chapters.

The comments and replies were analyzed with respect to the following categories: face, whether an FTA occurred or not, on/off-record, politeness strategies, Grice's maxims, Leech's maxims, the various non-observance strategies (flouting, violating, infringing, opting out, suspending, clashing), impoliteness, ideology and other notes, for example whether a comment was very factual or references were used. With regard to face, it was noted whether a positive or negative face was maintained, enhanced or threatened. If it was threatened then it was investigated whether the FTA was towards a person's positive or negative face, and whether it was on-record with positive or negative politeness, or off-

record with positive or negative politeness. Next, it was noted which of Grice's and Leech's maxims were broken and which kind of strategy was used: flouting, violating, infringing, opting out, suspending or clashing. However, if a reply was clearly intently offensive towards a reader and the reader was able to recognize it as such, then it was categorized as impolite. Finally, all possible ideological aspects were recorded. Those comments which openly stated their position towards Grammar Nazis and thus prescriptivism were categorized into "positive attitude towards GN" or "negative attitude towards GN". However, references to historical or political aspects were noted as well. Ultimately, features such as trolling, formality of language, swearing or other noticeable characteristics were also registered in the "other comments"-section. The total of comments amounts to 200 (100 comments and 100 replies) of which some replies also function as comments and are therefore repeated because the replies following them were of particular interest. Unfortunately, visual features, for example different fonts, colors and emojis (except in very few cases), have been lost during the data transfer to Microsoft Excel, but they would have overstrained both the capacity of the program and the length of this thesis in any case.

In order to understand functions and motivations better, the context of the comments must also be considered. In chapter 2.1, three contexts of politeness were mentioned: situational, social and cultural. The situational context of the comments is rather informal, thus making the imposition small. Many users do not choose to reply to questions or insults, and they are in no way obliged to do so. The social context is mostly apparent in power relations which do exist in online discourse as well, but in a slightly different form. For example, on AnandTech and reddit a user's status can easily be seen by his or her points or votes, however, through anonymity, and since everyone has the power to vote or reward points, everyone has essentially the same power. Nevertheless, groups or alliances are frequently established to grant more control and to serve collectively against individuals who do not share the group ideology. From a cultural perspective, these forums are largely dominated by users from within the Western hemisphere as demographics show¹¹. This is clearly visible in the sort of forum topics listed as most popular, as well as, general pop culture refer-

¹¹ For more demographic information of the different forums see section 1.6 of this thesis.

ences encountered in different threads. Nevertheless, in the age of globalization users have more in common with regard to shared cultural knowledge and I was unable to determine reliably where individual users came from.

Before turning to the analysis proper, a few striking features of language encountered in the comments need to be presented. There are several interesting features connected to language in the comments that contribute to the impression of politeness and language ideology. The general tone is rather informal due to the use of colloquial vocabulary, short coordinate sentence structure and non-technical abbreviations. However, there is one exchange in which the users try to be over-polite by using formal terms of address, archaic structures and modality:

- (1) O: Why hello sir a fine evening to you. Perhaps that first sentence could do with a comma, after "discussion" and prior to "fellow".
P: Cheerio, and thank you for kindly correcting my grammar. You are a gentleman and a scholar. Perhaps your first sentence could do with a comma, after "sir" and prior to "a". (reddit)

These correcting remarks are exceedingly socially polite in order to produce humor by providing a stark opposition to the often quite emotional and impolite comments. The opposite of the example above can be seen in posts which use a mixture of textspeak, phonetic spelling, homophones, or swearing:

- (2) GG: prolly bcuz you both go out of da way 2 correkt every person u possibly can 4 da spelling n gremmer mistakz all da time, yo (AnandTech)

- (3) v: Im not watching a fucking 30 second ad youtube fuck you (YouTube)
GG uses both 2 (*to*) and 4 (*for*) as well as features of slang (*da*, *yo*, etc.) to underline his statement's central accusation of another user's Grammar Nazi-status in a humorous way. User v employs a strong derogative term repeatedly because he or she is annoyed with the advertising on YouTube. Examples 1-4 illustrate within the same forum topic language is used very differently, depending on the context and intention of the speaker – a point that will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

The boundary between spoken and written discourse is very fluid. Throughout the data set, capitalization and punctuation are hardly observed which might be due to the generally increased typing speed of these exchanges (if exactly time

stamped, posts show that often comment and reply are typed within seconds of each other). The colloquial textspeak example above shows that although this thesis is exclusively dealing with written data, there are plenty of features from spoken discourse: discourse markers, deixis and slang. This might be due to the nature of the medium – casual exchanges in online forums – which is often typed in haste and formulated in a way that is reminiscent of spoken discourse. However, there are also a number of rare instances when tropes are used within the exchanges. This need not be an exclusive feature of formal or literary language as, for example, metaphors are used frequently in everyday communication, some of which have already been adopted as general sayings within generations or certain communities. Therefore, it is not surprising to find devices such as metaphors, similes, metonymy, irony, sarcasm, onomatopoeia, hyperbole, puns and rhetorical questions in online forums as well. There are a total of five examples which employ literary or rhetorical devices in their posts. Two such posts, one using sarcasm, another using a pun-reference can illustrate the function of these devices:

(4) LL: (It was grammar, not spelling... and now you're just making it worse)
Glad I could brighten your day though, sunshine. (AnandTech)

(5) ff: its rediculous. (reddit)

While the first post is ridiculing the other user through the use of sarcasm, the second post is a word play on *ridiculous* and *reddit* (achieved through blending). Through these examples (written discourse, features of spoken language, rhetoric devices, etc.) it becomes clear that language online is not so different from language offline, and that fears of the corruption of language through the Internet might be wholly unfounded especially when it comes to the phenomenon of language policing through Grammar Nazis.

In the corpus of data for this thesis, the most common mistakes were related to punctuation, capitalization or homophone confusion – the majority of which seem to be typos. This also explains why 40 comments were about spelling, and only 25 were about grammatical mistakes which are not made as easily as typos (although some can be). Frequently, users also voiced what the most annoying mistake was in their opinion, for example:

(6) q: And here is one of the ugliest word crimes ever! Offense* and Germans*. (YouTube)

- (7) KK: The errors that most get under my skin are "loser" (not the winner) being misspelled as "looser" (less tight) and "lose" (opposite of win) spelled as "loose" (not tight); as well as "you're" (contraction for "you are") being misspelled as "your" (possessive pronoun). (YouTube)

These users are annoyed with the fact that many people confuse letters because of their similarity with others or the lack of capitalization of proper nouns. The lack of capitalizing of the denotation *Grammar Nazi* was also the topic of many of the replies, as well as the misspelling of *grammar* as *gammer*. Furthermore, punctuation, which is often ignored in fast written exchanges, also generated a number of complaints. To illustrate, one exchange which includes both capitalization and punctuation:

- (8) ccc: grammar nazi

ddd: You forgot to capitalize the G and the N, and there is no verb in that sentence, meaning it is not a sentence...which would explain why you didn't add a period. (AnandTech)

User ccc is calling ddd a Grammar Nazi because of a prior correction, but ddd does not leave it at that, trying to provoke user ccc further. Although user ddd's corrections seem polite, correcting other interlocutors indicates that they are not as smart as oneself which, consequentially, is not a polite action. It is thus shown that corrections can also be used to annoy other users unnecessarily and that many of the mistakes made in the forums were not as severe as they are made out to be.

Prescriptivism versus descriptivism generates heated debates in almost any forum online. While some users argue that any deviance from the standard does not matter as long as the person is understood, others say that the rules of grammar and spelling are crucial to guarantee a cooperative environment and earnestness in the forums. Often people who make mistakes are not simply corrected, but also called out for being possible trolls, as in this exchange between three users:

- (9) U: The nickname of a product changed over time?

V: Sorry its too perfect . its nickname. .not nickname

W: The guy planted intentional spelling and usage mistakes as like an easter egg hunt to trollbait.Premise, which, nickname, noing, now ('know'), lots of missing commas and punctuation n shit. I'm sure there's more I didn't spot, guy is pretty funny. (reddit)

As in the example above, many users are unable to read the humorous intentions of trolls in online forums which can lead to impolite exchanges. However, the positive politeness strategy user W employs (Easter egg hunting game) is also used by another participants who promised to award up-votes on reddit for every mistake found. This indicates that trolling can be seen as a unifying strategy and not only as an annoyance.

All four forums investigated in this thesis have a netiquette – a list of rules of conduct in online forums. Furthermore, in each list there is a point that stresses the correct use of grammar and spelling to facilitate mutual understanding. In reddit's reddiquette for example the rule states "Use proper grammar and spelling. Intelligent discourse requires a standard system of communication. Be open for gentle corrections" (Reddit 2014: npn). This underlines a system in which correct language is encouraged (similarly to school) and erroneous language use can be punished. On both reddit and AnandTech users can be rated – on reddit with up- and down-votes, and on AnandTech with positive, neutral or negative reputation votes – and thus there are consequences to an individual's social standing if rules are disobeyed or many conflicts are associated with one particular user. Clearly, users want to be rated positively, and negative reviews create ground for impoliteness.

Turning from the linguistic features encountered in the posts to the motivations or reasons behind them, one will instantly notice that some recur. While quite a number of people see the usage of non-standard forms as a symptom of the decline in education, there are actually several factors which promote non-standardized spelling and grammar such as speed and ease (Crystal 2011: 62). Crystal (2011: 62) also mentions reasons why a user opts for the non-observance of a standard language:

1. The users are ignorant of the standard usage
2. They ignore it for time reasons
3. Their keyboard skills are not sufficient
4. They failed to notice the mistake in haste
5. The users feel standard spelling and grammar are unimportant
6. They use it to create a particular effect

These are just six reasons some of which are often combined, and it was interesting to see whether users openly affiliate themselves with one group. The data from AnandTech, reddit, Something Awful and YouTube showed that most

users who did not observe standardized spelling and grammar, resorted to one of the last three explanations: haste, unimportance in the context or effect (humor). There were eight comments by users who mention the reason for the misspelling or make clear in some way why they have ignored it and of these, two users resorted to the haste explanation. Two other users explained that correctness was unimportant to them at this point, and four users were just looking for lulz¹². Here is one example to illustrate a combination of point two and five in Crystal's list:

- (10) yyy: I actually noticed that error but I didn't think anyone would mind some rear projection tv jumping. (Something Awful)

This post refers to a mistake in the expression "jumping the shark"¹³ which is an idiom describing a particular moment in an episode when a series starts to decline in quality. The user then takes this idiom and uses it to refer to grammar, i.e. the moment the grammar of a person starts to decline. Finally, user yyy explains that he or she noticed the error, but did not fix it because of an assumed lack of care in other users. This illustrates that the reasons for misspellings are not necessarily related to competence, but are often performance errors.

This thesis will now turn to a more detailed analysis of the individual factors contributing to the tone and ideological picture of large online forums.

¹² *Lulz* is the plural form of lol which is an exclamation used online to indicate that something was exceptionally funny. Often the explanation "I did it for the lulz" is used as a valid reason for posting offensive or discriminating content online. Therefore, many users equate it with a form of *schadenfreude* (Urban Dictionary Online 2014: npn).

¹³ The expression originated from the *Happy Days* episode of season five in which Fonzie, on water skis, jumps over a shark (Wikipedia 2014: npn).

3.1 Politeness

3.1.1 Face, politeness strategies and FTAs

In the following section, the comments and their replies will be analyzed in terms of face, politeness strategies and FTAs. The guiding questions are: Does a user enhance or threaten another's positive or negative face? How is the FTA done? Do the users employ positive or negative politeness strategies to mitigate the FTAs? Since face, FTAs and mitigating politeness strategies are extremely interwoven, they will be presented in connection with each other. Before turning to the analysis of examples from the corpus, I will briefly review some general aspects about the categories and analytical process.

Face is a highly abstract concept in politeness theory. Seen on the level of everyday language use it is "emotionally invested" (Vilkki 2006: 324), contested and collectively constructed. Therefore, it is easily threatened because cooperation between speakers depends on their need to maintain each other's face needs (Brown & Levinson 1987: 61). This also explains why in conversations, such as those about language mistakes in this thesis, FTAs, and more specifically FTAs to a speaker's positive face, were the norm. These FTAs were performed bald on-record (BOR) and thus directly which often included impoliteness. However, not all of the BOR FTAs were examples of impoliteness because users were trying to mitigate the threat by using positive or negative politeness strategies. Furthermore, the large quantity of FTAs also entailed that Leech's maxims of politeness (especially tact, approbation, agreement and sympathy) were flouted frequently – this will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

The analysis is largely based on vocabulary choices, references and associative remarks, for example identification with a group (Grammar Nazis). Comments were seen as maintaining, enhancing or threatening positive face (+) if the user employed pronouns such as *we*, or other links to a collective, expressed admiration/inclusion/equality, or, in the case of threatening, disapproval/exclusion/inequality. Negative face (-) was identified in cases of imposition or as an FTA to negative face if there were limitations to a user's personal freedom. Therefore, FTAs to a user's positive face involved disapproval, complaints, belittling and disagreement. FTAs to a user's negative face were comprised of orders, requests, threats/warnings and offers. These FTAs were miti-

gated if the user tried to minimize the threat to the other's positive face through the use of solidarity, jokes or optimism. Another possibility was that the user minimized the threat by using negative politeness strategies such as indirectness, hedges or apologies.

The data corpus revealed that users did not maintain or enhance others' negative face at all, and that only in few cases they tried to support positive face. The majority of instances were FTAs which were sometimes softened through politeness strategies or emphasized as impoliteness. The following example illustrates one of the rare cases when a user tried to maintain and enhance another's positive face:

(11) h: Trolling is a art.

m: HOLY SHIT the amount of people that fell for the Troll Bait is Beautiful! Well Played /b/rother, well played! (YouTube)

Both statements are admiring and show features of in-group behavior through the use of reference, for example trolling and /b/ for the /b/-board on 4chan. User m enhances user h's positive face because he or she compliments the user, showing admiration, and establishes equality through the use of /b/rother. Furthermore, it is interesting to observe the contrast between the swearing (*HOLY SHIT*) and positive vocabulary such as *Beautiful*, showing that profanity does not automatically result in impoliteness.

FTAs to users' positive face were the most salient feature of the forum discussions collected for this paper. The following conversation shows how FTAs to a user's positive face are achieved:

(12) bb: This isn't a contrary an response. This is the standard response of academic linguistics.

Y: *contrarian

bb: You know damn well an autocorrector did that. But hey just ignore everything else with your red herrings, liberal ivory tower asshole.

cc: Do you not proofread your own comments before you press 'Save'? Or do you let your computer do all your writing for you?

In the exchange, the reader encounters a fight between three users, two of whom identify themselves as Grammar Nazis. User bb and user Y had an ongoing conversation about prescriptivism and user bb is very upset at this point that user Y does not stop correcting every typo. However, user cc also enters

the conversation and comes to user Y's defence. User bb makes an FTA to user Y's positive face through disapproving of his or her opinion which is countered by user Y with another FTA to user bb's positive face by correcting and thus disagreeing with him or her. Finally, user cc also chimes in with an FTA to user bb's positive face through negative assessment of user bb's abilities by asking offensive questions. There are no mitigating strategies employed which makes the conversation also an example of impoliteness (positive impoliteness and mock politeness). This exchange is prototypical of the data collected for this thesis because expressions of disapproval are the norm in these talks about Grammar Nazis, and thus FTAs to users' positive face are hardly ever mitigated.

Apart from disagreement, another strategy to threaten a user's positive face is exclusion. In the following example a user is seeking approval which is denied by the other user who insults and corrects him or her:

(13) BBB: If you need another Grammer Nazi editor, you can ask me too. Got nothin' better to do most days.

CCC: Don't know that you'd be the best choice, GrammAr Nazi. (Something Awful)

BBB's positive face is damaged by CCC's unmitigated on-record correction that insinuates that the user is not qualified to be a proofreader. This was also the case in many other examples where users' voiced the opinion that others do not fit the profile of Grammar Nazis and can therefore not be part of their group.

FTAs to others' negative face in the forum discussion were usually achieved through orders, warnings, suggestions or even threats. While threats were mostly examples of impoliteness, orders were usually less offensive because they were mitigated with the help of positive or negative politeness:

(14) ooo: SO grammer, much like my chrons diet, must be strictly observed.

ppp: "I don't want you ever startin' sentences with 'so' anymore ever again. Alright?" (Something Awful)

It is notable that user ppp did not correct user ooo's spelling mistake (*grammer*) and instead chose to concentrate on a minor stylistic choice. Along with the FTA towards ooo's negative face through an order, ppp also uses positive politeness in order to redress the threat by asking a question and thus showing interest. Although it could be argued that the question at the end is purely rhetorical, I

think that the whole statement is not complete serious because it seems as if the user is quoting someone (quotation marks and *startin'*) and additionally softened the imperative through the verb *want*. The examples of FTAs to users' negative face encountered in the corpus were all mitigated with the help of politeness strategies which suggests that unlike the unmitigated FTAs to positive face, users hesitate to impose on others' freedom.

There was also one case where a user threatened his or her own positive face via self-correction:

- (15) oo: Sad world we live in where people feel the need to guard their shortcomings and maintain that they are right no matter how wrong they might be. If thee Grammar Nazis ever developed a real life army, I would be glad to enlist.

oo: Sorry, the* (reddit)

User oo corrects him- or herself in order to prevent attacks from other users. The usually mitigating negative politeness strategy of apologizing is not directed at the person who the user is attacking, but rather at other potential attackers. Therefore, the utterance could also be seen as a threat to positive face with unmitigated self-damage to the speaker's face because he or she is damaging his or her own face by admitting regret. Furthermore, the fear of others also shows how important it is to some users to belong to a group (Grammar Nazis). Throughout the forums group face was usually shown through identification with Grammar Nazi-ideals and often users came to each other's rescue when a Grammar Nazi was attacked by someone else (see example 13).

Most of the FTAs committed in the forums were redressed with the help of negative or positive politeness strategies. In cases where an FTA was not mitigated, impoliteness was the consequence. The following exchange is an example of an FTA minimized with the help of positive politeness:

- (16) qqq: While not the whole joke of the song, Al admitted in an interview that he purposely left a split infinitive in Word Crimes so that Grammar Nazis would go apeshit in the YouTube comments and blogoverse, because it would be funny. So he realizes how anal-retentive grammarians are, too, it's all in good fun.

rrr: *admitted, bro (Something Awful)

User rrr commits an FTA towards the other's positive face by correcting him or her, but decided to add *bro* to express solidarity and stress that the correction is

not meant to offend the other user. If, however, *bro* was meant sarcastically, then the FTA is unmitigated and thus an example of sarcasm or mock politeness (see Culpeper 2005: 42). This illustrates that neither user qqq nor others reading the post can be complete sure what user rrr intended, and it also explains how misunderstandings may arise in online conversations. Most users do not know the other interlocutors offline and thus have no further knowledge of the others' personality, making it extremely hard to identify the comments' intentions without any further non-verbal cues. This might also be the reason why emojis have become so popular because they make it much easier to express when something should not be taken at face value.

Similar to negative face and FTAs to negative face, negative politeness strategies were also rarely used in the forums. However, one example, which was also mentioned in the introduction to the empirical chapter, from the corpus was especially interesting with regard to negative politeness strategies:

- (17) O: Why a fine evening to you. Perhaps that first sentence could do with a comma, after "discussion" and prior to "fellow".
P: Cheerio, and thank you for kindly correcting my grammar. You are a gentleman and a scholar. Perhaps your first sentence could do with a comma, after "sir" and prior to "a". (reddit)

This exchange incorporates an unusual number of negative politeness strategies and was quite contrastive compared with the other comments. The language seems old-fashioned and unlike the other exchanges because of the terms of address and the apparent hyper-politeness which is not usually encountered in forum discussions (as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter). The negative politeness strategies are the minimization of imposition through hedging, expression of thanks and obviating structures like passives. This examples shows that correcting others (FTA to positive face) does not necessarily entail discord, but can also be attenuated with the help of humor.

Another interesting negative politeness strategy was the distancing of users from Grammar Nazis in cases where they actually acted like Grammar Nazis. This is usually encountered when a user commits an FTA towards another's positive face, but hesitates to be impolite and thus mitigates the threat by using hedges, e.g. *I am not usually a Grammar Nazi, but* etc. Furthermore, this also shows that the user wants to protect him- or herself from any accusations. This

interesting strategy will also be discussed in more detail in the section on attitudes towards Grammar Nazis.

While the large majority of FTAs was made on-record, there were three instances when users resorted to commit an FTA off-record. The following example expresses this indirectness:

(18) AA: Tipping seems to be these forum's ON mode for rage (as well as bikes and women).

BB: Don't forget grammar and spelling corrections. (AnandTech)

While user BB's comment might seem like a purely additive note, it can be read as a criticism because of the focus on Grammar Nazis (topic of the forum thread under which these comments were posted). The grammatical mistake in AA's comment is noticed by BB who does not correct him or her directly, but chooses to hint at the error. The other user might not even recognize this off-record strategy as an FTA to his negative face (reminder) and consequentially does not react further to the statement. However, if the user recognizes the threat, he or she might feel offended and could classify the comment as mock politeness. This example will also be discussed further with regard to social ideologies in section 3.2.2. It basically underlines that politeness, FTAs and impoliteness not only depend on a speaker's intention, but also on the hearer's ability to recognize them as such.

FTAs are often closely associated with the non-observance of maxims because they do not necessarily adhere to the CP or PP. This topic will be elaborated on in the next section on the flouting, violating, suspending, opting out and clashing of Grice's and Leech's maxims.

3.1.2 Non-observance of maxims

The different categories of non-observances of maxims are often difficult to determine because according to Grice's definition of the types of non-observances a lot depends on implicatures and how a reader or hearer may perceive the utterances. Naturally, implicatures are subjective and invite different interpretations. Only a handful of non-observances of Grice's maxims could be found while there were numerous instances when Leech's politeness maxims were not abided. This is of course due to the nature of the exchanges, which rely heavily on impoliteness, and also the brevity and obscurity of some encounters.

Again, this research chapter is focusing on floutings in the replies rather than the comments which prompted them. In the introduction, it was hypothesized that the flouting of both Grice's and Leech's maxims must be the norm, but in the following section it will be shown that this supposition proved only partly correct.

Although flouting, violating, infringing, opting out, suspending and clashing are categories predominantly used with Grice's four maxims, they are also useful when applied to Leech's politeness categories, namely tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement and sympathy¹⁴. While reading the users' comments, it was at once clear that most did not pay careful attention to follow either the CP or PP, and many showed non-observance characteristics. Generally, I considered those utterances which were mere corrections in the form of **correction*, for example *user h: *an* (YouTube), to be non-observant of politeness maxims as I would argue that correcting someone automatically dispraises their language skills and thus indirectly doubts their intelligence or sometimes even worthiness. Thus, the maxims of generosity (maximized cost), approbation (maximized dispraise), agreement (maximized disagreement) and sympathy (maximized antipathic behavior) are violated. However, in cases where the writer was praised for their misspelling-skills, I did not count the reply as a maxim disregard, for example *user g: "enough"?? Lol, funny! :)* (YouTube), because the user actually praises and shows sympathy towards, as well as agreement with the other user.

As mentioned above, some statements were ambiguous as to whether they could be seen as non-observances or not. For example, it could be argued that suspending the maxim of quantity (length of a post, or abbreviations of frequently used words) is the norm in forums because users do not have the expectation that every maxim must be fulfilled, and that non-fulfillment does not necessarily create implicatures. Therefore, I have decided to only mark those non-observances which really deviated from the norm and which did not represent genre-specific aspects. Furthermore, the large majority of the comments display manner infringement because of mistakes, i.e. imperfect linguistic performance. However, it was also decided to leave these cases unmarked because

¹⁴ For a detailed explanation see section 2.1.3.3.

it would not reveal much about politeness strategies since the whole constellation of the study was designed to find such infringements of Grice's maxim of manner. Thus, it is more significant to look at those instances which stood out in the data set.

The findings show that Grice's basic maxims were adhered to more often (only ten distinct non-observances) than Leech's politeness maxims (74 cases of flouting). However, it was also more difficult to find out whether a user flouted the maxim of quality, quantity, manner and relation if others did not react towards it, or there were no clues from a prior comment. Non-observances of Leech's maxims were easier to identify because most cases were clear on their own without any reaction from other users. In order to highlight some examples from the data set, I will now turn to the individual discussion of each non-observance strategy, and which particular maxims were disobeyed.

Looking at Grice's maxims, there were instances where manner, quantity, quality and relevance were flouted, but never in combination, which is the biggest difference to the kind of flouting observed with regard to Leech's politeness maxims. Generally, it seemed to be the rule that if a user failed to observe the maxim of tact then he or she automatically flouted the maxims of agreement, sympathy and approbation as well. However, in some cases the maxims of tact, agreement and sympathy were flouted, but not the maxim of approbation. The following two statements will show the difference between these two cases:

- (19) F: I'm a grammar nazi. People hate me, but I correct them. Get it right!
G: +[user F] WRONG, sentence fragment, you should have used a coma not a period. (YouTube)
- (20) hh: You underestimate the stupidity of people. Also, a lot of young people use the internet.
jj: *internet Internet (reddit)

In the first example, the user addresses another directly through a linking device (+) and voices his or her dissatisfaction with a grammatical mistake before correcting the other user's comment. Because user G maximizes the cost to the other user, maximizes dispraise and disagreement, as well as minimizes sympathy with the obvious and recognizable intention to do so, the statement can be seen as flouting tact, approbation, agreement and sympathy. However, in the second example the writer does not address the other user directly, but

simply substitutes the mistake. Therefore, it can be argued that when a user is not addressed or referred to, the dispraise of this individual is limited and the maxim of approbation not necessarily flouted.

As mentioned above, Leech's maxims were never singularly breached which is probably due to their general semantic proximity. For example, it is almost impossible to dispraise someone (approbation) without fanning disagreement at the same time, or disregarding tact without minimizing sympathy between these individuals in the process. However, Grice's maxims are farther apart and when a user does not write enough (quantity), he or she can still produce relevant (maxim of relation), clear (maxim of manner) and truthful (maxim of quality) comments. Furthermore, breaches of Leech's maxims of politeness and impoliteness are often entwined which was shown by the fact that when impoliteness occurred Leech's maxims were necessarily flouted, but the flouting of politeness maxims did not automatically implicate impoliteness. This point can be seen in the following statement:

(21) Q: your absolutely right.

R: Grrrrrr, it is you're not your. All these mistakes are going to make me loose my mind.*edit: Can you start a sentence with a growl? (reddit)

Firstly, the user flouts the maxim of approbation because he or she maximizes the dispraise of the other user by voicing his or her annoyance with the user's mistake (emphasized through onomatopoeic *Grrrrrr*). Secondly, agreement is flouted because the user does not agree with the other's language choices. Finally, the maxim of sympathy is flouted because of the user's antipathic behavior. Although, user R flouts all of these politeness maxims, he or she does not attack the other user personally and there are no swearwords or insults used. Thus, the statement does not qualify as impoliteness.

Flouting was generally the strategy used most often in the data and it was also the only kind of non-observance which occurred in connection with Leech's politeness maxims. This does not perforce mean that other strategies like violating, infringing, opting out, suspending or clashing are never used in connection with the politeness maxims, but that the discussions in the forums were quite frank and overt because the writers wanted the readers to know when they were not being tactful or in agreement. Furthermore, in some cases, especially

with indirect statements the line between flouting and violating was quite thin as shall be seen in the following example:

(22) kk: Maybe alot aren't loose

ll: I haven't seen a lot of alots lately. (reddit)

On the one hand, this statement could be flouting the maxims of agreement, tact and sympathy, but on the other hand, it could also be interpreted as covert enough to count as a violation. If it were positioned on its own, it would have been impossible to categorize it clearly as either one, but luckily the other user replied outraged to this post clearly showing that the message was understood and not misleading in its intent as violations usually are.

With regard to maxim violations, it needs to be stressed again that finding this form of non-observance was especially hard since it operates in covertness. As stated in the introduction to the empirical chapter, violating a maxim is largely a matter of internal writer motivation. Thus, from written data a researcher can only know whether the non-observance was deceptive on purpose if the writer provides enough additional information. However, there was one exchange which was identified as a violation of the maxim of relevance:

(23) jjj: To all of you who think you're time is worth more than jury duty...or who think they're too important to serve...I can only hope that you, someday, have to have your fate decided by people who aren't smart enough to get out of jury duty...You don't have to actually be guilty to face a jury trial...just guilty-looking enough to get charged with a crime. (or picked up for hookers & blow, DUI, cheating on your taxes....)

kkk: Ahem, aren't you the former ATOT Grammar Nazi? (AnandTech)

User kkk is seemingly just asking a question when really he or she is hinting at the fact that as a former AnandTech Off Topic (ATOT) Grammar Nazi the other user should know better than to make such a blatant mistake. User jjj has probably acted as a language prescriptivist in the past. The comment to user jjj's post seems entirely irrelevant to the topic at hand and only makes sense if interpreted as a threat to the other's positive face through indirectness (negative politeness strategy).

Infringing could mostly be observed in the comments rather than the replies where the writers were non-native speakers of English and clearly lacked a higher degree of language competence, for example:

- (24) DDD: You don't like movie? More than dislike movie, I hate it. (Something Awful)

In this case, the user infringes the maxim of manner due to an awkward sentence structure and the lack of articles. In another case, the writer's infringement was identified as being caused by supposed intoxication:

- (25) yy: Hanged is used for when you someone dies. Hung is what you do to drapes.

zz: "Hanged is used for when you someone dies died. Hung is what you do did to drapes." Bold move, posting a comment riddled with errors in a grammar Nazi discussion. Have another drink, Doc. (reddit)

User zz is referring to the other's username which described user yy as a drunk. The whole exchange is humorous and user yy's infringement of the maxim of manner could just be an imitation of intoxicated people in order to stay in his fictional online character. Although the other replies are not all free from mistakes none could be clearly identified as something other than a typo, and definitely not as a result of an imperfect linguistic performance or impairment as in the examples above.

Opting out reflects the unwillingness of a writer to fulfill certain maxims. This neglect of a maxim was observed in two cases with regard to the maxim of manner:

- (26) I: Look over they're, somebody who doesn't understand the joke! (YouTube)

- (27) bb: leve lieve (reddit)

In both cases the users are mocking other users who were trying to correct them. They show intentional disregard for correct grammar or orthography, and ridicule the other user, indicating that they are simply unwilling to observe the norm dictated by others. This usually leads to great frustration on part of the Grammar Nazis and often entails impoliteness if the other user adheres to a prescriptivist opinion.

Suspending occurs when there is no expectation to fulfill certain maxims. As mentioned before, most of the comments could be seen as suspending the maxim of manner due to the genre of forum communications. However, there was one example of a suspension of the maxim of manner which stood out from the rest of the replies:

(28) k: Gr8 b8 m8 l r8 8/8. (YouTube)

This example shows that often in online discourse language forms deviating from the standard are acceptable. I would argue that in a colloquial online context, there is actually not always an expectation that the maxim of manner must be fulfilled in the way that only letters should be used in words. Instead often emojis or numbers (either in the form of leet or phonetic spelling) can be used. This is also another reason why language prescriptivists such as Grammar Nazis are frequently outraged by these usages.

Examples of the clashing of maxims could not be observed in the data catalogue collected for this thesis. Of course this does not mean that it never occurs in the context of grammatical or spelling corrections in forums, it just signifies that it might be either less common, or coincidentally not a strategy in the data collected for the corpus – or a combination of both.

Finally, many non-observances of Leech's maxims coincide quite naturally with impoliteness strategies because of their potentially offensive nature and it is worth taking a closer look at the various examples found using different linguistic features to affront other users.

3.1.3 Impoliteness

Culpeper (2005: 38) explains that “[i]mpoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face-attack[s] intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behavior as intentionally face-attacking”, or a combination of both takes place. One of the hypotheses of this thesis was that impoliteness is more frequently used than any of the non-observance strategies investigated in the previous chapter. The idea was that since impoliteness can be commonly found in uninhibited emotional discourses where a lot of swearing and name-calling exists, and it thus occurs regularly in online forums where users are protected by their anonymity. This hypothesis was proven to be partly true as impoliteness was indeed more common than the combination of violating, infringing, opting out, suspending and clashing of Grice's maxims as a total. However, while Grice's maxims need not necessarily be violated or flouted whenever impoliteness occurs, many of Leech's maxims of politeness were automatically breached whenever impoliteness occurred and beyond that more often in total. This is of course quite understandable because when one is trying to offend an-

other person, one is not usually tactful, generous or sympathetic, however, to some degree these maxims can be flouted without seeming outright impolite. Thus, Bousfield's (2008: 3ff.) and Culpeper's (2005: 35ff.) claims that impoliteness is more than the absence of politeness and more extreme than the categories of non-observance seem to be quite valid.

Of the four impoliteness categories proposed by Culpeper (2005: 41-42) positive impoliteness was used most often, but there were also a number of instances when users employed sarcasm or mock politeness. Positive impoliteness occurred when users called each other unfavorable names, excluded each other from the group of Grammar Nazis, or actively sought disagreement. Mock politeness was identified in those cases when users' statements were obviously insincere and offended another user. There were three examples of negative impoliteness and none of withheld politeness. Negative impoliteness occurred when users damaged another interlocutor's negative face by belittling or ridiculing them and thus did not take the other person seriously.

Looking at each forum separately in order to see whether there were in fact any differences, impoliteness occurred in eleven instances on Anandtech, three instances on reddit, six comments on Something Awful and five on YouTube. While this data might suggest that AnandTech is the most impolite forum, one needs to be careful for a number of reasons which have been mentioned before, but need to be stressed again in this context. Firstly, this thesis is dealing with a very small corpus of examples which makes the findings statistically irrelevant on a more generalized level, but guarantee that each example can be qualitatively investigated. Secondly, it is sheer impossible to read through all the comments in these forums and thus the selection represents mostly recent posts. Finally, users who are on AnandTech could be on one of the other forums with a different username. Thus, it is impossible to establish that one forum has more impolite users than another.

The data shows that in many instances impoliteness occurred in a chain reaction. This means that usually if one user is impolite towards another, the other user is very likely to respond with impoliteness. This can lead quite literally to vicious circles of verbal abuse where more insults are mirrored or added in each

conversational turn. Here is one example from AnandTech which shows the mirroring of insults:

- (29) II: some warning and why you likes or hated it could be useful you putz
JJ: You should proofread, you putz. I'm just messing with you for daring to post that in a grammar Nazi thread (AnandTech)

This is the climax of what was an ongoing, but up to this point indirect, verbal duel. User II used various expletives or insulting remarks before and JJ always responded with snarky sarcastic remarks without, however, using any form of swearword. This obviously annoyed II greatly and he or she directly addressed JJ with *you putz*¹⁵. The exchange can be classified as positive impoliteness because both participants use “inappropriate identity markers” (Culpeper 2005: 41) and seek disagreement. The example illustrates that linguistic and thus behavioral aggression can be transmitted verbally, however, that once such a negative discourse has started it is unlikely that the parties involved will reconcile. Long-lasting animosity is a particular feature of online discourse because people are unlikely to ever meet outside the forums and therefore do not work as hard to reach peace because there are seldom negative consequences.

Another feature seen in the above-quote is backpedaling (a positive politeness strategy) because JJ uses the phrase *I'm just messing with you* in the second sentence in his post. This shows partial regret at having offended or annoyed another user and also explains that user II might have provoked the rebuke because he or she was bold enough to post in a forum where language prescriptivists are the main audience. This can also be seen in the following post from AnandTech:

- (30) III: sounds like a plan, i'll consider it as soon as you learn to spell. on the other hand your posts possess a certain odor. so maybe you're making a joke?
TT: You aren't a very good grammar nazi if you missed my biggest error damn does not equal dam. Oh well I guess no one is perfect. (AnandTech)

This conversation indicates that users are aware of their impolite actions and sometimes do indeed feel remorse. Furthermore, some also try to point out that they were just trolling in order to gain other users' approval. Generally, very few

¹⁵ *Putz* is a Yiddish vulgarism for penis, but often used to address a worthless person (Urban Dictionary Online 2014: npn).

conversations continue for longer once the interlocutors have started to use impoliteness, indicating that although the conversations have no offline implications or consequences, most users still don't want to continue conflicts and are rather seeking solidarity and friendly rapport.

Generally, impoliteness is also easily facilitated through anonymity, which I believe to be the driving factor generating impoliteness in these exchanges. In this regard online exchanges differ greatly from offline communication because, as Bousfield and Locher (2008: 35f.) explain, usually impoliteness increases with social proximity between two people. However, I would argue that online forums create an instantaneous familiarity because all users are theoretically equal and often the topics discussed are quite personal. This atmosphere of artificial closeness and immediate friendship is encouraging at times, but also a potential source for discord when other users do not act as expected.

As mentioned above, once an impolite discourse has been established, users are unlikely to depart from this conversational path because there are no real-life implications or rewards for reconciliations. So what are the strategies used by different users to propagate impoliteness? The following examples (32 to 35) increase in their degree of offensiveness and show very distinct ways in which impoliteness can originate:

(31) II: People should be banned for creating a thread without any comments what so ever.

JJ: "People should be banned for..." ... for making posts without any proofreading whatsoever.

II: ... What the Fvck am I supposed to watch,

JJ: "People should be banned for..." ... for making questions without a question mark to indicate that it's an interrogative statement.
(AnandTech)

User II is referring negatively to a thread by another user that has garnered little attention and thus generated no further comments. JJ, who is not the user II was indirectly criticizing, comes to the other user's rescue and starts to mock II's comments due to their lack of grammatical correctness. The user shows negative impoliteness through ridicule, but the overarching strategy could also be described as mimicry (Culpeper 2005: 55).

In the next comment a user is called out for his or her attempt to correct another user's spelling without having recognized that the user was obviously a troll:

(32) h: Trolling is a art.

i: an*

k: +[user i] FACEPALM (YouTube).

The comment user i tried to correct was trollbait and therefore user k is pointing out that user i is obviously naïve and unwittingly fell for it. According to Culpeper's classification system (2005: 41-42), the utterance can be described as negative impoliteness because the other user is not treated seriously. The facepalm gesture symbolizes frustration, embarrassment or disappointment with the intellectual abilities of one's counterpart. It is quite popular and widely used, most likely due to its popularity in memes and other popular culture (Macmillan Dictionary Online 2014: npn). Thus, impoliteness is achieved through the verbal use of a gesture.

A third way in which impoliteness is used in these forums is illustrated in the following example:

(33) pp: Your to wierd. Maybe alot of us arent lose like you're mom!

qq: FU and btw: You're too weird (reddit)

Your-mum-jokes (or Yo-momma-jokes) are a sensitive subject, but quite popular with young men and widespread through different languages (Jeffries 2006: npn). The offense develops out of a negative sexual reference to another user's mother since the joke implies that his or her mother is promiscuous. Here, the users are dealing with positive politeness because of the breaking of taboos and usage of expletives. In this particular forum context, it can be assumed that user pp is a troll given the fact that *your* and *you're* are so purposefully switched, and both *weird* and *too* are misspelled as well. Furthermore, user qq takes offense and counters with *FU* (abbreviation for Fuck You) and continues to correct the other user. Thus, impoliteness can also be achieved through offensive humor.

The prototypical form of impoliteness used in the forums was positive impoliteness through exclusion of the other. The typical corresponding strategies are inappropriate name-calling and swearing:

(34) ttt: Stop postig textspeak shit, yours truely grammar nazi

uuu: Stupid fucker doesn't even know grammar and spelling, and he calls himself a Nazi? smdh (Something Awful)

Both ttt and uuu use strong expletives, *shit* and *fucker*, which underline the level of offensiveness the users are trying to achieve. Clearly, neither backpedaling nor humor (positive politeness strategies) are employed to soften the situation and it is quite apparent that the two users have little respect for each other. Additionally to positive impoliteness, user ttt also uses mock politeness (*yours truly grammar nazi*) as if he or she was writing a polite correspondence. This illustrates more than one type of impoliteness can be used within one utterance. Furthermore, impoliteness can range from mildly impolite to very impolite utterances, and can culminate over time.

While the examples above divided into four categories are all clearly overtly offensive, there are also instances of impoliteness which operate on a more covert level, but which can be just as offensive:

- (35) L: Not to be a Grammar Nazi, but: Their = Bobby tries to keep their coat clean. They're = People like you, they're fucking stupid!. There = Look over there it's an uneducated moron. (reddit)

User L employs offensive sentences masked as examples to indirectly swear at the other user. This is another example of a mixture between two types of impoliteness. On the one hand, negative impoliteness is employed to belittle the other user, on the other hand, the user is also called names and insulted.

One quite extensive comment shows that passive aggressiveness is yet another strategy to express impoliteness:

- (36) ZZZ: This is a pretty poorly organized sentence. First off, just take out "To be fair". Everybody knows that "To be fair" is a codeword for "I'm going to insult someone now and hope you're too thick to notice it's directed at you", and by using it others will deem your post less worthy of being taken seriously. Next, it's a little confusing to read. Are you implying that ALL grammar correcting sperglords are passive aggressive douchebags? If so, you probably want to remove "because they are" after "'Could of'" and move "passive aggressive douchebags" to in front of sperglord, so it reads "the passive aggressive douchbag speglords who correct 'could of' are pretty infuriating..." The sentence also feels like a bit of a run-on. It's not as bad as it could be, but I feel that the sentence would benefit greatly from either additional commas, splitting it into two sentences, or removing some of the bloat. Cutting out the whole "because they are passive aggressive douchebags", for example, makes the sentence both much cleaner and removes the blatant insult towards the person you're commenting on. So, instead of your original statement, I suggest the following

alteration: "Regardless of your political views, the sperglorlds who correct "could of" are pretty infuriating." See? With some simple editorial effort, your post is now far less insulting, and is both slimmer and easier to read, communicating your point much more effectively and in a manner that will allow people to take you seriously.

Through the lengthy explanations, negatively connotated vocabulary and a patronizing style, ZZZ manages to make the impolite point that the other user is both uneducated and dim-witted all the while pretending to give the other user helpful advice. This quote is meant to damage the other user's positive face through insults, exclusion and disagreement, but negative impoliteness strategies like ridicule and condescendence are also used. Therefore, it is shown that depending on which effect a user wants to achieve different strategies and types of impoliteness can be useful and often users mix them in order to maximize the impact.

Impoliteness is a prolific topic to which much could be added and it is especially interesting in anonymous online discourses that dispense with any form of accountability. In the following summary, the main points made in the last few sections will be recapitulated.

3.1.4 Summary

The last few sections investigated users' positive and negative face, FTAs employed to threaten face, strategies used to mitigate that threat, non-observances and several impoliteness strategies applied in situation when a threat was consciously reinforced. The findings indicate that conflicts were not avoided and that the conversations were quite direct.

The majority of comments threatened other users' positive face by expressing disapproval through corrections. These on-record FTAs were very rarely mitigated through positive and negative politeness. Positive politeness strategies encountered in the corpus data were jokes and terms of address showing solidarity with the other user. Negative politeness strategies were hedges and obviating structures such as passives or citation of general rules. The findings also showed that only very few of Grice's maxims were disobeyed while Leech's politeness maxims of tact, generosity, approbation and sympathy were flouted repeatedly throughout all four forums. Except for clashing, all other non-observance strategies mentioned in the literature review were used, however,

flouting maxims was clearly favored. Surprisingly, not even impoliteness was encountered as often as flouting which might indicate that even though users are protected through anonymity they still follow basic politeness principles.

Impoliteness is mainly achieved through four strategies in the forums investigated. The first one is mimicry or ridicule which leads to strong annoyance. The second one is using gestures to represent frustration or disbelief at another user's naivety or linguistic failures. Thirdly, users employed offensive humor like your-mum-jokes to emotionally offend another user. Finally, a classic form of impoliteness is encountered in the form of expletives and swearwords. Furthermore, impoliteness does not always need to be overt, but can also be transmitted covertly through sarcasm or passive aggressiveness. Generally, impoliteness towards users' positive face (positive impoliteness) dominated over negative impoliteness and mock politeness.

In the next chapter the last research question focusing on the strategies used to propagate certain ideologies will be discussed.

3.2 Language ideologies

Language is the system with which beliefs about society and politics can be transmitted, and apart from visual media (for more recent events) it is also the only medium with which humanity has access to its historical past and present. In other words, it could be argued that there is no activity or action without ideological implications. The wider discourse, this fits into, discussed in chapter one, is that the Internet has become an uninhibited and unparalleled medium for the transmission of ideas and information about political and historical events.

Clearly, power plays an important role in online exchanges because in everyday life users move through different systems of power. These systems of power are especially visible on reddit because reddit's users can be upvoted or downvoted, and can obtain a certain number of points in the process. It is quite visible who is a well-regarded or popular poster and who is not as successful. Furthermore, it also shows a great difference between newbies¹⁶ and established members of the community. Thus, power-relations are very visible and a hierarchical structure crystallizes rapidly during conversations. However, interestingly, these structures can be dissolved when a group forms. This strategy has been long-serving in any community outside the Internet as well. Although this power dynamic is only possible on reddit and AnandTech, the data did not feature significant differences in terms of power struggles compared with the other platforms. There would have to be a more extensive investigation into the particular correlation between a user's voting score and power positions to be able to make a meaningful statement about the connections.

Another interesting feature connected to power and ideology is persuasion. Persuasion was found to be only a minor influence in the discussions because it seemed as if users already had very clear positions, and I was unable to find instances where one individual changed their opinion of Grammar Nazis. Furthermore, it also seemed as if people were quite aware of the other users' position and did not actively try to persuade them to behave or write otherwise. The most open form of persuasion occurred when respondents tried to explain why,

¹⁶ "Newbie, newb, noob, n00b, noobie, n00bie or nub is a slang term for a novice or newcomer, or somebody inexperienced in any profession or activity. [...] It can have derogatory connotations, but is also often used for descriptive purposes only, without a value judgment" (Wikipedia 2014: npn).

for example, normative spelling would be important in this context, but it seemed to be more of a strategy to elaborate and defend one's standpoint:

- (37) z: [user y] Um... Good job at misunderstanding one of the points of the song. That rule is only for "it's" and "its." because "it is" is an extremely common contraction. Hell, using an apostrophe after a noun is almost slang as you don't hear "Jim's going outside." very often in proper English. Even then, both would use an apostrophe because you can tell the difference by the following verb to make it a contraction or noun to denote a possessive. The lack of apostrophe would pluralize the noun which, by the way, is impossible to do with "it." So long story short "Nazi's" is a possessive and thus uses an apostrophe just like "Jim's car" or "Larry's bacon" while "its" is the only exception. (YouTube)

The user elaborates his or her point of why the corrections of another user were incorrect quite extensively. It can be argued that the user actually wants to achieve that the other participant changes his or her behavior and admits that a mistake was made. Generally, users employed clear distancing strategies if another user did not agree with their views.

Often one is not willing to say explicitly what one thinks, but the anonymity of Internet forums erases some of this shyness. Anonymity seems to equate to no accountability, which is generally true as only few forums have a strict policy against offensive content. Two reasons for the freedom-driven ideology on the Internet are its origin – its time and place of birth – along with the general ideas of conduct held by its first users. It is significant that the Internet was developed during the 1960s, a time of civil unrest in the US, by the state and military researchers, and that it was first used among civilians during the 1970s and 1980s – periods of relative wealth (Ryan 2010: 31). The early adopters of the new technology were mostly tech-savvy Americans whose credo was to keep the Internet free for creative experimentation (Ryan 2010: 31). Even nowadays people protest limits to the freedom of online content, data transfer and any form of online censorship severely¹⁷.

If one compares overt and covert ideologies (Dirven, Frank & Ilie 2001: 1), it becomes clear immediately that while overt ideologies are easy to spot, for example identification with Grammar Nazis, covert ideologies are a matter of interpretation. Therefore, in an attempt not to over-interpret or wrongly identify covert

¹⁷ This point is illustrated in recent news stories about protests in Hungary and China supported by the hacktivist group Anonymous (Lyman 2014: npn) & (Bland 2014: npn).

ideologies, only 27 instances were distinctly identified, of which representative comments shall be discussed here with their particular interpretation.

- (38) OO: Could have fooled me! I'm sorry, but if you are going to post in a forum as a professional manufacturer of quality goods, you just might want to have someone proofread your post before revealing your lack of education to the world. /grammar nazi /spelling nazi (AnandTech)
- (39) JJJ: true Grammar Nazis know that the split infinitive is perfectly fine. It's just some nonsense that someone came up with to make our language more like Latin! (Something Awful)
- (40) K: Don't you just hate grammar Nazi's (Feminazi's) and they're acts? Honestly, if there was an army for them we should send them their, I think there so annoying. (YouTube)

The first example shows a positive attitude towards Grammar Nazis because it equates it indirectly with being educated and thus intelligent. The user is outraged by another's mistake and self-identifies as a */grammar nazi /spelling nazi*. The second response can still be identified as positive towards Grammar Nazis, but less so than the first quote. The reason for this is that the user still identifies with Grammar Nazis, but only to an extent where it is still reasonable. The last line is an example of trolling which ridicules Grammar Nazis and their editing compulsions. It openly shows a very negative attitude towards Grammar Nazis. What these examples show is that certain ideological attitudes are clearly visible through language, but through different application of vocabulary, etc. the directness of a statement can be fine-tuned.

Verschueren (2012: 8) writes that “[t]ypically, ideology – and hence its discursive manifestation – balances description and prescription” because “it involves theories of how things are in combination with theories of how things should be”. However, in the discourses centering on Grammar Nazis’ attitudes, prescriptivism dominated as a rule. Nevertheless, there were still a number of conversations that discussed the dichotomy, weighing the pros and cons of prescriptivism and descriptivism. In line with prescriptivism, language conservatism expresses the typical linguistic ideology common for prescriptivists that language change is a negative development and a language should be preserved in its original state since it is naturally the best. One user commented on this by expressing his or her fear of a lexical change:

- (41) xx: my **feelings** hurt FTFY My brain screeches every time I read someone write 'feel' when they should be writing 'feeling'. This has become the

trend online lately. I am afraid that in a few years, 'feel' will totally replace 'feeling' if this trend continues. (reddit)

User xx mirrors the view that language change often results from mistakes – a view which gives it a very negative tinge in the eyes of some traditionalists. Although the transformational impact of some mistakes is hard to predict, it can be assumed that user xx's polemic is not entirely justified with regard to *feelings* and *feels*.

In the first subchapter, the ideological and attitudinal associations with the concept of Grammar Nazi will be discussed in more detail. This section will then be followed by a debate on political, historical and social ideologies found in the corpus.

3.2.1 Linguistic ideology and Grammar Nazis

Ideologically, a Grammar Nazi is assumed to have negative connotations, but surprisingly the term *Grammar Nazi* seems to have undergone a significant semantic expansion already. It no longer adheres strictly to people who correct grammar and spelling mistakes, but mistakes in general, for example in the following exchange about diving gear:

(42) aaaa: One of my instructors told me his octopus was the first thing he bought. My friend, on the other hand, doesn't think it's worth purchasing a tank, BCD or octopus.

bbbb: Just to be a grammar nazi, I believe you mean regulator. The octo is a backup second stage reg that is part of your overall regulator setup (1st stage/2nd stage/octo/pressure gauge). (Something Awful)

In this example, the second user refers to him-/herself as a *grammar nazi*, but the mistake is actually conceptual and not related to a grammatical or spelling mistake at all. Although it can be argued that the correction is still language related, as it refers to the use of wrong terminology, it is nevertheless no longer limited to a conventional misspelling. Thus, it becomes clear that a *Grammar Nazi* might now be someone who corrects in general (with a language focus) and no longer purely orthographically or grammatically.

While an online forum rookie might initially believe that a *Grammar Nazi* cannot possibly be something positive, the data collected for this thesis seems to suggest otherwise. In the one hundred exchanges investigated for this thesis, the denotation *Grammar Nazi* appeared 28 times. Out of these 28, *Grammar Nazi*

was used in a positive context 20 times and with a negative connotation only eight times. Often positive ideological association with Grammar Nazis went hand in hand with a person's self-identification with the concept and accompanying prescriptivism. Negative statements always voiced an annoyance with the online representatives of such prescriptivism. Comparing the following three statements, it becomes clear that the term is very emotionally charged even outside of its historical context:

- (43) C:  this is a gun, copy paste it to kill grammar nazis (YouTube)
- (44) I: i like Grammar Nazi's, I find them funny x3 (YouTube)
- (45) F: I'm a grammar nazi. People hate me, but I correct them. Get it right! (YouTube)

These three examples from YouTube encapsulate the main attitudes toward Grammar Nazis – they are either passionately hated, well liked for their entertainment value or proudly identified with, not minding even negative associations.

However, there are also those users who think that Grammar Nazis are just a passing trend as user Y explains:

- (46) Y: I think the concept of a Grammar Nazi is similar to other Internet fads. They don't last forever. For a while it was funny to imagine that a small class of 'netizens' were united under the flag of pure grammar, wearing dark uniforms, and treating bad grammar like the Nazi's treated non-Aryans. For some it was also fun to join the ranks of the Grammar Nazis for a short time. (reddit)

Labeling Grammar Nazis a fad might be slightly miscalculated given the centuries-old tradition of prescriptivism (cf. criticism of inkhorn terms) which has infiltrated every modern medium so far (Baron 2009: 20). Furthermore, in this comment another ideological dimension of the term surfaces as well – National Socialism and the historical implications of the term *Nazi*. While this topic will be elaborated on later, it is alarming to see that some users even value the seemingly insignificant, in the historical context, aspects of Nazis, for example their uniform, and trivialize abhorrent war crimes. The title of the thread the above comment was published in was *The disappearance of Grammar Nazis?* published in /r/TheoryOfReddit, raising the following questions:

- (47) vv: It seems that Grammar Nazis are few and far between now-a-days. In the past where most mistakes were pounced on immediately, now no one at all will comment on them. If they do make a remark, it is usually be-

cause the mistake is unusually funny. I often see the period in the middle of the sentence that is so common to phone mistakes and mobile users. Do you believe the rise of mobile users has led to a decline of people correcting grammar? Or is it from more of an awareness of the multiculturalism(ness?) of Reddit? Or possibly, people have stopped rewarding Nazis with karma, so they've moved on to other jerkery? Thoughts? (reddit)

This user raises many interesting questions concerning Grammar Nazis, for example if their numbers are declining because the general public is becoming more aware of peoples' multicultural backgrounds. It is impossible to show whether the number of Grammar Nazis is actually decreasing, but the example shows that users are reflectively and seriously engaging with the topic of linguistic prescriptivism and its causes.

Sometimes corrections by Grammar Nazis are greatly appreciated for their teaching effects and some non-native speakers of English even ask to be policed by the self-acclaimed experts of grammar and spelling:

- (48) X: As someone who speaks English as a second language I liked that part of reddit very much when I joined this site in 2007. It was like free english lessons and had a positive effect on the general quality of the comments. Nowadays you risk being downvoted in the high double digits if you correct someone even if you are reasonable and polite. This is in my opinion the main reason people stopped correcting others and a rather sad development. (reddit)

While *Grammar Nazi* is also used in name-calling as an insult, user X's comment shows that to an extent prescriptivism can have positive effects on users, for example support during the language learning process. Subjectively, Grammar Nazis' prescriptivism can even contribute to the quality of comments, underlining an old belief that how you say something matters as much as what you are saying.

Yet, many people do not react towards language mistakes at all and concentrate rather on the content of a comment. Interestingly, there were some cases where spelling or grammatical mistakes were used to further discredit the content of a user's message. On a cognitive level, the belief that there can only be one standard is deeply ingrained in people and through the educational system, they have been taught that language mistakes automatically reveal a person's intellectual inferiority (Baron 2009: 6). Therefore, naturally the topic of prescriptivism was also repeatedly associated with intelligence in the forum posts. This is symptomatic of a society which sees great value in a written knowledge sys-

tem due to its long scriptural tradition. However, “prescriptivism about spelling is falling out of fashion” according to Josephine Livingstone (2014: npn):

Today, even the biggest pedants (I’m looking at you, Stephen Fry) will concede that it is in rather poor taste to emphasize the form of something as fluid as language over its functions.

The same article also explains that spelling mistakes are still seen as evidence that a speaker is illiterate or even stupid, meaning that good spelling and grammar equate to high intelligence in the general public’s opinion which is also reflected in some forum posts.

Another user’s comment about Grammar Nazis being pedants who ignore the crucial content of messages was also found in the corpus data:

(49) sss: I think your behaviour is pretty reminiscent to that of a grammar nazi correcting a typo (also known as nitpicking). (Something Awful)

Many users do not appreciate the correction of minor mistakes especially when they actually know the standard spelling, but feel like the swift provision of content is more important. These users support the stance that language online must not be exactly like language offline, especially the standard language learned in school. The idea is that as long as the content of a comment is eligible, linguistic elements like punctuation, capitalization and minor spelling mistakes do not matter. Therefore, the linguistic ideology behind these comments can be interpreted as being radically descriptive in nature and very critical of any prescriptive imposition.

It is unclear why some users find the identification with Grammar Nazis so uncomfortable, but there are a number of elements which could point to a possible explanation. Here are four posts (one from each forum) in which users stated a hesitance to identify with Grammar Nazis:

(50) EEE: I don't mean to get all grammar nazi on you since your English is understandable enough but I admit it got a bit distracting here (Something Awful)

(51) dd: I am not normally a grammar Nazi, I'll let little things slide but some of the things she says are beginning (to) make me into one. (reddit)

(52) aaa: Oh, I think you meant "peace" and not "piece." I'm not usually a grammar Nazi, but if you're going to allege someone is ignorant, you might want to sanitize your attack first (AnandTech)

- (53) L: Not to be a Grammar Nazi, but: Their = Bobby tries to keep their coat clean. They're = People like you, they're fucking stupid!. There = Look over there it's an uneducated moron. (YouTube)

These four posts use four different phrases which indicate that the users do not necessarily want to be associated with being a Grammar Nazi (*I don't mean to get all grammar nazi on you, I am not normally a grammar Nazi, I'm not usually a grammar Nazi, and Not to be a Grammar Nazi*), but then they proceed to correct the other user's grammar or spelling, which is essentially the definition of a Grammar Nazi. So why this hesitance to be associated with this language ideological group? One possible explanation is that these users are quite aware of the negative evaluations of the Grammar Nazi group and, unlike others, do not prioritize linguistic correctness over being well liked, or simply do not want to be put in a box. The strategy can also be seen as indicative or negative politeness with the goal to minimize the threat to one's own face.

As shown in this section, *Grammar Nazis* are not a clear-cut language ideological group (if such a thing even exists). They prompt a wide range of different reactions and treatments of the topic. It would be too simplistic to say that attitudes towards Grammar Nazis can be divided into either positive or negative because as shown, for example through hesitance, users are not always leaning in one clear direction.

3.2.2 Political ideology and Grammar Nazis

[The] singular capacity of language to be a locus of disagreement over what is correct is at the centre of its social functioning. Issues of linguistic correctness go far deeper than the particular grammatical or lexical quibble at hand. They are interpreted as reflecting the speaker's intelligence, industry [and] social worthiness [...]. [Language] determines who stands where in the social hierarchy, [...] who has political power [...] and whose version of history will be perpetuated. (Joseph 2006: 4-5)

As the quote above illustrates language is never void of political, historical and social features of ideology, emphasizing that it matters greatly whose discourse is more powerful. While this is true, sometimes ideologies navigate on a subconscious level and they are well-masked enough to escape detection. Some ideological aspects are in fact taboos and are rarely openly discussed. Thus, there were only rare instances of overt political or social ideologies within the corpus of comments and replies collected for this thesis.

Although, political statements did not feature prominently, traces of them were nevertheless found in a number of posts. Firstly, there are posts which reference political leanings and associate grammatical correctness with political views. Secondly, there are posts which refer to social ideologies, for example misogynistic and heteronormative ideologies, by combining them with language corrections. Thirdly, the historical-political dimension of National Socialism cannot be neglected and resurfaces several times in the posts through references and even puns.

The first kind of political ideology surfaced in a post by a user who was upset that another user corrected a mistake:

(54) bb: You know damn well an autocorrector did that. But hey just ignore everything else with your red herrings, liberal ivory tower asshole. (reddit)

This user expresses the view that Grammar Nazis can be equated with *ivory tower liberals* who have no consideration for the importance of content and just annoy other netizens¹⁸. Furthermore, the user underlines with the help of sarcasm that the issue at hand is clearly not the spelling or grammatical mistake, but the topic or content controversy. Another user also hints at the connection between political orientation and Grammar Nazis:

(55) YYY: To be fair, the sperglords who correct "could of" because they are passive aggressive douchebags are pretty infuriating no matter where you stand on the political or educational spectrum. (Something Awful)

It is not clearly identified which particular political affiliation might be associated with *sperglords*, but Grammar Nazis are definitely associated with an opposing and therefore negative political view.

Turning to the social dimensions of linguistic ideologies, it was noticeable that most attacks that included negative political or social attitudes were directed at minorities. Female users are one such minority who make up less than a third of the total user number in the four forums¹⁹. In one such post the opinion was expressed that Grammar Nazis are the same as Feminazis – a dismissive term

¹⁸ The word *netizen* is a blend of net and citizen, referring to a habitual user of the Internet (Ryan 2010: 209).

¹⁹ See section 1.6 for more information.

perpetuated by the extreme right-wing conservative Rush Limbaugh to describe “militant feminists”²⁰ (Rudman 2012: npn).

- (56) K: Don't you just hate grammar Nazi's (Feminazi's) and they're acts? Honestly, if there was an army for them we should send them their, I think there so annoying. (YouTube)

Although the trolling in user K's post is very obvious (intentional play with *they're/there* and possessive 's versus plural -s), it still shows that there is an association of the two denotations, *Grammar Nazi* and *Feminazi*. However, while *Grammar Nazi* can also have positive connotations evoking associations with pride and even identification as shown in the last chapter, *Feminazi* is primarily used in a disapproving manner (Rudman 2012: npn). Furthermore, it was not the only post within the data collection showing a negative stance towards women. Another post points to the difficult position women are in on forums in general:

- (57) AA: Tipping seems to be these forum's ON mode for rage (as well as bikes and women). (AnandTech)

This post broaches the issue of discrimination against women from another interesting angle: equating women with objects such as bikes and assigning them a potentially negative role. Although, these were the only posts directly connected to misogynistic views, the phenomenon is wide-spread online, for example recently through gamergate²¹, and further facilitated through the imbalance of sexes represented in online forums²².

Another conversation concerning ideology and social views centered on the issue of heteronormativity and transgender users. The reply underlines a transphobic view:

²⁰ Rush Limbaugh in his book *The Way Things Ought to Be* (1992): “I prefer to call the most obnoxious feminists what they really are: feminazis. Tom Hazlett, a good friend who is an esteemed and highly regarded professor of economics at the University of California at Davis, coined the term to describe any female who is intolerant of any point of view that challenges militant feminism. I often use it to describe women who are obsessed with perpetuating a modern-day holocaust: abortion. There are 1.5 million abortions a year, and some feminists almost seem to celebrate that figure. There are not many of them, but they deserve to be called feminazis”.

²¹ Gamergate (or #gamergate on Twitter) is a controversy centering on stereotyping and ethics in games, as well as video game journalism. The dispute started in August 2014 when a female indie game developer was targeted for supposedly having influenced the review of her game favorably by her then boyfriend. However, since then many outspoken women working in the gaming industry have been the target of public shaming campaigns, which has lead to severe criticism of misogyny in video games and the gaming community at large (Wikipedia 2014: npn).

²² See section 1.6 for more information.

(58) hhh: Actually she's a human being, just as much a part of the human race as you or I.

iii: Not to be a grammar nazi, but you keep spelling 'he' wrong. It doesn't start with an s. When discussing a male, use the male version 'he/his'. (AnandTech)

Interestingly, user hhh's post is not actually comprised of any mistakes and iii's comment is a criticism of the ideology propagated in the comment. While the first user wants to underline that transgendered individuals are equal to cis-gendered individuals, the second user employs the excuse of being a Grammar Nazi in order to defend his or her ideological views. The hesitance to identify with Grammar Nazis (*not to be a grammar nazi*) was also observed in other posts by people who corrected content features rather than grammatical mistakes. This illustrates again that hesitancy is not necessarily a feature of insecurity, but rather a strategy used to minimize the negative impact on oneself.

Of course, the label *Grammar Nazi* also has a historical dimension through the connotations and etymology of the proper noun *Nazi*. Since *Nazi* was long associated solely with a tragic chapter in history, it was mainly used to refer to those individuals propagating and agreeing with NS-ideology. However, over time, the term underwent a slight semantic shift and especially in the Anglo-American region came to denote an unusually strict individual (Merriam Webster Online 2014: npn)²³. Nowadays, there are numerous examples in popular culture, for example on the long-running TV show *Grey's Anatomy* where a female African-American surgeon was dubbed *The Nazi*, where people who have no connection to National Socialism are called Nazis, often not even in an anti-pathetic way. Thus, during the analysis I paid particular attention to whether the term was ever brought in connection with its historical genesis. In the examples collected there were only three instances where users referred to the historical context:

(59) o: *Grammar Grammar Nazi SS reporting for duty. (YouTube)

(60) MMM: The grammar nazi is saying that Hitler should have said "fewer" rather than "less", but "mine fewer" sounds kind of like "mein Führer"

²³ Merriam-Webster Dictionary describes a Nazi among others as: "one who is likened to a German Nazi: a harshly domineering, dictatorial, or intolerant person" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online 2014: npn).

which means "my leader" in German and is how the Nazis would address Hitler, so Hitler responds as though the grammar nazi were merely calling for his attention. (Something Awful)

- (61) mmm: It's true - whenever I see someone make a grammatical mistake in a reddit comment, or in the rant section of their webcomic, I can't help but point out their mistake in a way analogous to the titular alabaster race of god-men (Something Awful).

As the three examples above show the way in which the historical context features in the forums is only as a side note (for example in order to explain a pun), to establish a humorous reference to war-speak, or even praise Nazis as *god-men* (although this could just as well be a satirical exaggeration). It is never made a central topic and it is never discussed whether the term is appropriate or sensitive to those who suffered the Nazis' atrocious war crimes. It certainly is never reflected upon critically and no user seems to have worried about being associated with National Socialists.

3.2.3 Summary

So what can be concluded about ideological matters in relation to Grammar Nazis and language prescriptivism online? Firstly, both negative and positive attitudes towards language prescriptivism can be found. It was surprising to see that in this thesis' small sample positive attitudes towards Grammar Nazis prevailed at a ratio of almost 3:1. Secondly, linguistic prescriptivism can be associated with political views. For example, Grammar Nazis were associated with liberal or democratic voters in a US American context. Thirdly, misogynistic and heteronormative ideological views also pervade into language prescriptive discourses when Grammar Nazis' comments are seen as superfluous or too restrictive. In this context Grammar Nazis are equated with Feminazis. What these findings essentially show is that on a surface level a Grammar Nazi might be defined in a certain way, but the concept is far more multifaceted. Finally, the historical dimension of the term *Nazi* features referentially in comments, but primarily in a humorous way. This shows that while the word *Nazi* is historically associated with war crimes, *Grammar Nazi* has gained other connotations and is no longer solely a pejorative term²⁴ – in fact people who do not share any ideological ground with National Socialists refer to themselves as Grammar Na-

²⁴ However, there is in fact even a petition by an American historian online to ban the word *Nazi* once and for all due to its diminishing character of NS war crimes (Curry 2003: npn).

zis. The fact that many users hesitate to show a strong connection with Grammar Nazis, however, underlines that the historical meaning is not lost on present-day users even if they fail to discuss the term critically.

4 CONCLUSION

This thesis started out with three distinct research questions concerning Grammar Nazis in online forums. The first question concerned the reaction of people to grammatical and spelling mistakes and can be answered in the following way: the majority of reactions were evaluative. This means that users corrected their peers with a tendency to judge them negatively. However, there were also cases where users ignored errors or even praised them (in the case of trolling).

This brings me to the second research question, which centered on the politeness and impoliteness strategies used in these comments. In line with the findings from the first question, users performed mostly on-record FTAs to other's positive face, and flouting of Leech's politeness maxims was the norm. However, impoliteness was not as frequently used as expected and varied greatly in its degree. Four main features of impoliteness were identified: mimicry, gestures, humor and expletives, which were primarily used in connection with positive impoliteness.

The final question posed in the introduction concerned the expression of ideologies in these posts. The findings showed that users had a very clear opinion of whether they approved of prescriptivism, and by extension, Grammar Nazis. Surprisingly, the term was met more often with a positive attitude. A number of comments also revealed that the term *Grammar Nazi* has already undergone a slight semantic broadening to include corrections of all sorts of things, not only grammar and orthography. Finally, political, historical and social views of users surfaced as well and revealed that the term *Nazi* is still associated with its historical meaning (in a trivializing fashion), although Grammar Nazis are also openly associated with feminists and liberal democrats, which clearly contrasts the historical significance. The main finding was that people fiercely defended their linguistic ideology with unmitigated FTAs towards others positive face and often even through positive impoliteness.

Although the focus of this thesis was rather narrow, I tried to include aspects of recent events in online discourse, for example Gamergate, to show that the Internet has an extensive impact on social, political and cultural life in the 21st century. The Internet is more relevant than ever as a research tool in linguistics

for scholars who yearn to uncover knowledge of present-day languages and the dynamics of linguistic phenomena such as language change, variability and any aspect connected to sociolinguistics or pragmatics.

While I have tried my best to be as thorough as possible and at the same time extract some generally useful ideas from the data, there are obvious limitations to the present work. Firstly, the data collected is a very small set of examples from an enormous and essentially infinite source. Therefore, I have stressed throughout the paper that my findings are in no way comprehensive enough to represent all discourse concerning Grammar Nazis. This being said, some features occurred so frequently that it might still be valid to draw limited conclusions about the discourse in general. Secondly, some politeness categories are notoriously elusive and since real life communication is not as clear-cut as a researcher might wish, it was not always easy to determine whether an FTA threatened a user's positive or negative face, and exactly which maxims might have been flouted or violated. Thus, I tried to explain my interpretations as systematically as possible, but as such they are just one possible interpretation and opinions might vary in some instances. Finally, due to the limitations set for MA theses regarding length, financial means and time, many of the points made in this thesis, for example with regard to the fluidity of face, require further investigation and elaboration. Thus at the end of this thesis, I shall make some suggestions for further research into the field.

Another point that is especially relevant to the chapters on ideology is the impact of a researcher's own opinions and ideologies. As Verschueren (2012: 197) rightly stated "[w]riting about ideology is not itself ideology-free". Thus, it is obvious that my own views have seeped into the thesis and while I am not trying to hide my own involvement and views of the topic at hand, I hope the validity of the empirical part of my thesis has not suffered. Moreover, this thesis unequivocally sides with Verschueren (2012: 198) and Heywood (2007: 339) in their view of linguistic research as a necessary tool to understand the workings of institutions and political issues, as well as more trivial, everyday microenvironments and their practices. This role of linguistics essentially includes self-criticism and self-reflexivity as vital abilities of a researcher.

All of these points mentioned above indicate that it is crucial to develop research further in the field of Internet linguistics and that many more investigations of CMC must be conducted in order to obtain a more comprehensive idea of language in the undeniably most important medium of the present. The thesis at hand investigated only forum discussion, but there are many more genres to be found online, for example blogs or various social media discourses. Furthermore, the investigation of the fluidity of politeness concepts in online communication might also prove to be a fruitful task. Online material shows many interesting aspects of everyday life, but linguistic researchers should not feel limited to sociolinguistics, pragmatics or applied linguistics when material for systemic functional grammarians or even phoneticians is just as readily available. On that note, it also needs to be stressed that the Internet provides great opportunities for interdisciplinary research, for example on multimodality.

Internet linguistics and Grammar Nazis have entered the popular consciousness, for example with songs like Weird Al Yankovic's *Word Crimes* (which is naturally quite popular with Grammar Nazis and might be considered the theme song of this thesis), and numerous articles on language behavior online (Heller 2014: npn, Gopnik 2014: npn, or Drifill 2014: npn). However, what all of these treatments of the topic have in common is a conclusion similar to what Taylor (1990: 21) summarizes in the following manner:

To the extent that we reject the authoritarian and obfuscating arguments of [...] grammarians, we will finally come to see that language is a public institution which, because of its very independence, exists as a common good over which no individual or group can exercise any authority or control.

Essentially, both the Internet and language cannot be controlled, making their study always surprising and demanding, but never boring. Ultimately, this constitutes the vital fascination with both phenomena and ensures that there will always be researchers enthralled by the prospects of wading through infinite piles of data to venture out into the unknown.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alexa. 2014. <http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/anandtech.com> (Oct. 27th 2014).
- AnandTech. <http://www.anandtech.com/> (Oct. 27th 2014).
- AnandTech About. 2014. <http://www.anandtech.com/home/about> (Oct. 27th 2014).
- Androutsopoulos, Jannis. 2006. "Introduction: sociolinguistics and computer-mediated communication". *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 10(4). 419-438.
- Armstrong, Nigel; Mackenzie, Ian E. 2013. *Standardization, ideology and linguistics*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bach, Kent. 2005. "The top 10 misconceptions about implicature". In Birner, B.; Ward, G. (eds.). *A Festschrift for Larry Horn*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1-16.
- Baron, Dennis. 2009. *A better pencil: readers, writers, and the digital revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Barton, David; Lee, Carmen. 2013. *Language online: investigating digital texts and practices*. New York: Routledge.
- Baym, Nancy. 1996. "Agreements and disagreements in a computer-mediated discussion". *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 29 (4), 315-345.
- Bell, D. 2000. *The end of ideology: on the exhaustion of political ideas in the fifties*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Berners-Lee, Tim. 1999. *Weaving the web*. London: Orion Business Books.
- Bland, Archie. 2014. "FireChat – the messaging app that's powering the Hong Kong protests". *The Guardian*, Sept. 29th 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/29/firechat-messaging-app-powering-hong-kong-protests> (Nov. 19th 2014).
- Bousfield, Derek. 2008. *Impoliteness in interaction*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Bousfield, Derek; Locher Miriam A. (eds.). 2008. *Impoliteness in language: studies on its interplay with power in theory and practice*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Brooker, Charlie. 2014. "This awesome dissection of internet hyperbole will make you cry and change your life". *The Guardian*, Oct. 6th 2014,

http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/06/internet-hyperbole-charlie-brooker?CMP=fb_gu (Oct. 20th 2014).

- Brown, Penelope; Levinson, Stephen. 1987. *Politeness: some universals in language usage*. (2nd edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cruse, Alan. 2004. *Meaning in language*. (2nd edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Crystal, David. 1997. *English as a global language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal, David. 2006. *Language and the Internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal, David. 2008. *Txtng: the gr8 db8*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Crystal, David. 2011. *Internet linguistics. A student guide*. New York: Routledge.
- Culpeper, Jonathan. 1996. "Towards an anatomy of impoliteness". *Journal of Pragmatics* 25, 349-367.
- Culpeper, Jonathan. 2005. "Impoliteness and entertainment in the television quiz show: *The Weakest Link*". *Journal of Politeness Research* 1, 35-72.
- Culpeper, Jonathan. 2008. "Reflections on impoliteness, relational work and power". In Bousfield, Derek; Locher Miriam A. (eds.). *Impoliteness in language: studies on its interplay with power in theory and practice*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 17-45.
- Curry, Rex. 2003. "Not say nazi". <http://rexcurry.net/swastikastop.html> (Nov. 19th 2014).
- Cutting, Joan. 2008. *Pragmatics and discourse. A resource book for students*. (2nd edition). Oxon: Routledge.
- Dijk, Teun A. van. 1969. "Discourse, opinions and ideologies". In Schäffner, Christina, and Kelly-Holmes, Helen (eds.). *Discourse and ideologies*. Clevedon: Short Run Press, 7-37.
- Dirven, René; Frank, Roslyn; Ilie, Cornelia (eds.). 2001. "Introduction". In Dirven, René; Frank, Roslyn; Ilie, Cornelia (eds.). *Language and ideology: volume II*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1-26.
- Dirven, René; Hawkins, Bruce; Sandikcioglu, Esra (eds.). 2001. *Language and ideology*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Drifill, Rosie. 2014. "Confessions of a reformed grammar nazi". *The Guardian*, Nov. 14th 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/media/mind-your->

language/2014/nov/14/mind-your-language-grammar-nazi?CMP=fb_gu
(Nov. 20th 2014).

Duncker, Christian. 2006. "Ideologiekritik heute". *Ideologie-Report*.
<http://ideologie-report.com/> (July 5th 2014).

Eagleton, Terry. 2007. *Ideology: an introduction*. London: Longman.

eMarketer. 2013. "Digital set to surpass TV in time spent with US media".
<http://www.emarketer.com/Article/Digital-Set-Surpass-TV-Time-Spent-with-US-Media/1010096> (Oct. 20th 2014).

Fairclough, Norman. 1989. *Language and power*. New York: Longman.

Flaitz, Jeffra. 1955. *The ideology of English. French perceptions of English as a world language*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Fraser, Bruce. 1990. "Perspectives on politeness". *Journal of Pragmatics* 14,
219-236.

Gillette, Felix. 2014. "Hollywood's big-money YouTube hit factory". *Bloomberg Businessweek*, Aug. 28th 2014,
<http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2014-08-28/youtube-hollywoods-hit-factory-for-teen-entertainment> (Oct. 23rd 2014).

Goffman, Erving. 1967. *Interaction ritual*. Chicago: Aldine.

Gopnik, Adam. 2014. "The conscientiousness of kidspeak". *The New Yorker*,
July 20th 2014,
http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culturalcomment/conscientiousnesskidspeak?utm_source=tny&utm_campaign=generalsocial&utm_medium=facebook&mbid=social_facebook (Nov. 20th 2014).

Graham, Sage. 2008. "A manual for (im)politeness?: the impact of the FAQ in an electronic community of practice". In Bousfield, Derek; Locher Miriam A. (eds.). *Impoliteness in language: studies on its interplay with power in theory and practice*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 281-305.

Grice, Herbert Paul. 1981. "Presupposition and conversational implicature". In Cole, Peter (ed.). *Radical pragmatics*. New York: Academic Press, 183-198.

Grice, Herbert Paul. 1989. *Studies in the way of words*. Cambridge: Harvard Univeristy Press.

Gurak, Laura J. 2001. *Cyberliteracy: navigating the Internet with awareness*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Heller, Monica. 2008. "Language and the nation-state: challenges to sociolinguistic theory and practice". *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 12(4): 504-524.
- Heller, Nathan. 2014. "Steven Pinker's bad grammar". *The New Yorker*, Nov. 3rd 2014, http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culturalcomment/stevenpinkers-badgrammar?utm_source=tny&utm_campaign=generalsocial&utm_medium=facebook&mbid=social_facebook (Nov. 20th 2014).
- Herring, Susan. 2007. "A faceted classification scheme for computer-mediated discourse". *Language@Internet* 4. <http://www.languageatinternet.org/articles/2007/761> (Oct. 23rd 2014).
- Heywood, Andrew. 2007. *Political ideologies: an introduction*. London: Macmillan.
- Internet World Stats*. 2014. "Internet usage statistics". <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm> (Oct. 20th 2013).
- Irvine, Judith. 1989. "When talk isn't cheap: language and political economy". *American Ethnologist* 16(2): 248-267.
- James, Paul; Steger, Manfred (eds.). 2010. *Globalization and culture: ideologies of globalism*. London: Sage Publications.
- Jeffries, Stuart. 2006. "The mother of all insults". *The Guardian*, July 12th 2006, <http://www.theguardian.com/football/2006/jul/12/worldcup2006.sport> (Nov. 19th 2014).
- Johnston, Rich. 2001. "All your base...". *The Guardian*, Feb. 28th 2001, <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2001/feb/28/internetnews.g2> (Oct. 21st 2014).
- Joseph, John Earl; Taylor, Talbot J. 1990. *Ideologies of language*. London: Routledge.
- Joseph, John Earl. 2006. *Language and politics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Jourdan, Christine. 2006. "Pidgins and creoles genesis: an anthropological offering". In Jourdan, Christine; Tuite, Kevin (eds.). *Language, culture, and society: key topics in linguistic anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 135-155.
- Koerner, E. F. K. 2001. "Linguistics and ideology in 19th and 20th century studies of language". In Dirven, Rene; Hawkins, Bruce; Sandikcioglu, Esra (eds.). *Language and ideology*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 253-277.
- Kroskrity, Paul. 2004. "Language ideologies". In Duranti, Alessandro (ed.). *A companion to linguistic anthropology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 496-517.

- Krotz, Joanna L. 2012. "If you want to sell online, target women". *Small Business Center*, Jan. 4th 2012, <http://smallbusiness.foxbusiness.com/biz-on-main/2012/01/04/if-want-to-sell-online-target-women/> (Nov. 27th 2014).
- Lakoff, Robin Tolmach. 1973. "The logic of politeness; or, minding your P's and Q's". *Papers from the ninth regional meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society*. Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society, 292-305.
- Leech, Geoffrey. 1983. *Principles of pragmatics*. Harlow: Longman.
- Limbaugh, Rush. 1992. *The Way Things Ought to Be*. New York: Pocket Star Books.
- Livingstone, Josephine. 2014. "Spelling it out: is it time English speakers loosened up?". *The Guardian*, Oct. 28th 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/oct/28/-sp-spelling-language-learning-english?CMP=fb_gu (Nov. 19th 2014).
- Liu, Eric. 2014. "How to understand power". *Ted Ed*. <http://ed.ted.com/lessons/how-to-understand-power-eric-liu#review> (Nov. 25th 2014).
- Locher, Miriam A. 2010. "Introduction: politeness and impoliteness in computer-mediated communication". *Journal of Politeness Research* 6, 1-5.
- Lucy, John. 2005. "Through the window of language: assessing the influence of language diversity on thought". *Theoria* 54, 299-309.
- Lyman, Richard. 2014. "Hungary drops Internet tax plan after public outcry". *The New York Times*, Oct. 31st 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/01/world/europe/hungary-drops-internet-tax-plan-after-surge-of-protests.html> (Nov. 19th 2014).
- Macmillan Dictionary Online. 2014. *Macmillan Publishers Limited 2009-2014*. <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/> (Dec. 8th 2014).
- Mannheim, Karl. 1936. *Ideology and utopia. Collected works of Karl Mannheim*. London: Routledge.
- Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online. 2014. *Merriam-Webster Incorporated*. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> (Dec. 8th 2014).
- Mey, J. 1993. *Pragmatics: an introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Naughton, John. 1999. *A brief history of the future: the origins of the Internet*. London: Routledge.
- O'Driscoll, Jim. 1996. "About face: a defence and elaboration of universal dualism". *Journal of Pragmatics* 25(1), 1-32.

- Pagliery, Jose. 2014. "The deep web you don't know about". *CNN money*, Mar. 10th 2014, <http://money.cnn.com/2014/03/10/technology/deep-web/index.html> (Oct. 23rd 2014).
- Pew research internet project*. 2014. "Internet user demographics". <http://www.pewinternet.org/data-trend/internet-use/latest-stats/> (Oct. 20th 2014).
- Pew research social media*. 2014. "Social media use by age group over time". <http://www.pewinternet.org/data-trend/social-media/social-media-use-by-age-group/> (Oct. 20th 2014).
- Plester, B.; Wood, C. 2009. "Exploring relationships between traditional and new media literacies: British preteen texters at school". *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 14(4), 1108-1129.
- Povinelli, Elizabeth. 2006. *The empire of love: toward a theory of intimacy, genealogy, and carnality*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Quantcast. 2014. "Something awful network". <https://www.quantcast.com/somethingawful.com> (Oct. 20th 2014).
- Reddit. <http://www.reddit.com/> (Oct. 23rd 2014).
- Reddit About. 2014. <http://www.reddit.com/about/> (Oct. 22nd 2014).
- Rohrer, Tim. 2001. "Even the interface is for sale: metaphors, visual blends and the hidden ideology of the Internet". In Dirven, René; Ilie, Cornelia; Frank, Roslyn M. (eds.). *Language and ideology: cognitive descriptive approaches*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 189-214.
- Rudman, Chelsea. 2012. "Feminazi': the history of Limbaugh's trademark slur against women". *Mediamatters*, Mar. 12th 2012, <http://mediamatters.org/research/2012/03/12/feminazi-the-history-of-limbaughs-trademark-slu/186336> (Nov. 19th 2014).
- Ryan, Johnny. 2010. *A history of the Internet and the digital future*. London: Reaktion.
- Schäffner, Christina, and Kelly-Holmes, Helen (eds.). 1996. *Discourse and ideologies*. Clevedon: Short Run Press.
- Schäffner, Christina. 1996. "Editorial". In Schäffner, Christina, and Kelly-Holmes, Helen (eds.). *Discourse and ideologies*. Clevedon: Short Run Press.
- Schiappa, Edward. 1989. "The rhetoric of nukespeak". *Communication Monographs* 56: 253-272.

- Schieffelin, Bambi B.; Woolard, Kathryn A.; Kroskrity, Paul V. (eds.). 1998. *Language ideologies: practice and theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shaer, Matthew. 2012. "Reddit in the flesh". *New York Magazine*, July 8th 2012, <http://nymag.com/news/features/reddit-2012-7/> (Oct. 22nd 2014).
- Silverman, David. 2013. *Doing qualitative research: a practical handbook*. London: Sage.
- Silverstein, Michael. 1979. "Language structure and linguistic ideology". In Clyne, P.; Hanks, W.; Hofbauer, C. (eds.). *The elements*. Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society, 193-248.
- Simpson, Paul. 1993. *Language, ideology and point of view*. New York: Routledge.
- Smith, Anna DuVal. 1999. "Problems of conflict management in virtual communities". In Smith, Marc; Kollock, Peter (eds.). *Communities in cyberspace*. New York: Routledge, 134-166.
- Something Awful*. <http://www.somethingawful.com/> (Oct. 21st 2014).
- Something Awful Forum Rules*. <http://www.somethingawful.com/forum-rules/forum-rules/> (Oct. 22nd 2014).
- Sornig, Karl. 1989. "Some remarks on linguistic strategies of persuasion". In Wodak, Ruth (ed.). *Language, power and ideology*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 95-114.
- Sperber, D.; Wilson, D. 1995. *Relevance*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Taylor, Talbot. 1990. "Which is to be master?: the institutionalization of authority in the science of language". In Joseph, John E.; Taylor, Talbot J. *Ideologies of language*. London: Routledge, 9-26.
- Team AnandTech*. <http://www.teamanandtech.com/> (Oct. 27th 2014).
- Terkourafi, Marina. 2007. "Toward a unified theory of politeness, impoliteness and rudeness". In Bousfield, Derek; Locher, Miriam (eds.). *Impoliteness in language*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 45-74.
- Thomas, Jenny. 1995. *Meaning in interaction*. London: Longman.
- Upadhyay, Shiv R. 2010. "Identity and impoliteness in computer-mediated reader responses". *Journal of Politeness Research* 6, 105-127.
- Urban Dictionary Online. 2014. *Urban Dictionary 1999-2014*. <http://www.urbandictionary.com/> (Dec. 8th 2014).

- Verschueren, Jef. 2012. *Ideology in language use: pragmatic guidelines for empirical research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Vilkki, Liisa. 2006. "Politeness, face and facework: current issues". *SKY Journal of Linguistics* 19, 322-332.
- Wartenberg, Thomas E. 1990. *The forms of power. From domination to transformation*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Watts, Richard J. 1992. "Linguistic politeness and polite verbal behavior: reconsidering claims of universality". In Watts, Richard J.; Ide, Sachiko; Ehlich, Konrad (eds.). *Politeness in language. Studies in its history, theory and practice*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 43-69.
- Watts, Richard J.; Ide, Sachiko; Ehlich, Konrad. 1992. "Introduction". In Watts, Richard J.; Ide, Sachiko; Ehlich, Konrad (eds.). *Politeness in language. Studies in its history, theory and practice*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1-17.
- Watts, Richard J. 2003. *Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wayne, Teddy. 2014. "On Internet slang, IMHO". The New York Times, Mar. 28th 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/30/fashion/on-internet-slang-imho.html> (Oct. 20th 2014).
- Wikipedia. 2014. *Wikimedia Foundation Inc.*
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page (Dec. 8th 2014).
- Wiktionary. 2014. *Wikimedia Foundation Inc.*
https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Wiktionary:Main_Page (Dec. 8th 2014).
- Williams, Raymond. 1976. *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society*. London: Fontana.
- Williams, Raymond. 1977. *Marxism and literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wired Magazine: Geekipedia. 2014. "Leet". *Wired Magazine Online*.
<http://www.wired.com/culture/geekipedia/magazine/geekipedia/leet> (June 20th 2014).
- Wodak, Ruth (ed.) 1989. *Language, power and ideology*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Woolard, Kathryn A. 1992. "Language ideology: issues and approaches". In Kroskrity, P.; Schieffelin, B.; Woolard, K. (eds.). *Language ideologies: special issue of pragmatics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 235-249.
- Woolard, Kathryn A. 1998. "Introduction: language ideology as a field of inquiry". In Schieffelin, Bambi B.; Woolard, Kathryn A.; Kroskrity, Paul V.

(eds.). *Language ideologies: practice and theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3-47.

Yankovic, Weird Al. 2014. "Word Crimes". [song].
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Gv0H-vPoDc> (Dec. 8th 2014).

YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/> (Oct. 22nd 2014).

YouTube Press. <https://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html> (Oct. 21st 2014).

Yule, George. 2006. *The study of language*. (3rd edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zimmer, Benjamin; Carson, Charles E. 2011. "Among the new words".
American Speech 86 (4), 454-479.

Zimmerman, Jess. 2014. "Alex from Target was a fake corporate meme? That's not viral – it's offensive". *The Guardian*, Nov. 6th 2014,
http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/nov/06/alex-from-target-fake-meme-viral?CMP=fb_gu (Nov. 25th 2014).

5 INDEX

A

Affective stance, 5
Anonymity, 11, 15, 28, 35, 39, 56, 59, 63, 65

B

Bousfield, Derek, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 57, 59, 80, 81, 82, 86
Brown, Penelope, 16, 17, 18, 19, 26, 45, 81

C

Clashing, 24, 25, 38, 39, 50, 51, 53, 56, 62
Computer-mediated communication, 6, 7, 12, 79, 91
Cooperative Principle, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26, 28, 50, 51, 91
Culpeper, Jonathan, 19, 27, 49, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 81
Cultural context, 18
Cybermarketplace, 6

D

Deep Web, 11, 5

E

E-mail-speak, 7
Emojis, 12, 39, 49, 56
Epistemic stance, 5

F

Face Threatening Act, 1, 7, 19, 20, 27, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 62, 77, 91
Feminazi, 66, 73, 85
Flouting, 23, 24, 38, 39, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 63, 77

G

Gamergate, 73
Gender, 6
Grammar Nazis, 1, 5, 39, 41, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 55, 56, 57, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 74, 75, 77, 78, 79, 91, 92
Grice, Herbert Paul, 4, 7, 16, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 37, 38, 39, 50, 51, 52, 53, 56, 62, 82, 91
Group face, 19, 48

I

Ideology, 1, 6, 8, 9, 16, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 64, 65, 66, 67, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 77, 78, 80, 81, 82, 83, 85, 86, 87, 91
Implicature, 25, 80, 82

Impoliteness, 1, 7, 16, 20, 27, 28, 37, 38, 43, 45, 46, 47, 48, 50, 53, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 77, 81, 84, 86, 91
Infringing, 24, 38, 39, 51, 53, 56
Internet Linguistics, 7, 94

K

Kitty pidgin, 4

L

Leech, Geoffrey, 7, 16, 17, 25, 26, 28, 37, 38, 39, 45, 50, 51, 52, 53, 56, 62, 77, 84, 91
Leetspeak, 3, 4, 10, 11
Levinson, Stephen, 16, 17, 18, 19, 26, 45, 81
Lolspeak, 4

M

Maxim of agreement, 1, 25, 26, 45, 51, 52, 53, 54
Maxim of approbation, 25, 26, 45, 51, 52, 53, 62
Maxim of generosity, 25, 51, 62
Maxim of manner, 1, 14, 18, 22, 24, 26, 51, 52, 53, 55, 56, 62, 73, 79
Maxim of modesty, 25, 26, 51
Maxim of quality, 21, 22, 23, 24, 44, 52, 53, 66, 69
Maxim of quantity, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 45, 51, 52, 53
Maxim of relation, 5, 22, 24, 52, 53, 75
Maxim of sympathy, 25, 26, 45, 51, 52, 53, 54, 62
Maxim of tact, 25, 45, 51, 52, 53, 54, 62
Mimicry, 59, 63, 77, 91
Mock politeness, 47, 49, 50, 57, 59, 61, 63, 91
Multimodality, 12, 79

N

Negative face, 18, 19, 20, 37, 38, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 57, 62, 78
Netiquette, 4, 43

O

Off-record, 20, 38, 39, 50, 91
On-record, 7, 20, 38, 45, 47, 50, 62, 77, 91
Opting out, 24, 38, 39, 50, 51, 53, 56

P

Politeness, 1, 4, 7, 8, 10, 16, 17, 18, 20, 24, 25, 27, 28, 37, 38, 39, 40, 43, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 56, 57, 58, 60, 61, 62, 63, 71, 77, 78, 79, 82, 84, 86, 87, 91
Politeness Principle, 25, 26, 28, 50, 51, 91
Positive face, 7, 17, 20, 21, 23, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 54, 62, 63, 77
Pragmatics, 78, 79, 82, 84, 87

R

Relevance Theory, 22

S

Sarcasm, 41, 49, 57, 63, 72
Semantic shift, 53, 67, 74, 77
Semantic Web, 3
Singularity, 3

Situational context, 17, 39
Slang, 21, 40, 41, 64, 65, 87
Social context, 17, 39
Sociolinguistics, 78, 79, 80
Surface web, 11
Suspending, 24, 38, 39, 50, 51, 53, 55, 56

V

Violating, 23, 24, 27, 38, 39, 50, 51, 53, 54, 56

6 ENGLISH ABSTRACT

Over the last two decades, the Internet has become the most sought after communication technology available to three billion people worldwide, making it highly influential in terms of information transmission, as well as language description. In order to shed some light on how people speak and what people say about language online, this thesis examines the parallels between politeness and language ideologies in four large web-based forums. A special focus is put on the Internet phenomenon of *Grammar Nazis* – individuals who share a prescriptivist mentality with the mission to correct any form of spelling or grammatical mistake encountered – because of their wide-spread, critical reception. With the help of concepts such as *face*, *positive* and *negative politeness*, Grice's maxims of cooperation, and Leech's politeness maxims, as well as their non-observance strategies, and impoliteness theory, a corpus of two hundred comments and replies were analyzed qualitatively. In addition, the replies were also examined as to whether they showed positive or negative attitudes towards Grammar Nazis, and whether some users exhibited any other political or social ideologies. The findings revealed that replies to mistakes were mostly made in the form of on-record Face Threatening Acts (FTAs), neglecting Leech's politeness maxims, but that these comment were not necessarily impolite. Positive impoliteness and mock politeness mostly occurred through four distinct strategies: mimicry, gestures, humor and expletives. Furthermore, contrary to the initial hypothesis, positive attitudes towards language prescriptivism prevailed although most users were reluctant to identify with Grammar Nazis which might be due to the term's historical, political connotations.

Keywords: Internet, Grammar Nazis, politeness, impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness, mock politeness, positive politeness, negative politeness, face, face threatening act, FTA, on-record, off-record, maxim, cooperative principle, CP, politeness principle, PP, ideology, language ideology, linguistic ideology, Internet linguistics, computer-mediated communication, CMC, communication technology, information technology, Internet forum, message-board, corpus

7 GERMAN ABSTRACT

In den letzten zwei Jahrzehnten hat sich das Internet zur wichtigsten Kommunikationstechnologie entwickelt. Heute ist es drei Milliarden NutzerInnen weltweit zugänglich und damit besonders einflussreich in Bezug auf Informationsweitergabe und Sprachbeschreibung. Aus diesem Grund untersucht die vorliegende Arbeit, welche Strategien AnwenderInnen nutzen, um über Sprache im Internet zu diskutieren, wobei ein besonderes Augenmerk auf die Interaktion von Höflichkeitsforschung und Sprachideologien gelegt werden soll. Besonders soll dabei das Phänomen der *Grammar Nazis* näher untersucht werden, da dieses einen interessanten Kontrast zur Sprachkreativität des Internets darstellt. Mit der Hilfe von Konzepten wie *face*, *positive* und *negative Höflichkeit*, Maximen der Kooperation sowie deren Missachtungsstrategien und ferner unter Berücksichtigung der Unhöflichkeitsforschung wurde ein Textkorpus von zweihundert Beispielen aus vier verschiedenen Internetforen gesammelt und qualitativ analysiert. Zusätzlich wurde auch untersucht, ob NutzerInnen positive oder negative Einstellungen gegenüber *Grammar Nazis* äußern und ob auch politische oder soziale Ideologien in den Kommentaren aufscheinen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass auf fehlerhafte Kommentare meist mit direkten Angriffen und Missachtung von Leechs Höflichkeitsmaximen geantwortet wurde. Unhöflichkeit aber resultierte nicht unbedingt daraus. Insgesamt wurden vier Unhöflichkeitsstrategien identifiziert: Nachahmung, Gestik, Humor und Beschimpfung. Darüber hinaus wurde festgestellt, dass die NutzerInnen normative Grammatik als positiv empfanden, jedoch zögerten, sich als *Grammar Nazis* auszuweisen. Dieser Umstand kann durchaus von der historisch-politischen Konnotation des Wortes abhängen.

Stichwörter: Internet, Grammar Nazi, Höflichkeitsforschung, Unhöflichkeit, positive Höflichkeit, negative Höflichkeit, face, direkter Angriff, indirekter Angriff, Ideologie, Sprachideologie, Medienlinguistik, Internetlinguistik, Netzbasierte Kommunikation, Kommunikationstechnologie, Informationstechnologie, Internetforum, Textkorpus

7 CURRICULUM VITAE

Personal Information:

Name: Sophia Anna Bayer
E-mail: a0800798@unet.univie.ac.at

Education:

Aug. 2012 – Dec. 2013: Semester abroad at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, USA

Since 2011: English Language and Linguistics (MA)

2011 – 2013: Anglophone Literatures and Cultures (MA, “A MAZE: Unnatural Narratology and the Reader’s Perception of Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*”)

2009 – 2012: Comparative Literature at the University of Vienna (BA)

2008 – 2011: English and American Studies at the University of Vienna (BA)

2004 – 2008: Honauer High School, Linz

2005 – 2006: Woodriver High School, Hailey, Idaho, USA

2000 – 2004: Khevenhüller Middle School, Linz

1996 – 2000: Primary School, Ottensheim, Upper Austria

University-related Internships and Occupations:

Sept. 2014: Translator for the Department of Egyptology, University of Vienna

June 2014: Translator for Summer University Vienna

Mar. 2013 – Jan. 2014: Student Tutor, Comparative Literature, University of Vienna

Sept. 2011 – June 2012: Project Assistant at the Canada Center, University of Vienna

Academic Organizations and Conferences:

June 2014:	Graduate Conference Comparative Literature, University of Vienna (Presentation Topic: "Theoretical Pluralism in Mark Z. Danielewski's Fiction")
Since 2012:	The International Flann O'Brien Society
2011 – 2013:	Language Buddy Program (USA), University of Vienna

Academic Scholarships and University Awards:

Academic Year 2013:	Achievement Scholarship of the University of Vienna
Academic Year 2012:	Achievement Scholarship of the University of Vienna
Winter Term 2012:	International Exchange Scholarship of the University of Vienna
Academic Year 2011:	Achievement Scholarship of the University of Vienna
Nov. 2011:	Student Award of the English Department for the BA-thesis <i>"WHERE IS THE VOICE COMING FROM? Narrative Art and Authorial Concern with Indigenous Cultures in Rudy Wiebe's Short Story"</i>
Academic Year 2010:	Achievement Scholarship of the University of Vienna

Academic Interests:

Pragmatics, Conlangs, Internet Linguistics, Multimodality, Speculative Fiction, Postmodernism, Intertextuality and Intermediality, New Media, Graphical Novels, Puzzle Games, Gaming Culture, Deep Web and Darknet, Transgressive Fiction, Southern Gothic, 20th and 21st century North American Literature, Japanese Language and Culture