Folk-linguistic landscapes: The visual semiotics of digital enregisterment

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A B S T R A C T

This article analyzes folk-linguistic photo blogging as an example of twenty-first-century grassroots prescriptivism. Photo blogs engaged in grassroots prescriptivism usually focus on one specific linguistic phenomenon and collect visual evidence of its usage. Through the overt or covert language policing involved in such displays, folk-linguistic photo blogs contribute to the digital enregisterment of the linguistic practices they focus on as nonstandard or uneducated. This process is closely examined in a case study on emphatic quotation marks, a nonstandard form of punctuation that has been termed 'greengrocer's quotes', and its concomitant folk-linguistic photo blog. It is argued here that much of the persuasive power of such blogs can be attributed to their reliance on photographic material depicting signage in public space, and thus on the kind of visual semiotics that also informs many recent approaches in sociolinguistics. The simultaneity of these two phenomena is critically discussed. (Visual semiotics, enregisterment, computer-mediated communication, grassroots prescriptivism, emphatic quotation)*

INTRODUCTION

Overview

It has been observed in recent years that popular linguistic prescriptivism has become fundamentally associated with current language usage; thus Beal (2010:57) rightfully ponders 'why prescriptivism has returned with such a vengeance in the 21st century'. It seems to be a key feature of contemporary linguistic normativism that it is not only prompted by the well-established 'top-down' mechanisms—such as institutional, governmental, or journalistic engineering of language policy and ideology—but it also relies on 'bottom-up' forms of instigating and maintaining language ideologies. Such grassroots prescriptivism happens on the level of individual language users and/or communities of practice; it involves complex sociopragmatic mechanisms, such as language policing and sanctioning, enregisterment, and linguistic gatekeeping. Within these parameters, twenty-first-century prescriptivism takes place in a

489

variety of linguistic contexts. Due to the participatory appeal and the persistent nature of digital communication, it seems that this trend is particularly pronounced and tangible in forms of mediated communication, and in particular with regard to language use in digital contexts.

One genre of online language policing stands out as particularly productive and visible, namely photo blogging. Photo blogs engaged in grassroots prescriptivism usually focus on one distinct linguistic level or phenomenon (from specific language varieties or registers, to orthography and spelling, to pragmatic phenomena) and collect visual evidence of its usage. This results in large-scale repositories of photographic material that is contextualized and positioned through the addition of metalinguistic commentary, such as a post title, a caption, or user comments, and gets secondary circulation through social media channels such as reblogging, retweeting, and liking on Facebook. An example from the blog that is analyzed in detail further below is shown in Figure 1.[1]

The strong focus of such photo blogs on visual material is, to a certain extent, in accordance with larger tendencies regarding the multimodality of the internet, as online communication has gradually shifted toward more visually rich discourse, and many platforms have become increasingly geared toward the sharing and consumption of audio/visual material. Beyond this medium-specific trend, however, it may be noted that the approach of such photo blogs also coincides with recent methodologies in sociolinguistic analysis, namely the collection and documentation of visual evidence of language in public space. Specifically, the picture material that is found on a typical photo blog is highly reminiscent of the pictures used for illustration and/or qualitative analysis in forms of urban ethnographic studies such as the documentation and analysis of Linguistic Landscapes (e.g. Landry & Bourhis 1997; Gorter 2006; Jaworski & Thurlow 2011). In this sense, it is striking that both sociolinguists operating within a staunchly descriptivist framework, as well as bloggers with an arguably prescriptivist stance, take an active interest in a specific repertoire of visual semiotics that is almost identical in terms of its structural and aesthetic properties. In this article, though, my focus is not on the linguistic landscapes analyzed by sociolinguists, but on the 'folk-linguistic landscapes' that emerge from photo blogs, and how they contribute to the digital enregisterment of specific linguistic features. I briefly return to the similarity in approach in the concluding section.

This article sets out by giving an overview on two strands of recent sociolinguistic theory that converge in the phenomenon of grassroots prescriptivist photo blogs: that of twenty-first-century prescriptivism, especially in the form of digital enregisterment as it takes place in emerging online genres; as well as the topic of language use in public space and the implications of visual semiotics. This is followed by an outline of the data and the analytical framework used here which charts the field of grassroots prescriptivism in photo blogs and analyzes some of the recurrent topics and strategies of stancetaking. The data analysis then provides a detailed case study on the topic of emphatic quoting as a phenomenon of linguistic innovation and

Monday, January 20, 2014
New "Potatoes"

I wonder what they are actually frying and when they are doing it?
Plantains? Yesterday? Thanks Joe.

Posted by bethany at 9:10 AM

FIGURE 1. Sample picture taken from unnecessaryquotes.com.

change, and its concomitant photo blog, The "Blog" of "Unnecessary" Quotation Marks. Finally, the discussion returns to the notion of folk-linguistic landscapes and critically examines how visual semiotics is relevant both for current sociolinguistics and for grassroots prescriptivism, and how these two phenomena, which seem to have little common ground at first sight and may even be said to occupy opposing ends of a language-ideological spectrum, are positioned vis-à-vis each other.

Twenty-first-century prescriptivism

It can be argued that in the English-speaking world, just as in many globalized, postindustrial societies, the notion of language ideology, in particular with regard to popular normativism and prescriptivism, has undergone a gradual change. The influence of 'top-down' forces such as policy makers, grammarians, journalists,

and other proclaimed 'language experts' has been perceived as instrumental in the making and instigating of language prescriptions during the past three centuries (see e.g. Beal 2008). As such, the tradition of institutional prescriptivism is a relatively recent phenomenon that is closely tied to the late modern period of English, but it is generally regarded as the shaping force for the Standard Language Ideology (Lippi-Green 2012) that pervades English usage.

There is increasing evidence, however, that this top-down tradition of linguistic normativism is slowly giving way to more bottom-up processes, where linguistic ideologies are maintained and proliferated at the level of the individual language user. This is not to say that top-down prescription is a thing of the past; the 'prescriptive ideologues', as Pullum (2004:6) calls those 'whose avocation, or even in some cases profession, is prescribing for others how they ought to write and speak, and lambasting the linguistic incorrectnesses and infelicities of those who do not follow the prescription', certainly still exist. For example, the recent work by Lippi-Green (2012:67) offers rich evidence of how 'dominant bloc institutions' such as the entertainment industry or the judicial system in the United States have firmly embraced stances of standard language ideology. But crucially, such displays of power are nowadays accompanied by other, more stealthy yet irresistible mechanisms: namely a form of grassroots prescriptivism that operates at the level of individual language users or small-scale linguistic communities of practice. Simply put, in the participatory culture that is becoming typical for many forms of discourse in the early twenty-first century, anyone can be a 'prescriptive ideologue'. Nowhere is this to be seen more clearly than in metalinguistic discourse on the internet, where forms of language policing, linguistic gatekeeping, and shaming can be studied at close range.

The dynamics of bottom-up normativity have been noted at several points in recent research on language ideology and attitudes. For example, Beal (2008, 2010) offers diachronic overviews of nonstandard ('greengrocer's') apostrophe usage and comments on the shrillness of the debate in recent years; she speculates that '21st-century prescriptivism' may be influenced by sociotechnical factors in that the internet, much like the rise of commercialism and public advertising in the nineteenth century, 'pu[t] into the public sphere texts produced by writers of all social classes and levels of education' (Beal 2010:62).

In recent sociolinguistic theory, it can also be observed that different linguistic power mechanisms are increasingly being framed as bottom-up, nonessentialist, grassroots-based forces, such as authenticity (Coupland 2007), legitimacy (Heller 2012), or language policy and policing (Blommaert, Kelly-Holmes, Lane, Leppänen, Moriarty, Pietikäinen, & Piirainen-Marsh 2009). Regarding the latter, Blommaert and colleagues (2009) explicitly describe language policing as a mechanism that is no longer limited to institutional forces:

> The state, as we know, is just one actor among many regulating language behaviours in contemporary globalised societies. … We propose to use the notion of 'policing' in the domain of language in this

sense: as the production of 'order'—normatively organised and policed conduct—which is infinitely detailed and regulated by a variety of actors. (Blommaert et al. 2009:203)

As an analytical framework and tool for describing bottom-up language ideologies, the notion of enregisterment (Agha 2005; Johnstone 2009) has proven particularly fruitful. Enregisterment is a way of explaining how language attitudes and norms are engineered and maintained at the level of individual lay speakers; in Squires' (2010) useful description,

> (e)nregisterment is an ideological process whereby speakers' perceptions of linguistic variation, social structure, and other pertinent concepts are put to use in construing practices as group- and/ or variety-specific. Ideologies of language are subconscious heuristics through which speakers perceive and explain patterns of linguistic structure and use. (Squires 2010:460)

In the following analysis, enregisterment is adopted as a central analytical concept, in the specific form of digital enregisterment—that is, a language-ideological process that takes place in and through the digital medium and thus makes strategic use of the sociotechnical givens of the internet. The targets of such digital enregisterment may include medium-specific phenomena, such as 'netspeak' features, but is by no means limited to these features.

As noted above, the internet is a particularly pertinent domain to study grassroots linguistic prescriptivism in the early twenty-first century, and possibly acts as its gravitational center. It can be speculated that the participatory culture of second-generation digital media, coupled with the air of cultural pessimism that often accompanies technological innovation, has greatly contributed to this development—a firmly established digital complaint tradition. Even to the casual observer, it becomes apparent that digital discourse is brimming with folk-linguistic activity in manifold varieties. Some of it is benign and purposeful (e.g. folksonomies such as urbandictionary.com); much of it, however, is snarky or outright hostile in tone and imbued with a normative agenda. Casual, 'intrusive' language policing is a common factor in all discussion forums and other formats that enable user feedback and has been conceptualized in personas such as the 'grammar' or 'spelling Nazi' (Schaffer 2010). In other cases, platforms or digital outlets are explicitly created in order to voice normative sentiments, such as the German Twitter account @Der_-Oberlehrer ('the schoolmaster') or metalinguistic Facebook groups (see Squires 2010:36 for examples). Finally, a good portion of digital prescriptivism is self-reflexive, in that it is targeted at linguistic practices on the internet. Squires' (2010) analysis of the enregisterment of internet language offers a detailed account of this process and the underlying fears regarding imagined varieties such as Netspeak and Chatspeak (see also Thurlow 2002 and Tagliamonte & Denis 2008 for earlier studies on language attitudes toward computer-mediated communication (CMC)). But the internet is also used as a space for language policing that targets offline linguistic practices (see e.g. Johnstone & Baumgardt 2004 on the vernacular norming of Pittsburghese in an online discussion).

As mentioned, the analysis presented here is focused on popular prescriptivist photo blogs—an emerging digital genre that is explicitly (rather than casually) aimed at displaying and criticizing other people's linguistic practices, and which is usually, but not exclusively, focused on specific offline, 'real-world' phenomena. The overall stance that such blogs take toward the linguistic practices they describe is somewhat varied; however, I argue that even those platforms that claim to be benign and nonjudgmental may often have an underlying agenda of language policing and shaming.[2]

Visual semiotics, public space, and language use

For a deeper understanding of the grassroots prescriptivist photo blogs under consideration here, it is necessary to take into account the specific semiotic conditions under which they operate. Specifically, these sites rely strongly on a repertoire of visual semiotics, namely photographic material that depicts language use in public/urban space. The following overview gives some background on the visual semiotics of public space, and how this semiotic repertoire has been figuring prominently in sociolinguistic analysis recently.

The history of semiotics through the twentieth century, as a theory and discipline, is usually conceived as one of gradual rematerialization. That is, our understanding of signs and meaning-making has slowly moved from Ferdinand de Saussure's dyadic sign model, which excludes the real-world referent and is based solely on 'psychological impressions', via the Peircean triadic model, which includes the referent, to more modern and sociologically informed approaches such as Social Semiotics (e.g. Kress & van Leeuwen 2001) or Geosemiotics (Scollon & Scollon 2003) (for historical overviews, see e.g. Chandler 2007 on structural semiotics and Blommaert & Huang 2010 on later developments). This increasing awareness of visual and material culture, of the multimodality of semiotic repertoires, of space and place as the physical context of signs and meaning-making, has been described as the gradual emergence of a 'materialist semiotics' (Blommaert & Huang 2010).

Importantly, this transformation of semiotic thinking has been mirrored or recognized in neighboring linguistic disciplines, in particular in certain areas of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. The notion that objects can work as semiotic codes (and thus as 'commodity codes', in Chandler's (2007:149) terminology), that an analysis of discourse can include signs AND things, or even signs AS things, has gradually become a more common *modus operandi* in sociolinguistic analysis. It is worth pointing out that the rematerialization of semiotic theory is tangible not just in picture-based modes of analysis but also impacts many other areas of sociolinguistic study. For example, the notion of indexicality as proposed by Silverstein (2003), as well as Johnstone's (2009) work on commodification, are strongly based on underlying notions of semiotic codes as commodities. See, for example, Eckert (2012:92) regarding

linguistic variation as 'part of a broader stylistic complex including territory and the full range of consumption—such as adornment, food and other substance use, musical tastes'.

It can be argued that applying this semiotic approach to situated language use has been particularly felicitous, and increasingly popular, in analyses that extend the notion of materiality to the notion of place and space: how do signs manifest in physical space? How are they positioned, organized, and perceived by the public? How is language used as a semiotic resource within public space? These questions, which focus on the material, emblematic aspect of signs, have been embraced in many sociolinguistic approaches in recent years. In some methodological frameworks, the focus on signage in public space is of a constitutive nature: this is in particular true for the study of Linguistic Landscapes (LL), where the focus is on 'the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region' (Landry & Bourhis 1997:23). The material signage that is under analysis within this framework extends to 'any written sign found outside private homes, from road signs to names of streets shops and schools' (Shohamy, Ben-Rafael, & Barni 2010:xiv). This keen interest in the materiality of public signage appears to be particularly relevant in the analysis of qualitative ethnographic data from urban settings. Thus photos of language use in public space—and, more precisely, the collection, aggregation, and analysis of pictures taken in public space, usually (but not always) by the researchers themselves as part of their fieldwork—has become frequent in current sociolinguistic studies.[3] As an example, Figure 2a is a reproduction of a picture that figures prominently in Blommaert's (2010) work on the sociolinguistics of globalization, where it is used to illustrate the notion of language as a mobile and emblematic resource. The picture juxtaposed in Figure 2b, by contrast, is taken from engrish.com— one of the photo blogs that is the object of analysis here. The similarity of these images, both in terms of composition, presentation, and content, may already be noted here and is revisited in the discussion.

DATA AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: GRASSROOTS PRESCRIPTIVIST PHOTO BLOGS

Locating photo blogs in the digital genre spectrum

This section outlines the data under investigation here, namely photo blogs as an emerging digital genre of grassroots prescriptivism. As such, it gives an overview on the variety of topics and approaches encountered in these blogs, but also emphasizes the structural properties that seem to pertain to the genre.

Following blogging as their parent supergenre, photo blogs had become firmly established in the digital genre spectrum by the mid 2000s (see Herring, Scheidt, Wright, & Bonus 2005, who exclude photo and audio blogs from their genre analysis, but make explicit mention of their overall relevance). Adding multimodal

FIGURE 2. Signage in public space as pictured in Blommaert (2010) and on engrish.com.

content, in particular audio, video, or pictorial semiotic resources, has always been seen as an intrinsic factor of blogging and other forms of social-media usage; in photo blogs, picture material has become the dominant semiotic resource of the platform, with textual information reduced to a framing code which, depending on the specific blog, may be purely residual or have significant communicative functions. It is worth noting that the emergence of photo blogs went hand in hand with the rise of online photo sharing in general, for example, through popular platforms such as Flickr; previous sociolinguistic analyses have highlighted the fact that even a strongly multimodal environment such as Flickr presents ample space for variation in writing practices and stance-taking through the users (see for example Lee & Barton 2011).

Photo blogs share many of the characteristics typical of blogs in general (see Herring et al. 2005 for an overview): the material is presented in a counter-chronological manner, entries often contain meta-information such as a title, a timestamp, and a template for user feedback, and the blog architecture is likely to contain references to other bloggers or relevant external resources. Regarding photo blogs specifically, the picture material will often be produced by the blog author(s) themselves, but may also rely strongly on external material, depending on thematic scope. The range of photo blogs is large and varies considerably—from artists' portfolios, to humorous sites with entertainment purposes, to purely private photo streams of users' everyday life. In the past few years, the microblogging platform Tumblr has become a favored environment for photo blogs especially among younger bloggers, as its site infrastructure is particularly accommodating to multimodal material.

Grassroots prescriptivist photo blogs: An overview of topics and stances

Grassroots prescriptivist photo blogs are a specific subtype that has emerged in the second half of the 2000s. As the name chosen here suggests, they are characteristically run by authors who are linguistic laypeople,[4] in opposition to linguist blogs (such as LanguageLog) or blogs by self-proclaimed language experts with a professional agenda. As a consequence, their principal purpose is in the domain of entertainment; depending on the particular case, the stance of the authors toward language use and variation may range from benevolent and amused interest to harsh, normative critique. The typical *modus operandi* of these blogs is to focus on one specific level or domain of linguistic usage, in particular on forms of variation that are perceived to be incorrect or infelicitous, and to document their real-life occurrence through uploaded pictures. In this way, visual repositories of these linguistic phenomena are created that are quantitatively impressive, often containing thousands of instances. It is proposed here that such platforms are sites where digital enregisterment takes place in a systematic and strategic way. That is, grassroots prescriptivist photo blogs—in conjunction with other forms of digital output—provide a structure and a platform where specific linguistic features or phenomena are displayed, examined, and folk-linguistically interpreted; and where the speakers who use such features are often derided, shamed, or stereotyped in a specific way. In other words, such blogs are seen here as a genre ecology that is particularly conducive to digital enregisterment as a language-ideological process.

While there are many parameters that can be used to describe and compare different photo blogs—for example their structure, their ecology of sharing and commenting, their level of professionalism and monetization—two criteria have emerged as particularly relevant for the analysis provided here. The first is topic: Which linguistic level, phenomenon, or feature is the target of the blog? The second concerns stancetaking (Jaffe 2012): What is the positionality that emerges from the blog with regard to the linguistic topic at hand, and to linguistic variation quite in general? Table 1 gives an overview of some of the more central and well-known prescriptivist photo blogs. The broad spectrum that these sites cover in terms of linguistic topics and metalinguistic stances is briefly outlined below.

In principle, any kind of linguistic phenomenon can become the target of a prescriptivist photo blog; analysis has shown, however, that the most popular and long-standing sites in particular tend to focus on issues that are either on the micro or the macro end of the linguistic spectrum. That is, they gravitate toward issues on the graphemic level (spelling, punctuation, typography) or on the sociolinguistic and sociopragmatic level (global varieties, politeness, appropriateness). At the macro end of the spectrum, there are blogs focused on phenomena such as 'Engrish': that is, the particular variety of Japanese English usage that is found in public

TABLE 1. *Grassroots prescriptivist blogs considered for this study.*

Blog name	URL	Linguistic subject
Engrish	http://www.engrish.com	varieties of English
Engrish Funny	http://failblog.cheezburger.com/engrishfunny	varieties of English
Passiveaggressivenotes.com	http://www.passiveaggressivenotes.com	pragmatics
STFU, Parents	http://www.stfuparentsblog.com	pragmatics
Starbucks Spelling	http://starbucksspelling.tumblr.com	orthography
The "Blog" of "Unnecessary" Quotation Marks	http://www.unnecessaryquotes.com	punctuation
Apostrophe Catastrophes	http://www.apostrophecatastrophes.com	punctuation
Bad Apostrophes	http://www.badapostrophes.com	punctuation
Excessive Exclamation!!	http://excessiveexclamation.blogspot.de/	punctuation
Font Police	http://fontpolice.tumblr.com	typography
Ban Comic Sans	http://bancomicsans.com/main	typography

signage, which has been described as 'lookalike language' (Blommaert 2012) or 'decorative English' (Dougill 2008). The platform engrish.com is noteworthy in that it has been online since 1996, and thus well precedes the emergence of photo blogging as a recognized genre. Other blogs highlight notions of appropriateness and politeness in specific communicative settings: thus passiveaggressivenotes.com comments on (usually handwritten) signage used in public space in conflict situations, whereas STFU, Parents documents forms of 'oversharing' about family-related issues, predominantly on social media. At the micro end of the spectrum, there are a number of blogs focused on spelling or specific aspects of punctuation. It can be argued that these topics are obvious targets for digital enregisterment, as they represent key features of written discourse and signage. Finally, a number of blogs target issues of typography proper, such as font choice, but also technical typesetting issues such as kerning and sizing. While these graphemic topics do not fall in the traditional canon of structural-linguistic analysis (but see e.g. Spitzmüller 2013 on graphic variation as social practice), they have great impact on the materiality of signage in public space; in this sense, they can be seen as an extension of the theme of grassroots prescriptivism.

The metalinguistic factor of stancetaking can also be used to describe and categorize different prescriptivist photo blogs. How do bloggers position themselves with regard to the linguistic phenomenon they are documenting; and even more importantly, how do they view and acknowledge the process of digital enregisterment in which they participate? What many of the blogs under consideration here reveal is a certain

incongruence between explicit and implicit stance. As is typical of blogs, many of the sites contain a short 'About' section on the sidebar or in the form of FAQ, where a rationale regarding the blog's topic is given—in other words, these metalinguistic sections are a genre feature where on-record stancetaking typically takes place. Strikingly, many bloggers take great pains to disassociate themselves from any prescriptivist or defamatory stance. Thus the owner of Font Police states 'This is a light-hearted humour site, with no offence intended' (http://fontpolice.tumblr.com/). The FAQ on engrish.com are far more elaborated: 'the point of Engrish.com is to have fun with the Engrish phenomenon, not to make fun of (criticize/mock/ridicule) the people who made it. The webmaster has taken great pains not to point out the faults of others or have a discriminatory tone—just to have fun with the results. Engrish.com does its best to stay away from any type of "ha ha—these guys are idiots" lines or insinuations' (http://www.engrish.com/engrish-faq). The author of Unnecessary Quotes even invokes terms such as descriptivism and social construction. By contrast, a few blogs overtly commit to their normative stance. Thus the STFU, Parents blog is self-described as 'a submission-based "public service" blog that mocks parent overshare on social networking sites' (http://www.stfuparents-blog.com/about), and Passive Aggressive Notes assures the reader that 'If you enjoy railing against the flagrant abuse of the English language, you'll find yourself very much at home here' (http://www.passiveaggressivenotes.com/wtf/).

In contrast to these overt forms of positioning, covert stances may emerge from the way that the photo material is presented, framed, and commented on. Importantly, this includes not just the commentary provided by the bloggers, but also the metalinguistic perceptions voiced by their readers, and their folk-linguistic reaction through comments and secondary social media channels. It can be speculated that some of the prescriptivist impetus of such sites is derived not from the blog per se, but from reactions in user comments. On engrish.com, for example, the on-record stance of a nondiscriminatory tone as quoted above is strongly exhibited by the blog author and regular commenters, but this does not deter explicitly prescriptivist comments from being posted, such as this: 'I'm new to this site… and amazed, shocked, etc. Is this all for real?? I would be so gratefull if any person could shed some light on how these texts come to be. If you input bogus text into google translate en choose ANY LANGUAGE to ENGLISH chances are it would be better that this'[5] (http://www.engrish.com/2010/01/everyday-good-feeling/). Finally, it could be argued that the sheer activity of focusing on a specific linguistic phenomenon as a source of entertainment is a kind of covert positioning, as it implies that the language use in question is noteworthy in terms of being nonstandard and thus a target for mockery.

In sum, these blogs differ in thematic scope and in their varying stances of overt or covert normativism through which the folk-linguistic interest in matters of linguistic variation and usage is expressed. What unites them is the emphasis on visual semiotics, in particular on signage in public space, through which this interest is articulated and captured. This notion of anchoring in public usage is particularly important and striking: in contrast to previous studies of digital enregisterment and online

normativism (e.g. Thurlow 2002; Johnstone & Baumgardt 2004; Squires 2010), the data considered here are not purely textual, medium-immanent, but they refer to the real world, to language use in public space, and they do so via authentic pictorial material. The way in which these visual real-life instances of language use are collected, systematized, and presented has an almost folk-ethnographic appeal—as argued above, these photo blogs present what could be termed 'folk-linguistic landscapes'. The following section offers an in-depth analysis of one such photo blog, namely The "Blog" of "Unnecessary" Quotation Marks.

"UNNECESSARY" QUOTATION MARKS? THE DIGITAL ENREGISTERMENT OF EMPHATIC QUOTING

The "Blog" of "Unnecessary" Quotation Marks (http://www.unnecessaryquotes. com) was chosen here as a case study because it provides a prime example of digital enregisterment through a folk-linguistic photo blog. Thus it is centered on a highly specific subject, namely emphatic quoting, which has been recognized as a field of ongoing linguistic change, and it illustrates the perceived usage through real-life picture material provided by the blog author and her audience. In addition, it frames the visual repertoire in metalinguistic commentary provided through a posting title, a caption, the possibility to leave user comments, and an array of subpages such as an FAQ and a legal disclaimer. Finally, the blog has been running since 2005 and has been monetized in the form of a spin-off book publication (Keeley 2010)—a good indicator of a site's traction and reach in terms of audience.

The following analysis begins with a brief overview on emphatic quoting in recent usage and linguistic theory, and afterwards offers a critical assessment of the photo blog under consideration here.

Emphatic quoting

Linguistic theories of quotation marking tend to be firmly installed in the camp of relatively formal semantics and/or pragmatics, and usually do not have much to say about the implied sociolinguistic and semiotic aspects of quoting in a wider sense.[6] Within this framework, quoting is typically explicated in the form of quoting taxonomies that differentiate between nuances of semantic/pragmatic reference (see e.g. Abbott 2003 and Gutzmann & Stei 2011 for recent examples and overviews). During the past decade or so, these taxonomies have started to include an apparently new form of quoting, or at least of quotation marks use, which is often treated as a separate and curious case. Thus Gutzmann & Stei's list of 'varieties of quotation' concludes with the following:

1-e   We sell "fresh" pastry.   *emphatic quotes*
The type of quotation represented in (1-e) seems to put emphasis on the fact that the pastry is fresh. …

> Some theorists might object that examples like (1-e) are not an instance of quotation at all, but merely a misuse of [quotation marks]. (Gutzmann & Stei 2011:2651)

In an earlier account, Abbott (2003) had already noted the rising relevance of what she calls 'noncitational quotation marks': 'a particular use of quotation marks that may be growing', that 'has nothing directly to do with the citational uses of quotation marks at all', where 'quotation marks have acquired an emphatic use by analogy' (Abbott 2003:22–23).

Clearly, the researchers here have pinpointed a topic of linguistic relevance, namely a use of quotation marks that semantically and pragmatically departs from more prototypical notions of quoting. It is beyond the scope of this article to give a full account of the theory of emphatic quoting. For a simple, nontechnical explication, the pragmatic distinction between USE and MENTION seems helpful: we could say that most forms of quoting have a primary effect of mention, where the reference of an utterance is shifted from its real-world entity to the utterance itself. That is, the default cases of quoting point to the fact that the utterance has a reporting, metalinguistic, or similar quality; often, for example in the case of scare quotes, they signal an echoic or even distancing strategy. For some theorists, this mentioning function is a central quality of quotation in general (see Saka 1998:125–31). By contrast, emphatic quote marks could be said to at least partially shift the reference back to the real-world entity: in other words, their primary semantic function is one of use. Thus emphatic quote marks signal that the marked utterance has a direct relation to its proposition, and in fact reinforce this connection by emphasizing it. This approach is also taken by Gutzmann & Stei in their analysis of quotation in general and emphatic quoting in particular. With regard to the 'fresh' pastry example, they note that 'the quotational construction do(es) not refer to words … the pastry (is not) supposed to be related to the word *fresh*' (Gutzmann & Stei 2011:2658). Thus the sign regarding 'fresh' pastry does not seek to imply that the baked goods are stale (in a scare-quote reading) or that the utterance is attributed to someone else in the sense of reported speech, but rather the contrary: it is intended as a straightforward, and in fact emphatic, use of the word. Semiotically, we could say that in emphatic quoting, the quotation marks have become repurposed to signal emphatic use, similar to other forms of typographic marking—such as underlining or bold/italic fonts, as is well-established in the written semiotic repertoire.

Beyond this semantic/pragmatic account, a few issues regarding the sociolinguistic usage of emphatic quote marks can be pointed out. First, emphatic quoting is a phenomenon that has recently been rising in both public and scholarly awareness, and has thus become a target for the formation of language attitudes and enregisterment processes, as is analyzed in depth below. Some analysts even suggest that emphatic quoting may be on the rise and thus implicated in a trajectory of language change. Abbott (2003:22), for example, notes that such usage 'may be growing'; however, there are so far no systematic studies or quantifiable data on the

distribution and variation of emphatic quoting. Second, and closely tied to this, emphatic quoting is widely perceived as deviant and incorrect usage. In the case of emphatic quoting, the specific stereotype is that such usage indexes an uneducated speaker—the archetypal 'greengrocer'. Abbott (2003:22) and Gutzmann & Stei (2011:2651) both briefly mention 'greengrocer's quotes' as the folk-linguistic term for the phenomenon, although both reject it as 'elitist'. Beal (2010) has analyzed in detail the stereotype of the uneducated greengrocer with regard to apostrophe usage; very similar folk perceptions seem to hold for emphatic quoting. Lynne Truss, in her prescriptivist bestseller on punctuation, candidly and unironically illustrates this elitist stance when she writes that 'greengrocers are self-evidently horny-thumbed people who do not live by words' (Truss 2003:63). The frequent invocation of this social persona can be taken as an indicator of an enregisterment process in the sense of Agha (2005).

Incidentally, the nature of emphatic quoting makes it a prime candidate for normative ire. As the analysis above has shown, a kind of semantic reversal is at work here, where the semiotic implication of quote marks is shifted from 'mention' toward 'use'. Cases of linguistic variation that hinge on such seeming inconsistencies have traditionally attracted normative criticism and accusations of unclear, ambiguous, or illogical language use. Famous and storied examples that fall into this category include double negation or phrases such as 'I could care less'. Pullum (2004:7) notes this tendency for 'logicism' as a central prescriptivist principle.

Finally, the rise of emphatic quoting appears to have corollaries in neighboring semiotic repertoires, namely spoken discourse and computer-mediated communication. In spoken discourse, the use of 'air quotes' or 'finger quotes' as a form of gestural quoting (often in the sense of scare quotes) has attracted a lot of attention in recent years. Air quotes, though widely used, are met with much derision and are felt to be a verbal (or rather gestural) tic by many people; while no systematic studies on gestural quoting exist as of yet, Lampert (2013:46) in an overview on recent additions to the quotative spectrum comments on 'the prevailing bias that they are unwelcome, meaningless, and ruining the language'. As of yet, air quotes appear to be used predominantly in a distancing/echoic way, and thus as part of the traditional semantic spectrum of written quote marks; however, it will be interesting to observe whether air quotes with an emphatic function evolve over time.

A similar phenomenon can be observed in digital language use and language change, where typographic marking of emphasis has already become firmly established. While written discourse offers many traditional means of marking emphasis (such as bolding, italicizing, and the like), most of these are not available in the simple typing interfaces of most CMC genres. As an alternative, digital markup languages use tags to specify the typographic appearance of onscreen text. Markup instructions are added before and after words to provide typographic information, for example *asterisks*, _underscores_, /slashes/, or HTML tags . Over the years, through a semiotic transformation, markup items that convert to

typographic output onscreen have slowly become emphasis markers on their own terms, which are used as actual carriers of emphatic meaning. Thus usages such as 'We sell _fresh_ pastry!', or 'We sell *fresh* pastry!', to echo the above example, would not be unlikely or felt to be infelicitous in many CMC contexts. It seems at least conceivable that typographic emphasis marking in CMC might be a factor in nondigital language change, working in coalition or as a catalyst for the rise of emphatic quoting in everyday discourse. While the phenomenon has attracted much less attention than emphatic quote marks or air quotes, it has not gone under the radar of the most arduous prescriptivists. Thus Truss (2003:196) laments that '(a)nything new is welcome today. People experiment with asterisks to show emphasis ("What a *day* I've had!") and also angle brackets ("So have <I> !")'.

Unnecessaryquotes.com

The photo blog under scrutiny here is explicitly dedicated to emphatic quoting, focusing exclusively on examples of such usage; in the context of the blog, this form of quotation is referred to as 'unnecessary' quotation, as its URL suggests. The blog was created in 2005 and has been running continuously since then; in terms of blog entries, its peak years were 2008 to 2010, with over 1,000 entries per year. Until late 2013, this had amounted to a total of over 6,000 entries—an impressive repository of visual-linguistic data. The following analysis focuses on the blog's most active periods, as the response given by fellow bloggers and other readers constitutes a vital part of the blog's dynamic, in particular regarding the emergence of overt and covert stances toward emphatic quoting.

Site structure. As displayed in Figure 3, the blog's architecture is minimalist and bare bones, as is typical of many photo blogs. Beneath the blog title, entries are arrayed in a counter-chronological manner, with ten entries per page. An entry begins with a date, followed by a title, which may sometimes be a pun or similar joking commentary, or may simply quote the linguistic material that follows in the picture, so that a photo with signage saying *NEW "MANAGEMENT"* will indeed be titled *New "Management"*. Next is the picture itself; from early on, most of the picture material for the blog has been reader-provided. Underneath the picture, a caption is added, usually containing two elements: an intentional misreading of the signage, which treats the quote marks not as emphasis markers but as conventional (e.g. distancing) quote marks; and an acknowledgment to the submitter of the photo, mostly just by name, but on occasion with a link to their blogs/online identities. Finally, an entry concludes with a date stamp, a link for comments, and sharing buttons. As of 2013, there are few comments added by users; however, during the very active days of the blog in 2007 and 2008, some posts attracted several dozen comments. In more recent years, most of the commenting activity has migrated to the Facebook presence of the blog.

FIGURE 3. Front page of unnecessaryquotes.com.

Sample post: Puppys.   The posting on "Puppys" from November 29, 2008 (http://www.unnecessaryquotes.com/2008/11/puppys.html) can serve as a fairly representative sample from the blog. It is built around the photo displayed in Figure 4, a candid snapshot showing a hand-painted sign displayed by the side of a road. The sign contains the inscription: *FOR SALE… "PUPPYS"*. Many semiotic features of the inscription add to the impression that this is a distinctly nonprofessional sign, such as the amateurish quality of the penmanship and the error in plural marking in the word 'puppies'. It may also be noted that the quote marks—used here, without doubt, as emphasis markers—are accompanied by additional means of typographic highlighting, namely underlining and sizing. In short, the unofficial quality of the signage seems consistent with the unofficial nature of the business that it supposedly advertises, namely the roadside sale of live animals.

The accompanying commentary to the picture reads: 'So, what are they really selling? Goldfish in puppy costumes? stuffed dogs?', followed by a brief acknowledgment to the submitter of the picture. This comment epitomizes the rhetorical strategy adopted towards emphatic quote marks here, which is found in virtually every entry. Specifically, the author adopts a stance of fake naiveté regarding

FIGURE 4. Puppys.

their purpose: by offering deliberate misinterpretations of the sign such as 'goldfish in puppy costumes' or 'stuffed dogs', which would fit better with a distancing/mentioning/nonliteral function of the quote marks, the writer acts as if the emphatic use of quote marks were unknown, uncommon, or unparseable. Through this rhetorical move of staged incredulity, emphatic quoting is subtly but firmly enregistered as deviant and problematic, as it suggests that such usage is a potential threat to felicitous communication.

There are nine comments to this entry. As is typical of the blog, a few of the commenters join in with the faux-naïf reading of the sign. For example, commenter Dessie replies 'Breast augmentation?', and commenter mac adds, 'I agree with Dessie. "If your giving those 'puppies' away, I'll take the one with the brown nose" ;-)'. In this case, 'puppies' is intentionally misinterpreted as a slang term for breasts, and thus serves as a cue for sexual innuendo. While some commenters follow this dominant stance of implicit critique, others favor explicit metalinguistic criticism. Thus commenter Sara remarks on the spelling mistake: 'I'm surprised no one's mentioned that the "puppys" should actually be "puppies" (puppies)', and commenter sendintheclowns draws a parallel to nonstandard apostrophe usage: 'That is as bad as the signs that read, "EGG'S FOR SALE," "TICKET'S SOLD HERE," and "100'S TO CHOOSE FROM" ads...YUCK. What is UP with people, huh?'. It is in comments such as the latter that an on-record, grassroots prescriptivist stance becomes prominent within the discourse of this blog.

Picture material. Regarding the pictorial material itself, the blog has accumulated, over the years, a collection of around 6,000 photos of public signage containing emphatic quote marks. At least three semiotic layers are

relevant for a deeper understanding of how these pictures function in the context of the blog: contextualization through accompanying text, composition of the picture, and content of the signage.

CONTEXTUALIZATION is understood here in terms of the metadata that are provided alongside the image itself. In this sense, the material is presented in a rather minimalist way on this particular blog: the pictures are neither tagged nor otherwise organized into subsections or content-based categories. Also, the captions often contain little contextual information regarding place, time, and situatedness of the picture taken.[7] This is noteworthy in that the notion of public space, which is so relevant for the reading of signage in sociolinguistic studies, is apparently felt to be secondary here. Thus, detail on geographical (country, region, city) or functional (shop, roadside, public building, etc.) location of a sign is indicated only where it is necessary for the interpretation of the sign. For example, a picture of a sign with the inscription *FOR OUR "LITTLE PASSENGERS"* is contextualized with 'Clint saw this at the Des Moines Airport' (http://www.unnecessaryquotes. com/2008/10/i-think-you-know-what-theyre-talking.html).

Regarding the COMPOSITION of the pictures, the most noteworthy aspect is that they are indeed amateur snapshots—photographs spontaneously taken with digital cameras, cell phones, or mobile devices. Occasionally, this nonprofessional quality is evidenced through technical aspects such as a lack of focus or light reflections (see e.g. Figure 5a). The pictures themselves almost always have the signage in question as their major and central element, with little attention to the background or surroundings, or other picture elements. The overall similarity of the pictures is noteworthy given that almost all photos are reader-submitted and that no guidelines for submitted material are given. A recurrent exception to this typical composition is that submitters will occasionally be featured themselves in the pictures while engaging in the 'air quotes' gesture. Figure 5b shows such an example (one of the few pictures provided by the blog author herself). All in all, it can be assumed that the overall nonprofessional, grassroots quality of the pictures is not detrimental to the purpose of the blog but, on the contrary, contributes to the air of authenticity and real-world anchoring that is essential for this type of photo blog.

Finally, the CONTENT of the photo material concerns the different types of signage that may occur; a small sample is shown in Figure 6. It contains instances of both 'official' (e.g. municipal, institutional) and 'unofficial' (e.g. commercial, sometimes private, often handwritten) signage, as shown in Figs. 6a and 6b respectively—a distinction often termed top-down vs. bottom-up in LL analysis (Gorter 2006:3). Many instances also display features typical of nonstandard writing, such as grammar or orthography errors (e.g. "Dog's" welcome)—usually in the caption of the picture (see Fig. 6c). Also, the material in quote marks is often additionally marked for emphasis through other typographic means, such as underlining, caps, or font manipulation (Fig. 6d, upper sign, showing use of color, size, and positioning). Although the blog is clearly focused on English signage, there are occasional multilingual or non-English items (Fig. 6d, lower sign).
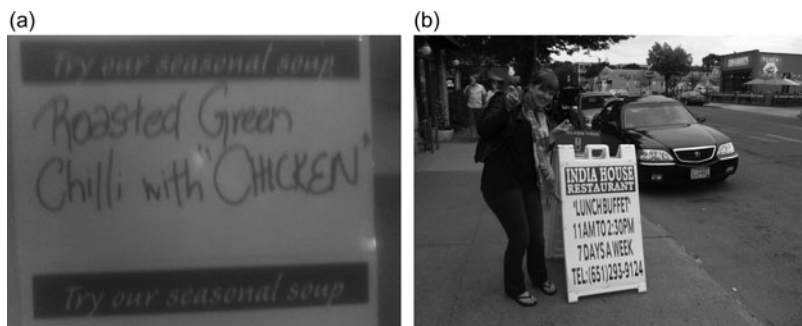
FIGURE 5. Nonprofessional photos on unnecessaryquotes.com.

Comments section. As noted above, the blog under consideration here does not attract immense user feedback, especially in recent years. Nevertheless, the comments section is an essential part of how the site functions. Many of the commenters are regulars to a degree, so that there is a core community of contributors who make an appearance on many postings. The fact that user commentary is an essential feature of the site is also evident in many of the original postings, where the blog author directly addresses her readership and anticipates a reaction from the commenters. For example, a posting containing French Canadian signage is accompanied by the text: 'Dave spotted this in Montreal but did not send along a translation. I get the basic message with sheer force of will, but I live in America and I know English and Spanish. So you guys tell me, is this funny? Make some jokes!' (http://www.unnecessaryquotes.com/2012/11/i-dont-speak-french.html). Reciprocally, the commenters will frequently address the blogger directly, for example, by administering praise for the blog project or by advertising their own sites.

Regarding the substance of the comments, a few recurrent categories emerge. Regularly, a chain of comments will spin off into off-topic discussions triggered by details of the pictures. A substantial part of the user comments, however, is centered on the signage itself and its metalinguistic discussion. These types of comments are of central interest for the process of digital enregisterment as it occurs in photo blogs. As was shown in the analysis of the 'Puppys' posting, there are two basic strategies of stancetaking available when reacting to the pictures. One is to follow the stance of staged incredulity set up in the original postings by offering alternative readings and focusing on the potential for misunderstanding in the signage. In these comments, the metalinguistic critique remains implicit and is masked by a pretension of humor and lighthearted commentary. The other option is an on-record metalinguistic stance that explicitly addresses the linguistic issues of the signage. It is in such overt postings that grassroots prescriptivist stances become most apparent. For example, a sign advertising *Sweet corn boiled in "milk",* photographed at the food court of a flea market, garners the following

FIGURE 6. A sample of pictures uploaded on the blog.

comment: 'Considering the sort of semi-literate vendors that populate flea markets it's not surprising they'd misplace a few quotes' (http://www.unnecessaryquotes. com/2008/04/soy-milk.html). Another sign from a bakery, containing lavish punctuation, has the comment 'Grocery stores make me facepalm, and I don't mean in the cute way' (http://www.unnecessaryquotes.com/2008/11/well-its-akin-to-theft. html). Instances such as these epitomize the process of enregisterment that is at work in such photo blogs, as they make an explicit reference to the persona of the uneducated greengrocer, as outlined above.

It is worth pointing out that not all commenters follow the dominant position taken on the blog toward emphatic quoting. Occasionally, a comment will question the overall prescriptivist stance of the blog, or just the appropriateness of a specific sign for criticism and mockery. For example, the sign from the Des Moines airport

discussed above prompts the following critical comment: 'Meh, even if it's unclear or confusing it's still a proper use of quotation marks, given that "little passengers" is being used as a euphemism for children'. However, such attempts at voicing alternative readings, or instigating a more nuanced debate about the linguistic implications of emphatic quoting, are usually quickly rejoined by either the blog author herself, or one of the regular commenters. In the case of the above comment, discussion is cut off by the blog author: 'good thing this isn't the blog of improper quotation marks, then, eh?' (http://www.unnecessaryquotes.com/2008/10/i-think-you-know-what-theyre-talking.html). Replies such as this make it clear that in the comments section, the floor is open only for a specific type of metalinguistic commentary—be it implicit or explicit in its stance.

Metadiscursive framing.   Finally, and importantly, the blog contains a number of metadiscursive elements that serve not only as a framework and a larger context for the discourse, but also provide the blog author with a place to explain the rationale of her project. These elements are accessible through the blog's sidebar and are relatively typical of blog architecture. They include items such as links to the author's Facebook and Twitter accounts, affiliate links to promote the book version of the blog, a legal disclaimer, a Wikipedia link to punctuation guidelines 'for correct usage', a list of 'greatest hits', and a blogroll. It is the FAQ section of the blog, however, that merits particular attention for the analysis presented here. The FAQ, written in 2007, apparently responds to many real or imagined comments to the project. As a consequence, its tone is somewhat explanatory and defends the blog's purpose; in the course of this, the author displays an awareness of the conflict potential of the blog's grassroots prescriptivist stance. This becomes especially clear in the following question:

> For Linguistics Nerds Only: *Don't you know about language change? Why be such a prescriptivist?*
> Alternate: *Thanks for fighting for pure English against the uneducated masses!*
> My real intellectual position is more of a descriptivist. I understand that language is constructed socially and therefore naturally evolves and changes and is not subject to absolutes. I conceive this blog as a kind of language play a la Derrida that also demonstrates the limits of such permissiveness, which becomes unclear writing. I'm trying to have fun with language, not protect it or enforce a "right" way to write or speak. (http://www.unnecessaryquotes.com/2007/09/frequently-asked-questions.html)

Here, the author decidedly positions herself against the accusation of grassroots prescriptivism. As a graduate student in rhetoric at that time, she is able to call on some of the keywords in the debate (language as a social construct, language change, 'language play a la Derrida'). Despite this stance, emphatic quoting is then described as linguistic 'permissiveness' and a form of 'unclear writing'. This latter point, which is made at several turns in the FAQ, is a telltale sign of a covert prescriptivist stance, as the argument of illogical, unclear, or ambiguous language use is firmly established in the arsenal of prescriptivist discourse.[8] And as with other cases, it can be argued that this is a fallacious argument. Just as language users are perfectly capable of parsing double negation, the risk of actually

misinterpreting an emphatic quotation (other than intentionally for jocular purposes) seems rather low.[9]

In sum, The "Blog" of "Unnecessary" Quotation Marks presents an ambivalent stance to the reader. While it takes great pains to distance itself from linguistic normativism in its metadiscursive section, this is counteracted by wordings such as 'unnecessary quotation marks', 'permissiveness', and 'unclear writing'—and, of course, through the sheer strategy of focusing on a specific phenomenon of ongoing language change, and illustrating it with thousands of real-life photos.

DISCUSSION: SHARED GRASSROOTS? VISUAL SEMIOTICS IN DIGITAL PRESCRIPTIVISM AND SOCIOLINGUISTICS

This article has provided an analysis of folk-linguistic photo blogs as an example of digital enregisterment, focusing in particular on the issue of emphatic quoting and the way that it is presented on the blog unnecessaryquotes.com. Underlying the analysis, two main arguments have been put forward here:

(i) The major argument is that such digital enregisterment is indicative of the bottom-up tendencies of twenty-first-century prescriptivism, and that photo blogs (as the one analyzed here) are good representatives of this tendency;

(ii) A more minor argument is that the visual semiotics which these photo blogs are built upon do much to explain their attractiveness and success as an emerging digital genre, and that this attraction extends, perhaps surprisingly, to the picture material that is increasingly being used in current sociolinguistic studies.

At the end of this analysis, it seems apt to revisit these hypotheses, and to critically examine their underlying assumptions. Specifically, this concerns two questions: (a) is it justified to treat such photo blogs as prime exemplars of grassroots prescriptivism? and (b) what does this tell us about the positioning of photo blogs and sociolinguistic analysis, about our consumption of visual semiotics as users and as sociolinguists?

Regarding the first issue, the analysis has emphasized that the stance of blog authors toward a normative and judgmental approach can vary, and that there is a spectrum between explicit and implicit stancetaking. As the analysis of Unnecessary Quotes has shown, a common pattern found here is an on-record stance that commits to descriptivism, which is somewhat negated by the implicit stance that emerges from the content and presentation of the blog. It is debatable to what degree such distancing moves in on-record stancetaking are effective. Beal (2010:61), in analyzing an apostrophe website, argues that they are not:

> Here, readers are invited to post examples, usually photographs of signs outside shops, restaurants and other commercial establishments. This 'hall of shame' negates the disclaimer that no 'direct criticism' is intended, and seems to be a source of entertainment rather than instruction, or, as Burchfield put it, for 'the amusement of educated people'.

In fact, to go a step further, it could be argued that these statements about right or wrong ways of speaking are, in their hedging and faux-naïf strategies, reminiscent of what Hill (2009) calls 'covert racist discourse' in the context of phenomena such as Mock Spanish—in this sense, we might speak of 'covert prescriptivism', which may prove to be just as effective a strategy of language policing.

Regardless of our interpretation of such metadiscursive caveats by the bloggers, the simple practice of focusing on one specific phenomenon of ongoing language variation and change is a telltale sign of a normative agenda. Coupled with the indicative lexicon of these blogs, where punctuation marks are posited as 'unnecessary' or 'catastrophes', where fonts are 'banned' and talkative parents are told to 'STFU', it can be argued that these sites are in fact prime instances of grassroots prescriptivism.

As for the second issue, the analysis provided here has emphasized that grassroots prescriptivist photo blogs are truly and substantially built around the picture material they provide. That is, the images they provide are not intended as merely decorative 'eye candy' or as illustrations of an underlying discourse; instead, they are the central and dominant semiotic repertoire and thus the raison d'être of these sites. As has been argued, photo blogs thus capitalize on the appeal of authenticity and situatedness that these snapshots provide. And it may be the case that this trend is by no means limited to purely recreational photo blogging. As noted in the introduction, there is a striking similarity in the photo material of signage in public space between photo blogs, and many current sociolinguistic studies—so much so that some of the pictures that figure in each domain might be interchangeable to a degree. We saw this, for example, in Figs. 2a and 2b. This close resemblance seems striking when considering the differing stances that are associated with these two activities. In opposition to grassroots prescriptivism, virtually all sociolinguistic analysis is firmly rooted in the descriptivist heritage of modern-day linguistics; if anything, it subscribes to an emancipatory, counter-hegemonic program that critically addresses linguistic mechanisms of power and discrimination. In this sense, the different interpretations and ways of consuming these pictures provides powerful evidence for the crucial role that stance and situational framework play in the analysis of semiotic repertories. As we have seen in the analysis provided here, the vastly differing and even opposing stances of photo blogs—informal, entertainment-orientated, prone to grassroots prescriptivism—and Linguistic Landscape analyses—systematic, scholarly, anchored in a descriptive perspective—only become apparent through their particular discursive framing.

It seems apt to keep in mind that a critical, descriptivist stance, however, is not an automatism even in a sociolinguistic framework. Blommaert, in a brief analysis of 'lookalike language' (i.e. 'Engrish'), acknowledges as much:

> Many of us have seen those [photo blogs]; in fact I am convinced that many of us drift onto websites documenting 'funny English' after long and tough days on the job, when the cold wind is blowing outside and everything in the world seems to go wrong. We find intensely entertaining things there, and even our professional familiarity with such things will not prevent us from bursting into roaring laughter when we read "welcome to my erection campaign" on a Japanese politician's website or "Too drunk to fuck" on the T-shirt of a young Thai boy. (Blommaert 2012:20)

It seems a good exercise in self-reflexivity to keep in mind that as analysts, we are not immune from the 'ha ha' gaze, as the author of engrish.com puts it, or 'the amusement of educated people', as Beal (2010:60) quotes the prescriptivist Burchfield—in particular where we engage with the rich visual semiotics of authentic, situated, and linguistically diverse photographs. With this caveat in place, this analysis has also shown that an awareness of the materiality of signs, and for the visual scope of language, has become firmly rooted in our twenty-first-century understanding of semiotic repertoires—whether it is in the realm of sociolinguistic analysis or in the everyday activity of blogging for entertainment.

N O T E S

[1]Web addresses for all photos in the figures in this article are listed below.

Figure 1: http://www.unnecessaryquotes.com/2014/01/new-potatoes.html.

Figure 2a: http://www.mmg.mpg.de/de/subsites/sociolinguistic-diversities/annotated-pictures/ninas-derriere/

Figure 2b: http://www.engrish.com//wp-content/uploads/2009/09/autism-technical-clothing.jpg

Figure 3: http://www.unnecessaryquotes.com

Figure 4: http://www.unnecessaryquotes.com/2008/11/puppys.html

Figure 5a: http://www.unnecessaryquotes.com/2008/02/tastes-just-like-chicken.html

Figure 5b: http://www.unnecessaryquotes.com/2009/06/oh-man.html

Figure 6a: http://www.unnecessaryquotes.com/2013/10/required-parking.html

Figure 6b: http://www.unnecessaryquotes.com/2013/09/organic-strawberries.html

Figure 6c: http://www.unnecessaryquotes.com/2013/10/dogs-welcome.html

Figure 6d: http://www.unnecessaryquotes.com/2013/02/its-ok-if-its-just-dirty.html

[2]The notion of shaming has in recent years become widely used in the sense of publicly admonishing or placing blame on others for behavior that is perceived as transgressive, most importantly in the context of 'slut-shaming' (e.g. Ringrose 2013:93). Prior to this recent usage, shaming had already been recognized as a ritualized speech act; see, for example, Schieffelin (1986) for an account from linguistic anthropology.

[3]For example, the collection of 'annotated pictures' published by the Working Group on Sociolinguistic Diversity (http://www.mmg.mpg.de/de/subsites/sociolinguistic-diversities/annotating-pictures) provides a good impression of such approaches.

[4]Biographical information is not available for all of the blog owners under consideration here. While none of them appear to have a professional linguistic background, it is reasonable to assume that most of them come from a middle-class, college-educated upbringing.

[5]All quoted material has been left unedited with regard to orthography and punctuation.

[6]This is not to say that quoting as a whole has been exempt from sociolinguistic analysis: specific aspects of quotation, such as the use of quotatives, have been analyzed in terms of variation and change and other sociolinguistic patterns of usage (see e.g. Tagliamonte and D'Arcy 2004; Buchstaller 2013).

[7]This is in contrast with other similar photo blogs: for example, the pictures on Passive Aggressive Notes are always accompanied by a more or less precise location and are usually framed by a brief, often humorous, narrative that contextualizes the signage.

[8]Truss (2003:149–50), not to be outdone, notes that there is 'a huge amount of ignorance concerning the use of quotation marks' and goes on to diagnose 'a serious cognitive problem' in the usage of emphatic quoting.

[9]Pinker (1994:377), in analyzing normative discourse on double negation and the expression 'I could care less', makes this argument in rather more acerbic terms: 'the implication that use of the nonstandard form would lead to confusion is pure pedantry. … A tin ear for prosody … and an obliviousness to the principles of discourse and rhetoric are important tools of the trade for the language maven'.

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