

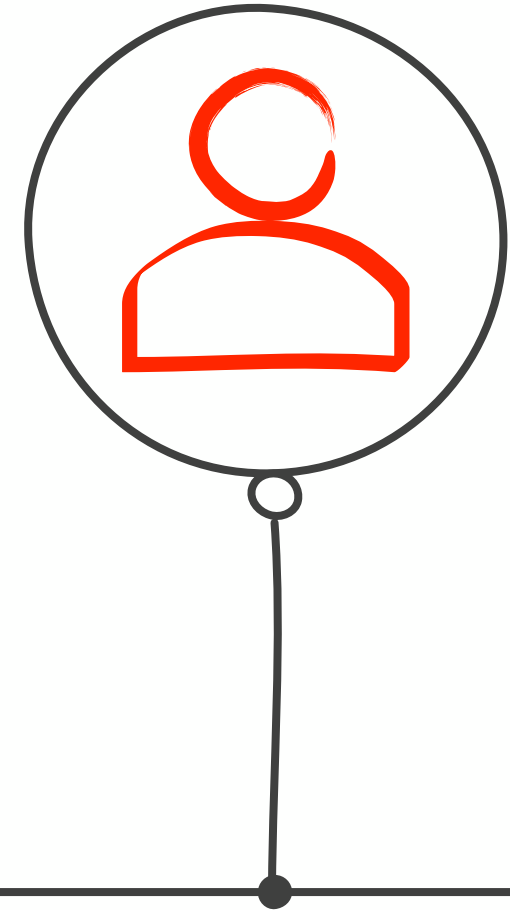
# **Normative Linguistics, Twenty-five Years on**

**ISLE forum, 20 November 2024**

**Morana Lukač**

# Background

1. **Directionality:** Grassroots prescriptivism<sup>1, 2, 3</sup>
2. **Data:** Focus on social media
3. New norms as **indicative of (social) change:**
  - Gender-inclusive language<sup>3, 4</sup>
4. **Method:** Experimental approach
5. **Beyond** Anglophone (normative) linguistics



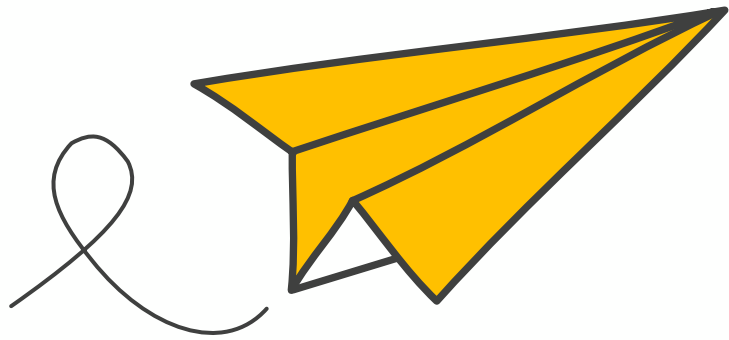
<sup>1</sup> Heyd, T. (2014). Folk-linguistic landscapes: Visual semiotics of digital enregisterment. *Language in Society*, 43(5), 489–514.

<sup>2</sup> Lukač, M. (2018). Grassroots Prescriptivism. *LOT*.

<sup>3</sup> Lukač, M., & Heyd, T. (2023). Grassroots prescriptivism. In *Routledge Handbook of Prescriptivism* (pp. 227–245).

<sup>4</sup> Lukač, M., & Bradley, E. (forthcoming). Effects of L1 and social attitudes on gender-fair English. In *Festschrift for Pam Peters*, OUP.

<sup>5</sup> Reichelt, S., & Lukač, M. (forthcoming). Trans\*inclusive language on YouTube. *J. of Language and Discrimination*.



**Directionality**

# Bottom-up

## ➤ **Grassroots prescriptivism**

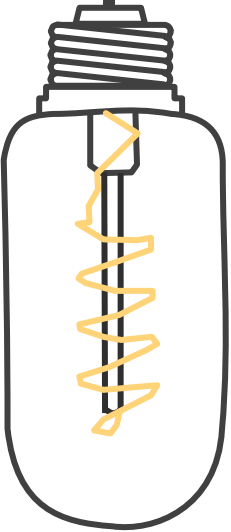
- Norms are also shaped bottom-up by language users
- Unfolds in informal contexts, such as social media, public forums, and letters to newspaper editors<sup>6,7</sup>

## ➤ **Rethinking normative linguistics and prescriptivism**

- Norms as dynamic and participatory, reflecting collective values
- Beyond language policing
  - Responsive to social needs, adapting in real time

<sup>6</sup> Lukač, M. (2016). Linguistic prescriptivism in letters. *J. Multilingual & Multicultural Dev.* 37(3), 1–13.

<sup>7</sup> Lukač, M. (2017). From usage guides to language blogs. In *English Usage Guides* (pp. 107–126). OUP.



**Data**





# The role of digital spaces in norm negotiation

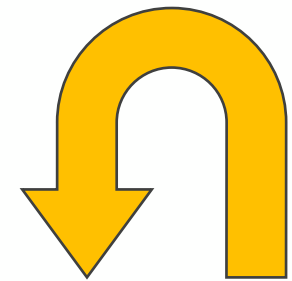
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- Norm negotiation in **real-time**
- **"New" authorities**
  - Who holds the linguistic capital?
- **Participation**
  - A case study on the use of gender-fair terms on social media reveals they encourage inclusivity and diverse participation<sup>8</sup>
- **Dynamic push-and-pull** of norms
  - Digital platforms reveal both support and resistance to language change, reflecting broader societal tensions

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<sup>8</sup> Reichelt, S., & Lukač, M. (forthcoming). Trans\*inclusive language on YouTube. J. of Language and Discrimination.

**New norms  
as indicative of (social) change**



# Language norms as evolving forces

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- Norms drive change, which is shaped by personal beliefs and social attitudes<sup>9, 10</sup>
- Social attitudes shape language standards
  - Politically responsive prescriptivism<sup>11</sup>
  - Progressive communities advance gender inclusivity in language
- Cross-linguistic influence
  - Acceptance of gender-fair language grows with exposure across cultures

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<sup>9</sup> Lukač, M., & Bradley, E. (forthcoming). Effects of L1 and social attitudes on gender-fair English. In Festschrift for Pam Peters, OUP.

<sup>10</sup> Lukač, M. (2024). "Non-binary Pronouns in Dutch and Prescriptive Influence." 7th Prescriptivism Conference, Aix-en-Provence.

<sup>11</sup>Curzan, A. (2014). Fixing English. CUP.



**Method**



# An experimental approach

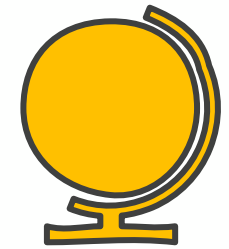
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- Studies largely focus on historical explorations of normative literature, corpus-based evidence, attitudinal surveys of language users and language professionals, studying attitudes and language ideologies “in the wild”
- I propose an experimental approach<sup>12</sup>
  - Can prescriptive pronouncements influence attitudes toward linguistic features (non-binary pronouns in Dutch)?
  - Preliminary findings confirm this may be the case

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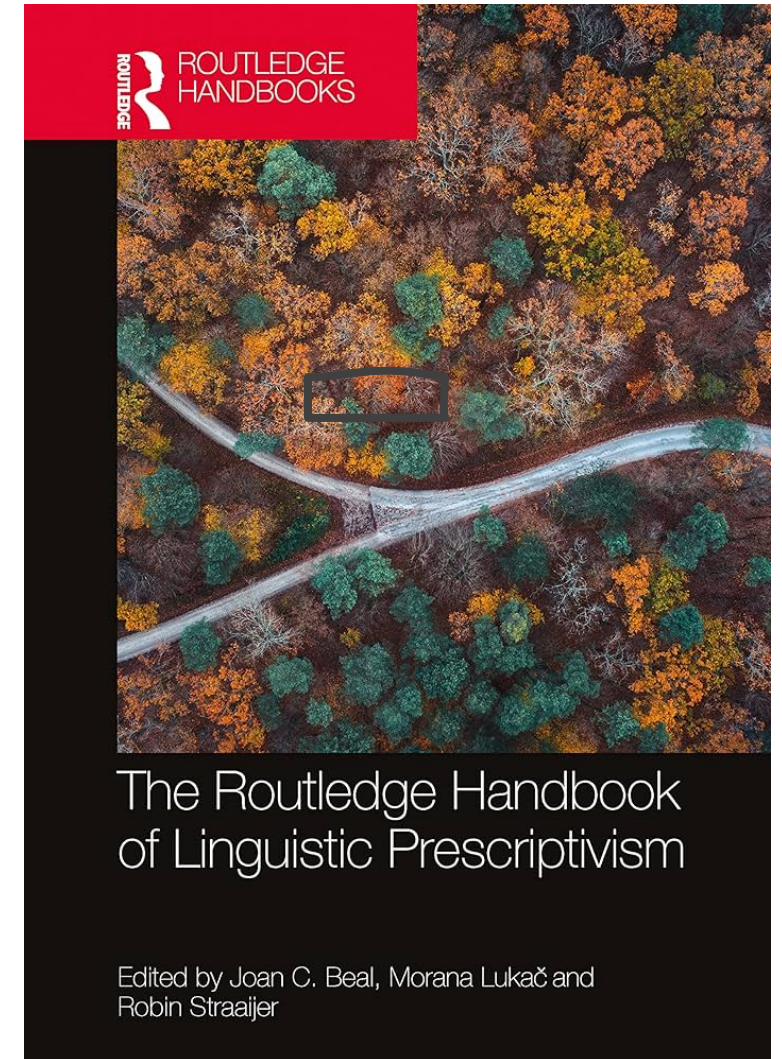
<sup>12</sup> Lukač, M. (2024). "Non-binary Pronouns in Dutch and Prescriptive Influence." 7th Prescriptivism Conference, Aix-en-Provence.

# **Beyond Anglophone normative linguistics**

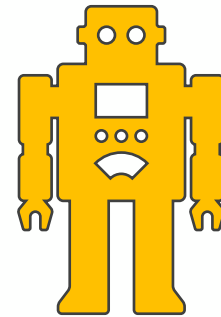


# Broadening the field

- **The Routledge Handbook of Linguistic Prescriptivism**
  - Focus on geographical variation
    - Prescriptive practices outside of traditional Anglocentric perspectives
    - Diversity of language norms globally
  - Advocating inclusivity
  - Diverse social and cultural contexts shape unique language standards
  - More nuanced understanding of the field



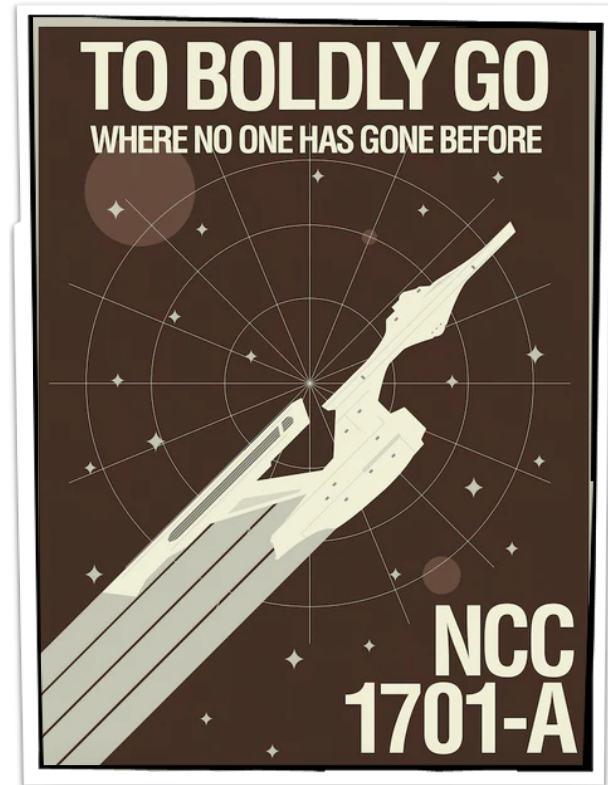
**What's next?**



# Future directions

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- Grassroots and digital influence
- Global perspectives
- Broadening research methodology
- Intersection with social justice
- Technology and AI



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