"Grammar Nazis never sleep": Facebook humor and the management of standard written language

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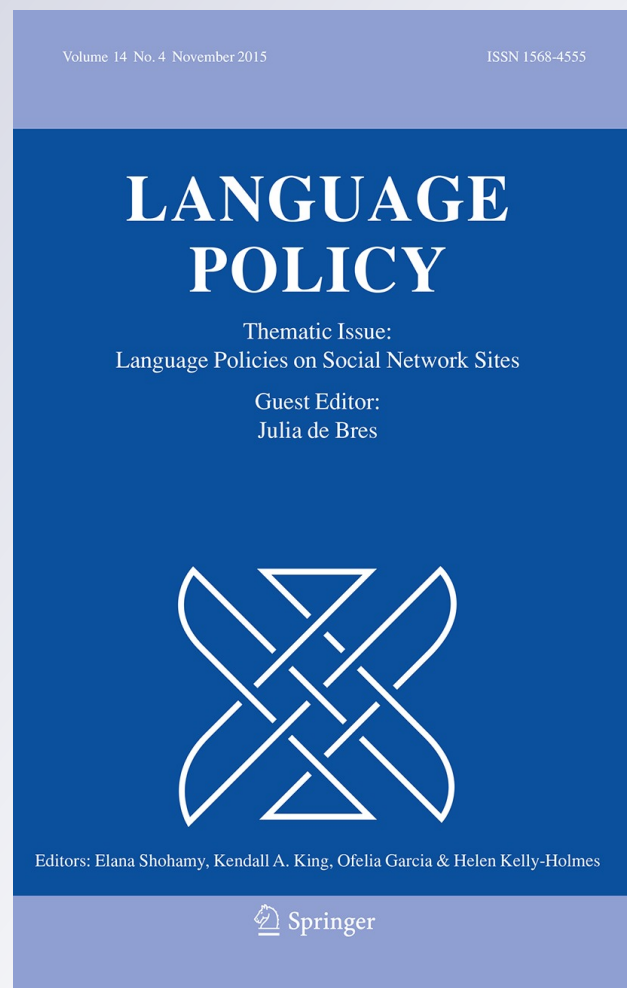**Abstract**   This paper uses Language Management Theory (Nekvapil and Sherman, Language management in contact situations. Perspectives from three continents. Peter Lang, Frankfurt/Main, 2009) to investigate Facebook pages as a site and instrument of behavior-toward-language, focusing specifically on the use of humor. The language in question is Czech, which is not the subject of extensive formal language policy. We show how standard written Czech is promoted on the micro level of everyday humorous interactions on Facebook, specifically those which correspond to the superiority theory of humor (Billig, Laughter and ridicule: towards a social critique of humour. Sage, London, 2005). We examine two pages which declare their affiliation with the idea of "Grammar Nazis". These pages were created in order to support *the noting and evaluation of deviations from standard written Czech for humorous purposes*, primarily through collections of individual mistakes found in both online and offline communication. A qualitative analysis of 550 posts from these two pages investigated (a) the linguistic phenomena which were managed, (b) the actors, settings and genres which were the sources of the noted deviations, (c) the humorous character of the management and (d) the depiction of the actors in organized management in regard to the "Nazi" metaphor and perceived norm authorities in the Czech context. The analysis revealed that the practices of individuals organizing under the title Grammar Nazis on Czech Facebook represent a necessarily incomplete language management process cycle, performed by non-experts, driven by standard language ideology, and associating

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"grammar" primarily with orthography. Given that the knowledge of orthography is related to one's education and cultural capital, it thus serves as an instrument of social differentiation.

Keywords   Grammar Nazis · Facebook · Czech · Language management · Online humor · Orthography

Introduction

On October 22, 2012, a dance club in a small Czech city posted an ad on its Facebook page, inviting prospective DJs to play there. One week later, the image was shared on Facebook by the administrator of the page *Grammar Nazi—Czech Version*. The image soon gathered over a thousand likes and numerous comments. Not, however, for its message, but due to violations of the norms of standard written Czech. It contained spelling and capitalization errors, as well as misplaced punctuation.

The comments ranged from amused to enraged, but most were humorous. Some commenters expressed metaphorical pain by writing "Ow", one noted "this is messed up". Some pointed to specific errors. Commenting on the capital "N", used incorrectly in the word "notebook", a user stated: "Laptops without a capital N don't have enough power to mix music!". Another mimicked the form of the message, saying "I be a deejay I have a Commodore Amiga and can play whatever".[1] Yet another labeled the club as lowbrow—referring to a TV station considered unsophisticated and to a tabloid newspaper, writing: "Do you watch TV Nova and read Blesk? Come to our place, you will feel at home…"

This practice of finding, sharing and commenting on linguistic norm deviations is connected to the image of the Grammar Nazi, and is common in online communities, where the Grammar Nazi label has been used to describe individuals who scold or harass others for their language errors. In recent years it has been heavily utilized on *social network sites*[2] such as Facebook. Here, a number of community pages exist which willingly identify with the Grammar Nazi label. These pages contain examples of overt and concentrated efforts to "police" language use and enact standard language ideology in a humorous manner.

In this article, we analyze the management of language by self-titled Grammar Nazi groups on Facebook, arguing that (1) despite the prevalence of unregulated language use online, the knowledge of codified norms serves as cultural capital and as an instrument of social differentiation, (2) Facebook is one outlet for individuals to utilize this capital through language management, and (3) the role of humor is significant in this process, especially when it is used to express superiority. The language variety in question is Standard (written) Czech.

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[1]   Unless stated otherwise, quotes have been translated by the authors. The last quote actually contains the word "laptop", although it refers to the word "Notebook" found in the ad.

[2]   For definitions and basic terminology pertaining to social network sites, see Boyd and Ellison (2007).

The Czech language situation and language management

To illustrate the backdrop for Grammar Nazi behavior on Czech Facebook, we will elaborate upon the Czech language situation. In the metalinguistic behavior of everyday Czech users, manifestations of standard language ideology (Milroy and Milroy 2012) can be observed. This is typically oriented toward Standard Czech (*spisovná čeština*), the written variety also upheld in oral domains such as news broadcasts on public television and radio, and some school situations. Standard Czech differs structurally from non-standard varieties, mainly in morphology, phonology and the lexicon. It is almost no one's native variety, and its *active* use typically begins during school education.[3] Functional competence in Standard Czech is important for professional language users—journalists and other writers, translators or teachers. Although it is not legally designated as the official variety, institutions, particularly media outlets, create guidelines for their employees prescribing it.[4] Non-standard Czech varieties, the native varieties of most speakers of the language, include so-called Common Czech (*obecná čeština*), used in Bohemia, and other varieties used in Moravia and Silesia.[5] These varieties can be reproduced in Czech orthography, but do not have a literary tradition, and are used in literary texts only in marked instances.

Standard language ideology is also manifested in the Czech society through the significant attention dedicated to orthography. The centralized codification of orthography appears in the publication *Pravidla českého pravopisu* (The Rules of Czech Orthography, hereafter RCO),[6] produced by the Czech Language Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences, generally designated as the relevant language codex. RCO is especially important when children acquire writing skills, during which orthography is exercised intensively. Pupils write regular dictations, a practice which has entered national popular culture through the public television program *Diktát* (Dictation), where popular actor and former teacher Zdeněk Svěrák reads texts, inviting viewers to test their orthography skills.

Neustupný and Nekvapil (2003: 243) characterize Czech society's relationship to orthography as modern (as opposed to post-modern), because little variation is tolerated. They observe that "both in schools and in the community at large the problem of orthography has attracted attention at the expense of other problems", and that "in Czech, the lack of ability to distinguish between *i* and *y*,[7] in particular,

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[3] Here, we emphasize active use of Standard Czech, presuming that children develop passive competence prior to school, from books or the media.

[4] See e.g. Czech Television's "Codex on Language Use" (Česká televize 2003), which prescribes Standard Czech in news broadcasts.

[5] Processes in Common Czech include é-raising (e.g. the neuter adjective, "velké", meaning *big*, becomes "velký"), ý-dipthongization (e.g. the masculine version of the same word, "velký", becomes "velkej"), and v-insertion (e.g. the word "okno", meaning *window* becomes "vokno").

[6] The first version was published in 1902, and was subsequently revised repeatedly, most recently in 1993, when suggested revisions (e.g. tolerance of spelling variation) encountered criticism from the public and the Ministry of Education (for analyses see Bermel 2007; Neustupný and Nekvapil 2003: 249–250). This version has been published in several academic and school editions in the years since (see e.g. Kolektiv pracovníků ÚJČ AV 2005).

[7] See the common spelling deviations in the discussion on deviation types below.

has been looked upon as a sign of intellectual primitivity. In the eyes of the public, spelling has often been seen as logical, and deviations from it as evidence of the lack of ability to think logically (pp. 245–246)".

A recent issue concerning Czech orthography in the age of mobile technologies and computer-mediated communication is diacritics. Czech diacritics include the caron (�‌ˇ), called *háček* in Czech, designating palatalization or post-alveolar pronunciation of consonants, and the acute accent, (´) called *čárka,* and ring (˚) called *kroužek*, designating vowel length. Because using diacritics requires a Czech keyboard, which many devices do not enable by default, informal texts (e-mails, text messages) commonly lack them.

These issues notwithstanding, the Czech language situation does not stand out in terms of *policy*.[8] It would thus not be fruitful to describe it using traditional theories of LPP. However, given the importance assigned to Standard Czech by the norm authorities discussed above, we presume that active efforts are made to maintain it, for example in schools or in the media. We also presume that this maintenance consists of day-to-day activity on the micro level, and is not always necessarily top-down. To capture this, we use Language Management Theory (hereafter LMT, see Neustupný and Nekvapil 2003; Nekvapil and Sherman 2009).

LMT was developed based on theories of LPP as well as language cultivation, but is a general sociolinguistic framework aimed at analyzing metalinguistic behavior, demonstrating connections between the sociocultural, communicative, and linguistic spheres. Emphasis is placed on behavior analyzable through these phases: (1) the *noting* of a deviation from an expectation (which may be an established language norm), (2) the *evaluation* of this deviation, (3) the *design of an adjustment* to the deviation, and (4) the *implementation* of the adjustment design. While all phases occur in some situations, often they do not. We consider GN Facebook humor a typical such example: users note and evaluate deviations, but rarely design adjustments, and adjustments may not be implemented.

In LMT terms, *simple management* occurs in individual interactions like those above, and *organized management* is performed by larger bodies, such as official norm authorities. From a sociolinguistic perspective, Facebook is appropriate for studying simple management because of the prevalence of evaluative practices therein[9]—the mutual evaluation of user-posted content. It also enables users to upload (typically mobile phone) photographs or screen captures of texts containing errors and share them with others, either on "walls" or in community pages or groups. Facebook is also a site of organized management, allowing users to self-organize—to form, join, and be active in communities oriented toward any language management phase. Organized management practiced by Facebook itself includes crowdsourcing translations of interface text, making its service available in multiple languages (O'Hagan 2009). Since the establishment of Czech Facebook in 2008 (Týden.cz 2008), its translation and localization have been maintained by a team of

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[8] Czech is not the subject of an all-encompassing language law. Rather, its status is determined for individual communicative domains through a collection of individual provisions based on actual needs (Dovalil 2013).

[9] This phenomenon in the new media has been described through the lens of stance-taking by Myers (2010).

volunteers, who also act as "language managers" (Facebook's terminology) by commenting on translations. While Facebook does not usually initiate language management of individual users or posts, other users often do so.

Although Facebook has not yet been studied using LMT, several studies have analyzed metalinguistic behavior in new media, including Facebook (see e.g. Lenihan 2014; Wagner 2011; or Androutsopoulos 2013, who mentions the concept of "metalinguistic critique" online). Our study investigates Facebook pages created to support practices of noting and evaluating unintentional deviations from Standard Czech, and whose users engage in such practices using the moniker "Grammar Nazis". We understand these users' activities as a specific type of language management which has been called "language policing" (see Blommaert 2013), which we define in LMT terms as *negative evaluation of noted deviations from language norms from a position of power, and the design and potential implementation of adjustments in the form of sanctions,* carried out in a humorous manner. In this context, we will show that the shared, negotiated and ideologically influenced idea of correct Standard Czech determines what users note as deviations and how they evaluate them.

Grammar Nazis in the landscape of online humor

The history of the term "Grammar Nazi" has not been thoroughly documented. One of the earliest recorded uses of the term in Google Groups archives occurred in 1995 in the academic discussion group *alt.gothic*. The author of the initial post, titled "Grammar Nazi on the Rampage!", noted the use of the word "thusly", which he considered wrongly derived, and therefore non-existent in English: "There is no such word as 'thusly'." (Savlov 1995) The reactions to his post suggest that the term "Grammar Nazi" was already familiar to forum members. Simultaneously, the word "Nazi" was being employed in humorous discourses to describe a person holding strong opinions and strictly requiring people to follow certain rules. A famous example of this usage is "The Soup Nazi" episode of the Seinfeld comedy series, also aired in 1995 (Ackerman 1995). Although "Nazi" is often used as a derogatory term (a mockery of "Nazi" behavior), it has also been ironically appropriated by online communities who willingly identify as Grammar Nazis.

Over the eighteen years since the *alt.gothic* case, the notion of the Grammar Nazi has become an acknowledged part of Internet culture in the English-speaking world. The database "Know Your Meme" considers it an Internet "meme" (Know Your Meme 2012)—a widespread piece of (often humorous) content or a practice that people circulate throughout the network (see Shifman 2012). Although the term has been somewhat divorced of its original Third Reich connotations, our analysis will show that some organized Grammar Nazi groups reinstate this connection by alluding to Nazi imagery.

As Danet demonstrated in 2001, humor is a major mode of online communication and a pervasive element of all types of online content (Danet 2001). According to Shifman and Blondheim, "the networked computer has become a dominant player in the production and distribution of humor", but in terms of research, online humor

is still "uncharted territory" (Shifman and Blondheim 2010: 1349). Shifman's own pioneering work on humor in new media (Shifman and Blondheim 2010; Shifman et al. 2007; Shifman 2012) builds on the tradition of humor scholarship. Humor scholars have been investigating reasons why people laugh for hundreds of years, the outcome being that "no single theory can hope to explain the complexity of humour" (Billig 2005: 175). The discussion has, however, converged around three major theories: *incongruity theory,* which claims that people laugh at what is surprising or unexpected (Koestler 1989; Morreall 2009); *relief theory*, according to which people laugh to relieve psychological tension (Freud 1963); and *superiority theory*, which asserts that we laugh when we feel superior to someone (Bergson 2008; Billig 2005). These theories tend to be seen as complementary rather than exclusive explanations of humor (Morreall 2009; Mulkay 1988).

Numerous deviations receive attention because they trigger comically ambiguous interpretations or strike users as *incongruous*. But as users associated with Grammar Nazi pages tend to speak from the position of experts, this article draws mainly from the superiority approach. Humor related to superiority and ridicule abounds online; according to Shifman, "some people enjoy not only watching videos of others whom they perceive to be inferior, but also take pleasure in scornfully imitating them, thus publicly demonstrating their own superiority." (Shifman 2012: 197) This also holds for the Czech context.

In his synthesis of superiority theory, Billig claims that the function of superiority humor is directly connected to social norms. In his view, "humour has a vital, disciplinary role in the maintenance of social life" (Billig 2005: 237). Although humor can be sometimes viewed as rebellious, in the end it "fulfills conservative functions" (Billig 2005: 241), as the disciplinary force of ridicule and mockery helps uphold social norms. We can therefore understand the management practices done in the name of "Grammar Nazis" as ridicule of people not conforming to linguistic norms. Although this kind of policing implies no direct penalties, it nonetheless confirms the distinction between what is perceived as "right" and "wrong" usage.

Ridicule tends to reinforce the position of those who possess certain skills or knowledge against those who do not. By doing so, it reflects the inequalities in the distribution of *cultural capital* in a society (Bourdieu 2002), which are also reflected in the online environment (Zillien and Hargittai 2009). Although users may behave differently online and offline, their "levels of education, access to media and technology, political affiliation or lack thereof—influence their online choices" (Phillips 2012). Ridicule of "improper" language use through policing, connected to the idea of Grammar Nazis, is enabled by these distinctions.

The existence of Czech GN groups confirms that the term is not exclusive to English-speaking cultures. Also, though we examine groups explicitly labeling themselves as Grammar Nazis, there are other Facebook groups, including Czech ones, engaging in similar kinds of activities but not embracing the term.[10]

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[10] These include groups like *Bůh nadělil češtině pravidla, abychom poznali kreténa na první pohled :-)))* ("God gave Czech rules so that we can recognize an idiot at first sight" or *Jazykové lamy* ("Language llamas").

Data and methodology

A preliminary search determined that the most prevalent management activity on Czech Facebook pages was humorous policing. Therefore, we targeted our further search toward pages which matched the following criteria:

1. The page language was Czech.
2. Management of Czech was a central theme.
3. Humor was featured in the management. We determined that a page used humor if individual posts contained hyperbole and irony, as well as written evaluation of featured material as humorous, primarily through the use of emoticons, written symbols of laughter or declarations of the achieved humorous effect.

The "Grammar Nazi" concept, represented by two Facebook pages, both claiming to be local representatives of international Grammar Nazi organizations, subsequently emerged as the analytical focus, for the following reasons:

1. "Grammar Nazism" is a concept adapted from outside the Czech context. It serves to identify people engaging in language management online and thus lends itself to potential comparative analysis of Facebook pages with similar practices in other languages.
2. It is a concept that is a part of "new" online popular culture and, sociolinguistically, it is interesting to untangle its interactions with Czech orthographic conservatism.
3. Facebook users organizing under the title "Grammar Nazis" provide a parodic image of social structures perceived as relevant actors in organized language management, including their local (Czech) aspects.
   The two pages are:
   Grammar Nazis—česká verze ("Grammar Nazis—Czech version", hereafter GNCV)
   A Facebook page with over 2,600 likes,[11] focusing mainly on noting deviations in public communication, such as the media, public spaces, shops and restaurants. It also links to news articles about language use and posts language quizzes. Although its "about" section claims it is the "Czech version of the Grammar nazi organization", the page does not directly develop the idea of "Nazism". It was listed among "top ten funniest Czech Facebook pages" by the website TyInternety.cz.
   Grammar Nazis Česká republika/Grammar Nazis—division Czech Republic[12] (hereafter GNCR)
   A less popular page with about 500 likes, whose administrators claim to "prefer quality over quantity". Its "about" statement includes the following: "The goal of the Czech division of the worldwide Grammar Nazi movement is the fight against the abuse of Czech language on our Internet. Every true Grammar Nazi calls attention to any grammatical error or stylistic defect he or she sees on the Czech Internet". Unlike GNCV, the administrators of this page actively elaborate on Nazi

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[11] Page likes as of October 23, 2013.

[12] Page title includes translation.

metaphors and humorously debate the movement's goals. The page's community also takes interest in international Internet memes and shares posts in English.

These pages were monitored for thirty days (July–August 2013) during which (1) all written page content on day 1 (including the publicly archived timeline) was copied into a separate file; and (2) all page activity and changes were recorded daily. The corpus of data from the two pages comprised 550 initial posts and all subsequent comments, including activity taking place during the monitoring period and the pages' archives (timeline).[13] We have translated all examples into English, with efforts made to preserve the deviations. Individual user names have been anonymized.

The data was analyzed in connection with the central emerging theme, *noting and evaluation of deviations from Standard Czech, conducted in a humorous manner*. With regard to the theoretical issues introduced earlier, we explored the following questions:

(a) What types of contributions are found on the pages?
(b) Which phenomena served as the object of management?
(c) What (which actors, settings, genres) were the contexts of the noted deviations?
(d) How were these phenomena managed through the use of humor?
(e) How are the actors in the (particularly organized) management depicted?
(f) How is the "Nazi" metaphor utilized in these processes?

To answer questions (a), (b) and (c), we performed a qualitative analysis of the management processes in the material, which helped us arrive at categories used to describe the respective facets of the pages. Then we performed rudimentary quantitative probes to provide a basic mapping of the management activities. A more detailed qualitative analysis followed, interpreting salient examples in terms of LMT and other concepts introduced above. To answer questions (d), (e) and (f), we compared the strategies employed to achieve humorous effect with the inventory of *humor techniques* introduced by Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004).

Types of posts

To map types of page activities, we classified individual posts, both "posts by page" and "posts by others", based on their purpose, resulting in the following categories:

1. Noting and/or evaluation of deviations from expectations
2. "Housekeeping"—posts regarding page organization: information about members or changes in administrator(s)
3. Meta-commentary—posts regarding identity or interpretations of the page's main theme
4. Quizzes and links to articles, pictures and other media deemed interesting for users
5. Off-topic posts—posts unidentifiable with the above categories (Table 1)

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[13] There is overlap between groups—we observed (and it was openly declared) that some users are practicing Grammar Nazis also performing management on other pages.

Table 1 Post types

	Deviations	Housekeeping	Meta-commentary	Quizzes & links	Off-topic	Total
GNCR—page	25 (28 %)	9 (10 %)	34 (38 %)	18 (20 %)	4 (4 %)	90
GNCR—others	29 (62 %)	1 (2 %)	15 (32 %)	2 (4 %)	0	47
GNCV—page	89 (86 %)	6 (6 %)	1 (1 %)	7 (7 %)	0	103
GNCV—others	291 (94 %)	1 (>1 %)	8 (3 %)	10 (3 %)	0	310

Number of posts per type on each page, posts by administrators and posts by others are separate, followed by percentage of total number of posts on given page/by given users

Based on this count, we observe that language management occurs on both pages, though there is a difference between pages concerning its predominant form. And as expected, the activities conducted by administrators and by other users diverged. We can roughly understand noting and possibly evaluation of a deviation in the context of an initial post as simple language management, constituting the majority of posts on the GNCV page. It is also the main activity of the GNCR "others". The GNCR administrators mostly post meta-commentary regarding the Grammar Nazi identity and offer language-related quizzes and links. We understand these activities as organized language management. Such behavior typically involves more than one user, and provides the necessary ideological basis for further simple management.

What is being managed

Prior to analyzing the pages' content, we must distinguish between two types of online Grammar Nazi performance. In the oldest examples of the use of this term, persons identified as Grammar Nazis performed management by directly entering a communication situation (especially on discussion forums), pointing out deviations and/or proposing adjustments on the spot, thus exposing themselves to angry comments by other users. Grammar Nazi Facebook pages, on the other hand, offer their users a safe space to share deviations discovered elsewhere. Because these pages are constructed as spaces reserved for humor and entertainment, critique of "bad grammar" is more acceptable here.

We found isolated examples of users or administrators documenting their own actions, providing proof of management done on the spot. GNCR administrators, for example, "invaded" the public profile of Czech pop-star Iveta Bartošová to correct her orthography, providing a screenshot as evidence. Utilizing the humor technique of *exaggeration*, they commented on one of her status updates:

> Grammar Nazis never sleep and are willing to strike at any time of the night to defend people from appalling grammatical errors. Dear Miss or Mrs. Iveta! If you wish to present yourself publicly using Facebook, don't take Czech orthography hostage!
> (GNCR, December 2, 2011)

They then corrected her spelling of the personal pronoun "mně" (see the discussion of orthographic deviations below). The overwhelming majority of posts, however, involve *only* noting and evaluating deviations found elsewhere.

The qualitative analysis of these posts reveals that they tend to manage specific deviations rather than generalized ones. In noting deviations, *proof of the deviation's occurrence is expected*, typically constituting a link to the text where the deviation was found or a photograph of it.

The question arising first and foremost is what is meant by "grammar" on the pages. Posted deviations can be divided into further categories. On the one hand, we find noted deviations from norms presumed by users to be codified—in dictionaries, grammars, or orthographic guides, and on the other hand, we find noted deviations from norms which are not officially codified, but for which the page members presume a consensus among educated Czech language users. We will now address individual deviation categories in more detail.

Orthographic deviations: spelling

Spelling is the predominant topic both in the RCO and on GN pages.[14] Czech spelling is largely phonemic, i.e. individual graphemes correspond to individual phonemes. Spelling problems occur when a phoneme has multiple allographs—for example, *i* and *y* and their long counterparts *í* and *ý* are allographs of the phonemes /I/ and /i:/, respectively. Also, multiple phonemes may be written as one grapheme or two, e.g. /mɲɛ/, the pronoun "me", is written as "mě" or "mně" depending on grammatical case.

> **User:** mě versus mně, that's an evergreen…
> (Link to youtube video with the pronoun "me" in its title)
> (GNCV, December 16, 2012)

Orthographic deviations: punctuation

Deviations in this category involved punctuation marks (commas, periods) as well as other typographic issues—quotation marks, spaces, indentations, or writing numbers (numerals vs. words). These deviations were typically noted in printed texts, mainly those issued by institutions.

Morphosyntactic deviations

These deviations, though not prototypically orthographic, are also addressed in orthography manuals—case endings,[15] noun–verb and noun-adjective agreement, verbal valency, and word order. Many examples concern Czech inflection, and the noted deviations are dominated by incorrect noun–verb agreement.

> **GNCV moderator:** Forming such a beautiful sentence after the weekend is an art form!

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[14] RCO understand orthography as spelling, capitalization and punctuation. We have, however, separated punctuation from spelling, which seems to be common practice among users of GN pages. We categorized the few capitalization errors found as orthography-spelling.

[15] Czech has seven cases for nouns and adjectives.

[A meme image of a woman with her head on a desk and the caption "Po víkendu jsou nejhorší prvních pět dní" (The first five days after the weekend are the worst), with the lack of agreement between the verb "jsou" (plural) and the noun phrase "prvních pět dní" (in Czech, numbers greater than four are followed by singular verb forms.)]
(GNCV, July 30, 2012)

Typos or copy/paste errors

These are deviations presumed by GN users to be the result of carelessness in text production, including missing or superfluous letters (or words) and the replacement of one letter by another, particularly if an adjacent key is typed by mistake. This may change a word's meaning, resulting in instances of incongruity humor, for example when a GNCV user notes "napsal" (he wrote) written as "naspal" (he slept) (GNCV—January 7, 2013).

Deviations in linguistic code choice

Some deviations relate less to codified norms than to users' expectations regarding usage in given situations (to which we refer here as "code choice"). There were very few of these, including stylistic deviations (mostly word choice) or deviations connected to language varieties (particularly Common Czech). Deviations related to the use of loanwords (primarily English ones) and code-mixing also fall into this category.

> **GNCV:** This isn't entirely in Czech (or in any other language), but the attempt to look international definitely is Czech.
> [A photograph of a doughnut in a shop with the label "čoko doughnut", the prefix "čoko" meaning "chocolate", thus representing a blend of two languages]
> (GNCV, July 17, 2012)

Codified norms and users' expectations were not always identical—some presumed deviations do not actually breach codified norms. Several discussions further negotiated the question "what counts as a grammar mistake?", and ultimately, reinforced the overwhelmingly orthographic orientation of the administrators, particularly on GNCR. Users debated whether the following examples count as noteworthy deviations:

(a)   Use of non-standard varieties, deemed acceptable by GNCR administrators when conforming to orthographic norms. Though written reproduction of these varieties is not officially codified, the highly transparent character of Czech orthography fosters a shared understanding of their norms.

> **GNCR**: Frankly, colleague, it doesn't matter to us if something is written in standard or in non-standard. The only thing that matters is that it is written using correct orthography. A non-standard sentence can be entirely correct in terms of orthography and grammar.
> (GNCR, June 8, 2013)

Table 2 Deviation types

	Orth/spell	Orth/punct	Typo/Copy	Morphosyn.	Code	Other/N/A	Total
GNCR—page	17 (85 %)	3 (15 %)	0	0	0	70	90
GNCR—others	15 (71 %)	1 (5 %)	3 (14 %)	2 (10 %)	0	26	47
GNCV—page	60 (68 %)	6 (7 %)	7 (8 %)	11 (12 %)	4 (5 %)	15	103
GNCV—others	194 (72 %)	9 (3.5 %)	12 (4.5 %)	40 (15 %)	14 (5 %)	41	310

Number of posts for each deviation type on each page, posts by administrators and posts by others are separate, followed by percentage of the total number of posts on given page/by given users, without the category other/N/A. The category other/N/A designates posts not containing deviations. Some posts were eliminated due to inaccessible links

(b) Lack of diacritics, deemed acceptable by the GNCR administrators when done consciously.

> **GNCR:**… we can write what we want in a specific language system, in the framework of the given language… for example we can write in the system of spoken Czech, and in the same way it isn't a grammatical or orthographic mistake to write without diacritics (if we are aware that we are doing it). (GNCR, December 25, 2011)

(c) Isolated typos, viewed as unintentional deviations, i.e. not caused by ignorance of the rules.

> **User:** I try to write grammatically correctly and hopefully I'm successful. It bothers me to see truly rough mistakes like i/y and other atrocities. Of course, typos happen to everyone occasionally. (GNCR, September 3, 2012)

In sum, "grammar" as the object of management on both Grammar Nazi pages is typically equated with language in general—both structure and use. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the deviation types noted on the two GN pages.

Based on this sample, we can argue that for GN users, the orthographic representation of Standard Czech is the prototype of "grammar". This is further confirmed by occasional posts on both pages singling out frequent deviations.

> **User:** I propose writing up a list of the worst violations that an excessive number of people commit… I'm adding my "favorites" which are guaranteed to get a rise out of me: […]
> - *ozvy se mi*[16]
> - *měl/mně/mne*
> **GNCV:** Haaaa, I'd be writing for a long time! Nevertheless—my favorite is probably when people confuse *bys* and *by jsi.*.[17]
> (GNCV, June 22, 2012)

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[16] A reference to the incorrect use of the allograph *y* instead of *i*. The correct version is *"ozvi se mi"*, meaning "contact me".

[17] Both expressions mean "you would". While the first (contracted) form is correct in Standard Czech, the second is not, although it seems more systematic morphologically.

Table 3 Deviation contexts (where the deviations were found)

	GNCR—page	GNCR—others	GNCV—page	GNCV—others
Facebook	9 (34.6 %)	4 (13.8 %)	6 (6.7 %)	42 (14.5 %)
Other internet	9 (34.6 %)	9 (30.6 %)	13 (14.6 %)	31 (10.7 %)
News media	2 (7.7 %)	8 (27.6 %)	13 (14.6 %)	62 (21.4 %)
Ads/labels	1 (3.8 %)	3 (10.3 %)	29 (32.6 %)	71 (24.5 %)
Restaurants	0	0	17 (19.1 %)	36 (12.4 %)
School	0	0	0	5 (1.7 %)
Public docs	1 (3.8 %)	2 (6.9 %)	7 (7.9 %)	29 (10 %)
General	2 (7.7 %)	2 (6.9 %)	0	8 (2.8 %)
Other	2 (7.7 %)	1 (3.4 %)	4 (4.5 %)	6 (2.1 %)
N/A	64	18	14	20
Total	90	47	103	310

Percentages are computed only from the overall total minus posts in the category N/A

In a survey launched by GNCR administrators on December 5, 2011, users were offered a choice of five options in response to "Which impurities are you most allergic to?". Four options were orthographic and/or related to punctuation (*mě/mně*, *y/i*, *s/z* and comma use), the fifth allowed users to name additional deviations. The majority of users (69) chose *y/i*.

Deviation contexts as targets of ridicule

Deviations posted on both GN pages typically contain information about the deviation's context and the individual committing it. By examining these more closely, we can further specify how acts of Grammar Nazism are legitimized (Table 3).

An initial glance at these numbers suggests that there are differing foci on each page, with GNCR focusing more on the "Czech Internet" and GNCV more on offline deviations. In both cases, the range of contexts was broader for deviations noted by "others" than by administrators. The relevance of deviation contexts is further revealed through the qualitative analysis. Many noted deviations were committed by those who, to paraphrase, "should be able to write correctly". These include professional language users, most often journalists.[18] As a GNCV contributor puts it: "From professionals, I expect flawless Czech. Is that too much to ask?" (GNCV, June 12, 2013)

Related sources include texts from official institutions and other publicly exhibited documents, restaurants and shops, advertisements and product labels. The assumption is that their authors are native speakers who attended Czech schools. A GNCV commenter notes: "Everybody has gone through compulsory elementary

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[18] There is a hierarchy among these contexts—a deviation in print journalism is deemed more serious than an online one, which can be edited.

school education… but not everybody has learned something there…" (GNCV, March 23, 2012) Occasional deviations found in school texts (by pupils *and* teachers) are also noted.

Another category is public online texts from non-institutionalized settings. While GNCV contains several of these, this category dominates the deviations posted on GNCR. Many of the users committing deviations online are interpreted as lacking education or cultural capital—for example, fans of the Czech comedy film Babovřesky, widely understood as lowbrow, are constructed as uneducated by the GN page users. Online discussions are also referenced, but are considered too easy a target. At one point, the GNCV administrator posts a screenshot from a discussion forum, but accompanies it with a disclaimer: "I don't post excerpts from discussions too much, otherwise I'd do nothing else; but I had to put this one here." (GNCV, October 18, 2012) The author of the excerpt mistakes the expression "v čele" (at the helm) for "včele" (a form of the substantive "bee"), making the deviation humorous because of the resulting incongruity.

As is evident from the examples above, ridicule of language use can be highly political, often pitting relatively more educated, "superior" members of the grammar "police" against "culprits", implied to be less cultured and educated. On some occasions, culprits may be foreigners, ethnic minorities, or the disabled. The question then arises of what kind of ridicule (and against whom) is acceptable. The pages have no explicit policies concerning the range of appropriate targets. On GNCV, the acceptability borderline is continuously negotiated. On the one hand, a user defending a non-native speaker comments: "To nag at foreigners because of Czech grammar is stupid." (GNCV, January 4, 2013). On the other hand, GNCV features deviations made by shop or restaurant owners who are likely Vietnamese immigrants. One user refers to them using a racial slur (*větve*[19]); another utilizes a stereotype of Southeast Asian cuisine—in response to a restaurant menu misspelling the expression "three kinds of meat", he or she writes: "rat, dog, and cat" (GNCV, December 21, 2012). However, another user defends the restaurant owner, posting: "These people I would forgive. It's worse when people can't write in their own language." (GNCV, January 13, 2012). On another occasion, a user posted a critical opinion about GNCV's ridiculing "poor" language use. The administrator then explains that the page merely notes errors committed by "healthy people":

> **User:** DISLIKE a page that makes fun of physical disabilities of others that's like laughing at a cripple because he cannot walk you think people who have 20 kinds of dis-something and cannot type with ten fingers are rabble?
> **GNCV:** I am absolutely not laughing at people who suffer from dysorthography. The page originated as a Czech version of a large organization that brings together people who value their mother tongue. It notes the errors which people (healthy people) can make in simple texts or signs; which is sad rather than funny, but sometimes a funny miscreation can be found. […]
> (GNCV, July 30, 2012)

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[19] The word *větve*, meaning "branches" or "twigs" in Czech, used to refer to the Vietnamese (*Vietnamci*) based on phonetic similarity of the words. Interestingly, there are also Facebook pages created to parody Vietnamese Czech.

Here, the administrator stresses positive values associated with Grammar Nazis, namely their dedication to their mother tongue, while downplaying the superiority nature of the humor herein. However, later, when introducing a language quiz, the administrator writes: "So that we don't just laugh at other people, here is the first GN quiz!" (GNCV, July 26, 2012)—admitting that laughing at other people *is* a major portion of the page's content. This inconsistency highlights the power relations underlying ridicule of language use.

Humor techniques and the Grammar Nazi identity

In this section, we will examine humor techniques employed by users when commenting on deviations, before moving on to the administrators' more concentrated efforts to establish their identity as Grammar Nazis. Users of both pages exhibit deviations they have encountered and bring them to the attention of the community. But they tend not to stop at reading and attributing "likes" to individual posts. They share them for the purposes of collective dissection, laughs and ridicule, developing sequences of humorous responses to the deviations. Often, they also engage in language play prompted by the perceived errors (see Danet 2001).

To classify humorous comments, we use the typology introduced by Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004). Based on inductive analysis of audiovisual content, they established an inventory of 41 *humor techniques*. Of these, most typical for GN pages are *exaggeration, irony, absurdity* and *impersonation* (often combined with repetition). While *absurdity* falls into the category of *incongruity* humor, *exaggeration* and *impersonation* contain a strong element of *superiority* (ibid.). Users tend to deploy these techniques in the following patterns:

1. They share *exaggerated* or *ironic reactions* to the deviations. They call them "crimes" or "monstrosities", they claim that the errors hurt their eyes, pretend to scream in pain and experience metaphorical "heart attacks".[20] One commenter exclaims: "I think my Czech teacher has just died," referring to an orthography norm authority. (GNCV, June 30, 2013) The hyperbole can be rather extreme, as in the case of one user complaining: "How is it possible that nature has not yet killed the author of such monstrosities?" (GNCV, May 4, 2013) Less often, users and administrators ironically "appreciate" the errors, like the example of the "beautiful sentence" mentioned above.
2. They play with *absurdity* and double meanings. When a noted deviation involves a meaning change resulting in incongruity, it invites users to develop the initial incongruous effect through wordplay. For instance, when the word "objednat" (to schedule an appointment) is misspelt as "obědnat", it looks like the word "obědvat" (to have lunch). When this error occurs on a note in a doctor's office concerning patient appointments (shared on the GNCV page), a commenter adds that this is "obviously for patients who are not fasting". (GNCV, August 7, 2013)

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[20] These reactions to non-standard language use, invoking images of violence and pain, are similar to those in Squires (2010).

3. They employ *ridicule by mimicking*. Commenters tend to repeat similar deviations in their own comments, highlighting the original deviation and ridiculing its presumed source. This also enables them to use "incorrect" language without risk of sanctions.

Despite employing similar humor techniques in comments on individual deviations, the two pages differ in their approach to the concept of Grammar Nazism. GNCV understands it loosely, as noting and evaluating deviations from users' expectations regarding Standard Czech. GNCR, on the other hand, adheres to a humorously exaggerated, "hardline" dedication to the Grammar Nazism cause, building an image of a strict and unforgiving language police, patrolling the "Czech Internet".

GNCV users and the administrator tend to post deviations from everyday life, unlike GNCR, who concentrate on the online environment. GNCV's Grammar Nazism is also rather democratized—anyone and everyone can be a Grammar Nazi, including those who themselves breach the rules of Czech orthography. The GNCV administrator is repeatedly confronted for committing deviations herself, but never penalized. Overall, the "Nazism" of GNCV is not absolute and the Nazism metaphor is not used for humorous purposes.

GNCR sympathizers, on the other hand, seem to yearn for a "totalitarian" rule by Czech norm authorities. Those referenced in various GNCR posts include the Czech Language Institute, the Czech Grammar (Mluvnice češtiny), and Josef Dobrovský, a Czech National Revival figure. These authorities are associated with symbols of the Nazi regime, including the act of "heiling", the "final solution", Night of the Long Knives, Kristallnacht, concentration camps and Auschwitz. As an administrator puts it:

> **GNCR:** Looking around the Internet, I believe that we are in dire need of grammar concentration camps. Forced orthography tests are the only solution to our current situation. Grammar macht frei!
> (GNCR, June 13, 2012)

New terms such as Grammatikeinsatzkommando, gramatikomando or Grammar SS are introduced, and their inventors are praised by administrators. Those committing deviations are referred to as "Grammar Jews" who, it is suggested, should wear a specially-designed star. In a humorous manner, GNCR extends the Nazism metaphor and utilizes Nazi imagery. Its transgressive nature is similar to other examples of Internet humor, like those found on forums like *4chan* (Phillips 2012).

Users contribute to this discourse by calling themselves agents and engage in vigilante justice. This is exemplified by the strike against singer Iveta Bartošová's fan page (see above), done on the order of the administrator(s), becoming an instance of organized management:

> **GNCR:** Mr. [Name], I hereby appoint you the main ambassador of the Czech division of Grammar Nazis for the Iveta Bartošová fan page. I expect you to use any method available to purge her profile of grammatical evil!
> **User:** It shall be done, mein Führer. Heil Dobrovský!
> (GNCR, December 5, 2011)

GNCR seem to be as strict to their members as to those committing deviations. In 2013, for example, agents were dismissed (having to "turn in their uniforms") due to grammatical violations, and potential administrators were rejected for the same reason. Although this strictness may be a pretense for the sake of humor, it may alienate users not in on the joke.

Unlike GNCV, GNCR builds the identity of a Grammar Nazi around obligations. This identity is, however, constructed playfully. The humorous effect is achieved through *parody* of Nazi discourse and *exaggeration* of management activities. By likening language norm authorities to Nazi authorities, GNCR administrators and sympathizers poke fun at organized language management itself.

Concluding remarks

As we have shown, Czech Grammar Nazis are one example of Facebook groups oriented toward the "unregulated orthographic space" of the Internet (Sebba 2012), and other spaces as well. We have analyzed management of standard written Czech through Facebook humor. Our analysis suggests that the tendency to utilize Facebook in this way may be connected to aspects of its affordances and conventions, which include, but are not limited to:

1. The possibility of creating Facebook pages based around a motto which may be freely formulated and negotiated. The concept of the "Grammar Nazi" is open to any Facebook user wishing to appropriate it, which users do in varying ways.
2. The opportunity for self-appointment to the role of language manager. Though this is also possible offline, the anonymous and ephemeral nature of online environments enables users, including administrators, to act as language "experts" without actually being them.
3. The frequency of identifiable deviations on the Internet, particularly on Facebook itself. Many noted and/or evaluated deviations come directly from these sources.
4. Social network sites' affordance of easy reproduction and sharing of deviations. Their potential to generate humorous interpretations and comments make such deviations an example of spreadable media, circulated by users of social network sites (Jenkins et al. 2013). The ease of posting mobile phone photographs contributes to the frequency of deviations found in public spaces.
5. The fact that social networks like Facebook facilitate evaluation and expressions of stance through comments and "likes".

Our analysis also provides findings related to language policy and management:

1. These pages *promote standard written Czech* and depict deviations from it negatively, which is evident both from the "about" sections and in actual noted and evaluated deviations. Our searches yielded almost no pages devoted to the *subversion* of standard written Czech.
2. The construction of GN page activities as humorous and entertaining legitimizes forms of language management which would otherwise be

considered impolite. These include excessive correcting, linguistic nitpicking, and scolding or ridiculing. But this non-seriousness cannot hide clear cases of language management propelled by standard language ideology.

3. The management is guided by *the perceived standard*. Administrators and users demonstrate knowledge of codified norms (especially the *Rules of Czech Orthography*), yet their knowledge does not appear to be extensive and they themselves commit deviations.

4. There is a general orientation toward deviations from standard written Czech most associated with lack of education. These are the orthographic deviations for which Czech pupils are (in the users' experience) most typically sanctioned. Therefore, knowledge of codified norms is a form of cultural capital utilizable on social networks.

5. Previous research on Facebook (Lenihan 2014; Wagner 2011) points to its potential in achieving language policy changes, i.e. management in all phases. We, on the other hand, have used LMT to highlight practices of Facebook users organizing as "Grammar Nazis" as an example of *partial management process cycles* (cf. Kimura 2014). Hypothetical complete cycles would involve the correction of all deviations, and a decrease in deviations in the public space (both online and offline). Users typically do not have the power (or even the desire) to design or implement adjustments, and most deviation contexts remain unregulated orthographic spaces. Humorously-oriented Facebook activity is non-binding—GN page users exhibit their own ability to recognize mistakes and to entertain others. Grammar Nazism thus cannot be considered behavior geared explicitly toward setting *policies*. However, the fact that groups reproduce the ideology of standard written Czech in contexts where it "should be expected" is indeed relevant from the language policy perspective. It points to the Czech language situation as a modern one, in which little variation is tolerated and where efforts are made to uphold the status quo (with its social stratification—correct Standard Czech as a marker of education).

Given the exploratory nature of this article, many questions remain open. Future research should pose the question of who the Facebook language managers actually are, consider their motivations, and examine their behavior-toward-language offline. We also have to keep in mind that these pages exist in a certain socio-historical context. The Czech lands were occupied by the Nazis during the Second World War and Czechs have therefore developed local humorous discourses on Nazism. Although the Czech GN groups consider themselves "branches" of an international movement, people elsewhere likely take other approaches to their language management practices. Other Grammar Nazi groups should thus be explored in relation to different national language cultures. This should reveal the types of deviations various GN Facebook groups note and evaluate, show how acceptable it is to creatively elaborate on the Nazi metaphor, and analyze the locally shared resources utilized to this end.

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