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Grassroots prescriptivism

Until the beginning of this century, with few notable exceptions, prescriptivism has received little serious attention among the academic linguistic community as a factor in language variation and change. The five studies included in this book are embedded in the growing research initiative that is attempting to paint a fine-grained picture of linguistic prescriptivism in the English language. In contrast to institutional prescriptivism, or the so-called prescriptivism from above, which is enforced by bodies such as language planning boards, governmental committees, and agencies, this book focuses on grassroots prescriptivism – the attempts of lay people to promote the standard language ideology.

Grassroots prescriptivism investigates the metalinguistic comments of language users expressed on traditional (letters to newspaper editors and radio phone-ins) and new media platforms (forum and blog discussions). This book demonstrates that, contrary to popular belief, language users are not passive recipients of language rules, but active participants in matters of linguistic prescriptivism. The diachronic exploration of grassroots prescriptivism reveals a complex picture. While in many respects, twenty-first-century prescriptivism represents a continuation of the 250-year-old prescriptive tradition, the author argues that prescriptivism, like language itself, undergoes change over time.

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