Grammatical Variation and Social Evaluation

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Abstract: How do written grammatical & typographical errors affect our initial social judgments? We often form snap judgments based on sparse online "profile" information alone (Stecher & Counts (2008a, 2008b)). In two experiments, we found that individual grammar preference and production of errors were linked to variability in judgments about both email readability and suitability as a housemate. In general, homophonous grammatical errors (e.g. *your/you're*) affected judgment and readability more severely than typographical errors (e.g. *teh*) or hypercorrections (e.g., *invited John and I*).

Introduction:

In Experiments 1 & 2, we measured individual production of grammatical errors, attitudes about grammar, and the impact of grammatical & typographical errors upon participant perception of the authors' character traits and habits.

In Experiment 3, we will measure how noticeable hypercorrections & homophonous grammatical errors are.

Predictions:

- Hypercorrections & typos will influence negative judgments less than homophonous grammatical errors.
- Negative social assessment will correlate to participants' production of non-standard forms.
- Prescriptivists will be more prone to negative evaluation

Design: Experiments 1 & 2

Transcription of Recorded Monologue

Intent: Evaluate participants' tendencies in producing grammatical errors

Participant Bio Questionnaire

Intent: Elicit participants' exposure to/use of views towards "good" grammar

How important to you is good grammar?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

(not at all) (very important)

Email Evaluation

Experiment 1: Grammatical vs. Typographical Errors

Intent: Investigate the effects of grammatical errors and typos on social judgments/perceptions

- 12 written matched-guise "email" narratives evaluated on a 5-pt Likert scale for a variety of characteristics
- 4 conditions: error-free; homophonous grammatical errors; typos

This email reads well

This student would make a good housemate for me.

1 2 3 4 5

(strongly agree) (strongly disagree)

Experiment 2: Grammatical vs. Hypercorrection Errors

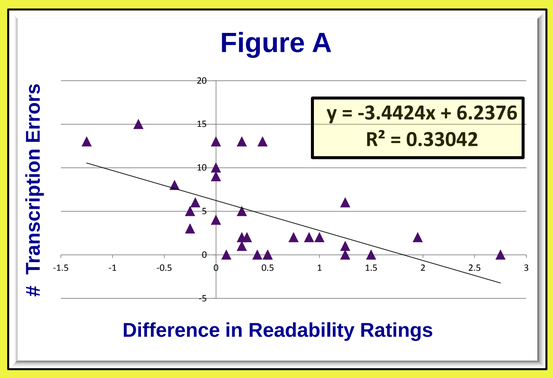
Intent: Investigate the effects of grammatical errors and hypercorrections on social judgments/perceptions

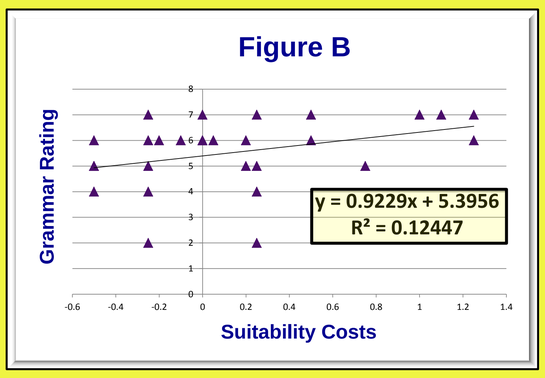
- Identical to Experiment 1, except hypercorrections rather than typographical errors.

Example text: My name is C.J. and its (it's) going to be great to be out of the dorms. I like to practice my guitar, and they're (their) hating the loud music where my bandmates and **myself** (I) live. We've been having lots of disagreements about **whom** (who) actually has the right to decide when it has to be quiet. If you're (your) into music, and would like to jam with my friends and **I** (me), hit me back. Trust me, it's going to be a great year!

Experiment 1

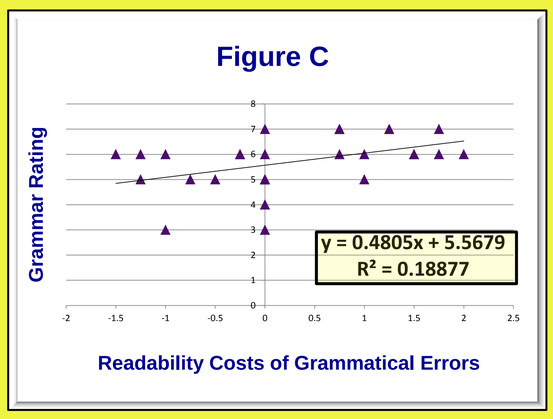
- Both typos & grammar errors decreased readability
- Grammar attitude predicted errors produced (R=-.49)
- Figure A—Error production predicted readability cost of grammar errors (but not suitability cost)
- Figure B: Grammar attitude predicted suitability cost

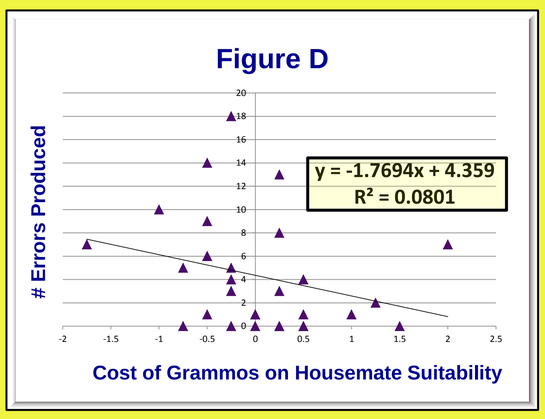




Experiment 2

- Hypercorrections didn't decrease readability
- Figure C: Grammar attitude predicted readability costs of homophonous errors
- Figure D: Error production predicted suitability costs of homophonous errors, but not costs of hypercorrections
- Grammar attitude unrelated to suitability costs





Experiment 3 : Editing Task

Intent: Determine "natural" grammar

- 24 randomized "email" responses to housemate advert
- Half contain typos, homophonous errors, & hypercorrections

Conclusion

- Grammar attitude & production predict homophonous error costs, but vary in weight
- Experiment 3 will clarify whether homophonous errors are more noticeable than hypercorrections

References:

Stecher, K.B. and Counts, S. (2008a). Thin Slices of Online Profile Attributes. *In* Proceedings of the 2nd Int'l AAAI Conference on Weblogs an Social Media (ICWSM, 2008) ICWSM '08. AAAI Press.

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