

# What is a language error? A Discussion

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*Why are we so afraid of making mistakes? Students in language classes, speakers of non-standard varieties, professionals working abroad – we all share the anxiety of dropping the ball. But where does this anxiety come from? Why do we perceive certain linguistic features as errors in the first place? Is there any inherent faultiness in such features, or is a language error arbitrary? And if it is arbitrary, are errors less real? In this discussion<sup>1</sup>, Maria Khachaturyan, Maria Kuteeva and Svetlana Vetchinnikova zoom in on the social life of variation in language and its uneasy relationship with our normative ideas. After that, Gunnar Norrman and Dmitri Leontjev give their comments. The discussion closes with replies by the first three authors.*

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## Kollegium Talk

*Maria Kuteeva (hereafter Maria)*

In this talk, our focus is on the question of language error. Why are we so afraid of making mistakes? And where does this anxiety come from? I will discuss this exciting topic from two perspectives with my colleagues Masha Khachaturyan and Svetlana Vetchinnikova, both Core Fellows at the HCAS. I'd like you to say a few words about yourselves.

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<sup>1</sup> The first part of this paper is based on a discussion between Maria Khachaturyan, Maria Kuteeva (moderator), and Svetlana Vetchinnikova in a series of Kollegium Talks organized by the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies on 9 December 2021. A video recording of the talk is available in the HCAS archive at <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/helsinki-collegium-advanced-studies/videos/kollegium-talks>

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