

Review of **Schimmel-Fijalkowytch, Nadine (2018): *Diskurse zur Normierung und Reform der deutschen Rechtschreibung. Eine Analyse von Diskursen zur Rechtschreibreform unter soziolinguistischer und textlinguistischer Perspektive* (= Studien zur deutschen Sprache; 75). Tübingen: Narr. LINGUIST List 29.4445.**

Dimitrios Meletis

Orthography has the power to polarize. On the one hand, it is a form of prescription negotiated by authoritative stakeholders invested in linguistic policy. It regulates and codifies exactly how the writers in a literate community can use the resources of their writing systems and still move within the realm of standardized norms. On the other hand, these members of literate communities strongly perceive orthography as common property that belongs to everyone who uses it. This ambivalent status invites sociolinguistically charged tensions that reveal themselves most clearly in the face of orthography reforms. Who should be allowed to decide on changes of orthography? How is it changed? It is questions like these that encourage actors from various domains and ranks to engage and intervene in often heated debates that produce a myriad of discourses on orthography. These discourses are the subject of “Diskurse zur Normierung und Reform der deutschen Rechtschreibung – Eine Analyse von Diskursen zur Rechtschreibreform unter soziolinguistischer und textlinguistischer Perspektive” (“Discourses on the standardization and reform of German orthography – An analysis of discourses on the orthography reform from a sociolinguistic and textlinguistic perspective”) by Nadine Schimmel-Fijalkowytch. With its focus on the orthography reforms of German, and its excursions that describe similar situations for French and Portuguese, it characterizes three central types of orthographic discourses: political, media, and technical discourses.

SUMMARY

The book is structured in eleven chapters. Additionally, it includes indexes of used abbreviations and print media, and a list of references. It is written in German. Titles of chapters, sections etc. as well as quotes from the book given in this review were translated by me.

The first part of the book, which comprises roughly the first three chapters, serves as its theoretical footing. Chapter 1 (“Introduction”) gives an overview of what the reader can expect from Schimmel-Fijalkowytch’s study. It establishes the fact that orthography reforms differ from other types of reforms such as tax reforms in that their consequences are not quantitatively tangible – instead, they have a qualitative dimension (p. 15) that warrants a (in essence Foucauldian) discourse-analytical approach. The book puts emphasis on two strains of discourses: on the one hand, those that are characterized by criticisms, accusations, and stereotypes and have contributed to the mistrust of the norms as well as the “constructors” (“Konstrukteure”, p. 16) who are responsible for them. These discourses highlight how, as Horbin (2014: 233) puts it, in “Germany, spelling reform is treated with suspicion and hostility”. On the other hand, there is a focus on discourses that involve institutions invested in language. As Schimmel-Fijalkowytch argues, an analysis of these two broad types of discourses allows drawing conclusions about how German orthography will develop in the future. The first chapter additionally mentions which aspects are going to factor into the analysis: what Schimmel-Fijalkowytch calls “system-linguistic” aspects (= linguistic, structure-oriented research on orthography), ideological aspects, specifically of the actors involved in the discourses, and aspects pertaining to orthographic variation. It is the ideological aspects that clearly feature most prominently in the book.

Chapter 2 (“Fundamentals”) is a mixture between a methodology chapter, a literature review and an anticipatory summary of the chapters that follow. In the methodology portion, the author discusses how discourses can be operationalized. To the previously named method of discourse analysis, she adds “empirical text analysis” (p. 24) and states that her text sample is representative: it stems from discourses from periods prior to and after the reform of German orthography in 1996 as well as the modifications of 2004 and 2006. The goals of the study are also stated most clearly in this chapter, as the author characterizes the study as more or less a comparison of different European nations’ language policy strategies, particularly in dealing with orthography. In this context, the book’s title, which highlights German, is surprising. In a very brief section (of three pages), some of the relevant literature on discourses and specifically on orthographic discourses and the German orthography reform is dealt with.

Chapter 3 (“The language policy background of the orthography reform”) can be regarded the final theoretical chapter, as it describes and defines central concepts and terms, the most important ones being language cultivation (“Sprachpflege”) and language policy (“Sprachpolitik”), with linguistic awareness (“Sprachbewusstsein”) and language criticism (“Sprachkritik”) also being addressed. Even though an actual common thread is missing from this chapter, the former two concepts occur throughout and are identified as basis for at least some of the factors that influence an orthography reform. Their relations with other central concepts such as standardization and their entanglement with politics are carved out. Highlights of the chapter are section 3.5 (“Orthography and language system”), which comes closest to a critical definition of orthography (see my evaluation below) and a figure (p. 48) that illustrates language policy actions with respect to linguistic needs, be they of societal, cultural, or political nature. As implied above, this chapter appears more like a collection of topics which are of relevance to the overall study than a coherent chapter (see below).

Chapters 4 (“Language cultivation and language policy in the German-language area”) and 5 (“Language cultivation and language policy in other language areas”) constitute what I see as the second thematic part of the book which deals predominantly with political orthographic discourses, but frequently mentions the other types of discourses as well. Chapter 4, with over 80 pages, is the longest of the book. First, it covers, in great detail, the historico-political background of the orthography reform in Germany from the 19th century to the present. In a strikingly shorter section (of only six pages), the situation in Austria is addressed. A considerably more extensive treatment (of about 40 pages) is given to language cultivation and language policy in Switzerland. Here, some of the most significant sections compare the Swiss orthography with the (Federal) German orthography of Germany (sections 4.7.4 and 4.7.5), and discuss how the diglossic situation of German-speaking Switzerland is dealt with in political discourses (section 4.7.12). What should be mentioned about this chapter is that the Austrian and Swiss situations are addressed against the backdrop of Germany, which – even though Swiss “idiosyncrasies” are dealt with at length – cements the impression that at the core, this study treats Germany as the default from which other regions deviate.

Chapter 5 is an excursion dedicated to orthography reforms of French and Portuguese. As in the preceding chapters, the reasons for orthography reforms (and goals of these reforms), the changes introduced, the stakeholders and their actions etc. are described and discussed. Missing translations for French and Portuguese quotes, which are abundant, make reading the chapter a lot harder for anyone not fluent in these languages.

The third part of the book is concerned with technical discourses and comprises Chapters 6 (“Technical discourses”) and 7 (“In-house orthographies”). As a brief but interesting chapter, Chapter 6 details how linguists, educationalists etc. involved (or not involved) in the Council for German Orthography and its work groups shaped technical discourses. Their work, Schimmel-Fijalkowyttsch claims, has led to a “high degree of scientific analysis and reflection” (p. 237). These technical dis-

courses take into account not only linguistic considerations, but also didactic and ideological aspects. Compared to the political and media discourses, they were not dominant in the public's awareness. However, the author believes them to be the "substrate for all further developments of German language" (p. 238).

Chapter 7 deals with in-house orthographies, i.e. orthographies that are only valid in given institutions and deviate (systematically) from the official orthography. The chapter's focus is, once again, clearly Switzerland and the in-house orthographies of some of its press organs. Schimmel-Fijalkowytsh argues that in-house orthographies make visible internal technical discourses and that they assume a role model function for the public. Differences between the various in-house orthographies are demonstrated by example of loan word spellings. Interestingly, and quite tellingly in the light of the overall conclusions that this study draws, Schimmel-Fijalkowytsh mentions how the FAZ (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung), a German newspaper, frequently reported on differences between its in-house rules and the rules of the official orthography, and that it did so only to obscure that it had, in fact, adopted the reformed official orthography.

As the final type of discourses, media discourses are addressed in Chapters 8 ("Media discourses in the German-language area") and 9 ("Media discourses in the international press"), the fourth part of this book. Chapter 8 is overall second in length (with about 55 pages). It details how the reform was perceived by the media as an "attack on the German language as a static element" (p. 273). Media discourses did not focus on didactic reasons for changing orthographic norms, or the reasons inherent in the structure of the traditional orthography, but continually critically assessed the added value of a reform. This, Schimmel-Fijalkowytsh claims, is also a reflection of the fact that the media was strongly personally affected by the reform, and dissatisfied with the new regulations. On the other hand, although they can be (and tended to be) one-sided and pejorative with regard to the orthography reform, it is a strength of media discourses that they can potentially act as multipliers of acceptance: if the media accepts (parts of) the reform, the public is assumed to follow. The chapter describes how the media debated the consequences of the reform and addresses the catchphrase "orthographic peace" ("Rechtschreibfrieden"). The biggest part of it is focused on Switzerland (p. 284-352).

Chapter 9 widens the scope and considers the supraregional and international press not as sources, but as a means to evaluate how much range the regional orthographic discourses of the German-language area could have. Furthermore, discourses in the international press can be operationalized to determine the relevance of a topic for the respective language communities: if the press in France, for example, dwells on a given aspect of the discussion, this might reveal the importance of this topic for French language policy as well. The chapter includes views to France, the Portuguese-language area, and the UK and the US and discusses their respective treatments of the orthography reform of German.

The conclusion of the book outlines the results (Chapter 10: "Results of the present study") and gives an outlook (Chapter 11: "Outlook"). While not a classical summary (the reader might look back to portions of Chapter 2 for that) or conclusion, a number of crucial conclusions are still found here, among them that media discourses are critical reflections of political and technical discourses, that different discourses are weighted differently across language communities, and that the media mischaracterized the German orthography reform as a largely political endeavor, thereby downplaying the significance of technical discourses. In her results, the author also recaps many of the stakeholders (institutions etc.) that are invested in language and have strived to objectify the emotional situation surrounding the reform. She also laments the vagueness of the role of some of these actors. This leads to the most crucial desideratum named in the outlook, the disentanglement of interests that are constructed in the discourses, and the actors who are associated with them. The present study has

shown, however, just how intertwined the discourses (and the interests expressed in them) are, so suffice to say, it will be a challenge separating them in a more fine-grained manner than Schimmel-Fijalkowytch has already laudably done.

EVALUATION

In sum, this book represents an insightful and valuable contribution to orthography research and, more generally, to the field of language policy research. Schimmel-Fijalkowytch attempts to treat the book's subject in extensive detail and from myriad possible angles, which results, on the one hand, in a remarkable overall picture that enriches the field, but, on the other hand, is also responsible for some of the book's shortcomings which I do not want to leave unmentioned.

One of the criticisms concerns the definition of orthography itself. Even though it is at the heart of the study, what really constitutes orthography remains to a large degree implicit. This becomes most obvious in sections such as 3.5 ("Orthography and language system"), which is crucial as it addresses the difference between "in conformity with the system" and (normatively) "correct", but ultimately remains too superficial. Accordingly, an explicit differentiation between orthography and writing system, two concepts that are not synonymous (although, as Neef 2015 notes, this is a distinction largely unknown to the English-speaking realm), is missing. Of course, the purpose of this book is not a linguistic description of orthography; yet, a deeper understanding of the triad of system–use–norm (cf. Mesch & Noack 2016) and its implications still proves vital for any discussion of orthography.

The aspect of use brings me to the users of orthography, and with it a glaring omission: public discourses. Although they are often entangled in political and media discourses, the "public" also has opinions and takes part in its own discourses on orthography that involve distinct aspects not present in other discourses. A limitation of the study to political, technical, and media discourses is ultimately warranted and even reasonable on the grounds of the restricted scope of a PhD thesis – which this book, an enormous achievement as it is, is based on. However, assuming engaged individuals of the public have voiced their opinions on the reform, for example on the internet (which, at least following the modifications of 2004 and 2006, seems like a reasonable assumption), discussion forums, comment sections and the like would allow at least a glimpse into not only what discourses the public construed but also how the other types of discourses dealt with in this book were perceived and negotiated by the public. Ultimately, while orthography is decided on by a few people, it is used by all of them. This alone marks public discourses as highly relevant, and at least an occasional mention of the public's reaction (and not just its reflection through the media) would have enriched the study. Leaving it out completely leaves an elitist aftertaste.

The classic literature review, embedded in Chapter 2, is surprisingly sparse, and some omissions are striking (for example, there is no mention of Johnson 2005). Granted, much of the relevant literature is included in the main body of the book. However, a more comprehensive critical survey of what research has been done on the topic in the first part of the book would have provided a richer background for Schimmel-Fijalkowytch's own study.

My last global point of criticism concerns the book's structure. As I stated above, the overall picture and common thread are there, and contentwise, they are strong, but they are not straightforwardly visible due to a sometimes confusing structure and frequent excursions that are interesting but detract attention from the main point. This includes the lengthy excursions about French and Portuguese. These are in and of themselves highly interesting, and they do serve as a means of comparison for the discussion of the orthography reform of German. However, as the latter is undeniably

the focus of the book (as the title suggests), these excursions could have been leaner. They would still have enriched a comparative perspective, but would not have shifted the focus from German to other languages and orthographies altogether.

In some chapters (such as Chapter 3), the author struggles to establish coherence as she addresses so many topics which are, superficially, not closely related, and sometimes, subsections that are indeed related are separated by other sections between them (such as 3.3 “Language cultivation and language policy in the political discourse – Prerequisite of a cultivation of language” and 3.7 “Language cultivation and language policy – a panoply of opinions in political discourses”). This leads also to a large amount of repetition, which is not a problem per se, and for the reading of individual chapters, even proves useful. However, when reading the whole book, these repetitions become palpable. Instead of textual summaries, a few more figures or tables would have been helpful, for example to summarize the respective changes of orthography in the reform and its modifications (such as the table provided for French on p. 175), or to summarize the stakeholders, their actions, and generally, the most important events with respect to the orthography reform in something like a timetable.

Overall, as I mentioned, this comprehensive book gives a detailed account of three types of orthographic discourses that concern the reform of (not only) German orthography: political, technical, and media discourses. Despite a few shortcomings, it does so quite successfully. It also highlights which aspects of orthography reforms are still in need of an investigation, and lays the necessary groundwork to make this further research possible.

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ABOUT THE REVIEWER

Dimitrios Meletis is a PhD candidate at the Department of Linguistics at the University of Graz, Austria. He holds two master’s degrees in linguistics and Slavic studies (with a focus on Russian) and has published a book on graphetics (2015), the study of the materiality of writing. Currently, he is working on his PhD project titled “Naturalness in scripts and writing systems” and is also conducting research on the linguistic attitudes on orthography, orthographic mistakes, and the pejorative correction of orthographic mistakes on the internet, a practice for which he has coined the term “orthographic shaming”.