

Orthographic shaming

Attitudes towards *orthography* and
orthographic mistakes in German



Graph O. Linguist
June 29 at 7:08am

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Dimitrios Meletis

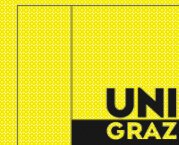
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CROSSING BORDERS: SOUTH, NORTH, EAST, WEST

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Outline

1. State of the arts: *perception of mistakes, orthographic discourses*
2. What is **orthographic shaming**? – *Outlining my study*
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 - c. Results of a preliminary analysis
3. Attitudes towards orthography
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 - b. Common threads
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1. State of the arts

+ research on language and linguistic behavior in social media, (im)politeness research, critical discourse analysis

- the more or less established term **grammar nazi** (less frequently **spelling nazi**) refers to actors, not pragmatic actions [about the **phenomenon in general** cf. Sherman & Švelch 2015, Švelch & Sherman 2017; in **youth language** cf. Bahlo, Becker & Steckbauer 2016]
- it is mainly **psychological research** that has dealt with the question of how mistakes/errors are perceived and what traits etc. are ascribed based on them
 - typing errors or typos [= **performance**] as well as ‘real’ orthographic mistakes [= **competence**] are associated with a **lack of spelling competence**, but not with general cognitive abilities [cf. Kreiner et al. 2002]
 - readers can distinguish between ‘real’ mistakes and intentional non-standard spellings [cf. Scott et al. 2014]
 - in other studies, however, orthographic mistakes **were** associated with intelligence; non-homophonous mistakes were perceived as graver than mistakes that resulted from homophony, e.g. **rite* instead of *right* [cf. Figueredo & Varnhagen 2005]
 - the evaluation of a writer who makes mistakes on behalf of a reader is dependent on the personality of the reader; errors (= typos) are sanctioned more strictly and perceived as graver than mistakes; the authors hypothesize that this is due to the fact that errors are more easily and more frequently recognized by readers [vgl. Boland & Queen 2016]
- **discourses on orthography** have also not been elaborately studied
 - if so, focus is on **orthographic reforms** [cf. Johnson 2005] and in this context, especially on **political, media, and technical/linguistic discourses** [cf. Schimmel-Fijalkowytsch 2018]; **public discourses** are not treated thoroughly

2. What is orthographic shaming?



= my terminological proposal that labels the behavior of publicly commenting on the orthographic mistakes of a person with the intention of (more or less) humiliating this person

2a. Methods and data

preparing a corpus with 100 examples

- every example consists of: (1) the comment that includes the initial mistake, (2) the comment(s) including orthographic shaming, (3) possible responses to the orthographic shaming comment(s), and (4) the context in which all of this occurred (the original Facebook posting)
- the examples are collected on Facebook with my private profile; the data collection is thus limited to my “bubble”; only comments from public pages that I have liked or subscribed can be included (with the exception of some examples that have been sent in by friends and colleagues)
- qualitative analysis of the pragmatic contexts, comparison; formation of categories and hypotheses that inform the guideline for the interviews

conducting 10 interviews (at this point: 14 interviews, 9 female, 5 male, new plan: 20 interviews; all interviews range between 20-38 minutes and have been transcribed and analyzed)

- qualitative analysis of the interviews (MaxQDA)

2b. Examples

SZ Süddeutsche Zeitung
Am 17. Apr. um 13:20 • 🌐

Angesichts mehrer Beißattacken solle die Sachkunde aller Hundehalter verbessert werden. Bislang gibt es eine entsprechende Nachweispflicht nur in Niedersachsen.



SUEDDEUTSCHE.DE
Tierschutzbund fordert bundesweiten Hundeführerschein

👍❤️😬 245 115 Kommentare • 6 Mal geteilt

👍 Gefällt mir 💬 Kommentieren ➦ Teilen

Angesichts mehrerer Rechtschreibfehler soll die Sachkunde aller Journalisten verbessert werden. Bislang gibt es eine entsprechende Nachweispflicht nur in der Grundschule.

#RechtschreibNazi
#DoYouThinkSpellingsAGame

PS: Ja, ich weiß wie das läuft, mache etwas ähnliches beruflich. Die Sätze werden zig mal umgestellt und geändert, und aus einer alten Version bleiben Formulierungen / Worte dann ungewollterweise in Teilen zurück. Aber hier konnte ich nicht widerstehen

Oder sitzt Ihr gerade in der Sonne und seit leicht abgelekt?

VG

2 Tag(e) Gefällt mir Antworten

Ay, auf den letzten Metern dem bösen seid/ seit-Fehler erlegen ... 😊 👍😬 7

2 Tag(e) Gefällt mir Antworten

Wenn Sie schon derartig auf den Putz hauen, sollte Ihnen wenigstens der Unterschied zwischen seid & seit geläufig sein. 👍😬 5

2 Tag(e) Bearbeitet Gefällt mir Antworten

<https://www.seid-seit.de/> 👍 1

SEID-SEIT.DE
seid-seit.de - Der Unterschied zwischen '...'

2 Tag(e) Gefällt mir Antworten

2c. Results of a preliminary analysis

- most often, a **polarizing** (most frequently a **political**) context is necessary for orthographic shaming to occur
- orthographic shaming as a “**knock-out argument**” that is not only meant to disrupt, but to end a discussion by discrediting people actively engaged in it
- spelling abilities are associated with **intelligence** and **educational level**
- **comments** are much **more frequent** than corrections
- reactions to orthographic shaming from “victims” either **fail to materialize** or are **negative**
- **orthography** and **grammar** are mixed (cf. the term *grammar nazi*); every mistake that is written appears to be considered orthographic
- **mistakes/errors in orthographic shaming comments** are very likely (and reliably) commented on/corrected to point out hypocrisy

3. Attitudes towards orthography: *interviews*

- three batches of questions: (1) (implicit) knowledge, beliefs, and opinions about orthography and orthographic errors/mistakes, (2) experience with and opinions about orthographic shaming, (3) reaction to and questions about a specific example of orthographic shaming
- duration of interviews ranged from 20 to 38 minutes
- interviewees had responded to an ad in the linguistics department of the University of Graz and were paid € 10 each
- **homogenous**, highly non-representative group: all of the interviewees are students and between 19 and 29 years old, have similar educational backgrounds and assess their own spelling abilities as very good (with one interesting exception); also, many of them are not heavy users of social media

3a. Highlighted aspects: *normativity*

“Because every time that I’m writing somewhere, I’m writing, and therefore it has to be correct, because otherwise I could just let it be. [interview B01: L. 149-150]

3a. Highlighted aspects: *ascriptions*

“... usually I value that people can spell correctly, because if they can't, that **makes** their IQ sink in my head. [interview A05: L. 26-27]

3a. Highlighted aspects: *orthographic shaming*

“... half a year ago, when I still had Facebook installed on my phone, I did it almost daily (*laughs*) – guilty pleasure, no, it just bothered me, but mostly it was because I didn’t want to argue about the content of the discussion and so I just corrected people’s spelling to maybe anger them a bit. [interview B04: L. 74-77]

3b. Common threads [1/2]

- orthography plays an **important role** in the interviewees' lives; for most of them in all contexts (informal/formal), all registers, and in all domains of life (private/professional)
- almost all of them [13/14] assess their own spelling abilities as very good
- there is a **strong distinction between mistakes, errors, and [unlicensed] variation** (e.g. dialect, youth language, older orthographic variants, choices); errors are seen as more problematic and evaluated more critically
- **nuanced statements** are made about people who make a great number of spelling errors (e.g. dyslexia is also mentioned, albeit seldom); however, most interviewees admitted to **judging a person “unconsciously”** based on low spelling performance

3b. Common threads [2/2]

- most interviewees [13/14] state they would never consider orthographically shaming another person and generally **object to this behavior**; however, they do not make blanket statements about orthographic shamers
- regarding their own mistakes, interviewees state they feel **shame and remorse**; corrections of their own mistakes are silently accepted

4. Conclusions

- writing is **deeply entrenched in norms** (unlike speech?)
- knowledge of these norms is considered **social/cultural capital** and **power**; this is used in strategies such as orthographic shaming, the response to which is, however, largely negative
- the public's attitudes (and the public *has* attitudes) towards orthography are valuable in further investigating the complex (also linguistic) function of orthographies and their status as a central cornerstone of linguistic policy

5. References

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**Thank
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** you*