

THE PRAGMATICS OF ORTHOGRAPHIC SHAMING

WRITTEN SPEECH ACTS AND THE NEGOTIATION
OF POWER, NORMATIVITY, AND DISCUSSION CULTURE

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STRUCTURE

1. Orthographic shaming – definition and examples, analysis
2. Attitudes on orthographic shaming and orthography: interviews, highlights, analysis
3. Conclusions



How do people correct the mistakes of others on social media, and do these corrected parties react? If so, how? Why do people engage in this behavior? What do outsiders think about it?

ORTHOGRAPHIC SHAMING: DEFINITION

A collection of six social media comments, each with a circular profile picture and a text bubble. The comments are arranged in two columns. The first column has three comments, and the second column has three comments. Each comment includes a timestamp, interaction buttons (like, dislike, reply), and a reaction count.

Comment 1 (Top Left): Profile picture: teal circle. Text: "Aber jeder der hier jenes Geschwaffel von sich gibt von dem ich rede, ist ein Linker! Denn nur Linke begreifen den Unterschied zwischen Äpfel und Birnen nicht." Interaction: 4 Std., Bearbeitet, Gefällt mir, 7 reactions.

Comment 2 (Middle Left): Profile picture: black circle. Text: "schon mal über einen Deutschkurs nachgedacht?" Interaction: 4 Std., Gefällt mir, 18 reactions.

Comment 3 (Bottom Left): Profile picture: teal circle. Text: "Irgendeiner von euch hatten Rechtschreibfehler ergo Diskussion beendet 😊" Interaction: 13 Wo., Gefällt mir, Antworten, 1 reaction.

Comment 4 (Top Right): Profile picture: dark blue circle. Text: "Wenn interessiert dass 😂😂😂" Interaction: 2 Tag(e), Gefällt mir, Antworten, 3 reactions.

Comment 5 (Middle Right): Profile picture: grey circle. Text: "Das Deutschbuch hat mir sehr gehilft 😂😂😂" Interaction: 1 Tag(e), Gefällt mir, Antworten, 1 reaction.

Comment 6 (Bottom Right): Profile picture: teal circle. Text: "3 Wörter und 2 Rechtschreibfehler sind frech..." Interaction: 1 Tag(e), Gefällt mir, Antworten, 3 reactions.

my terminological proposal (Meletis 2019) that labels the behavior of publicly commenting on or correcting the orthographic mistakes/errors of a person with the intention of **discrediting** that person; it focuses on the behavior rather than the actors engaged in it

ORTHOGRAPHIC SHAMING: ANALYSIS

- for orthographic shaming to occur, the **context cannot be neutral**
 - most often, it is a polarizing and emotional context inviting different opinions (i.e. politics)
- it is meant to discredit the corrected person to **devalue their argument**
 - this only works because/if orthographic competence is interpreted as a reflection of intelligence or education
- **humor** is a big part of orthographic shaming
- it more frequently occurs **in the form of comments** that address errors/mistakes **indirectly** than in the form of direct corrections
 - what is addressed is not a single and isolated error/mistake, but the orthographic competence of a person as a whole, and, consequently, the person in general
- targeted people either **do not respond** or point out that **orthographic shaming is no argument**

ATTITUDES ON ORTHOGRAPHIC SHAMING: INTERVIEWS

- three parts: (1) implicit knowledge, beliefs and opinions about orthography and orthographic shaming, (2) experience with and opinions about orthographic shaming, (3) reaction to and questions about a specific example of orthographic shaming
- 21 interviews (13f, 8m) ranging from 13 to 55 minutes
- interviewees had responded to an ad in the Department of Linguistics (University of Graz) and were paid €10 to participate
- homogeneous group: most participants are students, ages range from 18 to 29, similar educational backgrounds, all of them (with minor exceptions) assess their own orthographic competence as very good

ATTITUDES ON ORTHOGRAPHIC SHAMING: HIGHLIGHTS

“That they should find a hobby ...
I somehow find it a bit bullying
and I think one probably simply
has nothing better to do.” [A03]

ATTITUDES ON ORTHOGRAPHIC SHAMING: HIGHLIGHTS

“The fact that a mistake is corrected does not reveal anything about the person [correcting it], I think, it always also kind of depends on the tone of voice.” [A06]

ATTITUDES ON ORTHOGRAPHIC SHAMING: ANALYSIS

- orthographic shaming [act] is judged, orthographic shamers [actors] are not
- nuanced statements are made about people who make a great number of spelling errors/mistakes (dyslexia is mentioned, albeit seldom); however, most interviewees admitted to judging a person “unconsciously”, involuntarily; this could be termed involuntary **automatic orthographic shaming** and reflects the high status of the orthographic standardization
- most interviewees personally reject orthographic shaming and state they would never consider orthographically shaming another person; corrections are handled in private [through private messages] and with the intention of helping
- attitudes shift if it is not private persons but institutions that are being shamed
- orthographic shaming is perceived as being entertaining, humor plays a role in how a specific instance of orthographic shaming is evaluated

CONCLUSIONS

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

**THANK YOU
FOR YOUR
ATETNTION!**



attention