

(Re-)introducing *graphetics*

The study of the materiality of writing, its questions, and its problems

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Graphetics is the designation of a subdiscipline of the study of writing (which, following Neef 2015, I call *grapholinguistics*) dealing with all aspects concerning the formal and material aspects of writing (cf. Meletis 2015). Analogously to *phonetics*, it is further divided in the subbranches *productional graphetics* (studying writing processes), *visual graphetics*, and *perceptual graphetics* (studying recognition, reading, etc.).

To date, this subject has been predominantly excluded from linguistic theorizing because of the implicit general agreement among linguists that the specific shape and look of writing – with its varying features, e.g. font, type size, color, writing surface, etc. – do not contribute to the (denotative) meaning or generally, the linguistic structure of written utterances. It is the goal of this talk to prove the functions of the materiality of writing are manifold – and linguistically relevant.

The first part of the talk gives a brief outline of the most relevant historical conditions, obstacles, and milestones that are central to the development of graphetics within linguistics. As part of this historical reconstruction, definitions are presented, vocal advocates and their work are named, and key problems are compiled.

The second and key part then presents a descriptive graphetic model as a main concern of visual graphetics. Based on visual properties – especially blank spaces of different levels, e.g. word spaces, line breaks etc. – inherent in a variety of typologically different writing systems (e.g. German, Chinese, Arabic, and Thai), a number of descriptive graphetic units and levels is postulated and discussed.

Finally, a range of unresolved issues and desiderata are presented that ultimately serve as a means of incentive and orientation for future research in this area.

References

Meletis, Dimitrios (2015): *Graphetik: Form und Materialität von Schrift* (= Typo|Druck). Glückstadt: Werner Hülsbusch.

Neef, Martin (2015): Writing systems as modular objects: proposals for theory design in grapholinguistics. *Open Linguistics* 1, 708–721.