

Grapholinguistic Wars: How Three Arguments Reflect an Emerging Discipline's Core Questions

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Writing systems research – or *grapholinguistics* – is steadily gaining traction as an accepted subfield of linguistics. While it is often advertised and treated as a 'young' field, it is rather the case that we lack awareness of its history.

This talk aims to contribute to a first historiographic account by discussing and contextualizing the main points of three disputes centering on issues of writing and encapsulating the most pressing questions the discipline studies to this day.

In the first dispute, prolific writing researcher Peter T. Daniels proclaims – in a LACUS Forum talk – that “[t]here cannot be a structural graphemics” (Daniels 1991: 528) since writing systems cannot be treated with the same concepts as language. He argues that writing is merely a representation of language with no systematics of its own, thus rejecting the possibility of concepts such as *grapheme*. In a response, Earl M. Herrick (Herrick 1994) takes the opposite stance: writing *is* a system of its own and has idiosyncratic features that can *only* be captured in an independent grapholinguistic analysis. In two talks/papers as well as two additional replies, the two scholars adhere to views referred to as the *dependency view* and the *autonomy view*, respectively, reproducing an argument with a long tradition in German grapholinguistics, the crucial questions of which are being discussed to this day as they have a bearing on the very raison d'être of grapholinguistics as its own discipline.

In the second argument, Herbert E. Brekle attacks semiotician W. C. Watt's (1994) view of the diachronic development of writing as a systematic evolutionary process not dissimilar to that of language. Specifically, Brekle (1994) criticizes four evolutionary 'forces' assumed by Watt: homogenization, facilitation, heterogenization, and inertia, addressing not only their (un)consciousness but also their cognitive reality as well as the problematics of the teleology they imply. Additionally, Brekle laments that vital factors of economical, technical, and social nature remain unaccounted for in Watt's framework.

The third dispute starts with Primus' (2004) claim of form-function-correlations between visual features of Roman letters and phonological features of the phonemes they represent, which is forcefully attacked by Rezec (2010). This argument touches on the core of the question of how writing is approached as a subject and the systematics one attempts or expects to find in it. This links it to the first two arguments in that it addresses whether writing is merely a representational system or its own system as well as whether, in its diachronic development, iconic relations between the visual and the linguistic such as proposed by Primus could have been established.

Even though they represent only three points in a gradual development, these disputes are strikingly representative of contemporary discourses in grapholinguistics. By contextualizing them and highlighting their relevance for the discipline, this talk is a crucial contribution to a much-needed grapholinguistic historiography.

BREKLE, HERBERT E. (1994): Some thoughts on a historico-genetic theory of the lettershapes of our alphabet. In W. C. WATT (ed.), *Writing systems and cognition*, 129-139. Dordrecht: Springer.

DANIELS, PETER T. (1991): Is a structural graphemics possible? *LACUS Forum* 18:528-537.

HERRICK, EARL M. (1994): Of course a structural graphemics is possible! *LACUS Forum* 21:413-424.

PRIMUS, BEATRICE (2004): A featural analysis of the Modern Roman Alphabet. *Written Language and Literacy* 7.2:235-274.

REZEC, OLIVER (2010): Der vermeintliche Zusammenhang zwischen Buchstabenformen und Lautwerten. Erwiderung auf einige Thesen von B. Primus. *Linguistische Berichte* 223:343-366.

WATT, W. C. (1994): Introduction. In W. C. WATT (ed.), *Writing systems and cognition*, 89-114. Dordrecht: Springer.