Literacy and self-prescriptivism: A metapragmatic discourse analysis of attitudes towards orthographic regulation

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Writing has long been identified as a central factor in the standardization of languages. Yet, the effect of literacy on (standard) language ideologies remains understudied to this day (but cf. Johnson 2002, Dickinson 2015, Weth & Juffermans 2018), as do the public's attitudes on orthographic standardization. However, it is becoming increasingly important as the relation between authorities of language policy and the 'lay' people who are affected by policies has gradually changed, causing a new kind of 'twenty-first-century prescriptivism' (cf. Heyd 2014: 491) to evolve in which normativity is no longer negotiated exclusively top-down but is also constituted by bottom-up processes (especially of digital nature in the realm of the internet). This talk is devoted to an investigation of said prescriptivism.

In a recent pilot study 21 semi-structured interviews with Austrian university students were conducted to investigate attitudes on (i) orthographic regulation, (ii) deviances from the written standard and denigrating public corrections of mistakes (so-called 'orthographic shaming'), as well as (iii) changes of orthography, i.e. spelling reforms and involved stakeholders.

Many of the participants' utterances, e.g. "Every time that I'm writing somewhere, I'm writing, and *therefore* it has to be correct", were entrenched in normativity and (self-)prescriptivism, the most important aspects of which will be traced in this talk, as a metapragmatic discourse analysis of the interviews shows that in a literate community whose writing is orthographically regulated, (1) normativity appears to be inherent to literacy practices, which are strongly affected by standard language ideologies, (2) knowledge of various norms pertaining to the written standard is considered social/cultural capital and is instrumentalized in the establishment and reinforcement of hierarchies of power, and that, generally, (3) the public's nuanced attitudes towards orthography and literacy prove invaluable in examining the interaction between the status of prescriptive orthographies as central cornerstones of linguistic policy and everyday literacy practices.

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