

What's in a name? Trends and challenges in naming the study of writing

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Names matter. They are not only labels or reference terms for historical accounts, but strategic tools. (de Chadarevian 2002: 206)

Nomenclatural questions [...] should, in any case, detain us only in idle moments. (Watt 1994b: xii)

Abstract. The name of a scientific discipline is closely tied to the discipline's definition and (self-)conception. This renders naming processes highly significant as they involve intricate negotiations of and ultimately decisions concerning, among many other aspects, the boundaries of the newly designated discipline and research traditions that the chosen label may be associated with. In the little-researched history of the study of writing, scholars have proposed several names at different times and in diverse contexts. In this historiographic paper, nine are discussed: *grammatology*, *graphonomy*, *graphology*, *graphem(at)ics*, *orthography*, *writing systems research*, *grapholinguistics*, *script(ur)ology*, and *philography*. The 'baptism stories' behind these designations are characterized by common trends and challenges arising from the goal of coining a semantically transparent and unambiguous term that fits the study of writing and is more or less inclusive of the multiple disciplines and perspectives that wish to participate in it. Given that no name has been widely adopted and processes of disciplinary demarcation are still ongoing, this paper aims to systematically shed light on this important if somewhat chaotic part of the history of writing to raise awareness and ultimately inform future efforts in (further) establishing the study of writing.

1. The goal

“What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell just as sweet.” – William Shakespeare's famous line from *Romeo and Juliet* implies that the naming of things is arbitrary, that their intrinsic qualities are not captured by labels.¹ Given the arbitrariness of linguistic symbols, most linguists would certainly agree with this assessment with respect to 'common words' used in everyday language. The story is arguably different for technical terms, to which scholars regardless of their discipline commonly ascribe great relevance – especially when the terms are meant to label entire branches of study. One reason for this is that such designations are products of conscious and complex naming processes, which themselves become intimately tied to disciplinary identities. Unsurprisingly, then, these “processes of disciplinary demarcation” are highly relevant in the establishment of new disciplines as they usually provide them with “a founding narrative and articulate core problems, general approaches and constitutive methods” (Powell et al. 2007: 5). Retrospective historiographic contextualization can reveal whether we can evaluate such processes as ultimately 'successful' according to different questions: Has the designation been (widely) adopted? Is the coining or adoption of the term perceived as having been influential in the formation of the discipline? Following Powell et al. (2007), reconstructions of such naming processes can be called 'baptism stories'. This paper will trace multiple baptism stories for an odd yet interesting case of a discipline seemingly resistant to consistent naming: the study of writing.

¹ This paper is dedicated to Christa Dürscheid. 20 years ago,* her seminal textbook *Einführung in die Schriftlinguistik* (2002) was published. Often referred to simply as 'die Schriftlinguistik' in the Germanophone realm, it is a truly groundbreaking book that – in the course of its impressive five editions, the latest of which was published in 2016 – not only helped constitute and 'break the ground' for a field devoted to the study of writing but has since contributed tremendously in promoting it in the German-speaking linguistic community and beyond (an example being the book's Korean translation published in 2007). Furthermore, it has considerably shaped me as well as my career trajectory as a (grapho)linguist, and it was a great honor to write a book on writing with her (*Writing systems and their use*, Meletis & Dürscheid 2022). Christa, congratulations and thank you! *This paper was originally written and submitted in 2022.

Recent works published within the context of or addressing the study of writing often include or even commence with highlighting the coexistence of its many names. The following example is taken from Haralambous (2019: 151, emphasis in original):

There have been attempts to invent new terms: the author uses the term graphemics ('graphématique' in French) as a counterpart to phonology, others have proposed 'graphonomy', 'grammatology' (this term, originally introduced by Gelb (Gelb 1963) [...], became famous through Derrida's homonymous book (Derrida 1967), which is more philosophical than linguistic), and at a higher level: 'grapholinguistics' (according to the German term *Schriftlinguistik*), etc.

The terms listed here are by no means nonce words; indeed, they have all been consciously introduced at some point in the literature published within the study of writing. None of them managed to prevail over the others, however, which is how they all remain – albeit with divergent frequencies of occurrence – in use until this day. They are tied to different contexts, sometimes also distinct (sub)disciplines, as well as academic cultures and traditions – and they all have their own baptism stories, even if these are, in the case of the study of writing, often unspectacular stories of introductions of terms without a lot of fuss. Looking at the manifold attempts at providing the study of writing with a name, scholars in the field apparently do not abide to what W. C. Watt (1994b: xii) urges – that “[n]omenclatural questions [...] should [...] detain us only in idle moments”. Proclaiming a name for a field that has yet to be firmly delimited and defined, even if some – including Watt – may interpret it as putting the cart before the horse, is not a decorative activity but a strategy obviously believed to contribute to a large degree to just that – establishment. Names matter indeed in that they are not hollow shells but “strategic tools” (de Chadarevian 2002: 206). As Powell et al. (2007: 26) generalize, “[d]isciplinary formation is so diverse and ongoing development so variable that names are one of the few factors capable of providing and maintaining disciplinary identity”. Speaking of disciplinary identity, what does it tell us, then, that no label for the study of writing has been unanimously accepted and widely adopted?

This paper is not primarily intended as a contribution to the broader analysis of the importance and effects of naming processes, which was fascinatingly outlined in a case study of four disciplines far removed from linguistics (namely genetics, molecular biology, genomics, and systems biology) by Powell et al. (2007). While the reconstruction of conditions surrounding the coining and adoption of different terms for the study of writing may also, down the road, be compared with baptism narratives in/of such unrelated disciplines, the main goal here is to shed light on an important part of a historiography of the study of writing, research on which remains sparse (cf. also Meletis in press). Crucially, knowledge of the history of a discipline including an “[u]nderstanding [of] how scientific activities use naming stories to achieve disciplinary stories is important not only for insight into the past” (Powell et al. 2007: 5) but can provide valuable insight going forward. As the contributions collected in the present proceedings of a grapholinguistic conference show, the study of writing is (on the verge of) thriving again. In this context, acknowledging that negotiating its name is not a recent activity and examining trends and challenges in previous baptism stories can, in the best case, be informative and instructive with respect to any future efforts in further establishing the field.

The paper is structured as follows: In Section 2, a selection of prominent names that have been proposed for the study of writing will be presented individually. This is followed by a synoptic discussion of central common threads in Section 3. A short programmatic outlook in Section 4 closes the paper.

2. The candidates

In the following, prominent ‘candidate’ designations for the study of writing will be presented based on several questions including: Who invented or first used the term, and in which context? Was it then adopted by others, and why (not)? What is the term’s formal structure, i.e., what components does it consist of, what is their individual etymology and meaning, and what is their compositional meaning when combined? Conceptually, does the term suit the task of denoting the study of writing? Is it, for example, inclusive (enough), considering different perspectives on writing? What other, possibly non-writing-related meanings does the term have, and have these interfered with its use as a name for the

study of writing? Note that the collection of terms included here is, of course, non-exhaustive. It is an ultimately subjective selection based on my own experience in and with the field and the literature that has been produced in it, and it is – even if this is attempted as best as possible – certainly not free from biases (concerning, for example, my own discipline or research community, cf. Meletis 2021a).

General trends and challenges characterizing attempts at naming the study of writing will already be mentioned throughout when a given term illustrates a common feature especially well; they will, however, be systematically collected in Section 3.

2.1 Grammatology: Gelb's ill-fated term

One of the first and most persistent designations for the study of writing is *grammatology*, a “modern formation from Gk γραμματο-, the combining form of γράμμα ‘letter’ and -λογία ‘teaching’” (Coulmas 1996a: 173). The first time it was more widely disseminated was in assyriologist Ignace J. Gelb's *A study of writing* (1952),² a seminal book that ushered in a new era in the study of writing systems. Gelb's adoption of the name was inspired not by previous uses – with different meanings – in German and French (cf., for example, Hasse 1792, Massé 1863) but by a different term, *grammatography*, found in the title of the English translation³ of Friedrich Ballhorn's treatise of different ‘alphabets of ancient and modern languages’ (1861). Switching from *-graphy* to *-logy* makes sense, as concerning the field's scope, Gelb's aim was not a collective description of different writing systems merely for description's sake but to lay the foundation for an entire ‘study of’ writing.⁴ In other words, Gelb's (1963: 23) intention was to contribute to the creation of a new field, and as is common in the course of this process, a potential name is provided: “The aim of this book is to lay a foundation for a full science of writing, yet to be written. To the new science we could give the name ‘grammatology’.” In the next sentence, he goes on to mention less suitable alternatives: “This term seems to me better suited than either ‘graphology’, which could lead to a misunderstanding, or ‘philography’ (a new term coined in contrast to ‘philology’), which is not so exact as ‘grammatology’” (Gelb 1963: 23). As will become apparent in the course of this paper, both of these operations are extremely common in the context of attempting to name the study of writing: scholars mentioning the novelty or unestablished status of the field and, in the same vein, arguing for their designation of choice while often listing the disadvantages of available alternatives.

The story of *grammatology* reveals yet another very common feature of the terminological history of the study of writing: drastically put, the ‘derailing’ of terms due to their use in other contexts and with divergent meanings. In the case of *grammatology*, this also occurred very visibly and with lasting effects, when French philosopher Jacques Derrida adopted – with acknowledgment (cf. also Daniels 1996a: 3) – the term for his influential and programmatic post-structuralist treatise *De la grammatologie* (1967, translated as *Of grammatology*, [1977] 1997).⁵ While Derrida does focus on writing and its status, his *grammatology* is used in a “somewhat different though also related sense [...] to designate a theory of writing which he understands as a critique of the logocentrism of the Western intellectual tradition since Aristotle, which considers the sign (writing) as a mere supplement rather than an epistemic force in its own right” (Coulmas 1996a: 173). Interestingly, Derrida ([1977] 1967: 28, emphasis in original) also mentions other designations when describing his envisioned grammatology: “Graphematics or grammatography ought no longer to be presented as sciences; their goal should be exorbitant when

² Note that in this paper, the book's second edition (published in 1963) is cited.

³ As Gelb (1963: 273, n. 46) himself notes, the German original of Ballhorn's book does not use the term; it is titled *Alphabete orientalischer und occidentalischer Sprachen: zum Gebrauch für Schriftsetzer und Correctoren* (1847).

⁴ Eckardt (1965: 4f.) criticizes also the other component of the term as restrictive: “Doch scheint mir auch diese Bezeichnung [= Grammatologie, DM] nicht ganz zufriedenstellend. Es handelt sich ja nicht um eine ‚Wissenschaft der Buchstaben‘ – denn neben ‚Schrift‘ bedeutet γράμμα auch ‚Buchstabe‘ – sondern um die Schrift in ihrer Gesamtheit.“ [“But even this designation [= grammatology, DM] seems to me not quite satisfactory. After all, it is not about a ‘science of letters’ – for besides ‘writing’ γράμμα also means ‘letter’ – but about writing in its entirety”, my translation].

⁵ Cf. on Gelb's use of the term and Derrida's eventual appropriation also van de Mierop (2021).

compared to *grammatological knowledge*.”⁶ Not only does this echo the above-mentioned difference (in scope?) between *grammatography* and *grammatology*, but it also brings into play *graphematics* and reveals an awareness of this term (see below).

Despite Derrida’s influential borrowing of the term, three decades later, in 1996, *grammatology* was still going strong, as is underlined by the publication of two books highly relevant to the study of writing. In his *Blackwell encyclopedia of writing systems*, linguist Florian Coulmas (1996a: xxv) writes: “No student of writing can dispense with the seminal works of Marcel Cohen, David Diringer, Ignace Gelb and Hans Jensen which have laid the groundwork for the scientific study of writing. More than 40 years ago Gelb proposed the term ‘grammatology’ for this field of inquiry.” In *The world’s writing systems* (cf. Daniels & Bright 1996), which to this day remains the most complete edited collection of descriptions covering a wide range of writing systems, one of the editors, Peter T. Daniels, who had already used *grammatology* in his earlier work (cf. Daniels 1990), observed that “[n]o name for this field of study has ever become widely accepted: ‘grammatology’, proposed in the mid twentieth century, is better than most” (1996b: 1). Crucially, both mentions of the term do not sweep under the rug its tentative nature as a ‘proposed’ term. Noteworthy is also Daniels’ (1996a: 3, emphasis in original) observation that *grammatology* “parallels *phonology* and *morphology*, the branches of linguistics that study sounds and meaningful units”; the reason this is interesting is that it tells us something about the intended scope of the field as well as its affiliation with – or even incorporation into – an established discipline (in this case linguistics), which are aspects closely tied to the proposal of names for fields of study. 1996 really was a remarkable year for the study of writing, as John Sören Pettersson also published his *Grammatological studies: Writing and its relation to speech*, an unfortunately little-received treatise addressing theoretical and methodological approaches to the subject of writing. More recently, *grammatology* is used only sporadically, e.g., by Zhong (2019)⁷, and the decline of occurrences in pertinent publications suggests that it may have been superseded by its alternatives – one of them being *graphonomy*.

2.2 Graphonomy: Hockett’s little-known solution

In 2018, Peter T. Daniels’ *An exploration of writing* was published, a monographic amalgamation of his decades-long research on writing systems that was – given his undeniable status as an authority in the field – long-awaited. The book’s table of contents already foreshadows a terminological shift for Daniels, as its twelfth chapter is titled ‘Graphonomy and linguistics’. This marks a change from *grammato-* to *grapho-*, deriving from Greek γράφω ‘scratch, carve’, as well as from *-logy* to *-nomy* from Greek νόμος ‘law’, which as a suffix signifies a system of rules, laws, or knowledge about a body of a particular field. Already in the book’s introduction, Daniels (2018: 4f., emphasis in original) explains, in a footnote, why he now prefers *graphonomy* over *grammatology*:

The term [grammatology, DM] has become tainted in recent years: some scholars have taken it to refer to a school of writing-systems studies that holds to the Principle of Unidirectional Development⁸ [...] and some other notions supported by Gelb; and the French philosopher Jacques Derrida borrowed it (with acknowledgment) to label a certain approach within Postmodern literary criticism. Therefore, I prefer

⁶ The term *graphology* also features in his book (see Fleming 2016 and Section 2.3).

⁷ In her *Chinese grammarology: Script revolution and literary modernity, 1916–1958*, Yurou Zhong is not as much interested in a linguistic analysis of Chinese writing and Latinization efforts as in the fact that “the eventual retention of [Chinese] characters constituted an anti-ethnocentric, anti-imperial critique that coincided with postwar decolonization movements and predated the emergence of Deconstructionism” (<http://cup.columbia.edu/book/chinese-grammarology/9780231192637>, accessed November 2, 2022). This places her use of *grammatology* semantically somewhat between that of Gelb and Derrida, if a little closer to Derrida’s.

⁸ This now-refuted principle propagated a teleological evolution of writing systems; Gelb (1963: 201) formulated it like this: “[...] in reaching its ultimate development writing [...] must pass through the stages of logography, syllabography, and alphabetography in this and no other order”. Cf. for a discussion of counterevidence Daniels (2018: 133–135).

‘graphonomy’, which was introduced by Charles F. Hockett, [...] making explicit the analogy *astrology* : *astronomy* :: *graphology* : *graphonomy*.

He subsequently provides interesting details explaining why the “term could have been, but wasn’t, popularized” (Daniels 2018: 5), including the fact that according to a handwritten note in one of Hockett’s posthumously published manuscripts dealing with writing (‘Speech and writing’, 1952, published in ‘Two lectures on writing’, [1951a] 2003), he had planned to define *graphonomy* – but ultimately did not. Ironically, a clear definition including a delimitation of the field’s scope and aims is also missing from Daniels (2018) and following works such as Daniels (2021), which even includes the term in its title (‘Foundations of graphonomy’).

What was likely detrimental to a larger dissemination of the term was the context of its introduction: Predating Gelb’s use of *grammatology* by a hair, Hockett (1951b) first mentions and discusses *graphonomy* in a review of John DeFrancis’ book *Nationalism and language reform in China* (1950). The relevance of reviews notwithstanding, the attention they receive is arguably (and with exceptions) rather negligible when compared with that attracted by other types of publications, and in this particular case it is justified to rather drastically claim that Hockett’s introduction of *graphonomy* was ‘buried’ in a review, and that this is likely the reason it never gained traction. Importantly, it is – as so often – not only the field’s designation that is discussed here, but also its breadth and relation to linguistics (and, in this case, also anthropology):

Books like De Francis’s – and reviews of them – will be easier to write when it is realized that the field of science primarily involved is not linguistics, but the yet unnamed study of writing and writing systems, and when at least some preliminary codification of the latter field has been done. Since the logical label for this sister-branch of anthropology, namely ‘graphology’, is otherwise occupied, let us follow the students of celestial phenomena in a removal to the suffix *-onomy*, and speak of GRAPHONOMY. Like other branches of anthropology, graphonomy has a pure and an applied angle; De Francis’ book involves both angles, but perhaps primarily the latter. Graphonomy can only progress on the basis of sound linguistics [...]. (Hockett 1951b: 445, emphasis in original)

While Hockett separates the “yet unnamed study of writing and writing systems” from linguistics, he later does relate the two by stating that graphonomy “can only progress on the basis of sound linguistics”. We will return to this complex relation – and question of the independence of the study of writing – in the discussion of grapholinguistics (Section 2.5) and general common threads (Section 3).

Another noteworthy use of the term came twenty years after Hockett’s review: computational linguist Sture Allén adopted the term in the title of his 1971 *Introduktion i grafonomi: Det lingvistiska skriftstudiet* (‘Introduction to graphonomy: The linguistic study of writing’). The fact that this was a Swedish-language publication makes this an appropriate point to emphasize another recurring aspect relevant in a discussion of attempts at naming the study of writing: introductions or uses of terms in languages other than English. As will be shown below *Schriftlinguistik*, the fact that terms may very well already be accepted and even widely established in other languages does not preclude a more international, English-speaking community from subjecting them to considerable scrutiny. Taking a closer look at the Swedish line of using *graphonomy*, Allén’s mentioned introduction was written in cooperation with Staffan Hellberg, who, in the subsequent publication of his English-language dissertation *Graphonomic rules in phonology: Studies in the expression component of Swedish* (1974), also relies on the term. The title alone (especially its inclusion of *phonology*) implies that Hellberg embeds graphonomy (as a phenomenon to be studied, as a field, or as both?) in a linguistic context. He fails at giving it a fixed meaning, however, as Wolfgang Börner notes in his review, which from a terminological perspective proves illuminating:

Hellberg verwendet weder den im Wortsinn normativen Terminus *orthography* noch den strukturalistisch vorbelasteten Namen *graphemics* (*graphology* steht nicht zur Verfügung), sondern wie sein Lehrer Sture Allén den Terminus *graphonomy*. Dieser wandelt jedoch im Verlauf der theoretischen Diskussion seine Bedeutung. S. 1 wird *graphonomy* als autonome Schriftkomponente definiert: “The expression part of spoken language is often termed phonology. As its counterpart for written language, the term *graphonomy* has gained ground ...”. Das Ziel der Arbeit ist die Untersuchung der “relation between phonology and graphonomy” (p. 1). Ein “graphonomic environment” (p. 45) ist folglich ein aus

Buchstaben bestehender Kontext. Andererseits ist eine “graphonomic rule” (p. 42, 43 und passim) eine orthographische, d.h. Laut und Buchstaben verknüpfende Regel und in p. 201, Anm. 20 wird *graphonomy* auf einmal als “all (relevant) graphonomic rules”, also als Äquivalent zur Orthographie vorgestellt. Noch mehr umfaßt *graphonomy* in p. 47: “exception features in the lexicon as well as the interspersed spelling rules”. (Börner 1977: 337, emphasis in original)⁹

Not only does Börner (1977: 337) mention and contextualize other writing-related terms, distinguishing them from *graphonomy*, but in his critique it also becomes clear that Hellberg’s use (or rather uses) of *graphonomy* are meant to designate primarily written structures (or certain of their features, for which the adjectival form *graphonomic* is used), whereas Allén’s book title had previously employed *graphonomy* at a meta-level, i.e., as the title of the study of writing. This, then, addresses a feature inherent in the majority of designations discussed in this paper: a subject-discipline ambiguity that is, however, not restricted to writing but widespread in linguistics (and many disciplines) – take *phonology* or *morphology*, levels of language and simultaneously disciplines studying them. Given the prominence of these latter terms, this polysemy usually does not stand in a way of a widespread dissemination, which means *graphonomy*’s non-success is likely rather based on the marginal status of writing as a research subject (especially in linguistics and especially at the times of Hockett and then also Allén) as well as the fact that works in which *graphonomy* was prominently used were little-received. It remains to be seen whether Daniels’ recent (re-)adoption of the term will lead to a reevaluation of its suitability and more widespread recognition.

Before turning to the next candidate designation, other meanings of *graphonomy* shall be mentioned as they may also have contributed to a hesitance in using it. Firstly, it is close to a likewise writing-related term in which *-ics* replaces the *-y*: *graphonomics*, formally resembling *linguistics*, is “the multi-disciplinary field of fundamental and applied experimental research of handwriting and related skills” (taken from graphonomics.net, accessed October 19, 2022). The superficial and to some degree thematical closeness of *graphonomy* and *graphonomics* is undeniably not as severe as the complete collapse of two more drastically divergent meanings in the term *graphology* (see next section). Notably, in the view of semiotician William C. Watt, who also published extensively on writing systems and edited the volume *Writing systems and cognition* (cf. Watt 1994a), the two related meanings of *graphonomy* and *graphonomics* apparently do collapse, as he notes: “There is no unified viewpoint from which to survey the study of writing systems. If there were, it could as well be called ‘graphonomics’ as anything else” (Watt 1994b: vii). In a later passage, he acknowledges the term’s above-mentioned non-linguistic origin, however, associating with it the advantage of not carrying any connotational baggage: “‘Graphonomics’ has gained currency through use by Kao, van Galen, and Hoosain (1986), and has the signal advantage of not being associated with quackery or dead grammatical theories. It parallels ‘linguistics’ in the broadest sense.” (Watt 1994b: xii, n. 1).

As for more strongly deviating meanings, while not as influential as Derrida’s appropriation of *grammatology* (but in spirit loosely related to it), *graphonomy* – specifically “Constitutive Graphonomy” – has in a different context been defined as “a post-colonial literary theory”, “the constitutive ethnography of writing systems” (Ashcroft 1989: 58). The fact that such uses in different contexts and with (more or less) new meanings and connotations occurred for both *grammatology* and *graphonomy* (and other terms as well, see below) highlights that there is no monopoly of using very general terms formed from semantically obvious and terminologically readily available elements such as *-graph-* and *-logy* or *-nomy*, which makes their repeated coining in varying disciplinary contexts

⁹ “Hellberg uses neither the literally normative term *orthography* nor the structuralist-biased name *graphemics* (*graphology* is not available), but like his teacher Sture Allén the term *graphonomy*. However, this name changes its meaning in the course of the theoretical discussion. On p. 1 *graphonomy* is defined as an autonomous component of writing: ‘The expression part of spoken language is often termed phonology. As its counterpart for written language, the term *graphonomy* has gained ground ...’. The aim of the paper is to investigate the ‘relation between phonology and graphonomy’ (p. 1). A ‘graphonomic environment’ (p. 45) is thus a context consisting of letters. On the other hand, a ‘graphonomic rule’ (p. 42, 43 and passim) is an orthographic rule, i.e., a rule linking sounds and letters, and in p. 201, note 20 *graphonomy* is suddenly presented as ‘all (relevant) graphonomic rules’, i.e., as equivalent to orthography. *Graphonomy* covers even more in p. 47: ‘exception features in the lexicon as well as the interspersed spelling rules’” (my translation).

understandable (and, from the perspective of each coining and coiner, justified). This is also the reason the use of the next candidate term as well as repeated attempts at reappropriating it are indeed quite relatable.

2.3 Graphology: Perfectly parallel, but already occupied

The story of *graphology*, at least from the perspective of a forming study of writing in need of a name, is rather unfortunate. The obvious both formal and conceptual parallelism with *phonology* and *morphology* (see also Joyce 2023: 140), an undeniably established and widely used linguistic term, can straightforwardly explain the motivation behind proposing *graphology* as the name for its written equivalent. According to German linguist Konrad Ehlich (2007: 728), this leaning on successful pre-existing terms is a symptom of a general terminological trend in the linguistic treatment of writing: “Die Terminologisierung [in der linguistischen Schriftforschung, DM] ist Ausdruck eines Teilhabeversuches am Nutzen dessen, was in der Phonologie mit einem ziemlichen Erfolg erreicht worden war.”¹⁰ However, when the point in linguistics had been reached in which the subbranch dealing with writing had matured enough to require (or justify) a name of its own, *graphology* had already been taken – or somewhat more drastically put, preemptively ‘derailed’ – by “[t]he study of handwriting from the point of view of diagnostic psychology”, the basic assumption of which “is that features of handwriting [...] are indicative of character and personality traits” (Coulmas 1996a: 178). The disputed (pseudo-)scientific status of such a psychological handwriting-focused *graphology* (vs. uncontroversially accepted forensic handwriting analysis, which must be carefully separated from it),¹¹ which became popular at the end of the 19th century with works such as Klages’ (1917) *Handschrift und Charakter* (‘Handwriting and character’), shall not be discussed here. It is noteworthy, however, that it is often heavily scrutinized in linguistic works on writing (such as in Dürscheid 2016: 201f., n. 166).

Of relevance in the present historiographic account of terminology is that despite its dominant different meaning, “[s]ometimes the term ‘graphology’ is also used in analogy with ‘phonology’, that is, in the sense of *graphemics*” (Coulmas 1996a: 178; for *graphem(at)ics*, see next section). In this context, at least three main strategies of dealing with the term *graphology* need to be distinguished: (i) it is used in a linguistic reading without reference to its existing psychological meaning – either as a name for a linguistic phenomenon (i.e., a written module of language) or as a name of the field studying it, reproducing the above-mentioned ambiguity, (ii) it is rejected on grounds of its psychological meaning, or (iii) this meaning is acknowledged, but the term is reappropriated in the context of linguistics.

When searching for adoptions of the term in linguistic publications,¹² quite a few can be found – both in noun form (*graphology*) and in adjectival form (*graphological*).¹³ Examples include Logan (1973: Chapter III), who, in his study, devotes an entire chapter to ‘graphology’ (parallel to another chapter on ‘phonology’); he defines it as a synonym of ‘writing system’ (Logan 1973: 32) and mentions that he adopted the term from McIntosh’s (1961) ‘Graphology and Meaning’ (Logan 1973: 32, n. 1). Indeed, linguist Angus McIntosh is claimed to have been one of the first to use *graphology* systematically in

¹⁰ “Terminologization [in linguistic writing research, DM] is an expression of an attempt to share in the benefits of what had been achieved with a fair amount of success in phonology“ (my translation). Cf. also Wales (2014: 194, emphasis in original): “From Gk *graphos* ‘written’, linguistics has spawned a whole set of terms to do with the study of written language, most by analogy with the study of speech in PHONETICS and PHONOLOGY.”

¹¹ This perceived pseudo-scientific status is something *graphology* shares with the terminologically parallel *astrology*.

¹² Notably, what I carried out here were simple searches on Google Books and Google Scholar and not sophisticated and in-depth literature searches, which would likely yield more interesting results.

¹³ One slightly deviating form can be found in Louis Hjelmslev’s (1947: 69, my emphasis) ‘Structural analysis of language’, where he uses *graphiology* – although it is not clear whether this may be a typo: “Thus, Saussure would have it that the sounds of a spoken language, or the characters of a written language, should be described, not primarily in terms of phonetics or of *graphiology*, respectively, but in terms of mutual relations only, and, similarly, the units of the linguistic content (the units of meaning) should be described primarily not in terms of semantics but in terms of mutual relations only.”

this linguistic reading, as also outlined – and later contextualized with respect to the non-linguistic meaning of the term – by Gómez-Jiménez (2015: 71, emphasis in original):

Graphology is a linguistic level of analysis that comprises the study of graphic aspects of language. This term was first brought into use in linguistic studies in the sixties by McIntosh (1961), who considered it an analogous mode to that of phonology. In his paper ‘Graphology and Meaning’, he declared he had used graphology ‘in a sense which is intended to answer, in the realm of written language, to that of ‘phonology’ in the realm of spoken language’ (1961: 107).

Slightly later, well-known British linguist David Crystal started using the term, first together with Derek Davy (cf. Crystal & Davy [1969] 1979) and then in many later publications (such as Crystal 1980: 168f., [1987] 1997: 184–209, 2003: 210f.; cf. also Spitzmüller 2013: 111f. for a discussion of Crystal’s use of the term). One of his definitions reads: “*Graphology*, coined on analogy with *phonology*, is the study of the linguistic contrasts that writing systems convey” (Crystal [1987] 1997: 187, emphasis in original). As both McIntosh’s and Crystal’s uses of the term show, the pre-existing and more prominent psychological meaning is not always mentioned for clarification, even if it can be assumed that the authors were, of course, aware of it. In the majority of works, however, such a delimitation is practiced, an example being Wales’ (2014: 194, emphasis in original) *Dictionary of stylistics*, where *graphology* is defined as follows: “The study of such units in a language [graphemes and allographs, DM] is called **graphemics**, or **graphology**. (In popular usage **graphology** also refers confusingly to the study of handwriting as a means of character analysis.)” She goes on to mention that “[g]raphology can also refer to the writing system of a language, as manifested in handwriting and typography; and to the other related features [...], e.g. capitalization and punctuation”.

In most works in which the name of the study of writing is addressed explicitly, the unsuitability of *graphology* is pointed out (cf., exemplarily, Hockett 1951b: 445; Gelb 1963: 23; Nerius 1986: 38; Haralambous 2019: 151), occasionally with an explicit mention that it “is otherwise occupied” (Hockett 1951b: 445) and “could lead to a misunderstanding” (Gelb 1963: 23), such as by Daniels (2018: 5), who states (in parentheses, and rather critically) that “[g]raphology is the pseudoscience of diving someone’s personality from their handwriting”. Interestingly, in some of these passages, often between the lines, not only a slight annoyance with the term’s prior occupation but also a related (implicit) lamenting can be perceived. Watt (1994b: xii), for example, who approaches the study of writing from a cognitive rather than a purely linguistic perspective, writes that “[t]he ideal analog of ‘phonology’ would be ‘graphology’, the study of individual letter-components of a writing-system (both studies would then deal with elements nicely fissionable into distinctive features [...]); but it remains to be seen whether this term can be freed of its previous associations”. It is words and phrases such as ‘ideal’ and ‘can be freed’ that convey a sense of regret that *graphology* is unavailable.

Konrad Ehlich, a scholar of writing instrumental in shaping the German grapholinguistic tradition (see Section 2.5), wanted to reappropriate the term after acknowledging that its predominant meaning is a different one (cf. Ehlich 2001: 63):

The term ‘phonology’ uses the affix ‘-logy’, and in doing so, it makes reference to the inner systematic quality of the phoneme system. I think, it is worthwhile to keep this line of thinking in the case of graphics. So I would like to propose re-introducing the term ‘graphology’ into the theoretical framework, as a systematically founded term. Graphology in this sense is no longer a term referring only to expression characteristics of individuals, but it is a term which refers to the inherent organized structure of writing.

(Ehlich 2001: 65)

What is noteworthy about Ehlich’s attempt at reintroducing *graphology* is the specific meaning tied to it. It does not correspond completely with different prior uses that can be considered mostly synonymous with *graphem(at)ics* or ‘writing system’ (see below) but is intended to underline the internal functional organization of writing, which, crucially, includes its oft-neglected materiality. In other words, the term “highlights that the material subsystem of writing has its own systematicity. What Ehlich means by ‘systematicity’ is the fact that writing is spatially organized in a way that allows studying it as a visual system completely without the consideration of linguistic facts” (Meletis 2020: 34). Ehlich’s reading of the term, despite its fine-grained sophistication, was never widely adopted.

Finally, and somewhat humorously, *graphology* was also appropriated by a more philosophical tradition, by Juliet Fleming (2016) in her book *Cultural graphology: Writing after Derrida*. The reason this is humorous is that, as the title suggests, this use of *graphology* follows in the direct footsteps of Derrida's adoption of *grammatology* and also somewhat resembles the above-mentioned appropriation of *graphonomy* in the context of cultural studies. In the book's introduction, titled 'From Grammatology to Cultural Graphology', Fleming (2016: 1) writes: "Cultural graphology names a new approach to the study of texts" and contextualizes it – following Derrida's own (vague) ideas about a cultural graphology – within the field of book history.¹⁴ A straightforward definition of cultural graphology is not (and possibly cannot be) given but must be deduced from passages such as this: "Another name for this discipline, which would combine (at the very least) psychoanalysis, literary history, bibliography, book history, the sociology of texts, and information technology, is, of course, cultural graphology" (Fleming 2016: 39).

2.4 Graphem(at)ics, orthography, writing systems research: Fitting but restricted

The next candidate in some ways parallels *grammatology*, *graphonomy*, and *graphology*, and in other ways it does not. *Graphemics*, or its longer form *graphematics*, which are found in many languages (German *Graphemik/Graphematik*, French *graphémique/graphématique*, Spanish *grafémica/grafemática*, Italian *grafemica/grafematica*, Swedish *grafemik/grafematik*, etc.), again denote both a part of a language system – its functional written component (sometimes distinguished from *graphetics*, its material component) – and, as with the other above-mentioned terms, the field devoted to analyzing said component.

What needs to be clarified first with respect to this term is whether there exists a semantic difference between its shorter version *graphemics* and the longer *graphematics*, both of which are modelled after speech-related linguistic fields (*phonemics* and *phonematics*, which are most often considered synonymous). Usually, they are treated as equivalents, making the choice between them a matter of taste; however, a slight preference for *graphemics* can be observed in research with an Angloamerican origin, while *graphematics* (both as an English term and its translations into other languages) is more common in research stemming from other scholarly traditions such as the German one.¹⁵ It is only in exceptions that a fine-grained difference is intended by the two terms: In their German textbook, for example, Fuhrhop & Peters (2013: 203, emphasis in original) use the associated adjectives to highlight a conceptual distinction: "‘**Graphemisch**’ wird hier verwendet, weil der direkte Bezug zum ‘Graphem’ hergestellt wird; ‘**graphematisch**’ hingegen bezieht sich auf die gesamte Graphematik, als grammatisches Teilsystem."¹⁶

As for the term's history, according to Piirainen (1986: 97), the "theory of graphemics was founded in 1930's [sic] by the linguistic schools of Prague and Helsinki"; cf. also Coulmas (1996a: 176): "The case for an autonomous graphemics has been made most forcefully and consistently since the 1930s by members of the linguistic school of Prague." While the Prague school – and most vocally its member Josef Vachek – were instrumental in the theoretical establishment of a linguistic graphemics, the focus here shall remain on the terminological side of this process. Here, what is interesting in the case of *graphem(at)ics* is that its first coining or use likely happened without much ado due to the exact – and therefore obvious – terminological "parallelism of phonemics and graphemics" (Pulgram 1951: 19); cf.

¹⁴ More specifically, she attempts a deconstruction of said field: "[...] we can use the resources of deconstruction to shake up and enlarge the field that, for the time being, and in spite of its obvious limitations, might still be called book history" (Fleming 2016: 16, emphasis in original).

¹⁵ An interesting illustration of this English vs. non-English correlation of the shorter and longer versions is the name of the 2018 iteration of the /*grafematik*/ conference series, which was called *Graphemics in the 21st Century* (cf. <http://conferences.telecom-bretagne.eu/grafematik/>, accessed November 1, 2022). Here, French *graphématique* is the equivalent to English *graphemics* (cf. also Haralambous 2019: 151) although there exist respective correspondences in both languages (English *graphematics*, French *graphémique*).

¹⁶ "‘Graphemic’ is used here because direct reference is made to ‘grapheme’; ‘graphematic’, on the other hand, refers to the whole graphematics as a grammatical subsystem" (my translation).

also Hall (1960: 13, emphasis in original): “In recent years, following upon the development of phonemic theory, there have been several discussions of the relation of phonemes to their written notation, and parallel to *phoneme* and *phonemics*, the terms *grapheme* and *graphemics* have come into use.” *Graphemics*, in other words, was simply a natural choice for the linguistic subfield (and sublevel) concerned with units of writing, so whoever used it first likely did not sell its adoption as an inventive achievement. Also, unlike *graphology*, it was not already taken by an altogether different field (see above). It is likely for these reasons that early uses of *graphemics* do without elaborate (or sometimes any) definitions,¹⁷ and the scope and tasks of the designated field are only at times characterized (cf., for example, Bazell 1956).

It was the German(ist) research tradition and community that adopted *graphemics* for the study of the specifically linguistic functions of writing (in a narrow sense) encompassing aspects such as a grapheme definition, allography, and graphotactics, and it has since consistently stuck with the term – albeit, as mentioned above, mostly in its longer form *graphematics*.¹⁸ Crucially, even when *Schriftlinguistik* as a designation for a broader, more interdisciplinary study of writing (see below) had not yet been established, *graphematics* was not intended to fill that void but was predominantly used with its specific meaning alongside other terms such as *graphetics* and *orthography* (cf., exemplarily, Augst 1985; Gallmann 1985; Günther 1988; Fuhrhop & Peters 2013; Berg & Evertz 2018; Berg 2019). In other words, in the German reading, *graphematics* does not denote the multifaceted study of writing in its entirety but indeed only the linguistic part of it – and possibly not even all of that, either. In Dürscheid’s seminal *Einführung in die Schriftlinguistik* (2002), for example, graphematics was treated in an eponymous chapter alongside chapters covering, among others, the history of writing, literacy acquisition, and orthography. Especially the coexistence of dedicated chapters on graphematics and orthography must be commented on, both because it insinuates that they are not the same phenomenon and because the latter, like graphematics, has also been (and is partially still being) used as a *pars pro toto* designation for the linguistic study of writing, especially in the Angloamerican realm.

This is not the place to discuss in detail how in English-language work published mostly by scholars socialized in an English-writing culture, *orthography* (from Greek *ὀρθο-* ‘correct’, coupled with the recurring *-graphy*) is used in a descriptive reading related in sense to the above-mentioned *graphematics* or even the broader *writing system* (see below). In short, the reason for this could be that for varieties of written English, no binding orthographic codification regulated by an official authority of linguistic policy exists – as it does for the German writing system with the *Amtliche Regelung* issued by the *Council for German Orthography* (cf., for more details on the difference between descriptive and prescriptive meanings of *orthography*, Meletis 2021a; Meletis & Dürscheid 2022: Chapter 5). While in Germanist research, *graphematics* and *orthography* thus denote different phenomena,¹⁹ in literature with an Angloamerican origin, *orthography* is frequently used in a more general manner so that, for example, Richard Venezky’s (1970) seminal book on the English writing system (and not just its normative aspects) is called *The structure of English orthography*. And for *orthography*, too, we encounter the typical ambiguity, as to this day, it is used also for the enterprise of studying orthographic (or graphematic) structures, as in Condorelli’s (2022) *Introduction to historical orthography* (cf. also Condorelli 2020), in which it is defined as “the scientific study of writing in history” which “focuses on the description and study of orthographies, their development over time, as well as the forces and the processes which shaped and directed modifications in historical writing features” (Condorelli 2022: 3).²⁰

¹⁷ Cf. Hamp (1959: 1), who, in a paper titled ‘Graphemics and paragraphemics’ (!), writes: “It is not the purpose of the present note to discuss graphemics in any detail; nor is graphemics as such the central theme.”

¹⁸ Notably, Althaus’ (1980) article in a German-language linguistic lexicon was still titled ‘Graphematik’, so the shorter version was also used in German before becoming dispreferred.

¹⁹ This is also evident in the title of Gerhard Augst’s (1986) edited volume *New trends in graphemics and orthography*.

²⁰ It must be noted both that Condorelli (2022: Chapter 1) is aware of and does discuss the different meanings of *orthography* and that there are, of course, orthography-like normative phenomena also in historical stages of writing systems that are not officially regulated (cf., exemplarily, Mihm 2016). Also, as concerns the historical study of writing systems, a different tradition rooted mostly in German-language research must be mentioned, which goes by *historical graphematics* (cf., for instance, Elmentaler 2018). On the webpage of the book series *LautSchriftSprache* (Dr. Reichert Verlag), which is associated with the eponymous conference series focusing

In some modern works fundamentally based on earlier structuralist German research on writing, graphematics and orthography are seen as individual – albeit interacting and overlapping – components or ‘modules’ of a writing system, which itself is defined as the graphic and linguistic notation of a specific language. This view is most pronounced in Martin Neef’s (2005, 2015) multimodular theory of writing systems originally devised for German and later other alphabets (cf. Meletis 2020 for a broader adaptation considering also non-alphabetic systems). It is this use of the term and concept of *writing system* that serves as a fitting transition to the final candidate designation that shall be mentioned in this section, the umbrella term *writing systems research*. It is, first and foremost, the title of a Taylor & Francis journal that was published from 2009 to 2019, when it was, unfortunately, ceased. Rarely, the term can also be found in individual publications such as Mark Sebba’s (2009) ‘Sociolinguistic approaches to writing systems research’, in Joyce & Meletis (2021), where it is given preference over *grapholinguistics*, which there is mentioned as its synonym, or Joyce (2023). *Writing systems research* has the obvious benefits of being rather neutral and broad; when looking at the aims and scope of the now-defunct journal, for example, a multidisciplinary yet curiously selective picture is drawn of what the associated field could cover; it is reproduced in the following.²¹

Writing Systems Research (WSR) publishes work concerned with any issue to do with the analysis, use and acquisition of writing systems (WSs) such as:

1. The linguistic analysis of writing systems at various levels (e.g. orthography, punctuation, typography), including comparative WS research.
2. The learning and use of writing systems, including:
 - Learning to read and write in children (normal and disabled children, bilingual children acquiring two WSs, deaf children) and adults (illiterates, learners of second language WSs).
 - The psycholinguistic processes of reading (grapheme recognition, word recognition) and writing (spelling, handwriting) in specific writing systems and in cross-orthographic comparisons.
3. Neurolinguistics and writing systems (e.g., lateralisation, reading pathologies, reading and writing disorders).
4. The correlates of writing systems:
 - Writing systems and metalinguistic awareness (e.g., phonemic awareness, word awareness).
 - Cognitive consequences of writing systems (e.g., visual memory, representations of time sequences).
5. Writing systems and computer/new media:
 - Computers in reading and writing.
 - Consequences of computers/new media on writing systems and their use.
 - Computer modelling of writing systems.

This list reveals the journal’s (and field’s?) linguistic and psychological/psycholinguistic as well as cognitive focus and mentions – somewhat out of place – also ‘computers’ and ‘new media’ (rather than the broader ‘technology’) as an additional perspective on writing systems. What is strikingly omitted is the sociolinguistic perspectives that had even been characterized by Sebba (2009) in his article published in the journal’s inaugural volume. The journal thus sees literacy practices and in general the use of writing systems mainly from a processing perspective, not a more user-oriented communicative one.

on the diachronic study of writing, historical graphematics is defined as follows: “Als ein multidisziplinäres Forschungsgebiet stellt die [historische, DM] Graphematik die Brücke zwischen Philologie, Sprachgeschichte, Epigraphik und Semiotik dar. Daher beschreibt die historische Graphematik die allgemeinen Strukturen überlieferter Schreibsysteme” (cf. https://reichert-verlag.de/buchreihen/sprachwissenschaft_reihen/sprachwissenschaft_lautschriftsprache_scriptandsound, accessed November 1, 2022). [“As a multidisciplinary field of research, [historical, DM] graphematics represents the bridge between philology, language history, epigraphy, and semiotics. Therefore, historical graphematics describes the general structures of surviving writing systems.”]

²¹ <https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?show=aimsScope&journalCode=pwstr20> (accessed November 1, 2022).

Furthermore, the specific use of ‘writing system’ rather than just ‘writing’ (or *Written Language and Literacy*, which is the title of another central writing-related journal published by John Benjamins) implies a field that is more restricted than a comprehensive study of writing, as is also argued in Meletis (2020: 3, n. 3, emphasis in original):

[...] although its focus on writing systems is obviously justified, the term insinuates a narrower scope than what is actually studied by grapholinguistics: for example, solely graphetic research endeavors, such as studies that test which connotations or emotions different typefaces evoke, are definitely grapholinguistic but not about the writing system *per se*. Such questions might not always be seen as writing systems research.

In this quote, the designation of choice for the study of writing is *grapholinguistics*, to which we turn next.

2.5 *Schriftlinguistik*/grapholinguistics: A question of disciplinary (in)dependence and tradition

We thus arrive at the nowadays most widely adopted – but by no means unanimously accepted – designation for the study of writing, *grapholinguistics*, and its relation to its widespread German sister term *Schriftlinguistik*. Although, in the meaning relevant here, *grapholinguistics* entered the Anglophone research realm only recently (through, among others, Neef’s above-mentioned 2015 article ‘Writing systems as modular objects: Proposals for theory design in grapholinguistics’), its history is a much longer one. In German, *Schriftlinguistik* (and its synonym *Grapholinguistik*) had been used since roughly 1980, at first mainly by the *Forschungsgruppe Orthographie*, a research group surrounding German linguist Dieter Nerius (cf. Nerius 2012), who is sometimes mentioned as the founder of the term (cf. Neef 2021; Dürscheid 2016: 12, n. 2). One of its first uses in print can be traced to 1986,²² when Nerius used it in an article addressing concepts in the field of written language (‘Zur Begriffsbestimmung im Bereich der geschriebenen Sprache’):

Diese Ansätze einer Linguistik der [geschriebenen Sprache] und einer Linguistik der [gesprochenen Sprache] oder, wie wir auch sagen können, einer Grapholinguistik und einer Phonolinguistik, gilt es weiterzuentwickeln und auszubauen. Für die Grapholinguistik, die hier im Mittelpunkt unseres Interesses steht, gehört dazu nicht nur die Untersuchung des Graphemsystems und der anderen graphischen Formeinheiten, [...] sondern auch die Untersuchung graphomorphologischer, grapholexikalischer, graphosyntaktischer, graphotextualer und natürlich auch graphostilistischer Erscheinungen, im weiteren Sinne also sowohl das System der [geschriebenen Sprache] als auch ihre Verwendung in der schriftlichen Kommunikation. (Nerius 1986: 37)²³

Nerius does not provide a detailed definition but characterizes *Grapholinguistik* as ‘the linguistics of written language’ encompassing the study of both the system of written language – at various linguistic levels such as the ‘graphomorphological’ one – and its use in written communication. Given that the German-language journal in which his article was published also includes abstracts in English, Russian, and French for all its articles, translations of term are provided: English *grapholinguistics*, Russian *графолингвистика* (‘grafolingvistika’), French *grapholinguistique*.²⁴ From this, one can conclude that

²² Neef (2021) notes that German linguist Helmut Glück had already used *Schriftlinguistik* in his habilitation thesis which was accepted in 1984 and published in 1987 (cf. Glück 1987: 13, 59).

²³ “These approaches of a linguistics of [written language] and a linguistics of [spoken language] or, as we can also say, a grapholinguistics and a phonolinguistics, need to be further developed and expanded. For grapholinguistics, which is the focus of our interest here, this includes not only the study of the grapheme system and the other graphic form units, [...] but also the study of graphomorphological, grapholexical, graphosyntactic, graphotextual, and, of course, graphostylistic phenomena, in the broader sense, that is, both the system of [written language] and its use in written communication” (my translation).

²⁴ In this context, the Croatian grapholinguistic tradition shall also be mentioned, whose most prominent representative is Mateo Žagar. In his research, which includes the 2007 book *Grafo lingvistika srednjovjekovnih tekstova* (‘Grapholinguistics of medieval texts’), he – with reference to Christa Dürscheid’s work (see below) – applies a grapholinguistic framework to historical texts. Cf. also Žagar (2020: 180): “With the introduction of modern, primarily structuralist, grapholinguistics, scholars can now work on a solid framework within which

English *grapholinguistics* was Nerius' translation of choice – or at least one he likely approved of. Indeed, *grapholinguistics* is a straightforward and uncontroversial translation of German *Grapholinguistik*. Interestingly, however, the latter is not the German term that would eventually prevail and become established. Shortly after Nerius' article, in 1988, a volume co-edited by him and fellow German linguist Gerhard Augst already had the alternative *Schriftlinguistik* in its subtitle (cf. Nerius & Augst 1988). In the volume's introduction, in commenting on writing-related works that had been published up until that point, Nerius (1988: 1) remarks: "Solche Arbeiten dokumentieren das Interesse der internationalen Linguistik an diesem Forschungsgegenstand und zeigen, daß sich hier eine eigenständige linguistische Teildisziplin, die Schriftlinguistik oder Grapholinguistik, entwickelt hat."²⁵ This quote is relevant for two reasons that shall be addressed in more detail in the following: firstly, and terminologically, it marked the first step in *Grapholinguistik* being relegated to the status of a (mere) synonym of the preferred *Schriftlinguistik*; secondly, and more importantly, at the conceptual level, Nerius defines the field as a branch or subdiscipline of linguistics – albeit an explicitly 'independent' one.

As for the first of these points, the mentioned volume was just the initial step in promoting *Schriftlinguistik* as the new designation for the field. In 1993, the first edition of a now well-known German linguistic dictionary, the *Metzler Lexikon Sprache*, edited by Helmut Glück (cf. Glück 1993), included an entry 'Schriftlinguistik', and in 1995, a festschrift for Dieter Nerius was published (cf. Ewald & Sommerfeldt 1995) which highlighted the term very prominently in its title *Beiträge zur Schriftlinguistik* ('Contributions to *Schriftlinguistik*'). The arguably decisive moment in the term's establishment, however, came with the publication of the first edition of Christa Dürscheid's *Einführung in die Schriftlinguistik* in 2002. While, given the examples above, it was not the first book to carry the term in its title, it was not a collection of different shorter contributions to the field but a coherent single-authored textbook giving an overview of the field's different facets, thereby systematically characterizing and arguably in large part constituting it in the first place. Interestingly, although by the early 2000's, as outlined above, the term had already circulated for some time in the Germanophone linguistic community, Dürscheid wrote:

In diesem Buch wird der Standpunkt vertreten, dass die Schrift genuin ein Gegenstand der Sprachwissenschaft ist. Um dies kenntlich zu machen, trägt das Buch den Titel 'Einführung in die Schriftlinguistik', obwohl der Terminus 'Schriftlinguistik' bis heute nicht in den fachsprachlichen Gebrauch eingegangen ist. (Dürscheid 2016: 11)²⁶

The perception at the time the textbook was written was evidently that although *Schriftlinguistik* was being used in specialized circles, it – as well as the field it is meant to label – had not yet been accepted into the canon of linguistics at large (see also below). This, notably, is something that Dürscheid's textbook has managed to change following its publication. In 2012/13, German linguists Martin Neef and Rüdiger Weingarten (later also joined by Said Sahel) began editing a dictionary called *Schriftlinguistik* in the De Gruyter series *Dictionaries of Linguistics and Communication Science*, a companion series to the influential handbook series *Handbooks of Linguistics and Communication Science*. In the latter, the two-volume interdisciplinary handbook *Schrift and Schriftlichkeit/Writing and its use* edited by Hartmut Günther and Otto Ludwig (1994/1996) had been published, which, strikingly, did not utilize the term *Schriftlinguistik* that would eventually be picked as the title of the sister dictionary. For what follows, it is crucial to note that the dictionary series was meant (at least initially) to be bilingual; while the German versions of the dictionaries, the first of which was published in print in 2021,²⁷ include English definitions for all lemmas, the plan was to also publish entire equivalent

phenomena representing the distinct written realization of a linguistic unit are placed, together with the visual surroundings that optimise the transmission of a textual linguistic message [...]."

²⁵ "Such works document the interest of international linguistics in this research subject and show that an independent linguistic subdiscipline, [Schriftlinguistik] or [Grapholinguistik], has developed here" (my translation).

²⁶ "This book argues that writing is a genuine subject of linguistics. To make this clear, the book is entitled 'Introduction to [Schriftlinguistik]', although the term 'Schriftlinguistik' has not yet entered linguistic jargon" (my translation). Note that this passage is still intact in the textbook's fifth edition published in 2016.

²⁷ See <https://www.degruyter.com/serial/wsk-b/html#volumes> (accessed November 2, 2022).

dictionaries in English. Importantly, now, for the *Schriftlinguistik* one, *Grapholinguistics* was chosen as the title.²⁸ This represented a vital step in establishing *grapholinguistics* not merely as an apparent translation of the superseded and little-used German *Grapholinguistik* – which in the dictionary itself is also treated as a mere synonym of *Schriftlinguistik* (cf. Neef 2021) – but to establish it officially and visibly as the English designation of a field that, in the German-speaking area, had already found a considerable footing. Note, however, that the *grapho-* in *grapholinguistics* was by no means an obvious choice from a purely formal perspective, and certainly not an inevitable one.²⁹

Take *Korpuslinguistik*, for example, which in English is *corpus linguistics*, or *Kontaktlinguistik*, which in English is *contact linguistics* (or sometimes simply referred to by the phenomenon studied, *language contact*). These German labels, now, are categorically different from words like *Psycholinguistik*, *Soziolinguistik*, and also *Grapholinguistik*, in which bound lexemes are combined with *-linguistik* (in English, too, they are bound: *psycholinguistics*, *sociolinguistics*, *grapholinguistics*), as *Korpus*, *Kontakt*, and also *Schrift* are all free lexemes. Accordingly, a two-part English translation of *Schriftlinguistik* following the pattern of *corpus linguistics* would have been a possibility, raising the question of which word would be the best English choice for the broad *Schrift*: *writing*, which itself is polysemous as it designates – among many other things – both the act of writing and the resulting product, resulting in the awkward-sounding *writing linguistics*? Or maybe the Latin-derived *script* (which thus more elegantly aligns with likewise Latin-derived *linguistics*)?³⁰ Indeed, *script linguistics* has been used sporadically (cf., for example, Rössler, Besl & Saller 2021: XXVI); its core drawbacks are that *script* itself has been used with myriad different definitions, and these generally also have a narrower semantic scope than *writing* (see also the discussion of *scriptology* in the next section).

That *Schriftlinguistik* belongs to the free morpheme group while *grapholinguistics* is part of the bound morpheme group is not trivial but associated with an important semantic difference: the free morphemes in these designations stand for what is being studied by the respective fields: language contact, corpora, writing. By contrast, the bound morphemes are abbreviations for fields themselves (and associated methods, theories, paradigms, etc.). One of the criticisms that have been voiced against *grapholinguistics* is that as a designation, it evokes the latter group while the field that is in need of a name – the ‘study of writing’ – is actually of the former type. Unlike *psycholinguistics* or *sociolinguistics*, thus, *grapholinguistics* is not the merging of two disciplines: when *psycho-* stands for *psychology* and *socio-* for *sociology*, what does the *grapho-* stand for? The sobering answer: A discipline that does not exist, a discipline that is – as this paper shows – assigned many names, for which *grapholinguistics*, in its entirety, as an attempt to translate the uncontroversial *Schriftlinguistik*, is admittedly a less-than-ideal workaround *not* – as claimed in Meletis (2020: 8) – exactly parallel to labels for other subfields of applied linguistics. Daniel Harbour (pers. comm., Oct. 2022) explains with regard to *grapholinguistics*:

It cuts the world up in the wrong way. We already have formal linguistics, neurolinguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, etc. There is of course a degree of overlap between these (a sociolinguist can take a historical perspective and so end up doing sociohistorical linguistics; or sociophonetics; and a theoretical explanation can be given to some sociolinguistic variation). But for the most part, these subfields are distinct as to methods and subject matter. ‘Grapholinguistics’, qua term, gets the wrong end of the stick. Grapholinguistics does not sit alongside these areas as a separate subdiscipline. It crosscuts them. Neurolinguistics and psycholinguistics rely heavily on, and feed significantly into, the study of writing systems. Written language is just as suited to sociolinguistic study as spoken language is. Historical linguistic methods likewise.

²⁸ See <https://www.wsk.fau.de/baende/englischsprachige-wsk-baende/> (accessed October 24, 2022).

²⁹ Notably, arguing about the *grapho-* as the first (and obvious) constituent that recurs throughout the terminology used in the study of writing may be beside the point here and thus merely a cosmetic terminological analysis as the term’s component that people actually appear to have a problem with is evidently *-linguistics*, which is interpreted as limiting the field’s scope to linguistic questions (see below).

³⁰ The mixture of Greek *grapho-* with Latin *-linguistics* has indeed been criticized (Peter Daniels, pers. comm., Nov. 2020); see also a comment by user ‘Coby Lubliner’ under the blog entry ‘Grapholinguistics’ in the *Language Log* (<https://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=46324>, accessed November 2, 2022). Interestingly, for other etymologically (mostly) parallel designations – such as *psycholinguistics* – this mixture does not appear to be a problem.

This very clearly reiterates that the decision of how to name the field is not merely a terminological one but one that feeds into the crucial question of how the field is conceived and contextualized, what it covers, and what its boundaries are. As outlined above, Nerius (1986) had considered grapholinguistics a linguistic subdiscipline but had added that it was ‘independent’. What does this mean? It is likely related to Harbour’s reservations against *grapholinguistics*: the study of writing is inherently interdisciplinary and characterized by the adoption of multiple perspectives. Placing *grapholinguistics* alongside *psycholinguistics* and *sociolinguistics*, now, means it is separated from them although grapholinguistics has psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic questions at its core, and simultaneously, psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics deal with writing, too.³¹

The second major criticism voiced against *grapholinguistics* is that the interdisciplinarity needed to study the subject of writing as well as the great theoretical and methodological breadth and diversity of the questions associated with it make it its very own field; *grapholinguistics*, thus, somewhat inadequately and unfairly ties it (and reduces it) to linguistics when not all writing-related aspects studied are actually linguistic in nature.³² In other words, this line of criticism denounces the field’s incorporation into (or appropriation by) linguistics that is terminologically insinuated by *grapholinguistics*.³³ However, in direct response to this, it can be argued that while the subject of writing is indeed multifaceted and can only be captured by a mixture of disciplines and associated methods, writing is, at its core, a linguistic phenomenon, i.e., the graphic manifestation of language³⁴ – which is not to say that it is not also a lot more than that. Against this background, the terminological focus on linguistics would be warranted even for an interdisciplinary *grapholinguistics*. Following this line of argument, it could also be claimed that while several aspects of writing can be studied without a consideration of its linguistic facets, a truly systematic – and arguably part of a comprehensive – analysis and theory of writing can only be achieved on the basis of a solid linguistic foundation. This is highlighted by linguist Elisabeth Stark (2022: 28) in her discussion of disciplinary limits and their relation to interdisciplinarity:

Schrift als eigene Manifestationsform des Sprachlichen hat erst in jüngerer Zeit das systematische Interesse der Linguistik auf sich gezogen [...], und während die Beschreibung von Schriftsystemen und ihre Entstehung ebenso wie ihre gesellschaftliche und ökonomische Relevanz auch HistorikerInnen und im weiteren Sinne KulturwissenschaftlerInnen leisten können, kann nur eine Sprachwissenschaftlerin diesen Aspekten ein theoretisches Kapitel zur sprachwissenschaftlich fundierten Reflexion und Modellierung des Verhältnisses von Gesprochenem und Geschriebenem voranstellen. Schriftgeschichte, Orthographie und Typographie erfordern weiterhin eher wenig systematisches Wissen über die grundlegende Struktur menschlicher Sprache(n), wohl aber die Graphematik.³⁵

³¹ See also Joyce (2023: 140): “Meletis [...] suggests [...] that this designation has parallels with other subdisciplines of linguistics, such as sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics. While there is some merit in that observation, in contrast to the more interdisciplinary natures of both sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics, debatably, the term grapholinguistics fails to fully accord the study of writing with the central status that it deserves alongside the study of speech.” Cf. also Barbarić (2023: 119).

³² The fact that in the absence of institutionalization, grapholinguistics – or more generally the study of writing – does require some sort of ‘home’ discipline (or multiple such disciplines) to organizationally cling to is discussed in Section 2.7.

³³ In this context, Daniel Harbour (pers. comm., Oct. 2023) hypothesizes that having trained in formal linguistics could lead to finding the term less appealing: “In eschewing a name based on *linguistics*, we signal that we are stepping outside the linguistics in which we trained.”

³⁴ Cf. also Meletis (2020: 8, emphasis in original): “[...] writing, following a narrow definition, refers only to those graphic (i.e. visual and/or tactile) ‘marks’ that represent language. This excludes marks that refer (directly) to ideas or extralinguistic referents. Writing is always intimately tied to language, and language is the subject of linguistics. The term *grapholinguistics* highlights this linguistic basis.”

³⁵ “Writing as a separate form of manifestation of language has only recently attracted the systematic interest of linguistics [...], and while the description of writing systems and their emergence as well as their social and economic relevance can also be carried out by historians and, in a broader sense, cultural scientists, only a linguist can preface these aspects with a theoretical chapter on linguistically grounded reflection and modeling of the relationship between the spoken and the written. The history of writing, orthography, and typography still require

Ironically, what Stark criticizes in her paper titled ‘Warum es nur eine Linguistik gibt: Keine Interdisziplinarität ohne starke Disziplinen’ (‘Why there is only one linguistics: No interdisciplinarity without strong disciplines’) is precisely that many scholars operate within interdisciplinary ‘subdisciplines’ that require linguistics or other neighboring disciplines to have permeable boundaries, which according to her causes conflation and ultimately a weakening of the participating disciplines. In her view, true and successful interdisciplinarity can only be achieved when disciplines are strictly and narrowly defined. Although she does not mention it explicitly, it can be assumed that she rejects an interdisciplinary grapholinguistics, as only a narrowly defined graphematics – indeed commonly conceived of as a (if not *the*) central subfield of grapholinguistics – is a truly linguistic matter.

Despite a focus on linguistic questions, it is precisely such an interdisciplinary interpretation of grapholinguistics that has been – at least in the German-speaking community – widely accepted, not least because of Dürscheid’s textbook in which a chapter on graphematics is accompanied by chapters on, e.g., the history of writing, orthography, and typography – the topics Stark singles out as (predominantly?) non-linguistic. In other words, despite its terminological focus on linguistics, *grapholinguistics* denotes a field that is truly interested in all aspects of the linguistic phenomenon of writing – even if they are themselves non-linguistic. Thus, in recent publications, definitions such as the following can be found: “*Schriftlinguistik* (also known as grapholinguistics), a young linguistic subdiscipline that deals with the scientific study of *all* aspects of writing” (Condorelli 2022: 113, my emphasis). Further compelling evidence for the inclusivity of grapholinguistics is given by (socio)linguist Jürgen Spitzmüller who, starting with the third edition of Dürscheid’s *Einführung in die Schriftlinguistik* (published in 2006), contributes to the textbook a chapter covering typography. Now, many typographic aspects are not linguistic in a narrow sense, but this does not mean they lack communicative functions – quite to the contrary. Although the materiality of writing had long been dismissed by linguistics proper, it *is* studied in grapholinguistics, which is “die Teildisziplin, die es sich zur Aufgabe gemacht hat, eine umfassende theoretische Beschreibung schriftlicher Kommunikation zu leisten”³⁶ (Spitzmüller in Dürscheid 2016: 241). What definitely could still be debated (see the discussion of *philography* below) is whether grapholinguistics is also interested in aspects of writing that are non-communicative, which are logically also included when speaking of *all* aspects of writing. However, this discussion would in turn first necessitate answering the question of what such aspects may be – and whether, possibly, all aspects of writing are in fact in some way (not always, but in given contexts) communicatively relevant even when this is of course not always the perspective that is of primary interest.

A further challenge faced by the term *grapholinguistics* – and others with a similar history – shall be mentioned here: its above-described origin in Germanophone research, and thus its perceived boundedness to the German scholarly tradition,³⁷ which is likely part of the reason it is not (yet) found in many English-speaking publications (cf. Barbarić 2023: 123f.). It may be extreme and provocative to claim this, but it appears terms that do not originate in Angloamerican research traditions sometimes have a harder time being accepted by ‘originally’ Anglophone scholars. In some cases, if a term is not yet established in English-language research, scholars may even be oblivious of its existence. An illuminating example of this (cf. also Meletis in press) is an entry in the well-known linguistic blog *Language Log*. For context, it should be mentioned that in 2018, French mathematician, typographer, and linguist Yannis Haralambous initiated the conference series *Grapholinguistics in the 21st Century* (abbreviated as *G21C* and also known as */gʁafematik/*, see above) and later started the book series *Grapholinguistics and Its Applications* at Fluxus Editions, a publishing house he also founded. It is a mention of the second iteration of the *G21C* conference (held in 2020) that prompted Mark Liberman to publish a post titled ‘Grapholinguistics’ (originally in double quotation marks, which serve a

rather little systematic knowledge of the basic structure of human language(s), but graphematics does” (my translation).

³⁶ “[...] the sub-discipline that has set itself the task of providing a comprehensive theoretical description of written communication” (my translation).

³⁷ In this context, the pioneer status of German-language grapholinguistic research is occasionally mentioned (cf. Meletis 2020; Neef 2021; Meletis & Dürscheid 2022).

distancing function here) in the *Language Log*. In it, Liberman first cites a passage from the conference announcement in which Haralambous comments on grapholinguistics' little-known status:

Grapholinguistics is the discipline dealing with the study of the written modality of language. At this point, the reader may ask some very pertinent questions: 'Why have I never heard of grapholinguistics?' 'If this is a subfield of linguistics, like psycholinguistics or sociolinguistics, why isn't it taught in Universities?' 'And why libraries do not abound of books [sic] about it?'

After giving this quote, Liberman proceeds to answer the first of these questions: "Speaking for myself, I'll answer: We've never heard of grapholinguistics because you just made up the word." He goes on to remark that "[u]nder headings like 'Writing Systems', the issues involved are widely taught in universities", likely implying that there is no need for the term *grapholinguistics*. Also, he lists a number of – exclusively English-language – monographic works on writing systems and contends that "there have been plenty of previous objections to the treatment of writing systems as entirely secondary, derivative, and even negligible", citing a lengthy passage from Nunberg's (1990) *The linguistics of punctuation*. Finally, he writes, "[s]o I guess that at G21C 2020 we'll learn that everything old is new again...", insinuating that grapholinguistics as a discipline attempts to reinvent the wheel and is not critically aware of and founded on important works in the study of writing – even if these had of course not been published under the heading of *grapholinguistics*. In a footnote, Liberman lists works in which the term occurs that he found on Google Scholar, including Sariti (1967) or, in a very different sense, Platt (1974), but oddly fails to mention Neef (2015) or Meletis (2018), articles published before 2020 that carry the term in their titles and are shown (at the time of the writing of this article) on the first result page for 'grapholinguistics' in Google Scholar.

In conclusion, what Liberman's blog post proves is not that Haralambous has made up the word or the field associated with it, but that – highlighted also by numerous comments made by users under the post – researchers in English-language research communities may be oblivious to its existence and rich history. To close with a more hopeful counterexample, however, it is worth mentioning that in 2020, the term was adopted by Australian linguists Piers Kelly and Arvind Iyengar, who, in the abstract of their conference talk 'What is writing? Grapholinguistics as a field of scholarly inquiry' not only acknowledge that writing is an up-and-coming subject in linguistics, archaeology, and anthropology, but also associate the resurgence of interest in writing with the 'new' term *grapholinguistics*: "This is affirmed by the recent acceptance of a new name for the study of writing systems: grapholinguistics."³⁸

2.6 Script(ur)ology: A new term for a new field?

One of the shorter sections of this paper shall be devoted to a candidate designation that was coined rather recently in the context of French semiotics (or semiology): *script(ur)ology*. In the relevant sense presented here, it was introduced in a special issue of the French journal *Signata: Annales des sémiotiques / Annals of Semiotics* entitled 'Signatures. (Essays in) Semiotics of Writing' edited by Jean-Marie Klinkenberg and Stéphane Polis. In the issue's introduction,³⁹ they write:

Writing is envisioned here in its generality, as a semiotic system that mediates between the linguistic and spatio-iconic realms. Indeed, based on detailed analyses of the semiotic functions fulfilled by graphemes, the aim of this issue is admittedly to identify criteria and principles that could be used for developing a typology of writing. As such, the volume ambitions to contribute to a 'general scriptology', a discipline already explored by pioneering works, such as the ones by Roy Harris or Anne-Marie Christin, to name but a few of the directions that this endeavor might pursue.

³⁸ See <https://rune.une.edu.au/web/handle/1959.11/30186> (accessed October 30, 2022).

³⁹ Alas, the PDF or print version of the introduction was not available to me, only the online version (<https://journals.openedition.org/signata/1274>, accessed October 31, 2022), which is why this passage is cited without page numbers.

Conceptually, the envisioned scriptology⁴⁰ is, due to its semiotic conception, broader than, for instance, a linguistic graphem(at)ics, since it is – as Klinkenberg and Polis explicitly mention – certainly also interested in spatial and iconic aspects of the written modality that are usually neglected by graphem(at)ics (and/or relegated to neighboring subdisciplines such as graphetics, cf. Meletis 2015). However, at the same time, scriptology may be more narrowly conceived than grapholinguistics, as usage-based and communicatively relevant aspects such as sociolinguistic or psycholinguistic ones remain unmentioned.⁴¹ Terminologically, as a Latin-Greek hybrid (which in its linguistic composition is the mirror image of Greek-Latin *grapholinguistics*), *scriptology* relies on the polysemous term *script* that is associated with many a concept in linguistics and beyond (see also above) and elevates it to an entire ‘study’ of writing by using the suffix *-logy*. What the authors mean by *script* remains – at least in their introduction – implicit, although several passages such as the following allow drawing conclusions: “The traditional descriptions of writing systems – which classify scripts in broad categories (alphabets, Abjads [sic], syllabic scripts, logographic scripts, etc.) – necessarily simplify their richness and intrinsic hybridity.” Here, as is so often the case in literature on writing, the terms (and associated concepts) *writing system* and *script* occur in close proximity and are likely conflated by being used more or less synonymously, here with the meaning ‘type of writing system’, examples of which are the listed categories alphabet, abjad, etc. In my reading, biased by my own theoretical conception of writing, *writing system* denotes the system of writing in/for a specific language (such as English), while I interpret *script* in a material sense as a historically developed set of basic shapes (such as Roman or Cyrillic script) that can theoretically be coupled with any language.⁴²

Confusingly, the authors’ introduction of new terminology is compromised by an unexplainable case of inconsistency when – in inconformity with the issue’s introduction – in their following ‘texte intégral’ in which they sketch their envisioned field, the central term suddenly reappears one syllable richer – as *scripturology*. In its French original, this main article is titled ‘De la scripturologie’ (an homage to Derrida?), while the English translation⁴³ is given as ‘On scripturology’. In the latter, Klinkenberg & Polis provide these definitions for the newly christened field:

In this contribution we present the principles and parameters of a discipline which remains—in our intended meaning—largely yet to be established: *scripturology*. This discipline concerns the study of different facets of writing, perceived in its generality, as the semiotic apparatus articulating language facts and spatial facts. (Klinkenberg & Polis 2018: 57, emphasis in original)

Scripturology is understood as a general theory targeting the establishment of a semiotic typology of writing systems. Its horizon is therefore compatible, within the study of writing, to that of linguistic typology. (Klinkenberg & Polis 2018: 58)

These passages reveals that they consider scripturology to be part of a larger study of writing, confirming the above assessment that it is defined more narrowly than grapholinguistics. Terminologically, although only separated by one syllable, *scripturology* differs quite significantly from *scriptology* as it is not tied to *script* but rather to a different word, as the authors explicitly note:

The term retained for designating this domain of study is a blended compound, forged from the Latin deverbal noun *scriptura* (which refers both to the ‘written thing’ and to the ‘composition’) and from the Greek suffix *-logie* (which performatively establishes the scientific character of the field); this designation indexes, in some

⁴⁰ Condorelli (2022: 116, emphasis in original) also mentions a different meaning of (French) *scriptologie*: “Generally speaking, *scriptologie* has been used as a framework of inquiry for studying the Gallo-Romance and Italo-Romance dialectal areas and, although less comprehensively, the Ibero-Romance area.”

⁴¹ Note, however, that Condorelli (2022: 115), for example, still interprets the two as more or less synonymous: “[...] *scriptology*, which [...] corresponds to the general area of writing theory that contemporary linguists call grapholinguistics.”

⁴² Cf. also Coulmas (1996b: 1380, emphasis in original): “*Script* refers to the actual shapes by which a writing system is visually instantiated. [...] Every writing needs for its materialization a script, but there is no necessary link between a particular script and a particular writing system”. But see Gnanadesikan (2017) for a use in line with Klinkenberg’s and Polis’.

⁴³ The English translation was prepared by Todd J. Gillen.

way, the hybrid and heterogeneous character of the domain of study that we bring together and unify under this banner. (Klinkenberg & Polis 2018: 58, emphasis in original)

At the specific level, one could ask the question of whether (and why) a new term is needed for what essentially appears to be a semiotically broader approach to writing system typology.⁴⁴ More globally, what can be discussed in this context is the general decision to coin a new term. Arguably, proposing a new designation for a field is intended to echo the novelty of one's idea; as Klinkenberg & Polis (2018: 57) emphasize, in their meaning, the discipline has "yet to be established". Tying a new name to it – not unlike Christa Dürscheid did with her *Einführung in die Schriftlinguistik*, although *Schriftlinguistik* was not entirely new but rather unestablished – is, on the one hand, meant to contribute to the establishment of the field. On the other hand, we find another motivation rooted in the sociology of science (or rather, at a meta-level, academia): coining a new label – or successfully reappropriating it, see Derrida and 'his' *grammatology* – has the potential to tie the founder to the named discipline in quite a profound way. This can go awry when the term is not adopted by others and buried in oblivion; if, however, it is accepted and comes into widespread use, it can, by association, automatically cement the coiner's status as an authority in the field.

To close this section, as was done in the preceding ones, different, potentially even non-writing related uses of the discussed term shall be mentioned briefly. In the case of Latin *scriptura*, of course, it is rather obvious which other meaning – besides 'something written' – is a candidate for interference, as it has prevailed as the meaning of modern English *scripture*. Indeed, *scripturology* can be found – albeit admittedly not often – in this theological reading, an example being Mohsen Goudarzi Taghanaki's PhD thesis *The second coming of the book: Rethinking Qur'anic scripturology and prophetology*, in which *scripturology* is defined as "a new interpretation of the Qur'an's conception of scriptural [...] history" (Goudarzi Taghanaki 2018: iii). A related definition is also provided in Tan (1982: 51): "Scripturology is a rather generic designation of the study of all written bases or scriptures or religions such as the Bible for Christianity, the Koran for Islam, the Tend-Avesta for Zoroastrianism, the Vedas for Hinduism, the Tripitaka for Buddhism, the Kojiki or Nihonji, for Shintoism, and others."

2.7 Philography: An (old) new term and the future of an identity crisis

In recent years, as the study of writing is gaining traction and a more international community is forming – thanks to conference series such as the *Association for Written Language and Literacy* workshops and others – the field's designation has become the target of renewed debate. Especially the recent – prominent and highly visible – adoption of *grapholinguistics* in the title of the *Grapholinguistics in the 21st Century* conference series and the associated impression that it is in the process of winning this terminological battle have resulted in both an actual increase of occurrences of the term and the fact that it is more vocally scrutinized. The latter also stimulates the (renewed) discussion of alternative terms in which the present paper can be contextualized and that also at times produces new proposals. At this point, then, the non-exhaustive treatment of different candidates shall be closed with the presentation of such a 'new' (if in fact pre-existing) term that has been suggested in this context: *philography*.

In informal chats during conference breaks (at the 12th workshop of the Association for Written Language and Literacy in Cambridge in 2019), Amalia Gnanadesikan and Daniel Harbour expressed their reservations about *grapholinguistics* and brainstormed possible alternatives, agreeing on *philography* as a suited candidate.⁴⁵ When invited to elaborate on their preference, they explained as follows:

I do like 'philography', though. I like the appeal to precedent in 'philosophy' and 'philology'. While I have no objection to the use of 'grapholinguistics' when it is applicable [...], I like the fact that 'philography' focuses

⁴⁴ In Joyce & Meletis (2021), 'traditional' writing system typology's narrow focus on the linguistic levels that written units relate to (yielding categories such as phonography and morphography) is likewise criticized as being simplistic and reductive, and alternative criteria for other types of (also psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic) typologies are proposed (cf. also Meletis 2021b) – however, no new term is introduced.

⁴⁵ Harbour has already used the term – in the form of the adjective *philographic* – in Harbour (2021: 201).

on writing in and for itself, not just when it is a subfield of linguistics. Thus I see it as a wider word than ‘grapholinguistics’. It is both more inclusive (not just linguistics) and more focused on its actual subject (writing itself in all its aspects) [...]. (Amalia Gnanadesikan pers. comm., Oct. 2022)

‘Philography’ suggests a study that crosscuts these disciplines [neurolinguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, ..., DM], just as philosophy and philology do. And, like philosophy especially, it can bleed at the edges. Just as there is philosophy of art, so there is artistic use of scripts, of typography. I want these areas to be included in our discipline and I see ‘philography’ as opening that door in a way that ‘grapholinguistics’ doesn’t. (Daniel Harbour pers. comm., Oct. 2022)

Again, the terminological side of the story is – evidently and justifiably – tied to the (self-)conception of the field and the delimitation of its scope. Formally, the all-Greek *philography* is comprised of *philo-*, from Ancient Greek *φίλος* ‘loving, beloved, dear’, and *-graphy*, which as the obvious writing-related component occurs here at the end of the term (for a change). ‘Love of writing’ as the meaning of this undeniably elegant⁴⁶ term is indeed fitting to denote a field that deals with all aspects of writing. And, as Gnanadesikan and Harbour point out, it is comprehensive, i.e., inclusive of all possible facets of writing and the perspectives and methods studying them, which in this respect makes it superior to the (at least terminologically) linguistics-focused *grapholinguistics*.⁴⁷ Or does it?

This is an appropriate point to dwell on this question of inclusivity, which in its complexity surpasses the mere choice of a label for the field. Indeed, while all the many disciplines and scholars working on matters of writing should be welcomed by ‘the’ study of writing, what can be observed with almost all attempts at coining a designation outlined in this paper is that they usually still originate in an existing and established discipline – and in most cases, this is linguistics. A truly inclusive and balanced philography, by contrast, would favor no discipline participating in it, which, pessimistically, could lead to a rather fragmented state of the field with a weak common thread or shared core. If all perspectives on writing are valid, what is the main one? Does there need to be one? In theory, and when it comes to the actual study of the subject of writing, no. However, this question is not only of theoretical nature but one with paramount practical, e.g., institutional implications that could prove decisive when considering the future of the field (cf. also Meletis 2021a). Put simply: Where would philography fit in? This question is justified as we are possibly too late in the game (if there’s ever such a point) to aim to shape an entirely new field that we eventually – and rather sooner than later – expect to translate into chairs and journals and conferences and everything else associated with established fields. What the study of writing *is* – that’s not just a question asked by (and from within) a field that has an ongoing identity crisis but likewise a question of where the field should be ‘put’ organizationally, also concerning where it has the best chances to thrive. If viewed from a different perspective, it’s also a question of ‘ownership’: *grapholinguistics* insinuates that linguistics has a prerogative with respect to the study of writing. At the other end of the spectrum, *philography* – at least terminologically – makes it a disciplinary orphan. Of course, this discussion is a lot more complex than sketched here, and an inclusive philography can certainly have specific focuses and/or can be institutionally connected to an established discipline.

Interestingly, as foreshadowed above, *philography* is not a completely new term,⁴⁸ and it has occasionally been mentioned in discussions of a name for the study of writing, for example by Gelb (see above). Specific uses appear to be rare, however. One such occurrence of the term – in which it is not

⁴⁶ It would be naive to think that aesthetic considerations do not also feature prominently in terminological discussions. This is underlined by Harbour’s (pers. comm., Oct. 2022) personal assessment that he finds *grapholinguistics* unappealing.

⁴⁷ Another aspect that Harbour (pers. comm., Oct. 2023) mentions is the naming of potential subdisciplines: “Philography can and should have subdisciplines, such as the neurolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics of script use. It is perfectly natural for me to refer to these specialisms as *neurolinguistics*, *psycholinguistics*, and *sociolinguistics*, just as it is to talk about *neurolinguistics*, *psychosemantics*, and *sociophonetics*, all established terms in the field. Parallel names based on *grapholinguistics* are plain awful. Fields called *neurolinguistics*, *psychographolinguistics*, or *sociographolinguistics* deserve to fall stillborn from the press [...]”

⁴⁸ There is even a dedicated Wiktionary entry: <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/philography> (accessed November 1, 2022).

straightforwardly defined – is found in Andreas Gottschling’s (1881/1882) ‘Über die Philographie’ (‘On philography’).

Finally, another meaning of *philography* that its use as a designation for the study of writing must compete with is “the collecting of autographs, esp. those of famous persons”.⁴⁹

3. The common threads

In this section, several common threads characterizing naming processes in the study of writing will be presented in the form of a critical summary. Note that these are not mutually exclusive but overlap and interact in complex ways, with their separation here only serving as an idealization for illustrative purposes.

(1) Firstly, what we commonly find is mentions of the novelty or unestablished nature (and/or marginal status) of the field that is to be named: When Gelb (1952) proposed *grammatology* and initially even included it in the title of his book,⁵⁰ there certainly had already existed research on writing in various forms. However, with the fittingly named *A study of writing*, as is probably unanimously accepted among scholars of writing, he ushered in a new era in which research on writing became more focused and more about writing in and of itself. From that point on, *grammatology* was the designation to beat – until Derrida’s famous borrowing of it in the 1960’s, that is. The reason it did not prevail pre-Derrida is, however, most likely not of terminological nature but rather due to the marginal status writing had as a subject in linguistics. In other disciplines, ironically, the situation was the polar opposite: Specific philological branches with rich research traditions, especially ones with a focus on historical languages (among them the archaeology- and anthropology-infused assyriology that Gelb was invested in), were sometimes so focused on written documents, written language, and writing in general that coining a separate term for its study likely appeared superfluous and counterintuitive. Against this background, it is unsurprising that most attempts at coining a term discussed in this paper can be contextualized within linguistics, because there, the study of writing actually needed to be emancipated and had to prove itself. Ultimately, however, writing remained a linguistic niche topic for so long that the novelty of the field or different approaches in it kept being underlined. In 2002, Dürscheid mentioned that *Schriftlinguistik* had not yet entered the canon of linguistic terminology, and in 2018, Klinkenberg & Polis (2018: 57) named a discipline that “in [their] intended meaning” is “largely yet to be established” *script(ur)ology*. This underlines an important function ascribed to the naming process: It is intended to have a constitutive force. A field that has no fixed and accepted name may be unestablished for this precise reason, so performatively giving it a name is meant to provide it with a more stable identity (cf. also the examples in Powell et al. 2007). Therefore, and given the still ongoing debate about the field’s name, the question can and should be asked of what this tells us about the state of the field.

One more aspect that should be mentioned here as it is closely related to pointing out the unestablished nature of the field is that – as was discussed in the context of *script(ur)ology* – coining a new designation is also a process of claiming it as one’s own. This can be seen at the disciplinary level, when scholars want to claim the field for their discipline or at least highlight the prominence or priority of their discipline in studying writing (cf. *grapholinguistics*), but also at the individual level, when specific scholars want to be seen as the ones who elevate the field or a specific approach to a more established status (cf. *script(ur)ology*).

(2) In the context of presenting their term of choice, authors often also list the existing alternatives and take this opportunity to point out their shortcomings. The ubiquity of this practice is not accidental but rather systematic as it is a symptom of the awareness surrounding this central terminological question plaguing the study of writing. By doing this, authors also strengthen further the hierarchies created by arguing for their term of choice, as downplaying the suitability of possible other candidates serves to highlight the inevitability of their candidate.

⁴⁹ Cf. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/philography> (accessed November 1, 2022).

⁵⁰ Interestingly, the subtitle *The foundations of grammatology* was dropped from the second edition (1963).

(3) The coining of designations for entire fields appears to follow certain principles, one of them mandating the designation be as semantically fitting and transparent as possible. Also, it should fit in with existing designations for other (established) fields. The former principle is the reason for the reoccurrence of *graph-* in various forms (both as *grapho-* and *-graphy*) and positions (both in initial and final positions). The latter principle, on the other hand, straightforwardly explains the use of productive bound morphemes such as *-logy* or *-nomy*. Problems with the perceived suitability of names for the study of writing, now, arise precisely when these principles are not adhered to: *grammatology* has been criticized because of the narrower meaning that *gramma-* can have ('letter'), let alone its possible association with *grammar* and the writing of grammars (cf. the reading of *grammatology* in Zaefferer 2006; note that in this meaning, it can also be found as *grammaticography*). Similar reasons have been stated for the unsuitability of *scriptology* and *script linguistics*, as *script* has many definitions which are in most cases also narrower than that of *writing* in general, and the former's alternative variant *scripturology* evokes the wrong association. Conversely, *grapholinguistics* narrows it down at the other end as switching the neutral *-logy* or *-nomy* for the name of a specific discipline leads to a whole slate of problems (see also (6)).

The described principles are not confined to naming processes for/in the study of writing. Thus, the field has no monopoly over elements such as *graph-* and *-logy*, which of course is the reason we find so many of the terms presented here in different contexts and with distinct meanings. Some of these meanings, such as the ones of *graphology* and arguably also *grammatology*, had either previously been dominant (as in the case of *graphology*) or have prevailed over time (*grammatology*).

(4) Another terminological issue in the narrow sense is the ambiguity typical of many terms in linguistics (and other disciplines): the phenomenon and the field/branch/discipline studying it are referred to by the same name, which applies to the most established of designations such as *phonology*, *morphology*, and *syntax*. *Grammatology*, *graphonomy*, *graphology*, *graphem(at)ics*, *orthography* – all of these terms can denote phenomena of writing, in most of such uses something along the lines of 'the written level of language' or 'the graphic component of language', as well as the subbranches studying this very level/component. Notably, this latter meaning is sometimes expanded as the terms can also be used more broadly: *graphem(at)ics*, then, can encompass more than the study of the graphem(at)ic module of language. This is rather seldom, and all of the mentioned terms are commonly and predominantly associated with language and linguistics, insinuating that the study of writing is only concerned with its linguistic aspects.

That being said, with respect to broader alternatives, *grapholinguistics* is simultaneously wider in its meaning – according to most definitions, it is supposed to study all aspects of writing, not only writing as a component of language – and as narrow as (or even narrower than) these terms, as it is directly and visibly bound to linguistics, lending it a restricted and exclusivist aftertaste (cf. (6)). And *writing systems research*, as has been argued above, may appear broad but has its own drawbacks, as 'writing system' is likewise connoted linguistically and excludes aspects that could intuitively be judged as 'non-systematic' from a descriptive linguistic perspective.

(5) A challenge mentioned in the context of *Schriftlinguistik* and its slow and bumpy transition to a scrutinized English-language equivalent is the hold that Anglophone research communities seem to have over terminology. This has arguably not always been the case as English has only gradually advanced to an academic lingua franca, a process that has led to questionable and problematic maxims such as 'if you want to be read (internationally), you need to publish in English', an issue that appears even more exacerbated with respect to terminology. Against this background, terms that were introduced in other languages and, likely more importantly, whose introduction and adoption were embedded in a non-Anglophone research culture and tradition, are possibly at a particular disadvantage. In the case of terms for the study of writing originating in other cultures, not only must a fitting English translation be found that is accepted by scholars who want to participate, but research that has previously been carried out under this banner often continues to be (made) invisible.

A failure to look beyond one's horizon or outside of one's language may result in the complete oblivion of a possible designation. For *grapholinguistics*, this was shown with a blog post by an American scholar claiming that the word had just been made up (see Section 2.5). I want to mention another illuminating example that is, however, not located (solely) at the terminological but – which appears even more severe – at the conceptual level: In 1991, Peter T. Daniels published a paper titled 'Is a structural graphemics possible?', ultimately concluding that there cannot be such a field and thus negating his question; in 1994, he received a reply by Earl M. Herrick, who also devoted much of his research to questions of writing and gave his rebuttal the title 'Of course a structural graphemics is possible!'. As I tried to show elsewhere (Meletis in press), their entire discussion about the possibility of a structuralist approach to writing – while certainly raising valid and to this day crucial points about the field – seems weirdly anachronistic for scholars socialized in a German(ist) linguistic tradition since at the beginning of the 1990's, questions of graphem(at)ics had long been intensively discussed and partially even settled in the German grapholinguistic community. I named the article in which I present and historiographically contextualize their dispute 'There had already been a structural graphemics', which basically says it all. Ergo: cultural and linguistic boundaries are real, and they can pose major challenges in the establishment of fields and terminology.

Sometimes, meanings also get lost in translation, impeding the cross-linguistic applicability of certain terms. The above-mentioned *orthography*, for instance, has a broader and more descriptive meaning in Anglophone literate cultures than it does in German. A designation such as *historical orthography* will, thus, not as easily be accepted by scholars rooted in Germanophone traditions, who in this case indeed prefer *historical graphematics*. This also shows that the dismissal of terms can also work in the other direction, although the involved hierarchical dynamics in the two scenarios are certainly not equal.

(6) A central issue that seems to be taken for granted for the study of writing and is debated with respect to a suitable designation is – in more than one respect – inclusivity. As mentioned in (4), many of the terms collected in this paper are – for one reason or the other – tied to a specific discipline: linguistics. This applies to the maximum degree to *grapholinguistics* although the associated field – as evidenced also by the interdisciplinary conference series *G2IC* – actually prides itself on including all disciplines along with their research questions and the theories and methods employed in approaching these. Yet, it is understandable and certainly valid that a psychologist working primarily on visual aspects of reading or an art historian researching the appearance of writing in different types of art would refuse to describe their work as 'grapholinguistic'.⁵¹ Against this background, it may be striking but ultimately unsurprising that inclusive definitions of grapholinguistics and attempts to motivate others to adopt it stem almost exclusively from linguists.

Debates surrounding terminology reflect negotiations of power and ownership, which means that from this perspective, a label as neutral as possible would be a preferable democratic choice. *Philography* has been named as one possibility for such a neutral designation. However, the question that was raised in this context was whether the adoption of such a neutral term would actually avert negotiations of power within the study of writing. If the field is not to be seen as a fragmentary collection of those subfields of linguistics, psychology, anthropology, etc. that deal with writing but an independent field that incorporates all of those into a bigger and coherent picture, then adopting a neutral term truly requires (re-)shaping the field's identity around said picture. This is a complex process that implicates many more questions such as: Do all disciplines even want to 'sit at the table' (and to an equal degree)? What is the definition of 'writing' that such a study of writing in which all disciplines are truly equal relies on? In which department(s) would such a discipline have its home, or do we really aspire independence to such a degree that it would need its own new department? More practically: Who would organize and fund conferences? In philosophical thought experiments like this, no questions are disallowed. In reality,

⁵¹ In this context, an aspect that was altogether omitted in the present paper shall at least be mentioned: the corresponding terms that stand for people. In Meletis (2021a), for example, I call myself a 'grapholinguist', and at least 'grammatologist' and 'philographer' are also imaginable (with 'grammatologist' actually sporadically being used in the literature). These terms are even more contentious as they are tied not only to disciplines but to specific people and their individual self-conception as scholars.

however, when it comes to an actual implementation, most scholars of writing likely see no point in pursuing (likely risk-laden) answers to them.

4. The future

In order to give an outlook, we need to first sum up where we stand right now: As of yet, there is no widely accepted designation for the study of writing. As this paper attempted to show, this is certainly not due to a shortage of possible candidates. For each of them, however, compelling reasons speaking against a more widespread and uniform adoption can be found. Interestingly, all discussed terms still live on as each pops up sporadically in the literature, referring to the study of writing in – sometimes unexpected – contexts, at times explicitly linking to an existing terminological tradition, at others simply being re coined due to their terminological obviousness. Indeed, given that most of them are rather transparent and thus justifiable compositions, their continued (co-)existence is rather unsurprising and will likely continue. In general, the terminological discussion surrounding the study of writing as captured in this paper is a positive reflection of the resilience of both the field and continuous attempts at further establishing it. This does raise the question of whether we are stuck in an unproductive loop of recycling terms and arguing for their suitability, though. Conferences help in slowly forming an international community out of many diverse communities, and in this context, the name of the field is indeed only one – and not the most important – issue that needs settling. Other questions – theoretical, methodological, ones regarding the politics of science and academia – must likewise be faced, and it is unpredictable how they will influence terminology... and vice versa. Ultimately, an unambiguous, inclusive designation that pleases everyone may be a desideratum or wishful thinking. That's because with respect to scientific terminology, the answer to 'What's in a name?' is clearly: a lot.

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