Between dependency and autonomy

The relationship between speech and writing in early structuralist *Schriftlinguistik* and its impact on concepts of the study of writing

Dimitrios Meletis, *University of Vienna*
dimitrios.meletis@univie.ac.at

From the late 1970s, more and more linguists and Germanists in the German-speaking area started systematically studying the written modality of language. Historiographically, this development can be regarded as the beginning of a structuralist *Schriftlinguistik* ('grapholinguistics') (cf. Dürscheid 2016). The first core question attended to by this new field concerned the very conceptualization of writing, and whether it should be seen as dependent on or (relatively) independent of speech. This question has direct consequences for the definition of structuralist concepts used to analyze writing – including the *grapheme* or related concepts such as *allography* and *graphotactics*. Crucially, what was often treated as irreconcilable in this heated discussion was the secondary phylogenetic and ontogenetic status of writing when compared with speech (and sign language) and the possibility of studying writing and written language as phenomena in and of themselves (cf. Eisenberg 1985), a view that unproductively conflated developmental with epistemological (and mainly methodological) perspectives. This led to the emergence of two opposed camps: the *dependentialists*, who propagated a methodological dependence of writing on speech, and the *autonomists*, who argued that writing warrants its own study. Incidentally, this schism coincided with the establishment of two research groups that were separated also by a political border: the *Forschungsgruppe Orthographie* in the GDR (Nerius 2012), and the *Studiengruppe Geschriebene Sprache* in the FRG (Günther 1993).

This talk aims to trace and contextualize the arguments of this rift, which touches on the very core of the question of how writing can or should feasibly be studied (cf. also Daniels 1991 in an Anglo-American context). It discusses the core points made by the two groups (highlighted by their treatment of the core concept of *grapheme*) as well as the implications they have on a study of writing including its core theoretical tenets, its methodological tools, and its descriptive concepts. Finally, the talk explores the consequences of this Germanist, i.e., local controversy for a present-day and internationally practiced grapholinguistics and invites a discussion and comparison with similar historical developments in other paradigms or (linguistic, cultural, disciplinary) contexts.

Daniels, Peter T. 1991. Is a structural graphemics possible? *LACUS Forum* 18. 528–537.

Dürscheid, Christa. 2016. *Einführung in die Schriftlinguistik*, 5th edn. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Eisenberg, Peter. 1988. Über die Autonomie der graphematischen Analyse. In Dieter Nerius & Gerhard Augst (eds.), *Probleme der geschriebenen Sprache. Beiträge zur Schriftlinguistik auf dem XIV. internationalen Linguistenkongreß 1987 in Berlin*, 25–35. Berlin: Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR.

Günther, Hartmut. 1993. Die Studiengruppe ‚Geschriebene Sprache' bei der Werner Reimers Stiftung, Bad Homburg. In Jürgen Baurmann, Hartmut Günther & Ulrich Knoop (eds.), *Homo scribens. Perspektiven der Schriftlichkeitsforschung*, 371–378. Tübingen: Niemeyer.

Nerius, Dieter. 2012. Zur Geschichte der Schriftlinguistik in der Germanistik der DDR. In Jan Cölln & Franz-Josef Holznagel (eds.), *Positionen der Germanistik in der DDR: Personen – Forschungsfelder – Organisationsformen*, 387 – 397. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter.