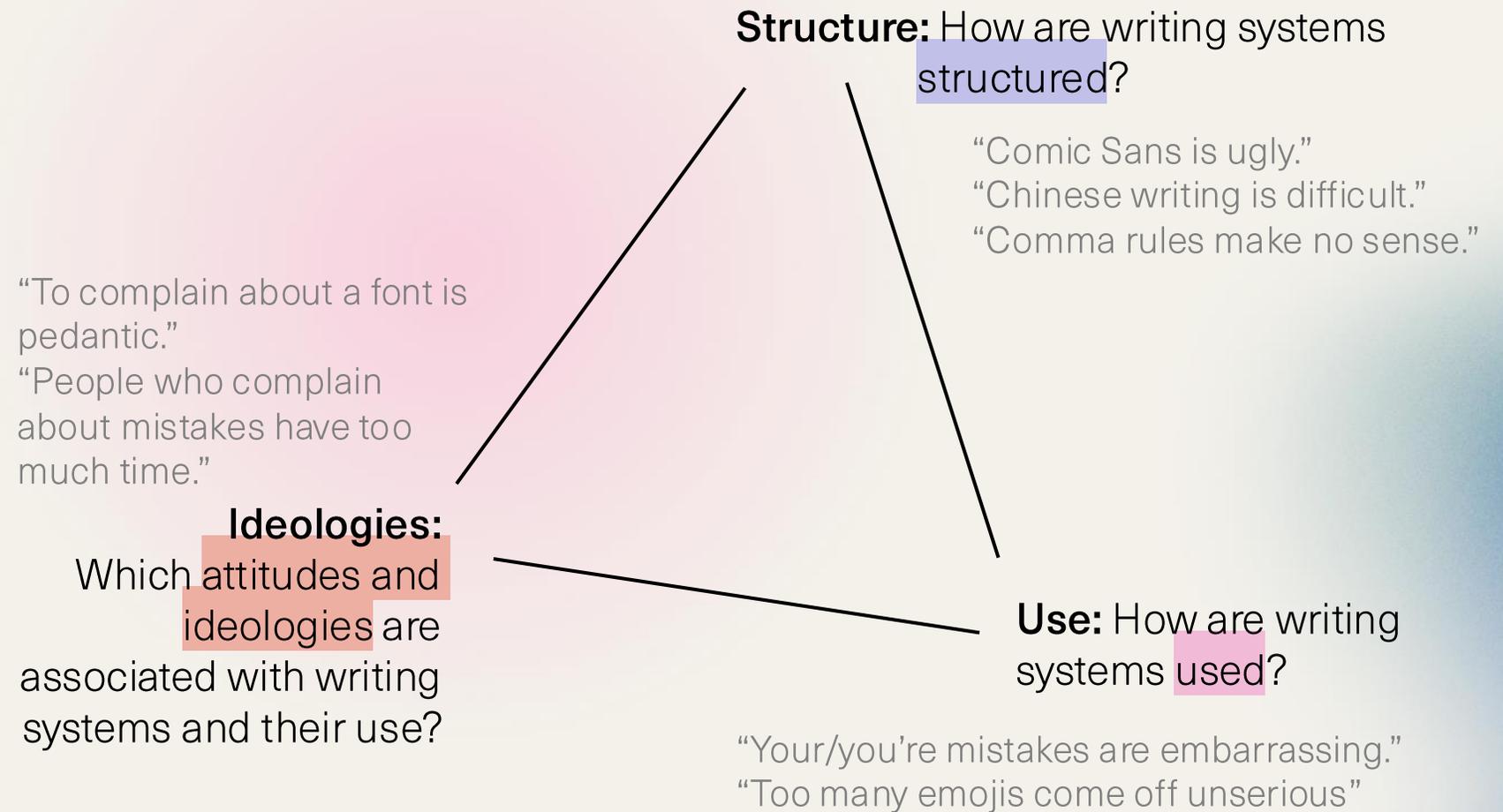


A 𐎠𐎡𐎢𐎣 𐎤𐎥𐎦𐎧

ATTITUDES AND IDEOLOGIES ABOUT WRITING SYSTEMS

Dimitrios Meletis / 06.11.2025 / National Chung Cheng University

THE TOTAL GRAPHOLINGUISTIC FACT



GRAPHOLINGUISTICS

A. Graphetics – Materiality (What does writing look/feel like?)

- 1 Comic Sans:** The font is ugly. / Its use in specific contexts is inappropriate. / To complain about the font is justified/pedantic/ableist.
- 2 Typographic mimicry:** Emulating fonts are often designed unprofessionally. / Their use is problematic/racist. / Only people who belong to a culture in question are allowed to make judgments about the appropriateness of the use of such fonts.

B. Graphematics – Linguistic function (How is writing related to language?)

- 3 Attitudes about writing systems, their learnability and difficulty:** The more phonetic, the better a writing system. / There is no 'optimal' writing system, as the quality of a writing system in a given context depends on users' prior literacy experience. / Writing systems can be beautiful/ugly/chaotic/elegant/hard/complex/ingenious.

C. Orthography – Normativity (What are the conventions/rules?)

- 4 Attitudes about orthography:** Orthographic rules are important. / Everyone should adhere to existing norms. / It's futile to complain about spelling reforms.
- 5 Correction of incorrect corrections:** Spelling mistakes are embarrassing. / To correct a spelling mistake is pedantic. / It is wrong to judge someone as 'dumb' only because they have made a spelling mistake.

A POSSIBLE DEFINITION

SO FAR

“label for efforts of gaining consistent descriptions and analyses of the written form of language and of developing them to a general theory of writing as a constitutive part of a general theory of language”

OPEN

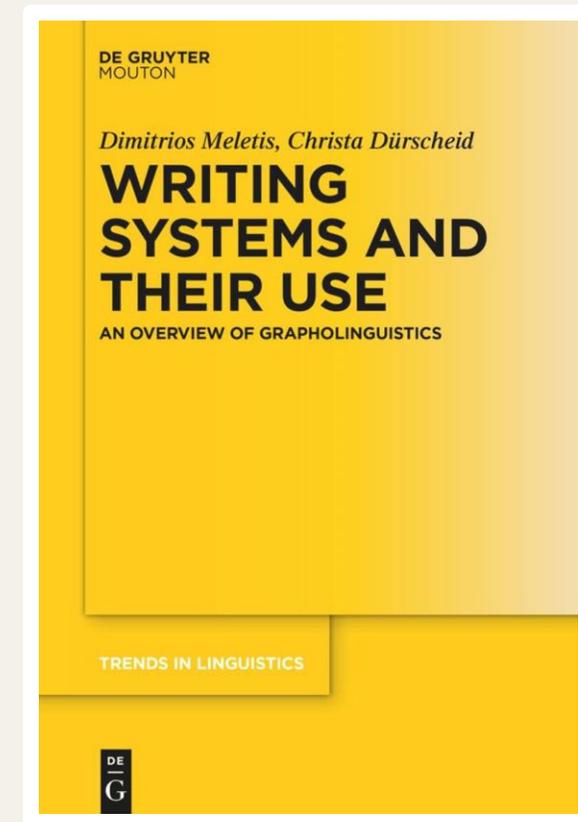
Glück 2016: 596, my translation

Glück, Helmut. 2016. Schriftlinguistik. In Helmut Glück & Michael Rödel (eds.), *Metzler Lexikon Sprache*, 5th edn., 596. Stuttgart: Metzler.

(already exactly the same in the first edn. of 1993: 533–534)

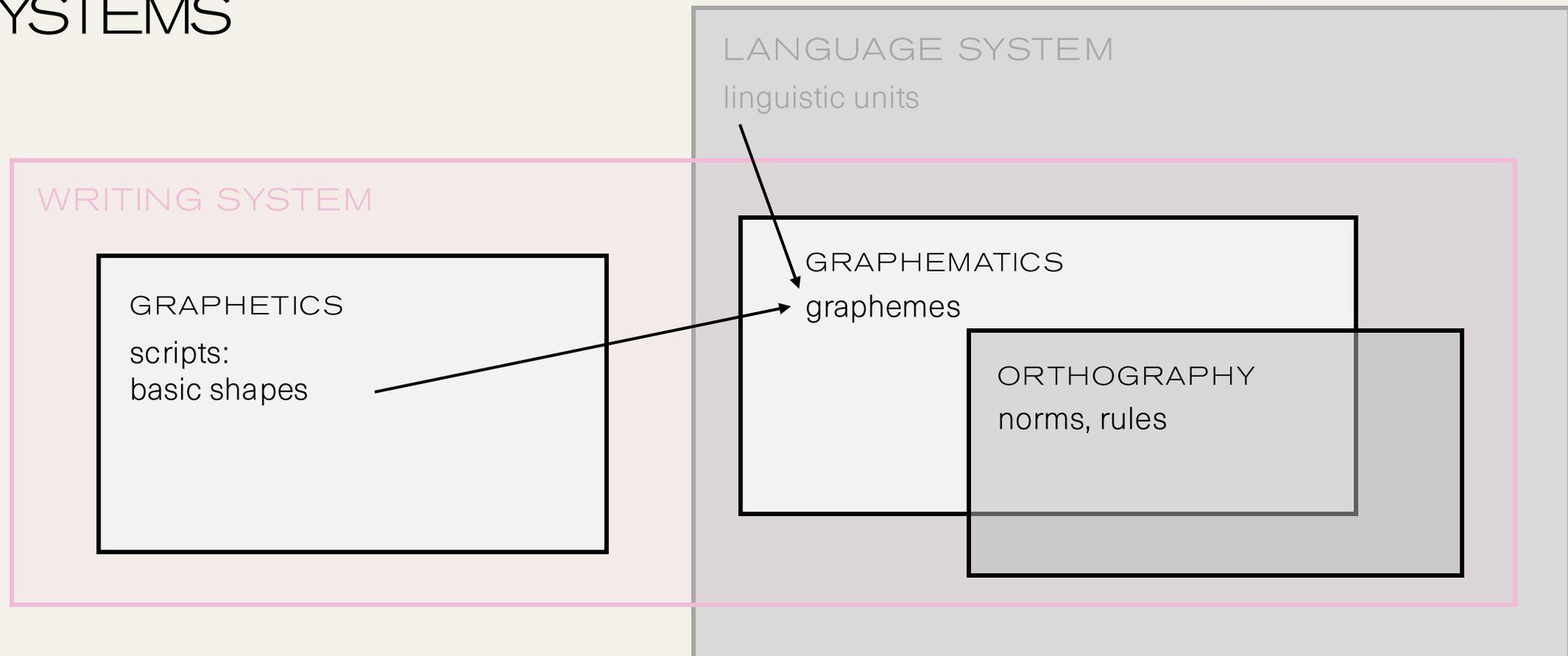
THE GOAL

- integration of different perspectives from diverse disciplines
 - including – but not limited to – anthropology and cultural studies, psychology and cognitive science(s), sociolinguistics
- combination of synchronic and diachronic perspectives
 - diachrony informs synchrony and vice versa
- establishment of a unified descriptive and explanatory framework – including methodology and concepts (e.g., *allography*) for all writing systems regardless of type
- publication of findings (at least additionally) in English to foster international visibility and exchange

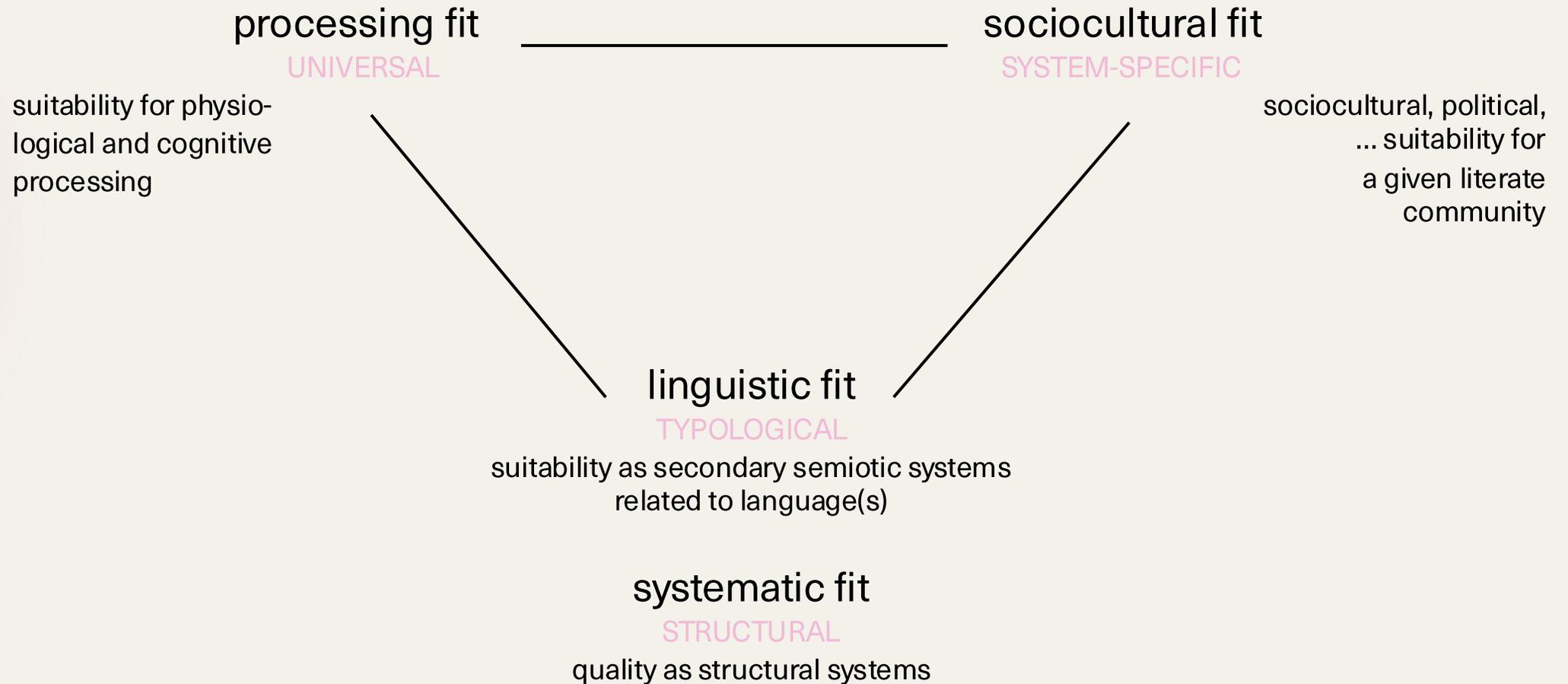


Meletis, Dimitrios, and Christa Dürscheid. 2022. *Writing Systems and Their Use: An Overview of Grapholinguistics*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110757835>

A MODEL OF WRITING SYSTEMS



EXPLANATION



MY RESEARCH

Dimitrios Meletis

Warum hassen alle *Comic Sans*?

Metapragmatische Onlinediskurse zu einer typographischen Hassliebe

1 Einleitung

If you love it, you don't know much about typography, and if you hate Comic Sans you don't know very much about typography either, and you should probably get another hobby.

Vincent Connare, Designer von *Comic Sans*¹

Ab dem Zeitpunkt, als mit dem Aufkommen des PCs einer breiten Masse die Möglichkeit geboten wurde, Schriftprodukte mithilfe von vorinstallierten Schriftbearbeitungsprogrammen und darin angebotenen Schriftarten selbst zu gestalten, wurde – oftmals unbewusst – mit vielen in Designkreisen geltenden Konventionen gebrochen. *Comic Sans* ist in diesem Kontext ein Paradebeispiel: Die 1994 entworfene Type (in Folge simplifiziert: Schriftart, Schrift) wird im Internet vor allem aufgrund von Verwendungen in dafür als unangemessen empfundenen Kontexten von vielen leidenschaftlich ‚gehasst‘. So existiert(e) unter anderem ein Manifest, das ein Verbot der Schrift fordert(e) (*bancomicsans.com*).² Personen, die die „Schauder-Schrift“ (Lischka 2008) „falsch“ verwenden, werden als *Comic Sans Criminals* bezeichnet und ihnen wird Hilfe angeboten, wie sie diese falsche Verwendung vermeiden können.³ All dies spielt sich hauptsächlich im Internet ab, weshalb partizipative Web 2.0-Plattformen, darin ausgehandelte Onlinediskurse und die beteiligten AkteurInnen für die vorliegende Untersuchung besonders relevant sind.

In diesem Beitrag wird gezeigt, dass neben graphematischen auch Non-Standard-Schreibungen auf formal-materieller, d. h. graphetischer Ebene für die Untersuchung von digitalem Schreiben von Bedeutung sind (zum *Graphetik*-Begriff

SOCIAL SEMIOTICS
2023, VOL. 33, NO. 5, 1046–1068
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2021.1989296>



OPEN ACCESS Check for updates

“Is your font racist?” Metapragmatic online discourses on the use of typographic mimicry and its appropriateness

Dimitrios Meletis

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ABSTRACT

Typographic mimicry is the wrapping of writing in a “foreign dress,” i.e. the use of typefaces in which one’s script (e.g. Latin) is made to visually resemble a different script (e.g. Chinese) with the goal of evoking associations with a “foreign” culture. First, this paper addresses the formal aspects of this practice, specifically the choice of visual features to be mimicked. The core part then focuses on typographic mimicry as a social practice and includes a discussion of both the typographic knowledge that different actors – both lay and expert producers and recipients – must apply to establish and recognise the associated cultural indexicality and the typographic ideologies (i.e. beliefs and attitudes) these actors hold. The central question being investigated is how typographic mimicry is discursively negotiated. An exemplary metapragmatic discourse analysis of online reactions to a food ad and comments to two articles covering the topic catered at readers with different knowledge backgrounds highlights that typographic mimicry is not a “neutral” practice. It shows that central aspects being debated are the (re)appropriation of cultural stereotypes by users both outside and within the respective cultures and the related question of whether using typographic mimicry is generally (in)appropriate (or even racist).

KEYWORDS

Typographic mimicry; cultural stereotypes; indexicality; metapragmatic discourse; typographic ideologies; cultural (re)appropriation



DiskursGlossar

Grammatiknazi / Grammar Nazi

Kategorie: Schlagwörter

Verwandte Ausdrücke: Rechtschreibnazi, Sprachpolizei,

Laiensprachkritik, orthographisches Shaming, Sprachkritik

Siehe auch: Memes, Konnotation, Kritik, Hashtag, Schlagwort,

Whataboutism

Autor: Dimitrios Meletis

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People incorrectly correcting other people: The pragmatics of (re-) corrections and their negotiation in a Facebook group

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ARTICLE INFO

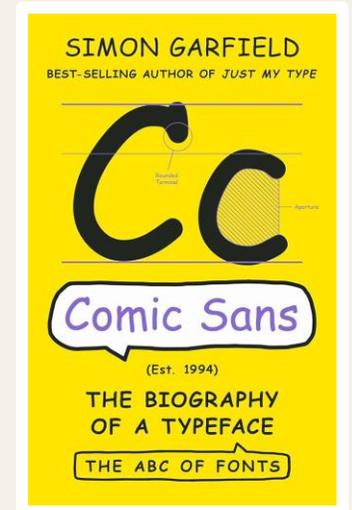
Keywords:
Stancetaking
Correction
Language ideologies
Linguistic normativity
Prescriptivism
Orthography

ABSTRACT

In highly standardized literate cultures, orthographic norms are perceived as socially binding, giving rise to negative evaluations of ‘incorrect’ writing, i.e., writing that deviates from the norm. This is evident in prescriptive practices in interactions on social media including direct corrections of a deviance (‘you’re’) or comments more or less implicitly referring to it (‘would be great if you knew how to spell’). In this study, we focus on a special type of corrections and the reactions to them: incorrect corrections. They are often corrected in so-called re-corrections, which frequently give rise to entire chains of corrections and comments that reflect diverse practices and attitudes both shaped by and towards normativity. By conducting an exploratory case study, we investigate (meta-)pragmatic strategies of stancetaking – such as mocking or doing being an expert – as well as their negotiation in (re-)corrections. Specifically, we focus on three posts taken from the public Facebook group *People Incorrectly Correcting Other People* consisting of, on the one hand, decontextualized screenshots showing an incorrect correction and ensuing re-corrections framed by the reaction of the poster posting them to the group. On the other hand, given the large number of group members, they include a myriad of additional comments discussing (re-)corrections at a meta-level. Our analysis suggests that re-correcting serves to criticize not a mistake but the positioning of correctors as superior. Thus, it implicitly challenges the normativity of standard language ideologies by exposing the hypocrisy of prescriptive practices.

GRAPHETICS

COMIC SANS



HISTORY

- created in the early 1990s by **Vincent Connare** by commission to Microsoft for Microsoft Bob
 - Connare considered the use of Times New Roman in software for children **inappropriately conservative** and **sober**
 - designed in the course of only **three days**
 - was modeled after **lettering of comics** (especially *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns*), but only the uppercase letters
- in the end, it was not used for *Microsoft Bob* but for different software
- was preinstalled on computers starting with *Windows 95*



The talking dog from *Microsoft Bob*

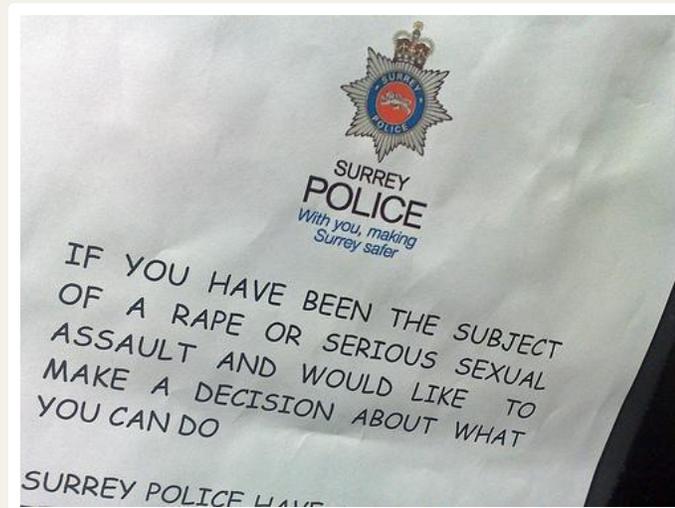
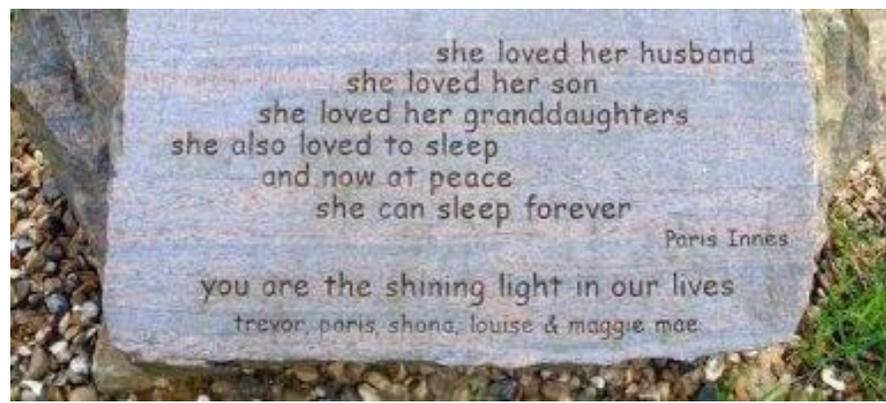


Comparison: Lettering in *Watchmen* vs. Comic Sans

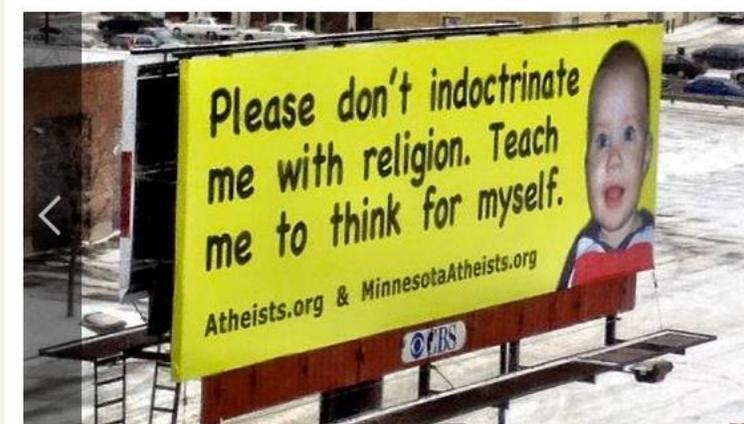
AGAINST

- ‘inappropriate’ contexts of use and high frequency of use (oversaturation) as biggest arguments
 - appears like children’s writing: “it is so irritably simple, so apparently written by a small child”
 - concern not the quality of the typeface per se, but its use; thus, it is (also) a criticism of the people who use the typeface ‘incorrectly’ or ‘inappropriately’
- **quality of the design of Comic Sans** is mainly criticized by designers and typographers
- question, **which actors** participate in which discourses

'INAPPROPRIATE' USES



REACTIONS



Atheist baby, someone better teach you graphic design.



BAN COMIC SANS

“[...] when designing a ‘Do Not Enter’ sign the use of a heavy-stroked, attention-commanding font such as **Impact** or **Arial Black** is appropriate. Typesetting such a message in **Comic Sans** would be ludicrous. Though this sort of misuse is frequent, it is unjustified. Clearly, Comic Sans as a voice conveys silliness, childish naiveté, irreverence, and is far too casual for such a purpose. It is analogous to showing up for a black tie event in a clown costume.”

Holly & David Combs
Ban Comic Sans Manifesto

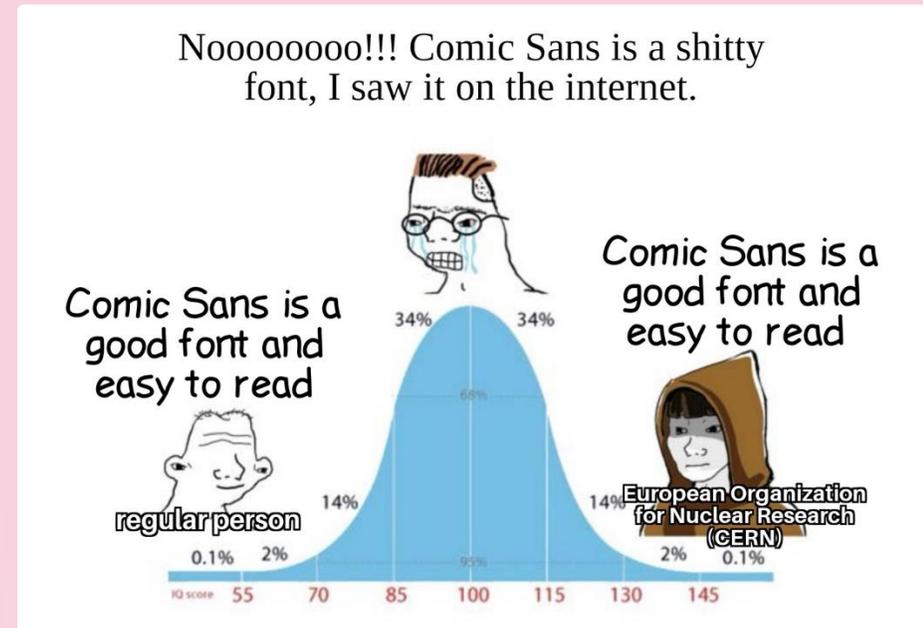
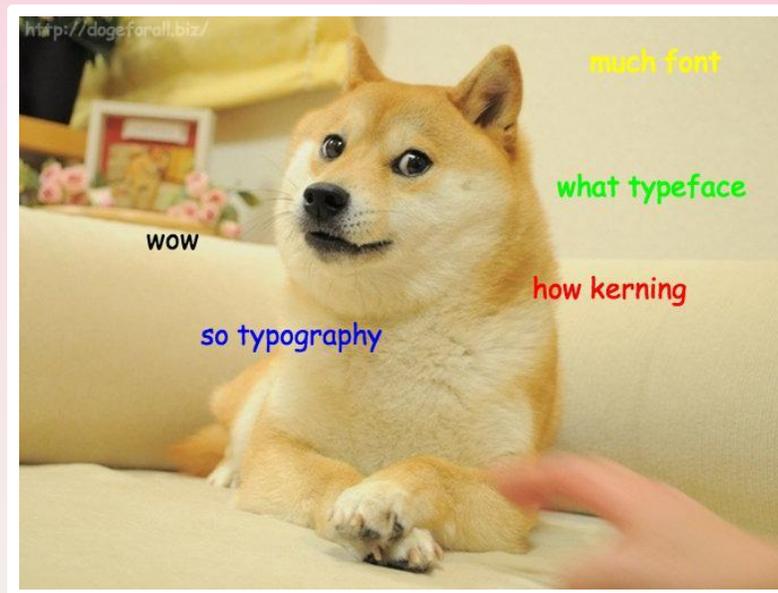
<https://1000manifestos.com/ban-comic-sans/>



VOICES

- “Comic Sans isn’t bad when it’s used in appropriate cases like comics (obviously). It’s purposefully designed to have a more ‘silly’ look [...], so when professors use Comic Sans in their powerpoints, it seems out of place.”
- “Times New Roman is a font that one can stop noticing; even in large doses it doesn’t come between the reader and the text. The very commonly used fonts are mostly designed like that. Comic Sans... not so much.”
- “the sweatpants of the font world”
- “So, the story of Comic Sans is not that of a really terrible font, but rather of a mediocre font, used incorrectly on a massive scale.”

MEMES

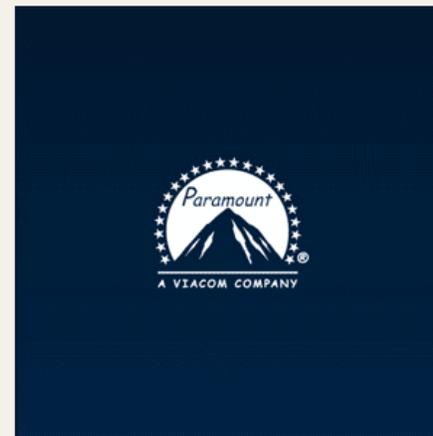
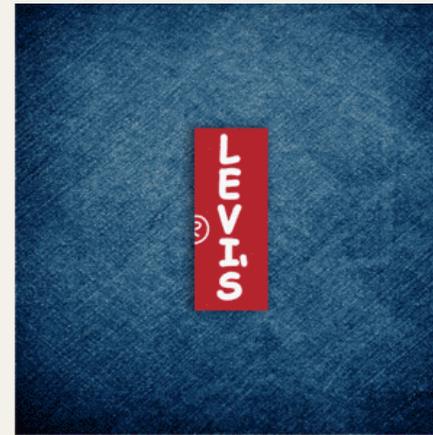
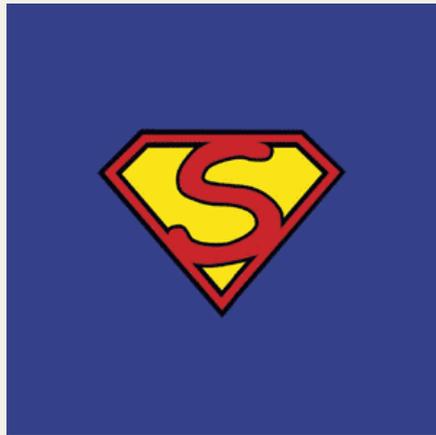


PROPONENTS

- around 2012, Thomas Blanc and Florian Amoneau posted redesigned logos set in Comic Sans in the tumblr blog Comic Sans Project
 - reception was very positive
 - illustrated that there are also appropriate contexts for the typeface and that it is not ‘inherently’ bad
- Comic Sans is supposedly more easily read by people suffering from dyslexia
 - criticism of the elitist and discriminating Comic Sans movement that is seen as ableist



COMIC SANS PROJECT



ABLEISM

The day my sister, Jessica, discovered Comic Sans, her entire world changed. She's dyslexic and struggled through school until she was finally diagnosed in her early twenties, enabling her to build up a personal set of tools for navigating the written world.

“For me, being able to use Comic Sans is similar to a mobility aid, or a visual aid, or a hearing aid,” she tells me while we're both visiting our family in Maryland. “I have other ways of writing and reading, but they're not like they are for someone who's not dyslexic.”

Lauren Hudgins, *Hating Comic Sans is Ableist* (2019)

<https://theestablishment.co/hating-comic-sans-is-ableist-bc4a4de87093/index.html>

EVEN WORSE? Papyrus



The video player shows a man in a dark shirt looking slightly to the side. Overlaid on the image is the word "AVATAR" in a large, glowing, cyan-colored font with a slight shadow. The video player interface includes a progress bar at 0:37 / 3:05, a play button, a volume icon, a settings gear, a full screen icon, and a share icon. The SNL logo is visible in the bottom right corner of the video frame.

Papyrus - SNL

SNL Saturday Night Live ✓
15,1 Mio. Abonnenten

Abonnieren

461.858

Teilen

Clip

ADMIRATION: Helvetica

Helvetica® 1957

ABCDEFGHIJKLMN
OPQRSTUVWXYZ

abcdefghijklmn
opqrstuvwxyz

“The Benchmark Sans”
Designed by Max Miedinger
Released in 1957

Technical / Grotesque Sans Serif
Product I.D. LV126276OP
Material No. 287126276

The Story Of The World’s Most Famous Font: Helvetica

TYPE · 01/09/2022



Meet the cast:

ABCD
EFGHIJK
LMNOP
QRSTU
VWXYZ

Now see the movie:

Helvetica

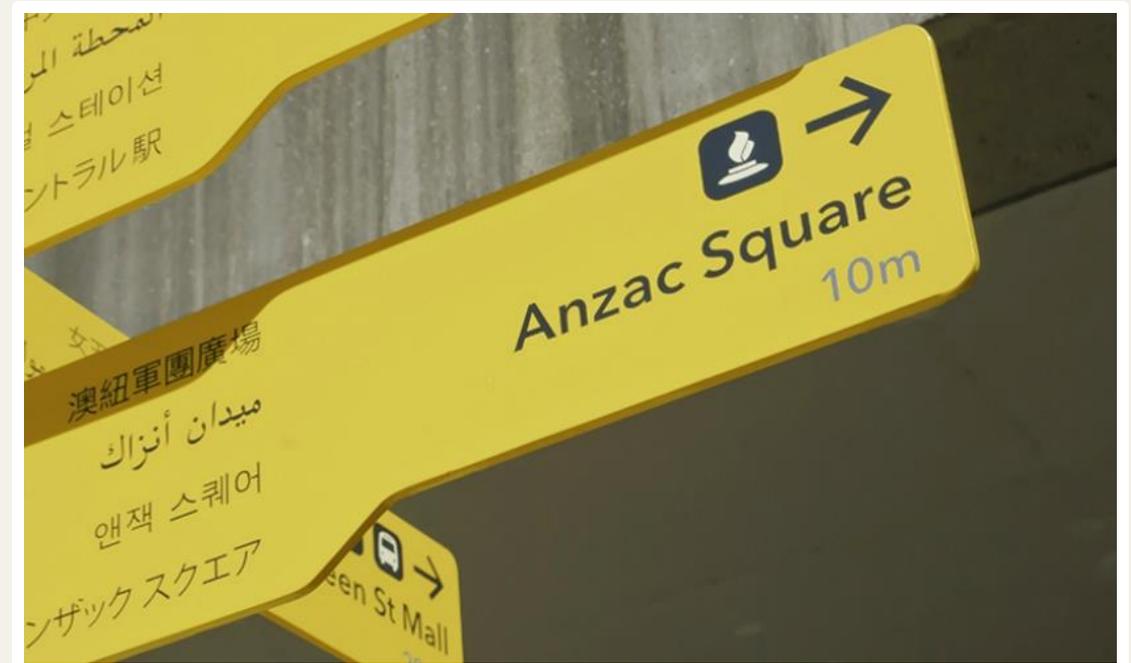
A documentary film by Gary Hustwit



MULTILINGUAL WRITING



multilingual, monoscriptual



multilingual, multiscrptual

MONOLINGUAL WRITING



monolingual, monoscriptual



monolingual, multiscriptual

MARKED MONOLINGUAL WRITING



monolingual, transscriptual



monolingual, monoscriptual

MEANING-MAKING POTENTIAL

- it is, at this point, accepted that the visual appearance of writing can also contribute to the meaning of a written utterance
 - and it is not necessarily secondary; the degree of its contribution must be evaluated individually in each case



TYPOGRAPHIC MIMICRY

- emulative function of typography (structural function, perspective of the product)
 - typefaces (i.e., different appearances of the same script) are made to resemble something else
 - example: so-called script typefaces emulate the appearance of handwriting
 - this also exists in the opposite direction: hand lettering in which handwriting mimics the look of printed text

Script Typeface

Black Phantom typeface



CULTURAL TYPOGRAPHIC MIMICRY

- expressive, indicating/indexical, connotative functions of typography
 - this is a more dynamic semiotic process that views typographic mimicry as a literacy practice
- a source script (such as Roman script) is made to look like a target script (such as Chinese script) in some way

ABCDEFGHI
 JKLMNOPQR
 STUVWXYZ
 abcdefghijklm
 nopqrstuvwxyz
 0123456789

作二铁板，一板印刷，
 自布字。此印者才毕，
 板已具。更互用之，瞬
 时。每一字皆有数印，如
 等字，每字有二十余印
 一板内有重复者。不用
 贴之，每韵为一贴，木

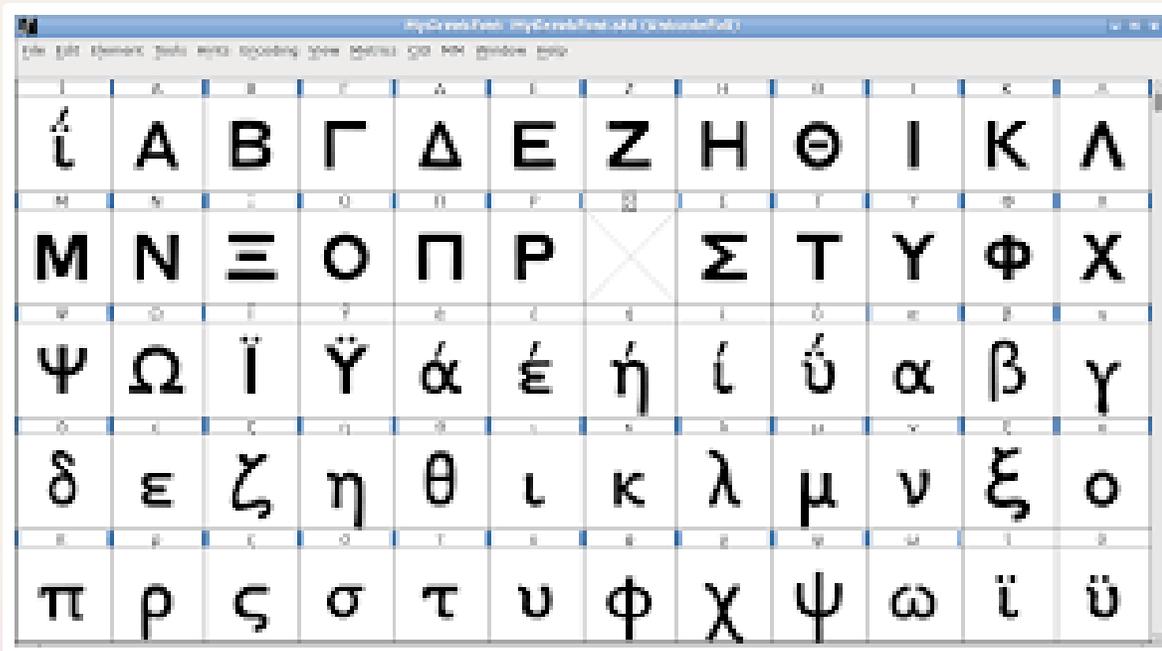
EXAMPLES

वेदवनाग्वारी

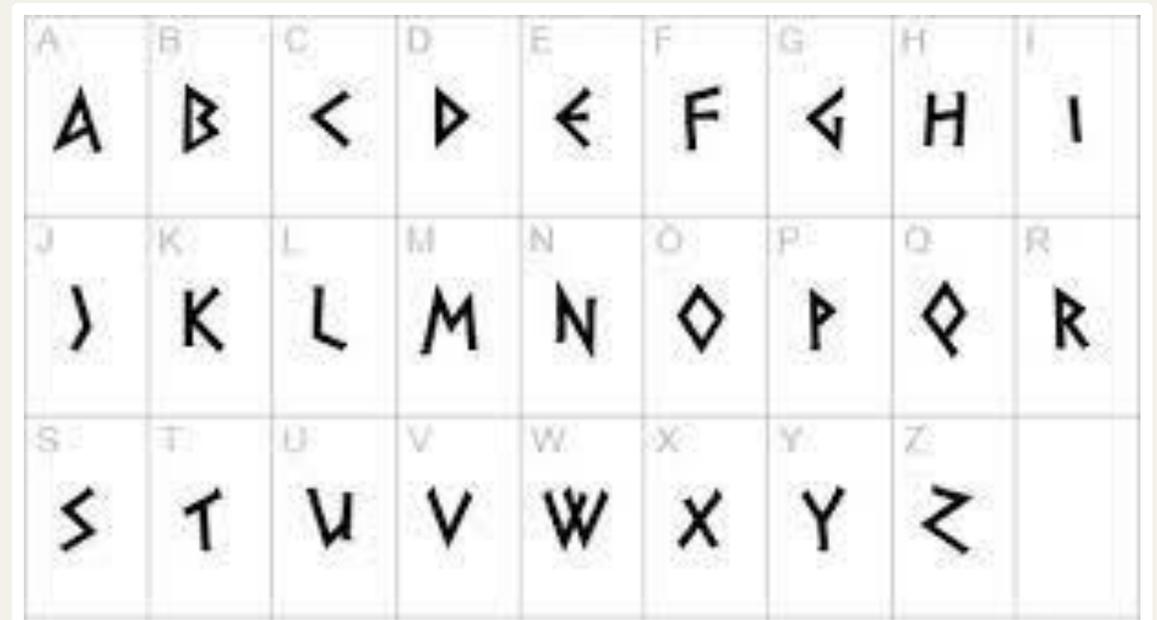
CHINESE

چنطہ

STRUCTURAL MAKEUP

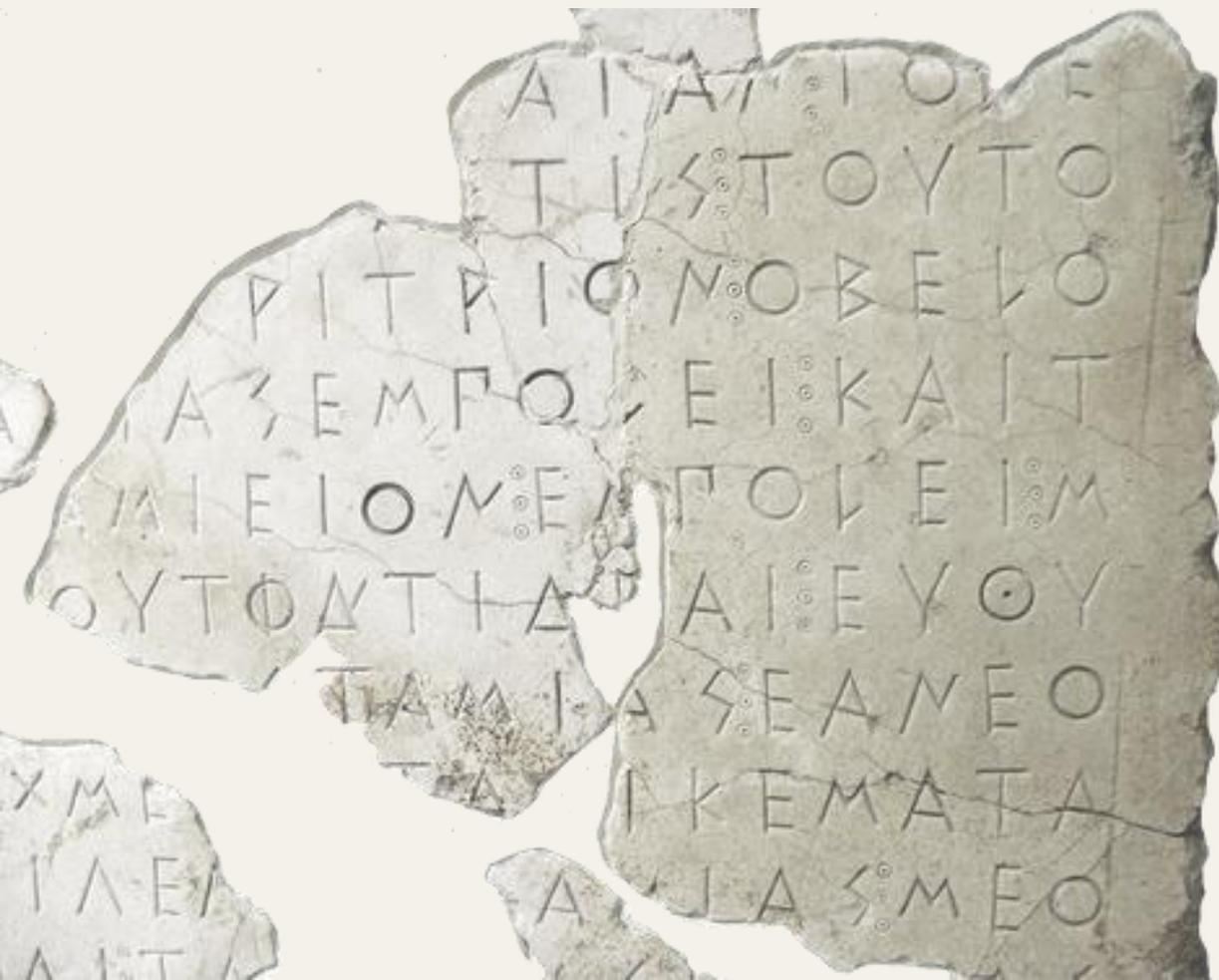


a modern Greek typeface



Gelio typeface

STRUCTURAL MAKEUP



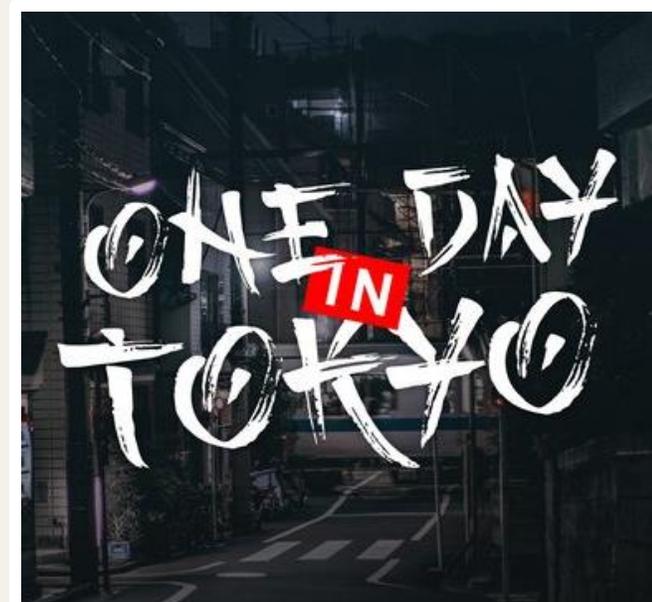
A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
A	B	<	▷	←	F	◁	H	I
J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R
J	K	L	M	N	◊	▷	◊	R
S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	
S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	

← a Greek inscription

WHAT IS MIMICKED?

- feature(s) of the visual appearance
 - which aspect/part/feature of the target script?
- the production process
 - e.g., writing with a brush

Chinese
calligraphy →



← Kashima Brush
typeface

THAI SCRIPT: ORIGINAL VS MIMICKED

ก ข ฃ ค ฅ ฆ ง จ
 ฉ ช ซ ฌ ญ ฎ ฏ ฐ
 ฑ ฒ ณ ด ต ถ ท ธ
 น บ ป ผ ฝ พ ฟ ภ
 ม ย ร ล ว ศ ษ ส
 ห ฬ อ ฮ

LOREM IPSUM
 utinam habemus assuevit
 ex eam nusquam commu
 LOREM IPSUM dolor sit a
 utinam habemus assuevit et est.
 ex eam nusquam commu
 LOREM IPSUM dolor sit amet, te d
 sed ut perspiciatis unde omnis iste

loops as a visually salient feature

RACISM?



freshdirect. SHOP NOW

Fruit • Vegetables • Meat • Seafood • Dairy • Weekly Deals • Quickshop

QUICK & EASY MEALS

Take Out Just Got Nervous

stir fry kits

Made with fresh quality ingredients daily and overflowing with wholesome veggies, our mouthwatering new Stir-Fry Kits sizzle up in a snap. When something this delicious is fewer than 400 calories per serving and takes just minutes to cook, why would you ever dial for delivery again?

ALL NEW!

DUMPLINGS

Dim Sum Made Easy

SHOP NOW

CROSSING

- is intimately tied to the type of graphic knowledge
- in (typo)graphic crossing, the appearance of a foreign script is emulated; this corresponds with typographic mimicry
- in graphematic crossing (which often coincides with graphic crossing), actual graphemes of the target script are borrowed which are visually similar to the graphemes of the source script cf. [Spitzmüller 2007](#)
 - this can lead to problems for biliteral readers of both scripts as they recognize the graphemes' actual functions

Spitzmüller, Jürgen.
2007. *Graphisches Crossing. Eine soziolinguistische Analyse graphostilistischer Variation. Zeitschrift für Germanistische Linguistik* 35 (3): 397–418.
[doi:10.1515/zgl.2007.026](https://doi.org/10.1515/zgl.2007.026).

アムハムモ
 アアアアア
 コムク



ムムムムム

Line (consonants)	w	r	y	m	h	n	t	s	k	Column (vowel)	
ん <small>n</small>	わ	ら	や	ま	は	な	た	さ	か	あ <small>a</small>	
		り		み	ひ	に	ち <small>chi</small>	し <small>shi</small>	き	い <small>i</small>	
		る	ゆ	む <small>fu</small>	ぬ	つ <small>tsu</small>	す	く	う <small>u</small>		
		れ		め	へ	ね	て	せ	け	え <small>e</small>	
		を <small>o</small>	ろ	よ	も	ま	の	と	そ	こ	お <small>o</small>



EXAMPLE



NON-ROMAN SCRIPT



Georgian mkhedruli
mimicking Asian



Japanese kana
mimicking Thai script



Chinese script
mimicking Arabic script

AGENTS

- distinction between actors/agents who create mimicking typefaces and users who merely use them
 - and for both groups, differentiation according to the degree of graphic knowledge
- a metapragmatic discourse analysis Meletis 2021 shows that it is a widely held belief that it is members of the (supposedly) indexed cultures themselves who predominantly practice typographic mimicry
 - they want to signal their own culture to outsiders; typographic mimicry is not used to appeal to in-group members

Meletis, Dimitrios. 2021. 'Is your font racist?' – Metapragmatic online discourses on the use of typographic mimicry and its appropriateness. *Social Semiotics*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2021.1989296>

COMMODIFICATION



EUROCENTRISM

- typography in general is very Latin-centered: “The dominance of Latin script is felt [. . .] acutely in type design practices, to the point where the world of typefaces is divided into two main categories: Latin and (all the other) non-Latin scripts” *AbiFare` 2019: 13*
- “On one hand, designers are ‘modernising’ scripts by minimising shapes and reducing forms, which some criticise as merely mimicking Latin type. Latinisation has been, and still is, a highly controversial and much discussed topic – which is why, on the other hand, technological developments are utilised to make scripts more calligraphic, traditional and livelier by incorporating, for instance, countless ligatures.” *Wittner 2019: 7*

AbiFare`s, Huda Smitshuijzen. 2019. Working bi-Scriptual: Multiscriptual typographic design and typesetting. In Ben Wittner, Sascha Thoma & Timm Hartmann (eds.), Bi-Scriptual: Typography and graphic design with multiple script systems, 12-23. Salenstein: Niggli.

Wittner, Ben. 2019. Script is language is communication. In Ben Wittner, Sascha Thoma & Timm Hartmann (eds.), Bi-Scriptual: Typography and graphic design with multiple script systems, 6-8. Salenstein: Niggli.

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

- there was a debate whether uses of typographic mimicry are racist Meletis 2021, especially if practiced by non-members of the indexed culture
 - in some cases, typefaces' names are also problematic (cf. Circumcision)
- through using typographic mimicry instead of the actual target script, 'Westerners' do not have to educate themselves in different cultures and their scripts, they are always accommodated
 - this also means that members of different cultures prioritize a distorted public image over their authentic self-image (however, this is often done for personal, e.g., commercial, gain)

Meletis, Dimitrios. 2021. 'Is your font racist?' – Metapragmatic online discourses on the use of typographic mimicry and its appropriateness. *Social Semiotics*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2021.1989296>

DEPRECIATIVE OTHERING

- aside from the fact that members of other cultures feel the need to cater to the needs of the (in many cases) majority, this is often felt to be depreciative on two levels:
 - firstly, the type design is often felt to be of lesser quality when compared to Latin type design, and it is often type designers who are not part of a culture who design mimicking typefaces
 - secondly, the fact that members of the cultures adopt these typefaces to refer to themselves and their cultures is self-deprecating; it is a form of silently agreeing to the hegemony of Roman script/Latin type

GRAPHEMATICS

SOURCES

REDDIT

Is there such thing as a "bad" writing system for a language and how do you recognise it?

What's your least favorite writing system for a language?

i made the worst writing system known to man kind.

What's the worst script/language pairing you can think of?

Writing system alignment chart, ngl it was difficult

What languages have the least adapted writing systems?

Has there ever been a study to determine which type of writing system is the easiest to learn?

What does r/linguisticshumor consider a bad orthography?

Most efficient writing system?

Written Chinese seems to be objectively worse than English...?

Any thoughts on this?

QUORA

What is the worst writing system?

What are the pros and cons of the various writing systems?

What languages have a worse spelling system than English?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of major writing systems in the world?

What is the worst alphabet/writing system of an ancient language?

Which are the worst written languages in the world?

What is the least effective writing system?

What is the ugliest writing system?

From a linguist's perspective, which is the most effective writing system?

What are some of the best and worst writing systems?

YOUTUBE

How to make a language: Writing systems

World's Hardest Spelling Bee... is a writing systems bee! But what even is writing?

The Hardest Language To Spell

Ranking the Best Writing Systems in the Universe

The Top 7 Craziest Writing Systems in the World

Top Ten Coolest Writing Systems

World's Most Complicated Writing System (corrections in the description)

The Hebrew Alphabet is bad

Why Does India Have So Many Writing Systems?

The Japanese Writing System in a Nutshell

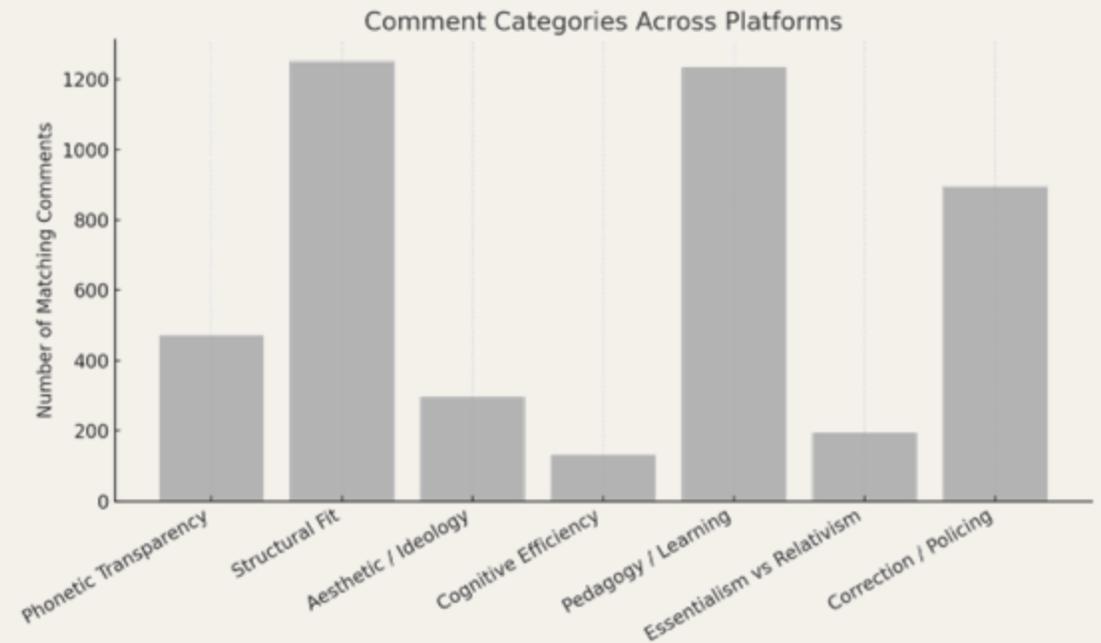
French Spelling Isn't That Bad

Why I think the Chinese writing system is TERRIBLE

CATEGORIES

Seven main discourse types :

1. Phonetic transparency
2. Structural fit
3. Aesthetic and ideological evaluation
4. Cognitive efficiency
5. Pedagogy and learning trajectory
6. Script essentialism vs relativism
7. Correction and expertise displays



1 · PHONETIC TRANSPARENCY

I'm a native speaker of french and I can't write without making a bunch of mistakes everywhere. A ton of people can't. If it was written phonetically at least native speakers wouldn't have so much trouble writing things that should be easy. And for non native learner of french it would still be probably easier to just learn masculine and feminine versions of words (alongside with liason letters) rather than to deal with that mess. At least reading would be easy. (**YouTube**, French spelling isn't that bad)

Polish. I don't know much about the language, but if only they had went with the Cyrillic alphabet instead I bet it would've made more sense phonetically. (**Reddit**, What languages have the least adapted writing systems?)

Some writing systems take less time and effort for people to learn, whether these are children in school learning how to write their native language, or adults learning a foreign language for professional purposes. If a writing system is mostly phonetic, it will be easier to learn. (**Quora**, What is the least effective writing system)

- transparency as moral virtue (“logical”, “fair”, “respectful to learners”)
- irregularity (and features such as silent letters) criticized
- alphabetic ideology as default
- users equate *sound–letter correspondence* with “good” writing system

2 · STRUCTURAL FIT

I'm sorry - what utter utter rot. I remember when this clip first came out and it frustrated me just because of the sheer degree of misinformation and misunderstanding and subsequent explanations of the Thai writing system which is actually one of the most beautiful, rational, logical, symmetrical systems where consonants, vowels and tones all fit like a glove. (...) this clip has done more to turn people off learning Thai, or give them an excuse to give up more than possibly any other clip on the internet. (**YouTube**, World's Most Complicated Writing System (corrections in the description))

It's just a side-effect of colonization and modern linguistics springing out of regions where roman script is most commonly used. And Latin is the most common script, regardless, so of course it will have strange mutations depending on where it lands. And yes it doesn't work well outside IE languages but IE is also the most common family in the world, so (...). (**Reddit**, Is there such a thing as a "bad" writing system for a language and how do you recognize it?)

Korean is a great one. It's an alphabet which pretty much sticks to one symbol for one sound. You can literally learn to read and write the language in an afternoon. (**Quora**, From a linguist's perspective, what is the most effective writing system?)

- ideology: "Good writing systems fit their language."
- goes beyond sound-symbol fit to system-wide coherence
 - critiques of mismatches in morphology, syllables, redundancy
- folk typology mirroring expert discourse

3 · AESTHETICS

It's funny because I have stumbled upon this after a discussion about the practicality of Mongolian Bichig as it's becoming an official writing system. I think Bichig looks great & I find it interesting as a script and plan to learn it and whilst it is alphabetical and is practical as a writing system for the most part like other alphabetic languages and has history and looks beautiful in calligraphy like Chinese, but it has very limited practicality in modern technology, because it's a vertical writing system and it would play hell trying to provide a bichig option on websites (...). (YouTube, Why I think the Chinese writing system is TERRIBLE)

They're all pretty bad, although some are definitely worse. A better question would be whether there are any good writing systems out there. (...) Hangul is beautiful and clever, but no longer in sync with the language, and perhaps too phonemic - that is, not phonetic enough. (Reddit, Is there such thing as a "bad" writing system for a language and how do you recognise it?)

This is really, REALLY subjective. This is my opinion (and please whoever is reading this - don't take offence because that is not my goal here). I don't find appealing the Ethiopic script (abugida) and the Inuktitut syllabary. Ge'ez abugida Inuktitut They look interesting but neither of the two are appealing to me. They look messy and compared to other scripts, aesthetics are not their strongest asset. (Quora, What is the ugliest writing system?)

- scripts described as *beautiful, ugly, chaotic, or graceful*
- visual taste often tied to cultural judgment or stereotype
- aesthetic praise may mask ideological bias
- reflects affective and identity-laden views of scripts

4 · COGNITIVE EFFICIENCY

The difficulty to learn one language is also heavily dependent on its global usage and popularity. Chinese is reasonably difficult to non-native users for requiring to memorize at least 500 common modern hanzi/characters, but with the interest of the language increases continuously and at least 1.2 billion native users, these facts contribute to its accessibility almost like English. (**YouTube**, The hardest language to spell)

The underlying principles of the system are easy, the fact that tons of shit is spelled with historical spelling that you just have to memorize is difficult. It certainly isn't as bad as English by any means, especially since the rules are generally consistent and few in number, but it's still a little weird to get used to. (**Reddit**, Writing system alignment chart, ngl it was difficult)

As someone who knows Mandarin Chinese, I feel quite qualified to answer. (...) Pros: It makes sense ; the characters are (usually) visual representations of its definitions. It makes good use of space ; because every word takes up approximately the same amount of real estate, you can convey a longer message on a smaller sheet of paper than if you wrote it with an alphabetic language. But the pros pretty much end there. Cons: It is extremely difficult to learn, especially for foreigners. (**Quora**, What are the pros and cons of the various writing systems?)

- scripts praised or criticized based on mental effort required
- users reference “brainpower,” memory load, or pattern recognition
- simple, regular, or modular writing systems seen as easier to process
- appeals to pseudo-science to rationalize intuition

Aliens would destroy our planet because they will rage from not being able to learn Asian languages 🤖
(**YouTube**, The Japanese writing system in a nutshell)

5 · PEDAGOGY AND EXPERIENCE

I am a Tibetan and studied for 12 years still can't read and write properly .. learned other languages in less years and atleast could read local news papers . I still can't read Tibetan news paper even though I speak the language fluently . It's difficult to form words in Tibetan as well (**YouTube**, The hardest language to spell)

(...) for someone who has never encountered hànzì, memorising the thousands of symbols seems like, and is, a Herculean task. Many of my classmates and I flunked Chinese test after Chinese test just because we forget what word to write. In fact, when writing an essay in Chinese, we are allowed (and even encouraged) to bring an e-dictionary to find out what words to use (...) One example of two Chinese words that seem like they should sound similar due to appearance are "免" (to waive) and "兔" (rabbit) . Though the difference is just a dot (点) that "兔" has but "免" doesn't, the pronunciations are worlds apart. (**Reddit**, Writing system alignment chart, ngl it was difficult)

(...) from the European languages the worst is unquestionably the Greek. I'm a native Greek speaker and after 12 years in school learning Greek day and night i cannot write a single Greek word correctly. I refused to learn it because from 6 years old i couldn't comprehend why i should learn something that is so stupid. My educated compatriots usually commend the complexity of the Greek language and they see it as a virtue, but let's face it. They are just idiots. (**Quora**, Which are the worst written languages in the world?)

- personal narratives of learning difficulties or breakthroughs
- scripts judged by how long they take to “click”
- frequent mentions of memorization, fear, joy, or frustration
- learning experience seen as measure of script effectiveness

6 · ESSENTIALISM VS RELATIVISM

(...) And yeah our script may not be quite as complex but we make up for it by making everything else super complicated. Most if not all Thai kids take formal Thai language classes for at least 14 years from kindergarten to 12th grade and even then there is still much more to learn. The bottom line is I don't think it's possible to say which language is the hardest to speak or write. It depends on your upbringing and how your brain works. (**YouTube**, The hardest language to spell)

“Most effective” for a writing system depends on the criterion used. No single script is optimal on all dimensions; different scripts trade off phonological transparency, morpho-lexical compactness, learnability, typographic economy, and fit to technological contexts. The following organizes those trade-offs, gives comparative evaluations, and offers practical implications. (...) Phonological transparency (phoneme-grapheme consistency): how predictably letters map to sounds. High transparency speeds literacy acquisition and decoding (e.g., shallow orthographies). (...) (**Quora**, From a linguist's perspective, which is the most effective writing system?)

As to which is best, it depends on the language. Alphabets are best with languages that have a medium number of sounds, especially those including consonant clusters, and short word length. Syllabaries are best with languages that have long words and few sounds, generally languages that don't have consonant clusters, and have a small number of vowels, of which one is typically far more common than the others. Ideograms are best for languages with lots of sounds or tones. Word length is not a big issue. (**Quora**, What are some of the best and worst writing systems?)

- is a script inherently hard or just hard for you?
- tension between universal claims and learner-specific views
- reflects deeper beliefs about linguistic relativity and cognition
- essentialist views often clash with relativist rebuttals

7 CORRECTION AND EXPERTISE

It is not technically correct to say Thai script derived from Sanskrit. It is derived from Khmer script and Khmer script derived from Brahmi script. You just go to Wikipedia dude. Should I continue to watch your video given that you already gave the wrong simple fact? (**YouTube**, The hardest language to spell)

Calling kilogramo a loanword is a stretch. As for c/q, predictable doesn't mean not redundant. For x/j Méjico and México are both accepted in different places precisely because México is not how anyone would spell it if they heard it in the present. Spelling cazar as casar (i.e. the way it's pronounced in most places outside of Northern Spain) is considered straight-up wrong. You /could/ have a "write what you actually pronounce" option for that too like with (p)sicólogo and Mé(x/j)ico but expecting the entire Spanish speaking world to keep track of pronunciations that are only used by a minority of speakers isn't that different from French speakers having to spell things the way they were pronounced 400 years ago. (**Reddit**, What does r/linguisticshumor consider a bad orthography?)

Actually it's not the language that has a writing system, it's the speakers that have one or both. Some people speak the same language, but use several different alphabets for it, and some alphabets (Latin in particular) are used for a wide range of languages. The best writing system for each writer is the one he or she knows best and is most comfortable with. (**Quora**, From a linguist's perspective, which is the most effective writing system?)

- users correct terminology and factual misunderstandings
- common refrains: “That’s not an abjad”, “Chinese isn’t pictographic”
- reflects boundary work between lay knowledge and linguistic authority
- policing often re-centers the conversation on “correct” metalanguage

IDEOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF DIFFICULTY

- the alphabetic condition: public discourse assumes phoneme–grapheme mapping is “logical” and universal → scripts judged by alphabetic norms
- difficulty as ideological mirror: “hard” ≠ complex — it indexes cultural distance and moral value (“Chinese = chaotic”, “Hangul = logical”)
- affective dimension: awe, frustration, beauty → emotional acts that sustain literacy ideologies
- native script effect: familiarity mistaken for universality; one’s first script becomes the hidden standard [Gnanadesikan 2021](#)
- implication: difficulty as a social index of identity, hierarchy, and belonging

Gnanadesikan, Amalia. 2021. S1: The Native Script Effect. In Y. Haralambous (Ed.), *Grapholinguistics in the 21st Century 2020* (pp. 103–123). Brest: Fluxus Editions.

HOW PLATFORMS SHAPE IDEOLOGY

- vernacular expertise: lay users perform knowledge; folk grapholinguistics mirrors academic debate
- metaprescriptivism: users mock yet reinforce norms → critical awareness doesn't erase hierarchy
- ideological condensation: each script becomes a cultural symbol (Hangul = modernity, Arabic = spirituality, English = irrationality)
- toward lay grapholinguistics: public theorizing about writing reveals a living ideological ecology of literacy

ORTHOGRAPHY

WHAT IS ORTHOGRAPHY?

“So, it’s about someone writing something that can be read by others, and about adhering to the specified conventions that most language communities have now agreed upon with varying degrees of bindingness.”

Karg, Ina. 2015.
*Orthographie:
Öffentlichkeit,
Wissenschaft und Erwerb.*
(Germanistische
Arbeitshefte 46).
Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110366679>

Karg 2015: 5, my translation

SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW STUDY

- three parts: (1) **implicit knowledge**, beliefs and opinions about orthography, (2) experience with and opinions about **orthographic shaming**, (3) reaction to and questions about a **specific example of orthographic shaming**
- **21 interviews** (13f, 8m) conducted in 2018 and 2019 in German ranging from 13 to 55 min (average 30 min)
- interviewees had responded to an ad in the Department of Linguistics (University of Graz) and were paid € 10 to participate
- homogeneous group: most participants were **highly literalized students**, ages range from 18 to 29, similar educational backgrounds, all of them (with minor exceptions) assess their own orthographic competence as very good

SOCIOLINGUISTIC CONTEXT

- in the German-language realm, orthography is doubly codified [in official rulebooks by the Council for German Orthography and dictionaries based on them]
- orthography is phenomenologically primary to the graphematics of the writing system Schmidt 2018: 28—from the outset, children learn not to write but to write correctly; orthography serves not as a guideline but as a corset of normativity Maas 2015
- ever since the latest spelling reforms [1996/2006], orthography has entered the public's awareness, spawning myriad different discourses Johnson 2002

Johnson, Sally. 2002. On the origin of linguistic norms: Orthography, ideology and the first constitutional challenge to the 1996 reform of German. *Language in Society* 31. 549–576.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404502314039>

Maas, Utz. 2015. Vom Sinn der Rechtschreibung. *Networx* 68.
<http://www.mediensprache.net/networx/networx-68.pdf>
(accessed 25 September 2021)

Schmidt, Karsten. 2018. *Phonographie und Morphographie im Deutschen. Grundzüge einer wortbasierten Graphematik*. (Stauffenburg Linguistik 107). Tübingen: Stauffenburg.

QUESTIONS

Leitfragen zum Interview: *Orthographic Shaming*

1. Was verstehst du unter „Rechtschreibung“? Was fällt für dich unter diesen Begriff? Was verstehst du unter einem Rechtschreibfehler?
2. Wie stehst du zum Thema Rechtschreibung? Welchen Lebensbereich würdest du am ehesten diesem Thema zuordnen? Welche Rolle spielt Rechtschreibung in deinem Leben?
3. Was denkst du über Personen, die häufig Rechtschreibfehler machen?
4. Hast du schon einmal die Rechtschreibung von jemandem im Internet ausgebessert? (Wenn ja, wie oft? Wo?)
 - a. wenn ja: In welchem Kontext? Warum? Gab es Reaktionen darauf? Wenn ja, welche? Wie stehst du im Nachhinein dazu, dass du das getan hast? |
 - b. wenn nein: Würdest du das jemals in Erwägung ziehen? Wenn ja, in welchem Kontext – was wäre für dich ausschlaggebend, um das zu machen? Wie würde deine Reaktion aussehen? Welche Fehler würdest du eher ausbessern als andere?
5. Wurde deine Rechtschreibung im Internet einmal ausgebessert?
 - a. wenn ja: In welchem Kontext? Wie hat diese Verbesserung ausgesehen? Wie war das Klima in diesem Gespräch? Wie hast du dich gefühlt? Hast du darauf reagiert – wenn ja, wie? Gab es Reaktionen von anderen Personen? Wie sahen diese aus?

NORMATIVITY & SELF-CENSORSHIP

Because every time that I'm writing somewhere, I'm writing, and therefore it has to be correct, because otherwise I could just let it be. [B01]

... as soon as you write something, it [= orthography] is certainly very dominant...

[A02]

Self-censorship. [A01]

NEGATIVE ASCRIPTIONS

... usually I value that people can spell correctly, because if they can't, that makes their IQ sink in my head. [A05]

... so I would like to avoid thinking that these people are then, uhm, intellectually a bit inferior to others, but it just easily gives this impression... [A04]

POSITIVE ASCRIPTIONS

... so whoever has very good spelling, I assume that they were very hardworking and that they attended a very good school or maybe even have an academic degree. [A06]

ORTHOGRAPHIC SHAMING

... half a year ago, when I still had Facebook installed on my phone, I did it almost daily (laughs) – guilty pleasure, no, it just bothered me, but mostly it was because I didn't want to argue about the content of the discussion and so I just corrected people's spelling to maybe anger them a bit. [B04]

AWARENESS OF DEVIANCE

... then one recognizes quite fast whether something was written incorrectly from ignorance or whether someone has simply mistyped when typing or has written somehow a little too hastily. [A01]

... they don't bother to prepare the text appropriately for me, and more like... it's kind of like they don't follow the etiquette. [A05]

SOCIAL BINDINGNESS

... people act as if this [= orthography] were the Traffic Code when actually it's just a suggestion and one must – I don't know, in public spaces, [...] in university and the like, one must adhere to it, but actually it would just be a proposal for the general public. [A05]

Orthography is important in all domains of written life. [B01]

AUTHORITIES

- ... people who understand it. [A01]
- ... scientists ... [A02]
- ... people who also deal intensively with language ... [A04]
- ... bright minds ... [B03]
- ... I think that should be left to the experts ... [B02]
- ... Germanists [...] those are the professionals, they must know about that, they have to know what is good for the German language ... [B04]

COMMON THREADS

- orthography plays an important role in the interviewees' lives; for most of them in all contexts (informal/formal), all registers, and in all domains of life (private/professional)
- there is a strong distinction between mistakes, errors, and [unlicensed] variation (e.g., dialect, youth language, older orthographic variants, choices); mistakes are seen as more problematic and evaluated more critically
- nuanced statements are made about people who make a great number of spelling errors (e.g., dyslexia is also mentioned, albeit seldom); however, most interviewees admitted to judging a person “unconsciously” and “automatically” based on low spelling performance, leading to social sanctions
- only experts should be allowed to make decisions about orthography (reforms)

CONCLUSIONS

- all registers of writing are affected by normativity (much more so than the registers used in speech?) which people are aware of
- knowledge of norms is considered social/cultural capital and power; this is instrumentalized in strategies such as orthographic shaming, the response to which is, however, largely negative, although most people (involuntarily) engage in a passive form of it
- the public's attitudes (and the public does have attitudes!) towards orthography are valuable in further investigating the complex function of orthographies and their status as a central cornerstone and instrument of linguistic policy

FUNCTIONS OF RECORRECTIONS

recorrection post

Recorrector

Of course it's 'you're'. Can you believe the gall of some people?

Correctee

Haha you're funny!

Corrector

*your

screenshot
(de-/recontextualized
discourse fragment)

recorrections as (mostly other-)corrections of incorrect corrections

- (1) factually correct a perceived mistake/misconception, and (2) subject the (incorrect) corrector to the same negative effects of an FTA they had wanted to bring upon the addressee(s) of their initial correction
- thus mitigate effects of attempted FTAs – by acting as FTAs themselves
- function also as (implicit) criticisms of the practice of correcting including the smugness and supposed superiority ascribed to correctors (also by themselves)
- not only mock a mistake but also the mocking practiced by correctors, with which those aim to position themselves as superior; thus, recorrectors may implicitly challenge standard language ideologies by exposing the hypocrisy of prescriptive practices but also position themselves as (morally) superior with respect to prescriptivism

PRELIMINARY DEFINITION:

metaprescriptivism

metapragmatic **ideologies** and **discourse** *about* prescriptivism that may themselves carry prescriptive undertones, or even **practices** that subvert prescriptivism but may themselves be prescriptive

CRITICISM OF LINGUISTIC PRESCRIPTIVISM

The image shows a screenshot of social media comments. On the left, there are three comments from users 6.1, 6.2, and 7.1. On the right, there are three comments from users 7.2, 1.1, and 14.1. Each comment is in a light blue bubble with a user profile icon, a name, and the text of the comment. Below each comment are interaction options like 'Like', 'Reply', and 'Share', along with a timestamp.

User 6.1
What's terrifying is the unforgiving needle nosed assholes social media has turned us all into. You understood it, right? Shut the fuck up then.
2d Like Reply Share

User 6.2
If you are intelligent enough to correct then you should be intelligent enough to know you only do it to prove you're better than someone else. Seems like adding substance to conversations is lost on majority of humans when any grammatical error occurs tho.
2d Like Reply Share

User 7.1
It was made with copper. It is made of copper. It was and is made from copper. This is the epitome of pedantry. They're both correct. Both past and present tense is correct. It was made with copper. That did not change, which means it is still made from copper.
5d Like Reply Share 157 🍌🍌🍌

User 7.2
Things like this will always spur arguments because language is plastic and its meaning is determined by what we collectively decide. When it was made, it was indeed made with copper (and steel and iron), and it is also still made of those things. Both of these are correct statements and the intent of the statement is clear either way. All of that being said, the pedantry of arguing which is MORE correct almost always comes from a place of Let Me Take Any And Every Opportunity To Show That I'm So Much Smarter Than Everyone Else, and honestly, it's so fucking tiresome.
5d Like Reply Share

User 1.1
At the end of the day, it was a simple typo and wasn't hurting anybody.
5d Like Reply Share 🍌

User 14.1
linguistic prescriptivism is stupid and you should feel bad
5d Like Reply Share

GENERAL PRESCRIPTIVISM

User 1.1
Do people really not have anything better to do with their time?
21h Like Reply Share 10 🍊 😬

User 1.2
User 1.1 I mean, look at us, all here in these comments, commenting. Don't we all have something better we could be doing?
21h Like Reply Share 19 🍊

User 1.3
User 1.1 that's literally what this page is for...so, no.
20h Like Reply Share 6 🍊

User 9.1
This group is for pedantic freaks I want to leave
21h Like Reply Share 🤔

User 14.1
Oh for Pete's sake this group is unhinged
15h Like Reply Share

User 1.4
Whoever steps in those kinds of conversations (on either side) needs to reconsider their life priorities and do something useful with their life.
43w Like Reply Share

User 1.5
User 1.4 - slightly ironic given the page you posted this on... 🤔
43w Like Reply Share

PRESCRIPTIVIST STANCES

User 5.1
Why do people scrub out the names? I would name and shame, perhaps they'll improve their grammar game.
6d Like Reply Share

User 5.2
User 5.1 the group rules require names to be removed.
5d Like Reply Share

User 12.1
This is intentional incorrectly correcting, and I love it.
44w Like Reply Share 43

User 14.1
bloody love this, people correcting people, on a post about someone correcting someone. Grammar Nazi porn!!!
43w Like Reply Share 5

User 10.1
Now I wanna see the person who sent that tweet getting attacked
43w Like Reply Share 36

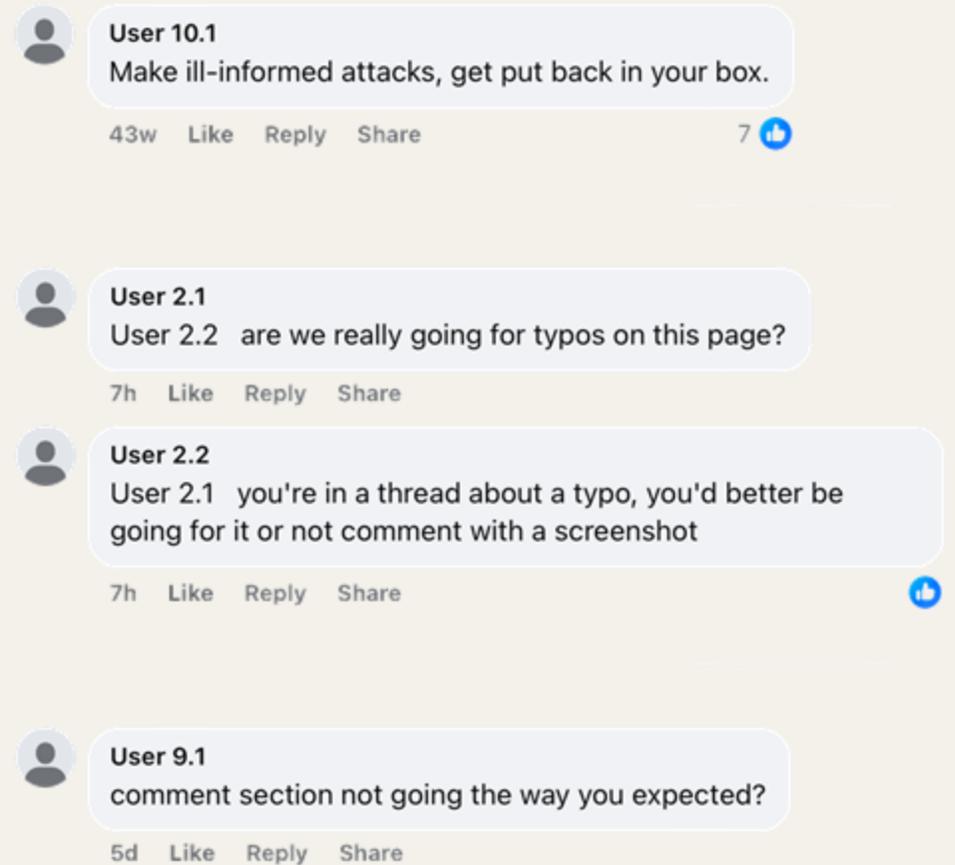
User 10.2
User 10.1 wait.. you want to see someone get verbally attacked for not knowing something?
43w Like Reply Share 17

User 10.3
User 10.2 Yes? Have you not been on the internet before? That's like 99.9% of it's purpose besides porn
43w Like Reply Share 20

User 14.2
This is what I joined this group for!! So bad it's good!
43w Like Reply Share

SUMMARY

- technical issue: how to best scrape and process Facebook comments?
- ethical issue(s): can available demographic information be used (carefully) – with what consent?
- Is it justified to also consider non-linguistic examples? What do the discussions there tell us about (linguistic) prescriptivism?
 - From an interdisciplinary perspective, what are the other disciplines and perspectives that need to be considered here? Philosophy, sociology, ...?
- What are all the ‘other’ comments under the posts about?
- the nature of the posts opens up specific contexts



The screenshot shows a vertical list of four Facebook comments. Each comment is displayed in a light blue rounded rectangle with a grey profile picture icon to its left. The first comment is from 'User 10.1' and says 'Make ill-informed attacks, get put back in your box.' It has 43 weeks old, and options for 'Like', 'Reply', and 'Share'. A blue thumbs-up icon with the number '7' is to its right. The second comment is from 'User 2.1' and says 'User 2.2 are we really going for typos on this page?'. It is 7 hours old, with 'Like', 'Reply', and 'Share' options. The third comment is from 'User 2.2' and says 'User 2.1 you're in a thread about a typo, you'd better be going for it or not comment with a screenshot'. It is 7 hours old, with 'Like', 'Reply', and 'Share' options, and a blue thumbs-up icon to its right. The fourth comment is from 'User 9.1' and says 'comment section not going the way you expected?'. It is 5 days old, with 'Like', 'Reply', and 'Share' options.

User 10.1
Make ill-informed attacks, get put back in your box.
43w Like Reply Share 7

User 2.1
User 2.2 are we really going for typos on this page?
7h Like Reply Share

User 2.2
User 2.1 you're in a thread about a typo, you'd better be going for it or not comment with a screenshot
7h Like Reply Share

User 9.1
comment section not going the way you expected?
5d Like Reply Share

WRITING SYSTEMS ARE NOT NEUTRAL

They are social, cultural, and psychological artifacts that shape how we perceive, value, and regulate language.

- **Graphetics**: graphic form → fonts, handwriting, typographic mimicry → aesthetic, affective, and moral evaluations of what writing looks like
- **Graphematics**: linguistic function → system “difficulty,” transparency → ideologies of logic, efficiency, and beauty reflecting cultural bias
- **Orthography**: normativity → correctness, regulation, policing → ideologies of authority, morality, and identity

Attitudes link cognition and culture.

They shape how people see, process, and feel about writing.

Studying them reveals not only how we read and write, but how we think about language, society, and ourselves.

