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The German Language and the Real World

*Sociolinguistic, Cultural, and Pragmatic Perspectives
on Contemporary German*

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4 Norms and Reforms: Fixing the Form of the Language

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I INTRODUCTION

Orthography is boring. It is a subject for elderly folk who love order, vote Conservative, and always keep their dog on a lead. Spelling is a burden for most schoolchildren, students, teachers, secretaries, and office workers. In more and more professions (in anglophone as in German-speaking countries) you have to master orthographic rules and conventions without gaining recognition for it: it is simply something which is taken for granted. If you are not sufficiently competent, you are considered uneducated and unsuited for promotion. At the same time, mastering the art of spelling is a particularly thankless task, as you can only be said to have achieved it if you are able to write a text without the reader finding anything remarkable about it. Should we therefore only discuss orthographical issues from socio-political perspectives? Why do we write the way we write? Who determines that we should write in this way and why do we conform to it? Why do we not write differently: why do members of the left and right, employers and trade unionists, feminists and male chauvinists, church-goers and free thinkers, all follow the same orthographical rules?

Orthography does not have to be boring. It does not have to be a subject just for elderly folk. The aim of our chapter is to show that orthographical issues can be of interest from several different perspectives: linguistic, historical, socio-political, and cultural, and we shall focus our attention on German spelling, which has taken over a thousand years to reach the form which is taught in schools and universities today, and which even now is a constant source of public controversy.

The debate in Germany on what constitutes the best form of spelling has long been of a rather political nature; there is a conflict between those who wish to preserve tradition and a sensitivity for the

language through a conservative orthographical approach and those who seek to democratize spelling, to create a form of spelling for the entire population and not just for intellectuals. This debate is bound up with cultural considerations; many people fear, for example, that abolishing the capitalization of nouns (a speciality of which Germans have become sole practitioners since the Danes reformed their spelling in this respect in 1948) would result in a cultural collapse, that children would no longer be able to read the 'classics'. Many had similar fears when the old German form of handwriting (the 'Sütterlin-Schrift') and 'Gothic' print were abolished in German schools. No one protested very loudly, however, as this took place in 1941 under Hitler's regime. Afterwards it was too late.

We thus want to try to show that orthographical issues can be considered from a variety of different viewpoints, illustrating this by various examples. We shall begin (in Section 2) with an outline of the historical development of German spelling. The next section will examine the extent to which it became nationalized in the last third of the nineteenth century and how the *Duden* established itself as the standard reference work and the primary influence on standardization. In the subsequent sections, we shall show how hesitantly and tentatively (in the face of often massive attacks) the efforts at reform which many see as necessary are being advanced today. Finally, we shall raise some points concerning current problems.

2 THE FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF GERMAN SPELLING

Huius enim linguae barbaries, ut est inculta et indisciplinabilis, atque insueta capi regulari freno grammaticae artis, sic etiam in multis dictis scriptu est propter literarum aut congeriem aut incognitam sonoritatem difficilis.

(This barbaric language is inelegant and crude and unaccustomed to obeying grammatical rules. It is also hard to write, due to the accumulation of characters in many words and their strange sound.)

The language being described in this way is German. The author of these lines is Otfrid, a monk who wrote a version of the Gospel in the town of Weissenburg in Alsace around 865, depicting the life and sufferings of Jesus. The Latin-educated monk had very good reasons for making use of such a crude language: his little flock were to have the Bible brought to them in their own tongue.

Otfrid's Gospel is one of the oldest works written in German. He had few if any models available to show him how the vernacular

(*theotisce*) was to be written. In a letter written in Latin to Luitbert, archbishop of Mainz, from which the above quotation is taken, Otfrid reflects on the difficulty of transcribing this language. He used the Latin alphabet as his character source for the written representation of his Rhine Franconian dialect, a task to which it is little suited. Otfrid further objects that German 'sometimes demands three (uuu)' of which the first two represent a consonant, that some vowels do not catch quite the right tone, and that in order to write in Franconian it is necessary to use the (Greek) characters γ , κ , and ζ , which are scarcely used in Latin.

These issues, discussed in the context of this earliest encounter with the written form of German, sound remarkably modern. The first transcription of every language to be written in an alphabetical writing system must involve the regulation of grapheme-phoneme correspondences. The Latin alphabet, however, was only partially suited to the task of transcribing Germanic languages such as Franconian or Old English, so that ambiguities and variations manifested themselves from the beginning. Otfrid, naturally enough, followed the principle of depicting the spoken (that is, what was heard) in the written. The principle 'Schreibe, wie du sprichst' (write as you speak) still has its supporters in the debates on German orthography today (Müller 1990, Günther 1985). For some 1,100 years it has been discussed as the problem of 'Laut-Buchstaben-Beziehung' (the relationship between sound and letter). Another feature of contemporary German was not yet relevant in Otfrid's day: the use of capital and small initial letters. For hundreds of years the majuscule (the capital letter) was used as a graphic device in the formulation of texts to highlight passages of particular significance, for example, the beginnings of chapters or, as we see in Otfrid's work, the beginnings of verses. The chapter beginnings of many handwritten manuscripts of the Middle Ages show how greatly the vividly fashioned majuscule, the initial, was bound to the aesthetic enjoyment of ornate images. Even after the invention of printing, the form of the foregrounded capital was determined by ornamental considerations: even long after Gutenberg it was a decorative feature and not the expression of a grammatical principle.

After the practice of emphasizing proper names, especially sacred ones, through the use of initial capitals had been established, a fundamental change in the function of the capital letter was introduced. Nouns (or more accurately: the heads of noun phrases) were specially marked with an initial capital. This characteristic survives today only in German, but in previous centuries it was also a widespread custom in other languages. In English, the rules stipulate the capitalization of book titles, headings, and so on: a remnant of the former practice.

In German, the syntactically motivated capitalization of nouns became customary around 1800 and later became codified, although it was implemented (as in English) in a rather casual way until the eighteenth century: words which the author felt to be particularly important could be capitalized, but this was not regarded as compulsory.

Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700–66), in § 46 of his *Grundlegung einer deutschen Sprachkunst* gives a vivid description of the gradual increase in the use of the majuscule:

46. Man hat nämlich, um der Zierde halber, schon in alten Zeiten, den Anfang jeder Schrift mit einem so genannten großen Buchstaben gemacht; und dadurch der ersten Zeile eines jeden Buches ein Ansehen zu machen gesucht. Man gieng hernach weiter, und gab auch jedem neuen Capitel, jedem neuen Absatze, und endlich jeder neuen Periode eben dergleichen Zierrath. Endlich gaben die Poeten, die Würde ihrer Arbeiten anzuzeigen, jeder Zeile ihrer Gedichte, oder jedem Verse, einen größern und zierlichern Anfangsbuchstaben. (Gottsched 1748: 57)

(In former times each text was already begun with a so-called capital letter by way of decoration; this was to give the first line of every book a striking appearance. This was then taken further, so that each chapter, each paragraph, and finally each sentence was given the same decoration. Eventually, in order to demonstrate the dignity of their work, poets gave each line of their poems or each verse a larger and more decorative initial letter.)

In the following paragraph Gottsched goes on to trace how God's name, the names of famous people, of countries and towns and 'in the end all people without exception' gradually became capitalized. And as capitals were so clearly legible, one also granted 'certain important nouns this privilege'. This had been the case in every European nation and so it had remained. And yet:

Wir Deutschen aber sind noch weiter gegangen, und haben wegen der, bey der letzten Art der Wörter vorkommenden vielen Unrichtigkeiten, darein sich viele nicht finden können, alle Nennwörter, davor man **ein**, oder **der**, **die**, **das** setzen kann, mit großen Buchstaben zu schreiben angefangen. (Gottsched 1748: 58)

(However, we Germans went even further and, because of the many errors which occur in the latter type of words and which many people have difficulty with, started to write all nouns which can be preceded by 'a' or 'the' with a capital letter.)

Then he articulates what many still think today: 'daß unsere Sprache einen so merklichen Vorzug der Grundrichtigkeit vor anderen erhält' (our language has the notable advantage over all others of being fundamentally correct). And (also very modern) he rails against several innovators who sought to abolish capitalization again, because its rules were too difficult. 'To abandon such a well established cus-

tom': that is something we Germans simply do not do, even today!

Of the two rules Gottsched formulated with regard to capitalization (XXII and XXIII), the first is still partially applicable and the second remains completely valid.

XXII. Regel: Man setze im Anfange jeder Periode, und in Gedichten vor jedem Verse, einen so genannten großen Buchstab.

(Rule XXII. At the beginning of every sentence and in poems at the beginning of every verse there should be a so-called capital letter.)

This applies without exception to the beginning of sentences, but the rule is no longer binding for lyric poetry.

XXIII. Regel: Man schreibe nicht nur alle eigene Namen, sondern auch alle selbständige Nennwörter mit großen Anfangsbuchstaben.

(Rule XXIII. Not only all proper names but also all independent nouns should be written with capital letters.)

The dilemma of whether or not to capitalize in German stems initially from the difficulty (and in some areas impossibility) of clearly categorizing all instances of capitalization and of formulating general rules accordingly. This is evident in the work of one of Gottsched's contemporaries, Chrysostomus Erdmann Schröter, a Saxon bureaucrat and author of a best seller of the time whose title-page is reproduced in Figure 4.1. This book with its baroque title went through several editions (in a continually changing form) in the space of a few years. It is about a thousand pages in length. The third edition, which appeared in the same year as Gottsched's *Sprachkunst* (1748), is quoted here. In the third section, 'Orthographia oder Rechtschreibekunst', Schröter formulates the rules for capitalization. According to him the following should be capitalized:

Alle Substantiva, oder solche Worte, die eine Sache, ohne Zuthung eines andern, verständlich ausdrücken; da ich **der**, **die** oder **das**, vorsetzen, und die Sache sehen, hören und betasten kan; ingleichen die Namen der Männer, Weiber, Städte, Dörfer, und dergleichen. (Schröter 1748: 6)

(All nouns, or such words which comprehensibly express an object without the addition of another word; before which I can place 'the' and if I can see, hear, or touch the object; likewise the names of men, women, towns, villages, and so on.)

Schröter's formulation of rules is not as rigid as Gottsched's. He states that although other languages may be different, one should none the less proceed with capitalization in German, given that every language has its own peculiarities. In German, after all, one does not write 'Vater (father) with an F, just because the English, Scots, Danes, Swedes, and Norwegians do' (Schröter 1748: 36–7).

Allzeitfertiger
und allerley Fälle gerichteter
Briefsteller,
Welcher der Jugend, nach züförderst festgesetzter
Orthographie und Stilographie,
So wohl allerley Arten Briefe, Wechsel,
Obligationen, Contracte, Abschiede zc. und was sonst
im gemeinen Leben, und insonderheit bey der löblichen Kauf-
manschafft erforderlich ist,
als auch, durch in Kupfer gestochene
Vorschriften
Die Lateinisch- und Teutschen Buchstaben,
nach den Grundstrichen und Wörtern, deutlich vor Augen leget;

FIG. 4.1. Title-page of Schröter's *Briefsteller* of 1748

Instances when one should write a word with a small initial letter, only implicitly mentioned in Gottsched's capitalization rules, are broadly dealt with by Schröter: adjectives and words that 'ein Seyn, Thun oder Leiden, bemerken' (signify being, doing, or suffering) are to be written with a small letter. His examples: *alt* (old), *schön* (beautiful), *ich liebe* (I love), *du leidest* (you suffer), *ibr seyd arm* (you are poor), etc. (p. 37).

What did the educated contemporary of around 250 years ago discover if he wanted to know what should be capitalized? If (to use today's concepts) he had consulted the theory (Gottsched) and the popular words of advice (Schröter), they would have explained to him that nouns or substantives in front of which an article can be placed and that are 'concrete', signifying something that can be seen or touched, as well as

proper names, all have a capital letter at the beginning of the word. All other words are written with a small initial letter. By and large this principle, which actually captures the essence of the current norms, remains reasonably satisfactory. It is not, however, completely watertight. Only independent concrete nouns which are able to take an article are supposed to have a capital letter. However, as the criterion of a word being able to take an article outweighs the criterion of its being concrete, the words *Zeitgeist* (spirit of the age) and *Weltanschauung* (philosophy of life) are written with a capital exactly like words such as *Tisch* (table) and *Stuhl* (chair). But *der einzelne* (the individual) and *im folgenden* (in the following) are both written with a small initial letter, although I can touch an individual person and can see the following section.

The principle would be very effective, though, if it were to be applied so that all words capable of taking an article and/or all concrete words in Schröter's sense were capitalized, but all others not. 'Use a capital letter in the context just mentioned, but a small one in cases of doubt': if such a rule were used, one of the major obstacles of German orthography would be easier to negotiate. That capitalization communicates syntactic information is indisputable; whether this is indispensable for the reading and writing of German, though, is a debatable issue. At all events, it is clear that its formation and historical development had nothing to do with grammatical considerations, as is occasionally suggested.

From the point of view of those mid-eighteenth-century authors who did have something to say about the subject, there would have been no reason for the 'orthography question' to become an issue in German studies during the following century. The style of the German classical writers tended primarily to have a stabilizing influence: the spelling practices associated with Goethe, Schiller, and their contemporaries can be regarded as being widely established by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Frequent reference is made to this by, amongst others, the linguist and expert on orthographical questions Dieter Nerius (see e.g. Nerius *et al.* 1987: 14). The writings of Johann Christoph Adelung show the state of the language at the time. Adelung, who is frequently mentioned in the same breath as Gottsched, merely summarized the contemporary state of language usage and unlike his predecessors formulated little that was new. He did, however, give a more detailed exposition of the prevailing rules. In his *Deutsche Sprachlehre für Schulen* (German Grammar for Schools), of which the 4th edition of 1801 is quoted here, he examines the capitalization of 'proper names and the adjectives derived therefrom' (e.g. Europe > European) and pronouns of address (1801: 487–8). Adelung refines the rules, expanding them to related areas, and there is a tendency towards greater standardization.

It is also clear that another area, namely the written reproduction of speech, was not yet very significant at this time. There were variations, for example, in the length of the vowel (*Name* (name) in Gottsched and Schröter, *Nahme* in Adelung), but these did not result in any interference in communication.

In summary, one can see that at the turn of the nineteenth century a standard practice of spelling had developed, which made it possible to extract information from written texts without difficulty. The remaining orthographical variations were not a serious obstacle for the reading public. That 'more recently formulated written language' which 'went under the name of *Hochdeutsch* [High German]' (Adelung 1801: 5), had achieved the widespread circulation which was a prerequisite for effective communication in the German-speaking area. This 'pure German' or 'good German' (as Adelung calls it) was, however, still in the first instance the property of the 'upper classes of the nation', dependent upon their 'culture and taste': but in the course of further developments its norms were accepted in all German-speaking areas (at least as far as the form of the written language that we are dealing with here is concerned). The principle on which these norms are based is often summarized in histories of the language by the maxim which had already been so dear to Otfried a thousand years earlier: write as you speak. In an inverted form this sentence was to have a great effect upon the spoken language.

Closely linked with the political movement towards unification in Germany after 1815 (the temporary achievement of which was represented by the founding of the German Empire by Bismarck in 1871) was the rapid establishment of a German 'national science' (*Germanistik*). The names Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm may be seen as an embodiment of this complicated process. Their apparently meticulous historical and philological work and their preoccupation with the monuments of early German history (equal attention being given to the areas of the law, literature, and language) served primarily to strengthen national consciousness and were, however esoteric they may have seemed, in every sense political. 'Was haben wir denn gemeinsames als unsere sprache und literatur?' (What else do we have in common other than our language and our literature?) asks Jacob Grimm not without pathos in the Preface to the first volume of his German dictionary (1854: 9).

In the process of this examination of the past, early German history was transformed by the Romantic vision of the researcher into an idyll, a standard against which to measure an imperfect present. Even the language of the time appeared to the philologist as a pale shadow of its former self in long past better days.

Vor sechshundert Jahren hat jeder gemeine Bauer Vollkommenheiten und Feinheiten der deutschen Sprache gewußt, d. h. täglich ausgeübt, von denen sich die besten heutigen Sprachlehrer nichts mehr träumen lassen.

(Six hundred years ago every common peasant was aware of the perfections and nuances of the German language, by which I mean he used them daily, nuances that the best language teachers today could not even dream of.) (Grimm 1819: 2)

And it is precisely these language teachers, in Jacob Grimm's opinion, that have brought about the wretched condition of the language through their 'woolly and erroneous rules' (Grimm 1819: 2). Even their names are not withheld: it is Adelung who stands accused.

In this Preface to the German Grammar of 1819 it is still the form of the German language which is of primary concern. Thirty-five years later Jacob Grimm examines orthography. From today's perspective he seems to be a radical reformer. He consistently uses a small initial letter in his writings (capitals only appear at the beginning of a paragraph and with proper names) and grumbles about the inadequacies of the Latin alphabet in the context of its 'application to German sounds', about the fluctuations and shameful inconsistency' of German spelling, about the 'accumulation of vowels and of consonants, which gives German writing the impression of being sprawling, stiff, and sluggish', and about representations of vowels:

wenn man nahm, lahm, zahm schreibt, warum nicht auch kahm? oder umgedreht, wenn kam, scham, name gilt, warum nicht nam, lam, zam? (Grimm 1854: 70)

(If one writes *nahm*, *lahm*, *zahn*, why not also *kahm*? Or conversely, if *kam*, *scham*, *name* are correct, why not *nam*, *lam*, *zam*?)

Furthermore, he criticizes the shortcomings of the ⟨ch⟩ (*Sicht* (sight), *Flucht* (flight)), and the ⟨th⟩ (*Thal* (valley), *Theil* (part)), which he finds unnecessary (Grimm 1819: 73–4) and which was actually abolished in the reform of 1901. He also points out that structurally, one of the letters ⟨f⟩, ⟨v⟩, or ⟨w⟩ is 'completely dispensable' and suggests discarding one and 'then redetermining the relationship between the others' (1819: 78).

Jacob Grimm derives his critique, as he does the justifications for his suggestions for change, from examples of the history of the German language. As modern as his explanations may sound, to make him the father of the reform movement would be to misinterpret his intentions. He does not want to simplify orthography for pedagogical reasons, like all reformers since Konrad Duden. To act as language teacher or schoolmaster is far from his mind. In a speech to the Berlin Academy in 1847 he spoke with derision about the move towards

standardization in the language and made fun of the tendency 'to pedantry in language':

In der sprache aber heiszt pedantisch, sich wie ein schulmeister auf die gelehrte, wie ein schulknabe auf die gelernte regel alles einbilden und vor lauter bäumen den wald nicht sehn. (Grimm 1847: 328)

(But being pedantic about language means proudly holding on to one's own fixed views on everything, the way a schoolmaster does to the rules he teaches or a schoolboy to the rules he learns, and therefore not seeing the wood for the trees.)

This tendency of Jacob Grimm's to adopt a casual attitude towards linguistic matters is usually overlooked. Generations of philologists have been glad to cite Grimm the philologist, but they have preferred to ignore Grimm the satirist and cynic. His pedant, who through sheer linguistic proficiency advised 'his consumptive wife not to drink *eselmilch* (ass's milk) but only *eselinnenmilch* (the milk of a female ass)' (1847: 329) has regrettably been forgotten. It is interesting to note that there is a sense of continuity with regard to this specific point: a short time ago it was publicly suggested that one should say *Kuckuck-innenei* (the egg of a female cuckoo) rather than *Kuckucksei* (cuckoo's egg) as only female cuckoos lay eggs, and *Amselmännchengesang* (the song of the male blackbird) rather than *Amselgesang* (the blackbird's song) as female blackbirds are unable to sing (Vogt 1992). This is presumably meant to be sarcastic. In Grimm's time, however, it was the pedants (especially Germanists) who prepared the way for the final codification of orthographical, lexical, and grammatical norms.

3 THE NATIONALIZATION OF GERMAN SPELLING AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE *DUDEN* AS A STANDARD REFERENCE

There is general agreement that the state of German spelling at the beginning of the last third of the nineteenth century was deplorable. Before 1871, every large German state and many of the smaller ones had their own rule-books for spelling. Orthography was as disunited as the country. In fact there were not that many rule-books and their differences focused primarily on details. It is true that the school-teachers who taught using these individual state rule-books had a lot of freedom in their actual teaching, as there was no definitive orthographical dictionary. The Prussian Minister for Culture, Raumer, complained in 1857 that:

Es ist ein unerträglicher Zustand, wenn in einer Anstalt der Lehrer der einen Classe die Schreibweise für falsch erklärt und mit allen Mitteln auszutreiben versucht, die der Lehrer der hervorgehenden Classe mit ebensolchem Eifer den Schülern eingeprügelt hatte. (Raumer 1863: 301)

(It is an unacceptable situation for a teacher in an institution to tell a class that their spelling is wrong and then attempt by every means to eradicate precisely what the previous teacher had drilled into the pupils with an equal amount of fervour.)

This assessment, however, refers primarily to the numerous words with two alternative spellings, which differed consistently from one another, in small ways (e.g. *Classe/Klasse* (class) and the ending *-iren/ieren*). This did not affect the communicative capability of the orthographical system: the degree of variation might even have been less than in the German language today, where, for example, *Zentrum* competes with *Centrum* and *Center* (centre).

The dominant trend at the time was towards standardization and the breakthrough in all areas of life came after the founding of the German Empire. With the realization at Versailles of the so-called *kleindeutsch* solution to the unification of the empire by Chancellor Bismarck in 1871 (the unification of the German states without German-speaking Austria) after the military victory over France, it was finally possible to achieve unity and standardization. Currency, measurements, weights, railways, postal services, and industrial production norms all had to be standardized in order to facilitate trade within the new national territory, and legal systems were to be harmonized. This process has highlighted the current parallels in many areas following the merging of the former GDR with the Federal Republic of Germany in 1990.

However, one area hardly affected the population of the new empire: that of the still unstandardized orthography. In fact, it took five years for the minister responsible in the dominant state of the empire, Prussia, to concern himself with orthographical questions. The *Verhandlungen der zur Herstellung größerer Einigung in der deutschen Rechtschreibung berufenen Konferenz* (Conference on the Establishment of Greater Standardization of German Orthography) took place in Berlin in 1876. Amongst those present was the 45-year-old headmaster Konrad Duden, who some years previously had published a slim orthographical dictionary in the small town of Schleiz where he worked. After ten days of tough negotiations the conference made a number of remarkable resolutions. The most notable of these was 'that length should only be graphically represented for the vowels e and i, as these occur in stressed as well as unstressed syllables' (quoted from Nerius 1975: 63). Following this ruling one would write

Kan (boat), *Färe* (ferry), *Son* (son), *Höle* (cave), *Hun* (chicken), *Gefül* (feeling). Only the need for differentiation between homophones allowed a continued distinction to be made between *Rubm* (glory) and *Rum* (rum). The issue of capitalization was not on the agenda in 1876.

The proposals of the conference (which also included the replacement of ⟨c⟩ by ⟨k⟩ and ⟨z⟩) although published with an explanation, were never put into force. According to contemporary accounts, Bismarck worked himself up into a fury over the new orthography, calling it *Sprachkonfusion*, which would only 'bewilder' the people, who were having to get used to all sorts of reforms, and banned it without further ado (see Sauer 1988: 87).

Still in the same year, Konrad Duden, who was a passionate advocate of the 'new orthography', published a short work with the title *Die Zukunftsorthographie nach Vorschlägen der zur Herstellung größerer Einigung in der deutschen Rechtschreibung berufenen Konferenz erläutert und mit Verbesserungsvorschlägen versehen von Konrad Duden* (The Orthography of the Future in accordance with Suggestions Made at the Conference for the Establishment of Greater Standardization within German Spelling, with Suggestions for Improvement by Konrad Duden).

In this work he puts forward the case for reform with verve. He justifies his position in a radically democratic fashion:

Der Reiz, welcher für den sachlich Hochgebildeten darin liegt, daß er durch die Gestalt des Wortes an die Herkunft desselben, an die Begriffsentwicklung, die es durchlaufen hat, vielleicht selbst an die Wurzel, aus der es entsprossen ist, erinnert wird, ja daß ihm hie und da eine, freilich meist sehr schwankende, Anung aufdämmert, warum diese Lautgruppe mit der Funktion betraut ist, gerade diesen Begriff zu bezeichnen — dieser Reiz, sage ich, ist dem Volke im großen und ganzen, zu dessen Gebrauch die Schrift da ist, völlig unverständlich, und er hat mit dem Zweck der Schrift nichts zu schaffen. . . . Reinliche Beschränkung auf den Zweck ist überall gut, darum ist diejenige Orthographie die beste, welche, das historische Studium der Sprache den Gelehrten überlassend, nichts weiter will als treu und sonder Müß das gesprochene Wort widergeben. (Duden 1876: 11–12)

(There is a certain attraction for the highly educated man in the fact that the form of a word reminds him of its origin, of its conceptual development, perhaps of the root from which it sprang, in the fact that it sometimes dawns on him, albeit mostly very hazily, why this group of sounds is accorded the function of designating this particular concept. But in my view this attraction is by and large completely incomprehensible to the mass of the people for whose use writing exists, and it has nothing to do with the purpose of writing. . . . It is always a good thing to limit oneself strictly to the purpose; therefore, the best orthography is the one which, leaving the historical study of the language to the scholars, seeks to do nothing more than to reproduce the spoken word faithfully and without excessive effort.)

These words are clearly directed against the historicization of linguistics and it is equally clear that Konrad Duden is concerned with the establishment of an 'orthography for the people'. The linguist Wolfgang Ullrich Wurzel, author of the only biography of Konrad Duden, describes the failure of the 1876 attempts at reform as a 'fiasco'. 'By means of a bureaucratic decree the results of a commission of renowned experts were declared null and void and relegated to the archives — nothing changed' (Wurzel 1985: 66). Wurzel comes to the conclusion that 'the consequences of this defeat . . . have not been overcome even today' (1985: 67).

Konrad Duden came to terms with the defeat remarkably quickly. In 1880 he issued the *Vollständiges Orthographisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (Complete Orthographical Dictionary of the German Language), which was published by the Bibliographical Institute in Leipzig. Its modest vocabulary gave the spelling of approximately 28,000 keywords, contained hardly any definitions and only a few grammatical comments on articles and the endings of both the genitive singular and nominative plural. It is not only the publishing house that to this day regards this slim volume as the first *Duden*: the German Post Office celebrated its centenary with a special issue. In linguistics, this edition is regarded as the first in a series of *Duden* spelling dictionaries (see Sauer 1988: 13 ff.).

This first *Duden* was based on the Prussian rules in operation at the time; some variations of spelling in other states, for example Bavaria, were also taken into account. The book became a best seller and was rapidly followed by new editions. These subsequent *Duden* dictionaries gradually increased the number of words covered from edition to edition and also included additional details on words that were 'better avoided' and the origin of many words. The fact that the 'Complete Orthographical Dictionary' conformed to the dominant principles of spelling in Prussia and included etymological elements, that is to say precisely the kind of historical component he had earlier rejected, shows with what ease Konrad Duden accepted the prevalent attitudes and abandoned his radical 'Orthography of the Future'. The reward for this was not long in coming. When the orthographical question was brought up once again by the authorities responsible for cultural policy after the death of Bismarck in 1898, Konrad Duden was invited to take part in the deliberations. In 1901 the *Beratungen über die Einheitlichkeit der deutschen Rechtschreibung* (Discussions on the Standardization of German Spelling), known today as the Second Orthographical Conference, took place in Berlin.

The host was the Reichsamt des Inneren (Ministry of the Interior). Those participating included not only the most important government

officials, but also representatives of the individual German states and of the Austrian monarchy. Switzerland had declined to take part, as the *Duden* had already been adopted as the definitive spelling dictionary there some years previously. Konrad Duden was one of the two participants at the conference who had also been present in 1876. This time, however, he was more than just a face in the crowd: through his 'Orthographical Dictionary' he had become an authority. The conference progressed at a remarkably rapid pace. After only three days of negotiation the rules for German spelling had been reworked. The minutes documenting the course of the discussions have been preserved and are reprinted in the appendix of Nerius and Scharnhorst (1980).

The Berlin conference could not be regarded as representing a reform of German orthography. Broadly speaking the rules were brought into line with the norms which had been established a good twenty years previously in the *Duden*. Of those suggestions made in 1876 only an amended version of the rule concerning the use of ⟨th⟩ and the replacement of ⟨c⟩ by ⟨k⟩ or ⟨z⟩ in foreign words remained. The question of capitalization continued to be ignored. All those present were able to approve the new framework of rules and in 1902 the 'Rules of German Spelling' were published in the form of a pamphlet. Since then there have been countless reprints. Originally published 'on the command of the Royal Prussian Ministry for Religious Instruction and Medical Affairs', it was also published long after the demise of the Prussian Empire without official sanction by the same publishing house, Verlag Weidemann, which moved to Berlin in 1902.

The currently available edition (without the imprint of the publisher) is published in both Dublin and Zurich and was last printed in 1964. This set of rules was once again given official approval in 1955:

Die in der Rechtschreibreform von 1901 und den späteren Verfügungen festgelegten Schreibweisen und Regeln für die Rechtschreibungen sind auch heute noch verbindlich für die deutsche Rechtschreibung. (*Bundesanzeiger* (The Federal Legal Gazette), no. 242, 15 Dec. 1955: 4)

(The orthographical conventions and rules laid down by the Orthographical Reform of 1901 and later decrees are to this day still binding for German orthography.)

This ruling was agreed by the various education and arts ministers of the Federal Republic of Germany's *Länder*. The *Bundesanzeiger* went on to state that 'in Zweifelsfällen die im *Duden* gebrauchten Schreibweisen und Regeln verbindlich sind' (in cases of uncertainty the ortho-

graphical conventions and rules used in the *Duden* are binding). And so it is that the current editions of *Duden* are regarded as being semi-official. Teachers make decisions about marks on the basis of the *Duden*, judges base their verdicts in relevant cases upon its rulings, the majority of Germans have faith in their *Duden*. And the compilers of the *Duden* in Mannheim actively encourage this ideology: since 1986 they have incorporated the additional line 'based on the official orthographical code' into the title of their 'Orthography'.

It was already clear, however, immediately after the second Orthographical Conference, that the framework of rules was unsatisfactory. The principal witness for the prosecution is Konrad Duden. Already in 1902 he writes in the preface to the seventh edition of his Orthographical Dictionary,

daß die so entstandene 'deutsche Rechtschreibung' weit davon entfernt ist, ein Meisterwerk zu sein. . . . Ihr Hauptvorteil besteht darin, daß sie überhaupt da ist und allgemeine Gültigkeit hat. (pp. iv-v)

(that the 'German orthography' which came into being in this way is far from being a masterpiece. . . . Its main advantage lies in the fact that it exists at all and that it has general validity.)

At the same time, however, he also urges that 'jetzt keineswegs für alle Zeiten ein Stillstand eintreten soll' (on no account should there now be a permanent standstill). Ironically, a standstill has been in effect now for over ninety years!

4 CHALLENGES TO THE AUTHORITY OF THE STANDARD NORMS

The process of the codification of German orthography had reached a conclusion in 1901, but the nature of this conclusion provided sufficient cause for further suggestions for reform. Already in the same year as the first appearance of the pamphlet of rules, a comprehensive reform concept entitled *Die lautlichen und geschichtlichen Grundlagen unserer Rechtschreibung* (The Phonetic and Historical Foundations of our Orthography) came on the market. The author was Oskar Brenner, a professor at Würzburg University who had taken part in the orthographic conference the previous year as a Bavarian representative. In the opening meeting there, Brenner had already voiced the need 'for strong intervention in the status quo' and had pleaded for 'radical simplification' (minutes according to Nerius and Scharnhorst 1980: 33). His proposal, published in the work cited above, dealt in particular with the clearest way to classify sounds and letters in relation

to one another (these relations were later known as 'grapheme-phoneme correspondences'), with the simplification of the marking of vowel quantity (length), and the strict limitation of capitalization to a minimum of cases. These form the main issues of the reform debate to the present day. Other areas of possible orthographical reform addressed by Brenner are: the writing of foreign words, hyphenation (syllabification), the formation of compounds, and questions of punctuation.

The history of this century's numerous suggestions for reform shows that in recent times there has been a shift in the importance and value accorded to individual points. Since at least the 1970s educationalists in particular have openly encouraged *gemäßigte Kleinschreibung* (a modification of spelling which would dispense with capital letters for most nouns), as it is in the use of capital letters that the majority of mistakes occur. Figures for the proportion of all writing errors (excluding punctuation) accounted for by these mistakes vary from 30 per cent to 50 per cent, with some authors setting the figure even higher (see Drewitz and Reuter 1974: 85). A current review of this area is to be found in *Die Rechtschreibung des Deutschen und ihre Neuregelung* (The Orthography of the German Language and its Revision; 1985: 21 ff.).

The alteration of phoneme-grapheme correspondences has ceased to be an issue since the so-called Wiesbaden Recommendations of 1958. The proposals put forward by the *Arbeitskreis für Rechtschreibregelung* provoked a lively discussion, but contained no suggestions for changes in this area.

To summarize, however, we can say that the two areas which played a predominant role from the beginning of the history of orthography are still those determining today's debates on what constitutes an ideal orthography. Owing to the structural limitations of the Latin alphabet used as the foundation of German orthography the relationship between sounds and spelling has been a bone of contention since the time of Otfried, and the curious rulings affecting capital letters have caused controversy since their provisional regulation in the eighteenth century. Both areas were largely ignored in the modification of the orthographical system in 1901, but both have become dominant pre-occupations of most reform proposals and both have become favourite targets for critics of reform.

The inadequacies of the current orthographical system can be seen most clearly in schools, in the classroom. As early as 1912, just ten years after the official introduction of the regulations, a teacher from Breslau called Kosog comments that

Die deutsche Rechtschreibung nämlich ist nichts weiter als ein wahres Schulkreuz; denn wenn man die Zeit, die dafür aufgewendet wird, die Tränen, die um ihretwillen von den Schülern alljährlich vergossen werden, summieren könnte, man würde erschrecken über das Unheil, das dieser Unterrichtsgegenstand Jahr für Jahr anrichtet. (Kosog 1912:3)

(German orthography is actually nothing more than a cross schools have to bear: if one could calculate the time expended on it, the tears spilt on its account by pupils all year round, one would be shocked at the damage this subject inflicts year after year.)

Kosog takes issue with two points: the alphabet and capitalization. Of the former he remarks (1912: 4): 'Unser Alphabet bietet nämlich auf der einen Seite zu wenig, auf der anderen zuviel . . . Es gibt kaum etwas Regelloseres und Willkürlicheres als dieses Alphabet' (On the one hand our alphabet offers too little, on the other hand too much. . . . There is hardly anything as disorganized and arbitrary as this alphabet). If one really were to follow the rule 'write as you speak' (or as you hear), then even a little word like *Fuchs* (fox) alone could be represented in sixty-three different ways: Kosog's examples range from *Fuks* to *Phucks*, *Vugs*, *Fux*, and *Phux* (p. 5).

To highlight the issue of capitalization Kosog gave seventy people of both sexes a dictation of thirty lines: none of his guinea-pigs was able to complete it without mistakes. This text with its multiple difficulties created a furore in the press at the time, resulting in many letters which confirmed 'the impossibility of reproducing the dictation without mistakes'. Kosog's conclusion (p. 24): 'eine Rechtschreibung, die selbst von den Gebildetsten im Volke nicht beherrscht wird, hat ihr Daseinsrecht verwirkt, und je eher sie verschwindet, desto besser' (an orthography which cannot even be mastered by the most educated in the land has forfeited its right to exist: the sooner it disappears the better).

There are two possible ways to bring about orthographical change. One is from below. If people no longer write in the way the rule-books demand, then the rules will alter at some point; the development of American orthography is an example of this process. There are other normative systems which have also done this in the last few decades: dress codes, table manners, forms of greeting and address, stylistic rules in general have changed or survived through the power of the people. As we shall show, examples of this can be given for some aspects of German orthography.

The other way is from above, when through laws or decrees the state changes the norms and thereby standard writing practices. This seems to be what the orthographical reformers are waiting for, since it is very rare for one of them to dare to publish a text which contains no capital letters (e.g. Drewitz and Reuter 1974). No one, to our

knowledge, has tried to alter the marking of vowels. A democratic state, it appears, does not dare to undertake orthographical reform. Only the National Socialist government produced a revised orthography with simplification in mind, but it was abandoned towards the end of the Second World War. Although the Nazi era had a profound effect on the German language as a whole (see Section 5 below), the 'grossdeutsch' (Pan-German) orthography (it was to be 'clear, simple and strong') disappeared with the Reich.

After the consolidation of the two German states in 1949, the orthographical question became caught up for a while in the conflicts of the Cold War. East and West Germany were not prepared to enter into negotiation with one another, but nor did either of the two states venture into orthographical waters alone. Attempts at reform in conjunction with Austria and/or Switzerland would have been possible: this would have resulted in other areas being pressurized into action.

5 CURRENT DEBATES ON ORTHOGRAPHICAL REFORM

Since the beginning of the 1980s, experts from German-speaking countries have at last been discussing the idea of reform at successive conferences. In 1988 they published a proposal for the restructuring of German orthography. The directive given by the state was to 'present suggestions for a reform of the framework of rules governing the areas of hyphenation, the writing of foreign words, and relations between sounds and spelling'. The issue of capitalization had already been excluded through the wise foresight of the authorities. They were clearly aware of the emotions which suggestions of change in this area would arouse. Even the moderate proposals for reform in the other areas resulted in media uproar. Every commentator, feature writer, and talk-show host was suddenly an expert on orthography. They united under the banner of 'preservation'. 'Die Muttersprache ist wie die Landschaft, in die man hineingeboren wird, etwas Angestammtes, eine Heimat, aus der niemand vertrieben werden darf' (The mother tongue is like the country in which one is born, an inheritance, a *Heimat* (home) out of which no one should be driven), stated the national newspaper the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on 12 August 1988. The worthy gentlemen from the commission, the 'reformers' (in quotation marks), were suddenly 'communist pigs', 'idiots', 'bearded revolutionaries' (*Sprachreport*, 4 (1988)).

A few trivial aspects of the proposals regarding issues of sound-to-spelling relations were used to ridicule the suggested reforms. The

authors had wanted to alter some cases of so-called *Dehnungsschreibungen* (ways of marking vowel lengthening): *Aal* (eel) was to become *Al*, *Moor* (moor) *Mor*, and the *Kaiser* (emperor) was to change its ⟨ai⟩ to ⟨ei⟩. The battle against the reform as a whole was waged with ludicrous examples such as 'der Keiser im Mor'. The brave reformers had actually only dared to tackle individual words, and had not intervened structurally in the writing of vowels: even the word *Mai* (May) was left unscathed. It was obvious that hardly any of the commentators in the media had read the reformers' extensive explanations, whose phraseology was not exactly crystal clear.

For some time now virtually no one writing texts for public consumption had observed any version of the beautifully precise rules governing the writing of two or more words separately or as a compound. The alteration of hyphenation patterns is done by the computer. No PC or typesetting computer is able to cope with the existing rules of hyphenation. The following examples of incorrect hyphenation are all taken from daily newspapers. The errors result from fundamental limitations of the software:

1. It is unable to recognize morpheme boundaries: for example, *Aben-dessen* (supper), *al-tägyptisch* (ancient Egyptian), *Al-teisenmann* (scrap-metal dealer), *al-tehrwürdig* (time-honoured), *Amo-kläufer* (madman), *ange-blich* (supposedly), *An-tarktis* (Antarctic), *Anzeigent-eil* (advertisement section), *Armeer-eserve* (army reserve), *Artike-lende* (end of an article), *Artisch-ocke* (artichoke), *Atlanti-kroueten* (Atlantic sea-routes), *Atomzei-talter* (atomic era).
2. It is unable to recognize fixed combinations of letters (bound graphemes): for example *alp-habetisch* (alphabetical), *Amp-hitheater* (amphitheatre), *ät-biopisch* (Ethiopian).
3. It takes too literally the rule of thumb that the combination ⟨st⟩ should not be split: for example *Abga-stest* (test of level of exhaust emissions), *Abschied-stournee* (farewell tournament), *Ausdruck-stypen* (types of expression).
4. It fails to deal effectively with the so-called *Fugen-s* (-s- linking two components of a compound): for example *Amt-seid* (oath of office), *Anfang-schor* (opening chorus), *Aufstieg-schancen* (promotion prospects), *Ausdruck-stypen* (forms of expression).

The use of either ⟨ph⟩ or ⟨f⟩ in frequently used foreign words, for example *Photographie*, *Fotographie* (photography), is not just a recent phenomenon. ⟨c⟩ and ⟨z⟩ are used interchangeably, not only in advertising (*Zigarette* is less chic than *Cigarette*). In some words ⟨k⟩ and ⟨z⟩ are restricted in their usage on historical grounds: *Kongress-Zentrum*

(congress centre) cannot be abbreviated (as KZ can only possibly be understood as an abbreviation for *Konzentrationslager* (concentration camp), whereas *Congress Centrum* (CC) is permissible. Even the *-eur* ending can hardly ever be replaced with *-ör*: *Koifför* (for *Coiffeur*) would barely be decipherable, *Likör* sounds 'tackier' than *Liqueur*. Punctuation only irritates pedants these days, and to a large extent its importance depends on the situation and social context in which it is used. For example, it is expected to be more or less correct in published texts and in Germanists' seminar papers, but the comma before 'und' and the semicolon after certain complex sentence structures are no longer an educational issue.

So the efforts of the last reform proposal were in vain. The reformers were not officially allowed to comment on capitalization; on the issue of sound-to-spelling relations they were far less radical in their suggestions than their colleagues in 1876; and the rest nobody wanted to hear. Admittedly, after the incorporation of the GDR, the German state did have more important tasks than to formulate rules on hyphenation in compound words ... And the language community, or more accurately, those of its members who work with the language, are putting pressure on the rules from below. East Berlin called its television channel *Deutscher Fernseh Funk*, which was described rather sourly by the 1991 *Duden* as 'a deviation from orthographical rules' (p. 204), according to which only *Deutscher Fernsehfunk* is acceptable. Ironically, they have been conspicuously violating this principle themselves since 1989: the words *Deutsches Universal Wörterbuch* are emblazoned on the spine of their dictionary.

A further interesting development in the writing of compound nouns is the use of capital letters for each of the components of the compound (*PostGiro*, *SchülerFerienTicket*). This use of capitals within a word is a device often used by creative advertising copywriters to emphasize words within words and typically occurs at morpheme boundaries in compounds. However, this technique has another important function in contemporary German, which is to form gender-neutral human nouns (see Hellinger, in this volume). *LeserInnen* (readers), *BerlinerInnen* (Berliners) are perfectly normal terms for the majority of *Leser und Leserinnen* (male and female readers) of *taz*, the Berlin newspaper which is not just read by *Berlinerinnen und Berlinern* (female and male Berliners). The *PolitikerInnen* (politicians) of the former Red-Green coalition government of the city introduced this spelling innovation. This isolated ruling, since withdrawn, has not yet been adopted by the rest of the country, but it may only be a matter of time before it becomes more widely accepted.

From the viewpoint of the 'official' orthographical rules, all these

forms are regarded as incorrect. The authoritative book of norms, the *Duden* spelling dictionary, has deliberately ignored language development in this area for years. The chief editor of the *Duden* published in Mannheim, Günther Drosdowski, defined the *Duden's* purpose as follows: 'to establish the spelling of words according to official rules and try to ensure that the number of written variations is kept to a minimum, so that the communicative function of the written language is not impaired' (1987: 26). What he overlooks is that standard writing practices change for precisely those communicative reasons. Women do not just want their presence to be linguistically implicit, they want to be explicitly acknowledged by the language. Furthermore, in many cases the use of the capital within a word is an expression of creative pleasure in manipulating the written language.

Admittedly, the imperial German preceptors of the official rules could not have foreseen developments like these; nevertheless, in a democratic society orthography cannot remain an eternal monument to past eras. Closing your eyes to changes will not make them go away. It is not enough for the new 1991 *Duden* coyly to change a section heading from 'Notes for the User' to 'Notes on Dictionary Usage' (p. 9) and for the reader to find in the same edition that the most 'radical' alteration deep in the jungle of rules is that now, within names written in capital letters 'the ß may also be used for reasons of clarity' (Rule 187). Thus, HEINZ GROßE is now promoted to HEINZ GROBE. It is almost moving to read in the Preface that 'the presentation of the guidelines for orthography and punctuation has been improved' (*Duden* 1991: 5), until one finds 212 rules following on barely 50 pages. Spellings like *PostSparen* and *EuroCard* may still be regarded as a fad, but the large variety of gender-specific descriptions in written form cannot simply be dismissed: the number of people who have searched through the rules section of the *Duden* in vain to find them must run into millions.

Another discrepancy in the noble claim of the *Duden* editorship to 'ensure the standardization of orthography in German-speaking areas' becomes more and more obvious from edition to edition: the German language is being infiltrated by English and American words and expressions at an increasingly rapid rate. Anglicisms are adapted to the morphological-syntactic structure of German to varying degrees and some more rapidly than others (see Glück and Sauer, in this volume). However, full integration, including the adaptation of loan forms to the German orthographical system, is only rarely achieved. At the turn of the last century 'cakes' became *Keks* (which actually means 'biscuit!') and 'strike' *Streik*; the development of the plural forms *Kekse* and *Streiks* completed the integration progress. It will be

interesting to see if *cornflakes* are transformed into what one already sees described on the packaging as *Kornfleks*. Konrad Duden went into battle against linguistic 'intruders who have not earned the right to German citizenship' (Duden 1887: p. iv). His descendants simply record them and make do without the rhetoric. There is still enough room, however, for a few tentative exceptions. Why, according to *Duden*, one can call two very young children *Babys* but two elegant women either *Ladys* or *Ladies* remains the secret of the Mannheim editors.

The problem of the spelling of words integrated into German from another language is a complex one because (as in English and French) the spelling of the original language is normally adopted, even if it does not correspond to the rules of German orthography. One writes *Joystick* [tʃɔɪstɪk] and not *Tschojstick* in German, just as in English one writes *weltschmerz* [wɛltʃmɜ:ts] and not *weltshmerts*. However, whereas such foreign words are phonologically integrated into the English language and therefore made to conform to the structural pattern of the English system, foreign words in German, at least those borrowed from English and French, retain the pronunciation of the language they originate from. One not only writes *Balkon*, *Teint*, and *Grand* but also pronounces them [balkō], [tɛ̃]; and [grā] as in French, although (standard) German possesses no nasal vowels. The 'German' pronunciation of such words ([balkoŋ], [tɛŋ], [graŋ]) would be regarded as uncultured. This leads to the problem that every German must be familiar with the phonological and orthographical systems of both English and French (and increasingly of Italian), in order to be able to read and write their own language; words like *hors d'œuvre*, *gratin*, *fettucini*, *gnocchi*, *ice cream*, and *cheddar cheese* find their way on to many German menus, but also *čevapčići* and *ražnjići*, *giros* and *souvlaki*, *vinho verde* and *köfte kebab*. Whereas, however, the first group has to be mastered phonetically (and, if necessary, orthographically), this is hardly ever the case in the second group.

6 CONCLUSIONS

There is no doubt that the degree to which orthographical norms are regarded as absolutely binding has changed in many cases since 1901. The norms have been considerably relaxed, influenced amongst other things by the almost playful nature of their use in advertising campaigns. The *sätzer* and *sätzerin* (compositor; normally spelt *Setzer*, *Setzerin*) of the Berlin *tageszeitung* have become almost legendary, enlivening articles with their individual commentary. The use of the

capital I within words (*LehrerInnen* (teachers), *SchülerInnen* (pupils)) will probably become established, despite the entrenched opposition of the *Duden* editorial staff and the reservations of linguists, representing as it does a socio-political demand. 'Incorrect' spellings, used millions of times, will gradually become accepted as 'correct', for in the end it is actual usage which is the determining factor.

After all, the prevailing orthographical rules are themselves only the product of the particular social structures that existed at the turn of the century, when norms were established on the basis of the writing conventions current at that time. As history has shown, the *Sprachkultur* (language culture) of German does not simply mean the extent to which the written form of the language has been standardized. On the one hand, we continue to uphold an orthographical system that Konrad Duden's successors consider to be fixed in perpetuity. On the other hand, the set of rules embodied in the current *Duden* has expanded to such an extent that virtually no one can cope with it in its entirety. Some way must therefore be found to liberalize the system, if a mastery of 'correct writing' is not to become the exclusive property of a minority.

Admittedly, writing is no longer the primary means of communicating over long distances. In Konrad Duden's time there were few telephones, no radios, no televisions. Today, however, information is transmitted to a much greater extent by means of the spoken language than in writing. But this does not mean that writing is unimportant, and it is a matter for some concern that in spite of universal education many people still feel inhibited in expressing themselves in writing. Precisely in order to combat these inhibitions and to make writing a cultural asset accessible to all, we should discuss ways of changing its norms to make them more user-friendly. After all, for centuries these norms were not fixed but were in a state of constant flux. The 'classical' writers of German literature managed without a codified norm, and even today no one has difficulty in reading, for example, Goethe texts in the *Vollständige Ausgabe letzter Hand* (complete final edition) of 1830.

The editors of the *Duden* may continue to determine what form German orthography should take in order to enable efficient written communication without sacrificing tradition. Linguists may deliberate on possible future spelling systems. But attempts to achieve absolute standardization should be resisted. In particular, aspects which do not affect the physical form of words, the evolved relationship between phoneme and grapheme, could be changed straight away: for example, hyphenation and some aspects of writing loanwords or of capitalization lend themselves to more liberal treatment. There is also room

for a greater degree of tolerance towards errors: much of what is considered to be 'wrong' is anyway no more than a creative attempt to manipulate spelling in a playful way. Advertisements in particular show how a deliberate violation of the rules can grab a reader's attention. This cheerful anarchy, which is practised even by state organizations such as the Federal Post Office and the Federal Railways, will not lead to a collapse of the orthographical system. Hopefully it will lead to orthographical issues being taken a little less seriously and allow them to be dealt with in a more liberal fashion. The elderly folk who find these developments alarming will, no doubt, see things differently.

Further reading

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