Language in Society **36** (2007). Printed in the United States of America
DOI: 10.1017/S004740450707025X

SALLY JOHNSON, *Spelling trouble: Language, ideology and the reform of German orthography*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2005. Pp viii, 208. Hb $89.95, Pb $39.95

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Since the 1990s language ideology has developed into a field of inquiry of its own. Research on language ideology seeks to investigate how linguistic forms and practices and their conceptualizations are enmeshed in other contextually bound cultural patterns and practices, and how language–culture relations are fraught with moral and political interests. Taking language ideology and Blommaert's (1999) notion of language ideological debates as a point of departure, Sally Johnson sets out to explore the emergence and escalation of a public dispute, involving a variety of social actors (linguists, judges, private citizens, etc.), that broke out in Germany with the introduction of the reform of German orthography in 1996. The focus of the volume is primarily on one aspect of the German debate: the legal battle between those who attempted to challenge the reform on the basis of its alleged incompatibility with some of the principles sanctioned by the German Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*), on the one hand, and the judges of the Federal Constitutional Court, on the other. However, for a more nuanced understanding of the debate, the role played by linguists and the media is also taken into consideration. As Johnson convincingly demonstrates throughout the volume, the debate on German orthography was definitely not about language alone. Rather, it was about different conceptions of the German language together with their political, moral and aesthetic loading.

The volume, which consists of six chapters, is well structured and clear. Chapter 1 begins with a concise discussion of the "heart of the matter" and a presentation of the aims of the study. The central question the book seeks to answer is why an orthographic reform generated such heated protests. The analytical focus is on the contents of two legal documents, namely the responses the Federal Constitutional Court produced to address the two main challenges to the German spelling reform. The author positions the study within the existing scholarly tradition of language ideologies and language ideological debates. Crucial to understanding the whole argumentation of the book is Blommaert's definition of debates as "historically locatable periods in which a struggle for authoritative entextualization takes place" (1999:9). As the reader will notice, Johnson's concern is to illustrate not only the reasons that underpin the stances taken by (groups of) individuals in the debate, but also the semiotic processes whereby these stances compete with one another to become authoritative, and thereby ulti-

mately "natural, obvious, *objective*" (Gal & Woolard 2001:4; emphasis in original).

Chapters 2 and 3 situate the 1996 reform in a precise and detailed historical and linguistic context. Chapter 2 sketches an overview of the orthographic reforms that have been more or less successfully accomplished since the political unification of Germany in 1871. Chapter 3 begins with an outline of the two linguistic principles that are the cornerstones of the 1996 reform – that is, the phonological and semantic principles of orthography. Simply put, according to the former, orthography is a matter of representing speech-related features in writing, ideally in a phoneme = grapheme equivalence. According to the latter, meaning is directly ideographically represented in writing (i.e., not via the mediation of speech), which leads, for example, to spelling the same morpheme consistently no matter how differently it is pronounced. The chapter goes on to give a meticulous account of the linguistic intricacies of the German reform, some of which prove to be essential in order to understand the nature of the legal disputes summarized and discussed in the following chapters.

In chapter 4, the three main challenges to the spelling reform are presented: two legal complaints of private citizens, which were brought before and eventually overruled by the Federal Constitutional Court, and a referendum carried out in Schleswig-Holstein, the most northerly state of the German Federation. Without reproducing the details of the legal challenges, one can say that the arguments focused on whether the orthographic reform was compatible with the German Basic Law with regard to three issues: (i) the role of the executive (the government) vis-à-vis the legislature (the national or federal parliaments) as the legitimate decision maker in cultural and linguistic matters (the reform was introduced by a ministerial decree and not by a statutory law); (ii) the rights of the state vis-à-vis the rights of the individual citizen in these matters; and (iii) the extent to which the reform allegedly impinges on the constitutional rights of individuals as members of a purported "speech community" (*Sprachgemeinschaft*).

As demonstrated in chapter 5, different conceptions of speech community and language underpin the stances taken by the three main groups of social actors in the debate – the complainants, the judges, and the linguists. First, the complainants opposed the reform because they considered it a form of external intervention by the state, imposing a norm fundamentally different from the internal norm, which they viewed as organically developed, self-regulated within the speech community, and not originating in historical and political decisions. Moreover, the new norm would lower the prestige or symbolic value of the pre-1996 standard. This would eventually entail a diminished social status accorded to those who did not master or refused to conform to the new standard. Second, the judges upheld the right of the state to intervene in linguistic matters. The judges argued that the state has the right to regulate language as any other "rule-governed area of social life" (p. 134), and that this right has been historically

wielded, for example in previous spelling reforms. The judges also maintained that state intervention in the matter was minimal and in accord with the internal norms of the speech community. Moreover, they claimed that actual usage within the speech community would in any case continue developing on its own. As Johnson remarks, this means that the judges, as well as the complainants, refer to "the same romantic ideal of speech community as the locus of an autonomous and disinterested form of codification" (136). However, while the complainants viewed the speech community as a site of resistance against the state, the judges invoked the allegedly inevitable change within the speech community as a pivotal argument to legitimate state intervention in linguistic matters. Third, linguists may be considered the "invisible hand" of the debate. In fact, they were not directly and visibly involved in the legal disputes, but their conception of language mirrored in the spelling reform was one of the factors that triggered the whole debate. Linguists proposed a new orthographic norm based on both phonological and semantic principles. Informed by a structuralist approach to language as an independent system, linguists "were motivated by a desire for generalisability, systematicity and objectivity . . . at a structural level" (142), which they hoped would make German orthography easier to teach and learn. By contrast, viewing orthography as indexical of German culture and ultimately the nation, the complainants saw spelling changes as a threat to the aesthetic and moral properties embodied in the language as the bearer of German tradition.

Finally, chapter 6 describes the mechanisms whereby the complainants, the judges, and the linguists tried to secure authority for their stances. Inspired by Eira's (1998) work on discourse and authority in orthography and on Gal & Woolard's (2001) collection on languages and publics, Johnson shows that the groups involved in the German debate attempted to rationalize their viewpoint on orthography and make it objective by drawing on different competing discourses, or on the same discourse but in different ways. Simply put, while one can say that the reformers drew on a scientific discourse and the opponents on a historical and religious discourse, both the reformers and the opponents drew on a political discourse that underscores the unificatory function of orthography in setting up a tangible linguistic boundary for a speech community. However, while the reformers viewed the reform as a step toward unity, the opponents considered it a threat to unity.

The book is well written; reading it is highly enjoyable, and the style is always clear. This, together with detailed and sophisticated analysis of relevant data, makes Johnson's book on the debate on German orthography a pivotal contribution that brings together the fields of language ideology and German sociolinguistics. Therefore, the book is highly recommended to scholars of German and of language ideology, and to anyone who desires deeper insight into the mechanisms whereby language ideologies are reproduced in a specific sociocultural and historical context.

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(Received 15 November 2005)

Language in Society **36** (2007). Printed in the United States of America
DOI: 10.1017/S0047404507070261

CHARLOTTE BURCK, *Multilingual living: Explorations of language and subjectivity*. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, 218. Hb $75.

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What are the pros and the cons of writing a book outside one's main field of expertise? *Multilingual living*, a book about bilingualism written by a psychotherapist whose previous work has focused on gender and family therapy, offers interesting answers to this question. Among its advantages are a fresh perspective and the considerable body of expertise in the field of family relationships that Burck brings to the table. She asks intriguing questions about living in more than one language and answers them in engaging and compelling ways. Yet her outsider status also carries its price: Scholars who do not take part in an academic conversation within a field do not always have a clear idea of whether their work is truly novel or whether previous work has already attempted to answer the same questions in similar ways. Rather, they are at the mercy of a body of literature they are able to locate through a time-constrained search, without a clear feeling for which sources can be considered central in the field and which are peripheral, or which debates are still going on and where scholars might have reached a consensus.

This shortcoming is particularly evident in chapter 1, "Researching multilingualism and multilingual identities," which aims to review the literature relevant to the present study. The chapter unsuccessfully attempts to bring together a variety of unrelated, outdated, and often peripheral sources, violating the three unspoken rules of a literature review: currency, comprehensiveness, and relevance. The discussion of multilingual development in childhood, for instance, relies on research conducted in the 1970s and 1980s, rather than on the abundant body of recent work. The section on linguistic relativity misses Lucy's (1992a,b) seminal work, instrumental in the current revival of interest in the so-called Sapir-