



ON HIDDEN REFORMS OF THE GERMAN OFFICIAL ORTHOGRAPHY

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German official orthography



German official orthography

- What framework conditions must be in place so that one can speak of a reform with regard to an orthography?
- How many reforms of the German official orthography have there been?
- A prerequisite for a change in spelling conventions to be called a reform is that rules are affected instead of individual cases.

1998

- 1. official reform

2006

- 2. official reform

German official orthography

Chapters of the Official Rules of the German Orthography (Johnson 2005: 54f.)

- a. Sound-letter classifications
- b. Separate and compound spelling
- c. Hyphenation
- d. Capitalization
- e. Punctuation
- f. Word division at the end of lines


- 113 individual rules

1998

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 Johnson, Sally (2005). *Spelling trouble? Language, ideology and the reform of the German orthography*. Clevedon etc.: Multilingual Matters.

A new letter

Uppercase: ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZÄÖÜ
Lowercase: abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyzäöüß

New uppercase form: ß

Correspondence rule: <ß> → [s]

Relevant cases: allcaps writing

Proper name

Gauß

Allcaps writing before 2017:

GAUSS

Allcaps writing since 2017:

GAUß

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Antiqua-Fraktur dispute

Typefaces of the Latin alphabet

Antiqua

Fraktur

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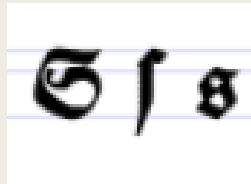
Antiqua-Fraktur dispute

1941

- Ban on black letter font

On 3.1.1941, Hitler issued a ban of the black letter font:

“Today, the Fuehrer [...] has decided that the Antiqua script is to be designated as the normal script in the future. [...] Gradually, all printed matter is to be converted to this normal script. As soon as this is possible in terms of schoolbooks, only the normal script will be taught in the country schools and elementary schools.” (cited from Mentrup 2007: 142)



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 Mentrup, Wolfgang (2007). *Stationen der jüngeren Geschichte der Orthographie und ihrer Reform seit 1933. Zur Diskussion, Texttradition und -rezeption*. Tübingen: Narr.

Conditions on reforms

1941

- Ban on black letter font

- An existing codified and binding norm of orthography
- An authority that has the power to change the norm

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German official orthography

1941

- Ban on black letter font

- An existing codified and binding norm of orthography
- 19th Century: Many different norms in the individual German speaking countries
- 1871: Foundation of the German empire
- 1876: Conference on the establishment of greater unity in German spelling
- 1901: Second Orthographic Conference

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German official orthography

1901

- Unified orthography

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German official orthography

Problematic aspects of the 1901 German official orthography

- Large number of spelling variants
- Partly unclear rule formulations
- Central aspects of the orthographic system are not addressed at all, particularly punctuation and compound vs. separate spelling

→ numerous proposals and attempts to reform the German Official orthography during the 20th Century

1901

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German official orthography

Reform attempts by Bernhard Rust, Minister of Science, Education and National Culture from 1934 to 1945

- 1936, rejected by the Ministry of the Interior
- 1941, rejected by the Ministry of the Interior
- 1944, new spelling dictionary (with rules) approved for schools only

Rust (1944)

Rules for German Spelling and Dictionary

Published by the Ministry of Science, Education and National Culture 1944

German School Publishing House Berlin

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German official orthography

1901

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1944

- Rust reform

Reform attempts by Bernhard Rust, Minister of Science, Education and National Culture from 1934 to 1945

- 1936, rejected by the Ministry of the Interior
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- withdrawn in August 1944 on Hitler's personal order

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German official orthography

- Orthographic norms usually have only a limited scope of application.

German official orthography is binding for schools and for public authorities only.

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Situation in the Federal Republic of Germany since 1949

- School education falls in the competence of the individual federal states.
- In order to arrive at general agreements, there is a permanent conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs ('Kultusministerkonferenz', KMK).
- The KMK is legally responsible for the official regulation of German spelling, as far as school matters are concerned.
- Decisions can also be adopted by other authorities, so that the German official orthography is also valid in the state legal system.

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Duden

- Konrad Duden (1829-1911), teacher and author of spelling dictionaries (from 1880 onwards)
- Proponent of a unified orthography of German
- Publishing house: Bibliographisches Institut

- Today, Duden is an imprint of this publisher

- Most important publication: Duden spelling dictionary (1st ed. 1880, 28th ed. 2020)
- Contents: Word list (currently 148,000 entries) and a chapter with guidelines for spelling and punctuation (about 170 rules)

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Paul Grebe and Duden

- Since 1947, Paul Grebe was head of the Duden editorial department
- In order to outmaneuver the competition in the spelling market, he made submissions to the KMK:
 - First submission 1950 (kept secretly)
 - Second submission 1955 (made public)
 - Tenor: Only the Duden spelling dictionary is in agreement with the German official orthography, while the other dictionaries on the market are not.
- Resolution of the KMK of 18/19 November 1955 (quoted from Mentrup 2007: 256). "The spellings and rules for spelling laid down in the spelling reform of 1901 and the later decrees are still binding for German spelling today. Until a possible new regulation, these rules are the basis for teaching in all schools. In cases of doubt, the spellings and rules used in the Duden are binding."

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- Official status of Duden

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Official status of Duden

1955 was the moment of the most extensive reform of the German official orthography.

In particular, from then on explicit rules for punctuation and for separate vs. compound spelling existed.

In effect, it was a hidden reform.

Each new edition of the Duden dictionary may constitute a further hidden spelling reform if the rules given there are modified.

Official status of Duden

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Official status of Duden

From 1955 to 1998, the editors of a private publishing house were allowed to determine the official rules of German orthography.

Even today, the Duden is often perceived as official by users, and the publisher does much to keep up this appearance.

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Conclusion

Prerequisites for orthography reforms:

- An existing codified and binding norm of orthography
- An authority that has the power to change the norm

A change in spelling conventions can be called a reform if rules are affected instead of individual cases.

Based on these assumptions, German official orthography, as constituted in 1901, had at least three reforms.

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Thank you very
much for your
attention!