

TRANSKRIPT

THREE POSITIONS ON THE GERMAN SPELLING REFORM



Sprache. Kultur. Deutschland.

Since 1st August 2006 the new spelling rules have been in force in Germany. The lead-up to it was plagued by a bitter culture war.

Gerhard Augst, professor emeritus of German: “People have become a little more casual in their approach to spelling”

I have always promoted the idea that the normal amount of knowledge that a person can acquire in eight or nine or ten years of schooling is sufficient to master the rules of spelling. Take, for example the German word *Quäntchen* (a modicum or grain of something). Every normal German and every schoolchild thinks quite understandably that it stems from the word *Quantum* (quota, amount). The linguist or language historian, however, knows, of course, that it does not come from *Quantum*, but from *Quintum*, the fifth. It should therefore not be spelt with an “a” plus umlaut (ä). That is why under the old spelling rules it was written with an “e” as *Quentchen*. We then decided that we would write it with an “ä”, because most people write it like that anyway. For me, however, I am totally against people using the way words are spelt to show they have had a humanistic education. I think that the one thing the reform has achieved is the fact that people have become a little more casual in their approach to spelling.

Friedrich Denk, retired teacher at a grammar school: “useful as a hole in the head – a small one, but a painful one”

The reform is as useful as a hole in the head – a small one, but a painful one. The idea that students would make fewer mistakes did not come true in the least. Today more mistakes are in fact made, various words have been simply abolished. For example, the word *wohlbekannt* (well known). *Dieser Herr ist mir wohlbekannt* (This gentleman is well known to me), that is, I know him well. When I write *wohlbekannt* as two words – *Dieser Herr ist mir wohl bekannt* – it means that I probably know him. In the future only the two-word spelling is allowed. This means that a certain variation of meaning is now lost.

Peter Schlobinski, professor of German and head of the Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache: „forget once and all about the spelling reform”

You can forget once and for all about the spelling reform. The digital revolution is, of course, a much stronger factor and has a much greater social relevance than any spelling reform. The complaint that everything was better in the good old days, also with regard to spelling, has been heard for quite a long time. If I may, I would just like to remind us all of the time when comics first came onto the scene with words like *pow*, *zap*, *ugh* and so on – people prophesied the linguistic decline of the Western World. And then we saw how all this was incorporated into the German system, without it necessarily leading to the demise of German spelling rules. In connection with this there have been two studies: one from Switzerland, one from the United States. They show that students are fully capable of using the right mode of written communication – on the one hand, in the language they use at school and, on the other, in the language they switch to when posting a Tweet or a text message or a Whatsapp. Experimenting, effectively switching from standard language to special jargon, using different sign or symbol systems, adding photos with captions – all this is known as multimodality. This, of course, leads to a certain form of creativity in the way they deal with these different forms of communication and that, of course, is something that is really quite positive.