Mapping out the sociolinguistics of orthography

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Abstract

Look in the index of a sociolinguistics textbook for a reference to orthography as a topic in its own right and you will usually look in vain. Linguistics has for a long time treated orthography as a matter for phonologists, not sociolinguists. Yet orthography is an area where social and ideological factors such as authority, authenticity and identity (personal, group, subcultural and national) come into contact with linguistics in a very striking way. Linguists ignore these at their peril. In this talk I will argue that we have need of a field of 'sociolinguistics of orthography' which treats orthography as a social practice, and show how this might look, using examples from languages around the world.