

‘Everyday language’ in emigrant letters and its implications for language historiography – the German case

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Abstract

The mass literacy drives of the 19th century have proved to be a landmark in German language history, as for the first time the majority of the people in the German-speaking countries were able to participate in the culture of writing. The full impact of the spread of writing among the lower social classes on language variation and change has, however, not yet been recognised in language historiography. With examples from grammar and spelling in private emigrant letters, the present article strongly argues for an alternative approach to language historiography, using such texts as a starting-point for a ‘language history from below’.

1. Introduction

In the 19th century, writing High German was no longer a privilege of the upper and upper middle classes. As a result of 19th century literacy drives, for the first time in Western history not only members of the social elite, but also large parts of the ‘ordinary’ population (farmers, artisans, soldiers, housemaids, etc.) were able to put pen to paper – although they had relatively rarely reason or opportunity to do so. Migration constituted one of the occasions when letter-writing was compulsory in order to continue personal communication after a disruption of face-to-face interaction. In the context of mass emigration, members of the lower and lower middle classes produced a volume of letters which is unprecedented in the history of writing in German. Thus, emigrant letters from the 19th century represent the first text sources in language history – perhaps not just of the German-speaking world – which give us an authentic and representative picture of language as it was used by the vast majority of the population.

The original letters provide a wealth of linguistic data about everyday language beyond the emerging standard varieties of the 19th century. (It

should be noted, however, that they do *not* represent local dialects.) They enable historical linguists to view language history from a drastically different perspective than earlier generations have done in their narrow and often deadening focus on the language of elite writers. Following a corresponding paradigm in socio-historical studies, this approach might be termed ‘language history from below’ (Elspaß 2005). Emigrant letters not only depict a wide range of hitherto barely recognized linguistic variation, which is gradually re-emerging in current research on sub-standard or colloquial standard language. They also reveal astonishing linguistic developments and changes under the surface of the written standard variety, which have practically gone unnoticed by traditional historiography. In this paper, examples will be given from the grammar and spelling of New High German.

2. Preliminaries – linguistic norms in lower-class writing

As compared to present-day professional texts, a great deal of spelling and grammar displayed in 19th century letters by unprofessional writers would nowadays strike us as simply wrong and incompetent. If we stick to this perspective for the moment, several questions may arise:

- How can the writers’ grammar and spelling be ‘wrong’? Who determined what the ‘right’ norms were?
- Did the writers know what they wrote was ‘wrong’? And how could they know it was ‘wrong’?
- What’s exactly ‘wrong’ with the writers’ grammar and spelling? What’s maybe progressive or even radical about their grammar and spelling?

Trying to find an answer to the third pair of questions will be at the heart of section 4 of this paper. Let us consider first what ‘the’ (prescriptive) norms were, who had set them up and how or whether they affected the writing practice of ‘ordinary people’ when they sat down to compose private letters.

2.1 *The status of 19th century prescriptive norms*

The standardization process of the German language was not yet finished by the end of the 19th century. The first orthographic reform came into effect in 1902, and although Adelung’s *Sprachlehre* from 1781 is often considered the most influential modern (school) grammar of New High German,¹ there was in fact no authoritative grammatical codex like today’s *Duden* grammar until the beginning of the 20th century.

What many readers intuitively feel, however, when they read 19th century texts, i. e. in their original German script and in their original spelling and grammar, is that this is not modern German, but something we may call 'Middle New High German' (ca. 1650 to ca. 1950).

We might rightly ask which of the 19th century school orthographies and grammars represented a norm that would allow us to pronounce any form found in a text from this century as 'wrong' or 'incorrect'. Even if we acknowledge the existence of prescriptive norms, i. e. a consensus among most of the leading school grammars about acceptable and unacceptable spellings or grammatical forms, and that most texts used by non-professional writers did not match the grammar book norms, texts by lower class writers do not display mere orthographic and grammatical chaos. It is the linguist's task to determine what exactly could be 'wrong' about individual forms, or rather: in what way they differ from school grammar norms and why.

2.2 Linguistic norms in the lower-class writers' perspective

The development of prescriptive (grammar school) norms of the time was, to a certain extent, a circular process. These norms are based on printed role-model texts, which were originally written by a routine elite of writers ('the best writers') and have passed through an editing process in which professional proof-readers adapted the texts to the grammar book norms. Those who read printed texts may have received a passive knowledge of such norms. People did not, however, only read printed, but also hand-written texts. Non-proficient writers had certainly not acquired their active writing competence by studying and exercising grammar book norms. Firstly, primary school children from the lower classes could simply not afford books. Secondly, there is no clear evidence that grammar books were actually used in such primary schools; so far, I have come across just one single 32-page long grammar (Bohm and Steinert 1851) which was explicitly intended for use in primary schools. The 'famous' 19th century school grammars, e. g. by Heyse (1838) and Becker (1831), were addressed to grammar school teachers, not to the 'common writer'.²

It is well-known that the schooling of lower-class children, particularly in the first half of the 19th century, suffered from poor or even non-existent formal instruction of their teachers (cf. Elspaß 2005: 50 and 290 f. for examples). Moreover, there is plenty of evidence that pupils learnt to write from old grammar books or small collections of texts (religious texts, in particular) that were available to their local teacher; sometimes they even had to bring in hand-written texts from home, which were used for writing exercises, e. g. simple copying (Messerli

2000). It is clear that such ‘model texts’ would not present up-to-date orthographic, grammatical or even stylistic norms, but they were meant to constitute the view-point from which we could rightly judge the ‘norm-conformity’ of 19th century lower-class writing.

In this context, it is worth noting that lower-class writers – at least those from my corpus – are certainly aware of a lack of linguistic deficiencies. But they have a clear sense for the relevance or irrelevance of mistakes in relation to the formality of the text or text type:

- (1) Ich habe mich in der Eile oft schlecht ausgedrück und schlecht geschrieben; aber ich denke das macht unter Brüder nichts aus.
(‘In the hurry I have not expressed myself well and have written badly, but I think that does not matter between/among brothers.’)
[Johannes Hambloch, 02. 12. 1853]
- (2) dieses Schreiben wierd gewies viele velers Sein aber ihr müßet Es miehr nicht vor übel nehmen
(‘this letter is certainly full of mistakes, but you must not take it amiss’)
[Dedert Farwick, 29. 12. 1867]

Interestingly, many writers seem to consider bad handwriting rather than orthographical or grammatical mistakes as a possible offence to their families and friends (cf. Sandersen, this issue) – when they apologize for ‘bad writing’, they clearly have bad handwriting in mind:

- (3) Ich muß mein Schreiben schließen mit der Bitte, mich zu entschuldigen, wegen der schlechten Schrift, das dieser Brief nur als Aufsatz geschrieben wurde, u. ich ihn nocheinmal abschreiben wollte, weil aber die Madlena gerade schnell schreiben mußte, so hatt ich nicht mehr Zeit ihn noch einmal abzuschreiben.
(‘I must end my letter by asking for apologies because of the bad writing; I had written this letter as a draft, and I intended to copy it, but I had no time to do this because I also had to write a quick letter to Magdalena.’)
[Anna Katharina Beck, 25. 09. 1854]
- (4) Entschuldigen meine Handschriefft. Ich bin in große Eile, bitte um baldige Antwort.
(‘Excuse my handwriting. I am in haste. Please answer soon.’)
[Balthasar Schmitz, 10. 06. 1866]
- (5) Muß mein schlechtes Schreiben entschuldigen, die Kinder stoßen einem so oft an.
(‘Must excuse my bad writing. The children keep bumping/kicking me.’)
[Paula (Große Osterholt-) Greving, 30. 12. 1888]

3. Concept and corpus: The 'language history from below' approach

The results presented in this paper form part of a larger project on a 'language history from below' (Elspaß 2005). This concept implies a radical change of perspective in language historiography and has two aspects. Firstly, a 'language history from below' focuses on the language use of the sections of the population that have been rather neglected in historical linguistics so far, i.e. the lower classes and lower middle classes, which at least in 19th century Germany account for the vast majority of the population (about 95%). Large parts of the 'ordinary' population, and not only members of the social elite, were able to put pen (or pencil) to paper, particularly as a result of massive literacy drives in the 19th century.

Secondly and more importantly, the concept of 'from below' pleads for a different starting point in the description and explanation of language history. In linguistics, the shift of perspective involves an acknowledgment of language registers which are fundamental to human interaction and which are prototypically represented by speech in face-to-face-interaction.³ A 'language history from below' would thus set off with the analysis of texts which are as close to actual speech as possible. Such material is best represented by ego-documents such as private letters or autobiographies. From an overall corpus of some 9,000 to 10,000 letters of emigrants' correspondence which are accessible in public archives, I have analysed 648 letters by writers from all German-speaking countries and regions with a total of 375,000 words (or rather graphic units). 60 of these letters were written by 25 people (mostly men) with secondary or higher education, and 588 letters by 248 writers – men and women – with primary education only. Most letters were written by people who were in the process of emigrating or who had just emigrated (mainly to the US), a small proportion of the letters stem from relatives or friends of emigrants at home. To my knowledge, this is the biggest and most representative corpus of 19th century informal writing in German which has been analysed linguistically so far.

4. Reconstructing linguistic norms and variation in 19th century lower-class writing

In what follows, I will give six examples of norms of usage which were not accepted in 19th century prescriptive grammars. The first three cases present examples of 'old norms of written usage', which have survived in present-day substandard regional varieties. The second group comprises grammatical and graphical features which are becoming or have already become standard in modern German.

4.1 *Old norms of written usage**Double negatives*

Double negatives are heavily stigmatised in many Germanic languages today and considered as substandard features (Cheshire 1998), whereas they are fully integrated into Romance languages like French (cf. Martineau in this issue). The stigmatization process started rather late (18th century). In early German grammars, double negation was presented as a 'legitimate, sometimes even positive [...] rule of German' (Langer 2001: 167). According to nineteenth-century grammarians like Schöten-sack (1856: 557), New High German had adopted the 'law' in Latin grammar that a double negative makes a positive, i. e. an affirmative statement. If we believe what Admoni claims in his standard textbooks on the historical syntax of German (Admoni 1990: 187), double negation had virtually disappeared from written German by the beginning of the eighteenth century. Schiller, Goethe and some nineteenth-century writers, however, employed double negatives repeatedly in their works, as they seem to have appreciated the stylistic nuances that the use of double negatives can create (Paul 1920: 334). We cannot say whether they considered double negatives as 'substandard' (in relation to which 'standard'?) or bad language. Judging from actual language use, many of the lower- and lower middle-class letter writers in the nineteenth-century certainly didn't. Out of 248 writers who had primary education only, 32 (12.9 percent) could be identified as using double negatives in their letters. 28 of them came from Central or Upper German dialect regions – where 149 writers had received basic school instruction only (18.8 percent). It can be concluded then that double negation had not disappeared from written German and that it had basically become a variant in southern written German.

Prepositions vor/für

Another stigmatized feature of present-day German is the use of the preposition *vor* instead of *für* and vice versa (in most cases equivalent to 'for'). Although grammarians attempted to set up a grammatical distinction between *vor* and *für* as early as the eighteenth century, these two prepositions remained free variants in texts of that century (similar to the use of the conjunctions *wie* and *als* after an adjective in the comparative, cf. von Polenz 1994: 210). As for the nineteenth century, again the analysis of written language use does present a different picture as the prescriptive grammar school norms 'vor and für may not be confused' and 'to use vor instead of für is wrong'. Out of 540 instances of the use of *vor*, in 229 cases (42.4 percent) it was used where grammarians would

have had *für*. It is revealing to compare this grammatical feature in texts written by educated writers and texts from writers with primary education (Table 1).

Table 1. Use of the preposition *vor* in 19th century letters.

writers with ...	<i>vor</i> instead of <i>für</i>		'correct' use of <i>vor</i>		Σ (= 100%)
... secondary education	5 (by 1 writer)	17.9%	23	82.1%	28
... primary education	224	43.8%	288	56.2%	512

The figures show quite clearly that for 19th century writers with primary education, *vor* and *für* were variants in contexts in which prescriptive grammars would have *für* only. All but one writer with secondary education followed the prescriptive norm.

Table 2. Use of the preposition *vor* in 19th century letters by writers with primary education.

year of birth of writers	<i>vor</i> instead of <i>für</i>		'correct' use of <i>vor</i> ⁴		Σ (= 100%)
≤ 1825	131	53.9%	112	46.1%	243
1826–1839	65	40.6%	94	58.8%	159
≥ 1840	28	25.5%	82	74.5%	110

This norm of usage with two variants, however, did not remain stable during the whole of the 19th century. In Table 2, the results for writers with primary education are differentiated according to age groups of writers. According to these figures, younger generations of lower and lower middle-class writers increasingly adopted the grammar school variant in their usage. However, *vor* instead of *für* remained a frequently used variant. As with double negatives, the regional distribution of this variant displays a noticeable pattern: Writers in the west of Germany, in the West Central German dialect area in particular, use *vor* instead of *für* very often.

The graphs < i/ie >

Regional preferences can also be found in certain spelling variants. In words like the present tense forms of the verb *geben* 'give', *gibst* '(2nd person sg.) give', *gibt* 'gives', *gib* '(imper.) give', and in the past tense

forms of the verbs *gehen* ‘go’ (*ging(-)*), *hängen* ‘hang’ (*hing(-)*) and *fangen* ‘catch’ (*fing(-)*), the variants *giebst*, *giebt*, *gieb*, *gieng*, *hieng* and *fieng* were used throughout the 19th century. However, there is a noticeable difference between the use of the present tense forms of *geben* (*giebst*, *giebt*, *gieb*) and the past tense forms *gieng*, *hieng* and *fieng*. The spelling forms *giebst*, *giebt*, *gieb* were written in all German-speaking countries and regions, and they were considered the ‘correct’ form by many grammarians. Konrad Duden, for instance, in the first edition of his orthography (Duden 1880: 62), has *giebst*, *giebt*, *gieb* as dominating and preferable variants to *gibst*, *gibt*, *gib*, whereas he rated the *ie*-forms in the past tense of *gehen*, *hängen*, *fangen* (*gieng*, *hieng*, *fieng*) as secondary variants to the *i*-forms *ging*, *hing*, *fing*. In the first Orthographic Conference (1901), the *i*-variants were declared as standard spelling. Tables 2 and 3 present the results of the corpus analysis, again differentiated according to the age groups of the writers.

Table 3. *ie/-e-spellings in gib(-) in 19th century letters.*

year of birth of writers	<i>gieb(-)</i>		<i>gib(-)</i>		Σ (100%)
≤ 1825	56	53.3%	49	46.7%	105
1826–1839	28	52.8%	25	47.2%	53
≥ 1840	28	37.8%	46	62.2%	74

Table 4. *ie/-e-spellings in ging(-), fing(-) and hing(-) in 19th century letters.*

year of birth of writers	<i>gieng, hieng, fieng</i>		<i>ging, hing, fing</i>		Σ (100%)
≤ 1825	20	15.6%	108	84.4%	128
1826–1839	7	6.1%	108	93.9%	115
≥ 1840	10	10.4%	86	89.6%	96

Two things become apparent. Firstly, the *ie*-spellings in the *gieb*-forms were much more frequently in use than the *ie*-variants in the past tense forms of *gehen*, *hängen*, *fangen*. Secondly, as with *vor* instead of *für*, the *ie*-spellings are less frequent in the younger age groups. (This is very obvious in the case of the *gieb*-forms, but less clear in the other case, where there are rather few instances per age group.) The results indicate a trend towards the variants which eventually became the orthographic norm. Here, the interesting question arises as to whether the orthographic norm followed actual language use or whether the *i*-variants

were taught more and more as the only acceptable norm in schools, so that their rise reflects the changing norms. There is no clear answer from the present data.

The *ie*-spellings are highly motivated insofar as they reflect spoken long /i:/. In the *gieb*-forms, <ie> 'matches' the orthoepic standard, so <i> is actually an exception to the general rule in present-day standard German that /i:/ in a stressed syllable is represented by <ie> (like *Liebe* 'love', *lieben* 'to love', *schieben* 'to push', etc.). Thus, in this case, 'wrong' pronunciation, i. e. short /i/ in *gieb*-, would not automatically result in wrong spelling. By contrast, 'non-orthoepic' /i:/ in the past tense forms of *gehen*, *hängen*, *fangen*, which is standard pronunciation in the southwest of Germany (König 1989 II: 159), consequently leads to *gieng*, *hieng*, *fieng*. In fact, whereas the *gieb*-spelling appears in 19th century letters from all German-speaking regions, all but one of the *gieng*-, *hieng*-, *fieng*-variants come from writers in the southwest (the West Upper German and the Central West German dialect regions).

Thus, again we have an old norm of usage which is still used as (sub-standard) regional variant in present-day German. The next group of variants comprises variants which are gradually emerging as standard features in present-day German.

4.2 Non-written standard norms of usage

Progressive am-construction

Periphrastic *tun* and the *am*+INF+*sein*-construction are both analytical constructions that can convey habitual and progressive aspect in German. (6) is an example of habitual aspect, (7) of progressive aspect with *tun*+INF.

- (6) sie brauchten den Doctor der *that* mehrere Tage 2 mal den Tag ihn *besuchen*
(‘they needed a doctor; he *came to see* him twice a day for several days’) [Bernd Farwick, 03. 1867]
- (7) jezt *tun* wir *Treschen* aber ganz anders wie dort
(‘now we *are (at) threshing* the grain but very different like at home’) [Josef Schabl, 13. 08. 1922]

The *tun*-periphrasis is another example of stigmatized grammatical features like those presented in section 4.1, which writers used (very) frequently in 19th century private letters, but because of stigmatization have only survived in substandard German today (cf. Langer 2001).

The *am*-construction has gone the opposite direction. It has made its way up from regional (sub)standard to standard German. Again, many grammarians consider this a fairly recent tendency. But it can already be found in 19th-century texts of writers from the west of Germany – I found 15 instances and another 15 with the phraseological expression *am Leben sein* ‘to be alive’ – and it has even been spotted in Swiss German texts, e. g. novels by Jeremias Gotthelf (van Pottelberge 2004). As examples (8) and (9) show, by using the *am*-construction writers can express exactly those categories of aspect, i. e. habituality and progressiveness, that can be conveyed by periphrastic *tun*:

- (8) er war im einen neüegegrabenen Bierkeller *am Arbeiten* und einen alter Steinere Wand fiel um und traf ihm zu Tode [my emphasis, S.E.]
 (‘ ... he was working in a recently dug-out bierkeller when ...’)
 [Bernd Farwick, 12. 07. 1868]
- (9) die Arbeit ist hir rar auf die Zechen kann man jetzt noch keine Arbeit krigen
 wir *sint* jetzt auf der Eisenbahn *am Arbeitthen* [my emphasis, S.E.]
 (‘ ... we are now working on the railway’)
 [Matthias Dorgathen, 07. 05. 1881]

The *am*-construction is presumably somewhat too ‘young’ to have attracted the attention of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century grammarians. In the twentieth century, it was frequently criticized as ‘bad German’, but this may have come too late to prevent it from becoming very popular in present-day German, first ‘under the surface’ of standard German, later in standard German. What we have here, then, is an interesting example of a grammatical form which emerged from regional varieties of German to fill a gap which was caused by the suppression of another form in the standard.

Paratactic weil

In current research German grammar, ‘paratactic *weil*’, i. e. verb-second position of the finite verb in clauses introduced by the causative conjunction *weil* ‘because’, is heatedly discussed and often seen as a fairly recent syntactic or lexical tendency in modern German.⁵

- (10) da war unser akord gebrochen *Weil wir wusten nicht* daß sei [sie] zusammen hielten⁶ (‘then our contract was breached BECAUSE WE KNEW NOT that they conspired’)
 [Heinrich Küpper, ca. 1847]

- (11) Getroschen haben wir auch nicht viel *weil man mußte schon den Hafer bald grün verfüttern*
(‘we haven’t threshed [?] much BECAUSE ONE HAD TO feed the grain [to the cattle] while it was still green’)
[Mathes Josef Windirsch, 02. 04. 1896]

As examples (10) and (11) show, paratactic *weil* is much older than the interest that it has aroused among linguists in recent years (Ágel 2000, 1887), and it is certainly older than the examples from Brecht’s *Mutter Courage*, which are often cited as first examples of this construction in written modern German. It has been speculated whether there could be a continuity of the use of paratactic *dieweillweil* from Early New High German to present-day German (Selting 1999). Researchers have brought to light only isolated instances of *weil* in 18th and 19th century German texts so far, which left in doubt whether there really is such a continuity. As opposed to ‘hypotactic *weil*’, examples with paratactic *weil* remain relatively rare in the corpus, but they do exist. Some of these instances cannot be identified as ‘clear’ paratactic *weil* cases, like example (8) in which the prepositional phrase *in Herbste* and the object *zwei Küh u eine Kalbin* could also be interpreted as extrapositions, which would leave the finite verb *hatte* in the end position of the *weil*-clause:

- (12) *weil wir hatten in Herbste zwei Küh u eine Kalbin*
(‘because we had in the autumn two cows and a calf’)
[Mathes Josef Windirsch, 02. 04. 1896]

However, the fact that a) we have a clear case of paratactic *weil* from the same writer (cf. example (11)) and that b) this construction is documented for the dialect region of the writer (Schiepek 1899: 42) points to the fact that the writer knew the construction and may have adopted it from his dialect.

I will not further discuss paratactic *weil* and other causative conjunctions here. It will suffice to say that verb second position after *weil* is by no means a recent development in German and that its origin has to be analysed in context with the complex system of 19th century causative conjunctions (*da*, *denn*, but also *indem*, *nämlich*, *wegen* and others) and syntactic development such as extraposition – something which researchers in historical and present-day grammar have hardly attempted to undertake (cf. Elspaß 2005: 296 ff. for details).

Enclitic s

Like Adelung (1781: 367 f.), 19th and early 20th century grammars and orthographies allow enclitic *s* forms representing the pronoun *es* ‘it’ only

in connection with prepositions, e.g. *ans*, *aufs*, *durchs*, *ins*. For contracted forms of verbs, conjunctions and pronouns with *es*, which was allowed in exceptional cases only (i.e. literary dialogues), the orthographies demanded to mark the dropped schwa by an apostrophe.⁷ This ‘spelling rule’ was not even observed by literary writers, as can be seen by numerous examples of *gehts* and *wenns* in works by Lessing, Lichtenberg, J.Paul, Hölderlin, Schiller, Goethe, Grabbe, Grillparzer, Hebel, Droste Hülshoff, Raabe, Gotthelf, Fontane, etc.

Table 5. *Spelling variants with and without enclitic s (without apostrophe) in geht es, gibt es, wenn es, wird es, mir es, dir es, wir es.*

spelling variants	enclitic <i>s</i> forms		‘full’ <i>es</i> forms		Σ (= 100%)
<i>gehts/geht es</i>	31	20.4%	121	89.8%	152
<i>gi(e)bt/s/ gi(e)bt es</i>	14	19.4%	58	80.6%	72
<i>wirds/wird es</i>	10	14.7%	58	85.3%	68
<i>wen(n)s/wen(n) es</i>	25	15.3%	138	84.7%	163
<i>mi(e)rs, di(e)rs, wi(e)rslmi(e)r es, di(e)r es, wi(e)r es</i>	15	18.3%	67	81.7%	82

In the frequent forms *geht es* (‘GOES-IT’), *gibt es* (‘GIVES-IT’), *wird es* (‘BECOMES-IT’), *wenn es* (‘IF-IT’), and *mir es* (‘ME-IT’)/*dir es* (‘YOU-IT’)/*wir es* (‘WE-IT’), enclitic *s* appears in 15 to 20 percent of all cases. Moreover, enclitic *s* was used in many other, less frequent contexts:

- (13) Nun will ich *Schreiben wies* auf dem Schief war.
 (‘Now I will write HOW-IT was like on board of the ship.’)
 [Heinrich Möller, Frühjahr 1866]

There is no discernable preference for *s*-enclisis in any of the German-writing regions. Thus it can be seen as a supra-regional variant in the emigrant letters.⁸ Interestingly, enclitic *s* has repeatedly been mentioned as a typical spelling variant of modern German chat-language. The letters show, however, that it is certainly not a variant which has crept up in ‘netspeak’. In the 24th edition of the *Duden* orthography (2006: 36), *s* enclisis is accepted in ‘umgangssprachlichen Verbindungen eines Verbs oder einer Konjunktion mit dem Pronomen “es”’ (‘colloquial word formations of a verb or conjunction with the pronoun *es*’) like *gehts*, *nimmst* or *wenns*. This can be seen as a late if not overdue acknowledgment of a spelling norm of usage which has long been starting to glide down the slippery slope of grammaticalization.

4. Conclusion

In German language historiography, the 'long 19th century' has predominantly been presented as the age of the *Bürgersprache* ('the language of the *bourgeoisie*') and the spread of standard German, with a focus on literary language and the ideological roots of codification efforts and modern language purism. This, however, entails a narrow view on what is 'of value' in an account of a nation's language history. From a broader perspective (including a 'view from below'), the 19th century must be rather be hailed as the century in which, for the first time in more than 1,100 years of writing in German, not only a selected few, but the majority of the people were able to communicate in spoken *and* written German. Mass literacy can thus be seen as a crucial landmark in the history of German. The analysis of 'everyday language' in the private letters of ordinary people can not only provide us with an insight into the language use of the vast majority of the population, but also carries valuable information on linguistic developments which have gone unnoticed in language historiography and in the research on present-day German grammar. They have demonstrated that ordinary people's writing remained relatively unaffected by official standards that were set up in school grammars and by the language norm debates of the 19th century. The emigrants' writings rather show clear traces of norms of usage, which partly date back to the 18th century or even older writing conventions and which can partly be linked to language use in spoken vernaculars that have gradually emerged as new variants of present-day German.

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Notes

1. As far as I can see, the claimed 'influence' refers to influence on other grammars and textbooks. Few researchers (like Konopka 1996; Takada 1998; Langer 2001) have investigated the actual influence on the writing practice so far.
2. Likewise, it is not clear to which extent 'common people' had access or did actually use 'model letter writers', which arose in the mid-19th century. Some of them, like Ludwig Kiesewetter's, Otto Friedrich Rammler's or Wilhelm Campe's 'model letter writers', did have dozens of impressions (which does not tell us much about their actual circulation, of course). Some lower-class writers may have consulted them to see how to start a text of a specific text type or which phrasing may have been appropriate in highly formalized texts, but it may be safely assumed that they did not bother to consult them when in doubt about individual spellings or grammatical forms in a private letter.
3. Cf. Peter Koch's and Wulf Oesterreicher's (1985) well-known concept of 'language of proximity' or 'conceptual orality' (as opposed to 'language of distance' or 'conceptual written language').
4. Phraseological *vor*, as in *vor allem* (*l'allen*) 'particularly', *vor kurzem* 'recently', *vor Augen* (*haben/sein!* ...) 'to have/be! ... before one's eyes' etc., was not counted.

5. Basically, some researchers interpret paratactic *weil* as yet another example of a general tendency to give up subordination in German, whereas others think that *weil* simply replaces the more formal *denn* and ‘adopts’ its sentence structure (cf. Wegener 1993; Wegener 1999; Selting 1999).
6. Emphasis added here and in the following examples by me, S. E.
7. Cf. Bohm/Steinert (1851: 26), Duden (1880: XV), and Duden (1914: XIV).
8. Hermann Paul (1916: 244) observed that forms like *er hats* (‘he HAS-IT’), *ich bins* (‘I AM-IT’ = ‘it’s me’), *ichs* (‘I-IT’) or *ers* (‘HE-IT’) were frequent in colloquial (spoken) language of his time. Admoni (1990, 221) believed that ‘full’ *es* forms indicated the ‘stability’ of the inflectional system of German since the 18th century; exceptions, i. e. enclitic *s*, appeared only in texts which imitated ‘gröbere Umgangssprache ... (z. B. bei Nestroy)’ (‘coarse/crude colloquial language’). Admoni’s conclusions have to be weighed against the fact that his analyses of 19th century texts were always restricted to *printed* texts.

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