



International Symposium on ‘Typographic Landscaping’  
University of Gothenburg (17/06/2013)

## Graphic Variation and Graphic Ideologies

### A Sociolinguistic Approach

#### 1 Introduction

Scriptal variation: “a neglected area within sociolinguistics” (Unseth 2005: 19)

##### Outline

1. Introduction
2. Things, people, sense: On the communicative relevance of ‘materiality’
3. (Graphic) variation and knowledge
4. Metapragmatic approaches
5. (Very short) conclusions

#### 2 Things, people, sense

##### Materiality as a factor of communication

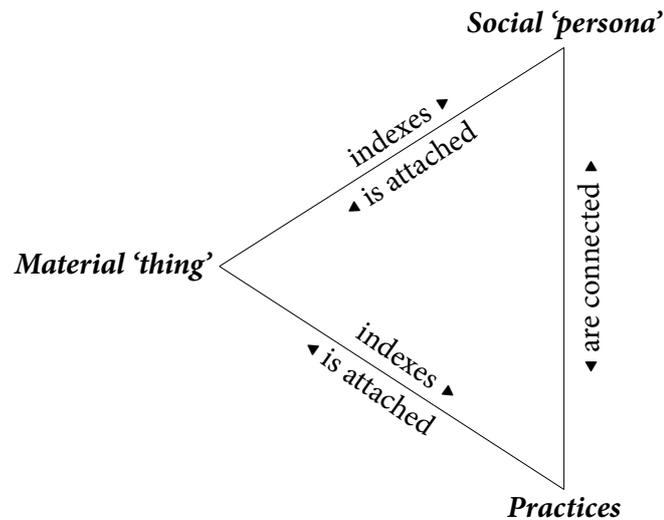
- *Perceptibility*: The material appearance of things makes things perceivable.
- *Interpretability*: only perceivable things are interpretable.
- *Perceptibility* and *interpretability* are basic preconditions for *semiosis* (‘things’ become *signs*) (Cf. Keller 1998)

##### Materiality as a social factor

- Language/communication makes individuals *perceivable*
- Due to the (concrete way of) communication, communicating individuals can be *interpreted* as social actors
- Material things create *social landscapes*, which symbolize social orders

##### Social emblems

“An *emblem* is a thing to which a social persona is attached. It involves three elements; (1) a perceivable thing, or diacritic; (2) a social persona; (3) someone for whom it is an emblem (i. e., someone who can read that persona from that thing). When a thing/diacritic is widely recognized as an emblem – when many people view it as marking the same social persona – I will say that it is enregistered as an emblem, or is an *enregistered emblem*. ‘Enregistered’ just means ‘widely recognized,’ and there are degrees of it.” (Agha 2007: 235)



“Things convey identities through acts in which they are emblematic for those connected to each other through those acts. A necktie is a thing. A car. A hat. A sideways glance. An accent. A sob. All things. All perceivable. Too many things. But [...] let us note that things by themselves are not to the point. It’s the emblematic functions they have through acts that connect people; that’s the point. Although emblems are embodied in diacritics, a single diacritic can yield different emblematic readings under different conditions [...]. Our focus therefore needs to be not on things alone or personae alone but on acts of performance and construal through which the two are linked, and the conditions under which these links become determinate for actors.” (Agha 2007: 235)

### Variability/style and ‘social visibility’

“Style is a means to enhance social visibility.”

(“Stil ist ein Mittel zur Steigerung sozialer Sichtbarkeit.”) (Assmann 1986: 127)

### Invisibility of ‘Script’

“le moyen de production du signe est totalement indifférent, car il n’intéresse pas le système [...]. Que j’écrive les lettres en blanc ou en noir, en creux ou en relief, avec une plume ou un ciseau, cela est sans importance pour leur signification.”

“The means by which the sign is produced is completely unimportant, for it does not affect the system [...]. Whether I make the letters in white or black, raised or engraved, with pen or chisel — all this is of no importance with respect to their signification.” (de Saussure [1916] 1959: 120 [fr.: 165–166])

“Type well used is invisible *as* type, just as the perfect talking voice is the unnoticed vehicle for the transmission of words, ideas. [...]

The book typographer has the job of erecting a window between the reader inside the room and that landscape which is the author’s words.” (Warde [1932] 1991: 111/113)



### 3 (Graphic) variation and knowledge

#### Social significance of variation

“In general, we can say that every difference in language can be turned into difference in social value – difference and inequality are two sides of a coin, a point often overlooked or minimised in analysis.” (Blommaert 2005: 68–69)

“[...] there are in fact many points within writing systems where variation can occur, and where there is variation, there is in practice always social meaning.” (Sebba 2009: 39)

#### Social-symbolic ascriptions: Typefaces

“There’s more to life than *Times New Roman*.” (Danet 2001: 306–311)

#### Social-symbolic ascription: Micro-Typography

“I received a letter from a responsible of the [German] designer association inviting me to join a committee.

The letter has been set in 10 point Avant Garde, justified, very long lines, huge white space between words, no leading. I rejected immediately.”

“Ich erhielt einen Brief von einem Verantwortlichen des Designer-Verbandes mit der Aufforderung zur Mitarbeit in einem Ausschuß.

Der Brief war in der 10 Punkt Avant Garde gesetzt, Blocksatz, sehr lange Zeilen, sehr große Löcher zwischen den Wörtern, ohne Durchschuß. Da habe ich lieber gleich abgesagt.” (Willberg/Forssman [1999] 2001: 78; my translation)

#### Knowledge

“[...] the use of the word knowledge (*savoir*) [...] refers to all procedures and all effects of knowledge [or *recognition*; J. S.] (*connaissance*) that are *acceptable* at a given point in time and in a specific domain.” (Foucault [1990] 1997: 60)

#### Graphic ideologies

**Definition.** *Graphic ideologies*, or *ideologies of graphics*, are any sets of beliefs about graphic communicative means articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived orders and communicative use of graphic elements. [Cf. Spitzmüller (2012: 257), drawing on Silverstein (1979: 193).]

### 4 Metapragmatic approaches

“The ‘Air Snack’ sign is set in Gothic type. Nevertheless, there are no Nazis in sight.”

“Das Schild ‘Air Snack’ ist in Fraktur geschrieben. Trotzdem sind keine Nazis zu sehen.” (Berliner Zeitung, 4.05.2004)

#### Semantic structure

“General form” of a concessive sentence:  $p' \rightarrow \text{normally} \neg q'$  (Cf. König 1991: 633)

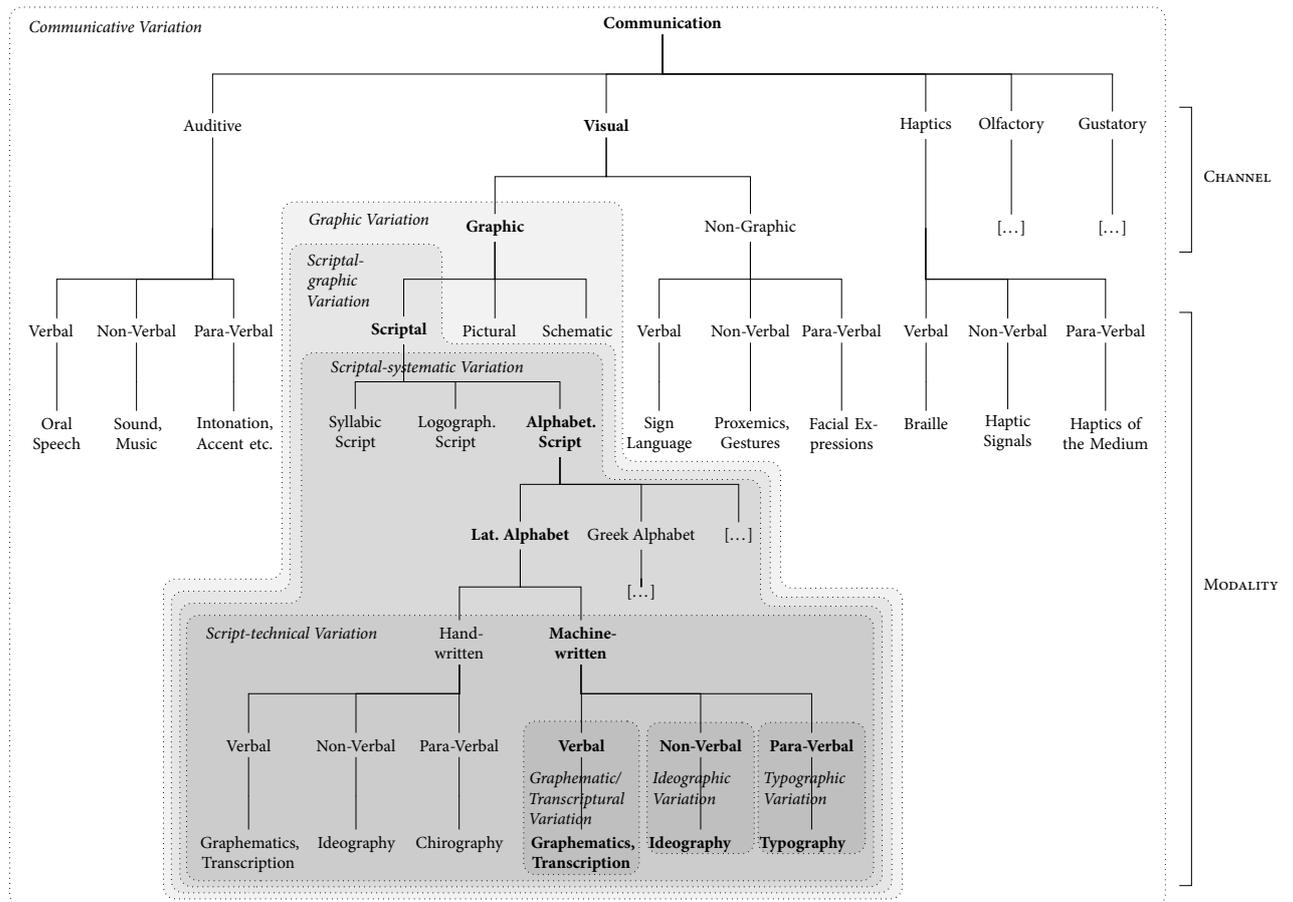


Figure 1: Layers of communicative variation (Spitzmüller forthc.: 215)

### Further examples

- “In contrast, the titles of the publisher ‘Internationale Beziehungen’ [‘international relations’] look sensational and cheap. [...]. Both titles are typeset in Fraktur, as if they were thrillers from the Nazi era.” (Berliner Zeitung, 23.05.2002)
- “The other two newspapers are called ‘Der Insel Bote’ or ‘Der Fahnenträger aus Pommern’, the latter equipped with the subtitle ‘circular letter for national socialists’ and the addition ‘proud, German, and free’. Typeset in Fraktur, of course.” (Berliner Zeitung, 16.09.2002)
- “Later, I sometimes observed how the two people entered a black Opel Manta car. On the rear window, ‘Pitbull Germany’ was written in Fraktur type, which was popular amongst the Nazis. Thus, all prejudices were evoked. Here is where my understanding ended.” (Die Zeit 28/2000)
- “Hamer’s books: they are full of odd medical theories and anti-Semitism. Conspicuous: the Fraktur type.” (Hamburger Morgenpost, 7.02.2006)

## 5 (Short) Conclusions

“Whoever said that with 26 soldiers of lead he could conquer the world was clearly no typographer, for he wildly underestimated the size of the army required.” (Twyman 1986: 199)



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The presentation slides are available at <http://www.spitzmueller.org/docs/pres-gothenburg-2013-06-17.pdf>.