Part I

Introduction

1

Historical Orthography: Purposes, Ambitions and Boundaries

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1.1   Overview

Before introducing historical orthography as a core field of study for the contributions in this volume, some preliminary assumptions must be established concerning the term *orthography*. Already at this point it should be made clear that this term can be and has been interpreted in various ways. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Simpson and Proffitt 2000–), the word *orthography* started to be used in English in the mid-fifteenth century, as a borrowing from Anglo-Norman and Middle French (ultimately derived from Greek), meaning "correct or proper spelling," which has since remained one of the main senses of this word. In the sixteenth century, it also acquired more general senses of "a system of spelling or notation" and "[s]pelling as an art or practice; the branch of knowledge which deals with letters and their combination to represent sounds and words; the study of spelling." Although, as the definitions above indicate, *orthography* can be considered a synonym of *spelling* in popular knowledge, and especially a conventionalized spelling system of a given language, the term has also been used with reference to "[t]he standardized writing system of a language" (Crystal 2003: 257) or "a spelling norm which consists of all the standardized and codified graphic representations of a language" (Rutkowska and Rössler 2012: 214), thus comprising also the capitalization, punctuation and word division agreements followed in a given language. Spelling, from yet another point of view, can be understood as "the graphic realizations of all words" (Rutkowska 2013a: 29) of a given language, and, in that case, orthography, intended as a binding norm in that language, would encompass spelling. Ultimately, the term *orthography* can also refer to a branch of knowledge which studies various aspects of the structure and functions of writing systems, considering not only fully developed normative usages but also writing practices at different

stages of standardization, including very early ones, which still involve high levels of variation.

Much like orthography, other essential concepts, such as, for instance, *writing system*, *grapheme* and *allograph*, have been interpreted in different ways, depending on the theoretical approaches adopted by the authors. These include, for example, the relational (or referential) and autonomistic approaches (see Chapter 5). In view of the diversity of definitions of orthography and related terms, as well as the complexity of orthography as a field of study, and its intricate relationships with various levels of linguistic description, including, most conspicuously, phonology and morphology, but also syntax, semantics and pragmatics, we have decided not to attempt to fully uniformize the terminological usage in this volume, considering it to be an unfeasible task. Instead of erasing contrasts, we chose to promote future dialogue among researchers, letting contributors specify their theoretical approaches and provide their own definitions of the relevant terms. Our approach has resulted in a number of partly overlapping definitions of expressions related to orthography across this book.

At first sight, this terminological inclusiveness may seem inconsistent or even overwhelming to an inexperienced user, for example, to an undergraduate student. However, we prefer our volume to reflect the actual state of the art, that is to say, the richness of perspectives taken by the scholars conducting their research in orthography, rather than pretentiously seeking some unconvincing artificial unity. This approach also seems the best solution if we consider that chapters are likely to be frequently consulted individually, for example, as materials for discussion during university courses, or as reading material for researchers or students interested in finding out more about a given topic and/ or a specific language. Since terminological considerations are entertained and alternative explanations are offered in various chapters below, and the authors follow a variety of approaches, some of which may show little overlap (such as, for example, the grapholinguistic and sociolinguistic approaches), we limit ourselves here to clarifying the most basic assumptions and distinctions, as well as the conventions followed in this volume.

It also needs to be clarified at this point that although, as editors, we have striven to ensure clarity of the terms and definitions employed by the authors, especially with regard to aspects strictly or loosely related to orthography, we assume that our readers will be familiar with the rudimentary linguistic terminology, particularly within the areas of phonology and phonetics, as well as morphosyntax. Basic information like the symbols inherent to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), for instance, is not explained here, as it is supposed that readers should know the sound values of a given IPA character, or at least that they should be able to look it up independently if needed. This choice has been dictated purely by the sheer length of the volume, which

has been, as one might imagine, a rather challenging feature – but also a welcome patience and endurance challenge – of the present project.

So far, we have talked about the boundaries and limitations of the book. But what does it actually do and what information does it provide? Again, this is not an easy question to answer, given the scope of the project, but we attempt to provide here a summary of the most important points. This volume does not merely present current views and terms within the area of synchronic orthography, but it should rather be placed within the area of *historical orthography*, which can be defined as a subdiscipline of linguistics focusing on the study, understanding and comparison of orthographies, including various interpretations of this concept, and their development over time (see Condorelli 2022a: 3). This subdiscipline explores the underlying forces and processes which shaped and directed modifications in historical orthographic systems and features, from the creation of the first writing systems to our contemporary era. As will become evident to the readers of this volume, research within this discipline has followed different strands, according to various geographical areas and periods of time, covering a breadth of interests and goals which include but are not limited to theoretical issues, different types of orthographic change and regularization, empirical methods and models for the study of historical orthography, as well as the linguistic and extralinguistic contexts which shaped orthographies diachronically (Condorelli 2020a: 2–6).

The diversified range of interests in historical orthography is not surprising, if one considers the outstanding differences in terms of the research into the field, the pedagogy of the subject across languages, as well as the number of linguists with divergent fundamental assumptions and methodologies who share an interest in the possibilities, tendencies and causes of orthographic change from a purely national-philology perspective (Condorelli and Voeste 2020: 239–41). Other factors that have affected the way in which historical orthography is formally studied and explored today are the different political decisions made in the administration of higher-education curricula related to profound historical, cultural and political differences across nations and continents. For example, the phenomenon of biscriptality (see, e.g., Bunčić et al. 2016 for more discussion; see also Chapter 8, this volume) is pertinent to the histories of the orthographies of several Slavic languages (e.g. Belarusian and Croatian), but is of less relevance to the writing systems of many other languages. In contrast, the philological approaches and traditions (see, e.g., Fulk 2016; see also Chapter 17, this volume), based on specific languages, seem to have been maintained in various regions, cultures and political circumstances. Among the most popular approaches to studying orthography and historical orthography in recent research, especially among the young scholars' generation, are the theoretical and comparative ones (see, e.g., Meletis 2020a).

While some of the factors mentioned above have caused a relative state of isolation among members of the same scholarly community (see Amirova 1977: 6–7, Baddeley and Voeste 2012b: 1), the existing differences in historical orthography undoubtedly represent an element of richness and diversity which should be valued and looked after in the future in order to ensure that there is some progress in the field. Nevertheless, this divergence also makes it difficult to apply a full-fledged comparative approach when discussing theoretical and methodological developments in historical orthography across various languages, research strands and personal research interests. Also, as a result of the great variety of interests, the relevance of historical orthography as a branch of scholarly inquiry is not defined only in the boundaries of a group of those who are interested in the discipline per se, but rather it is applicable to a much larger audience of researchers, not least those working in historical orthography from the perspective of phonology, etymology, lexicography, sociolinguistics, corpus linguistics, philology, literature, history, art history, bibliology and history of the book.

Aside from some of the most obvious cross-disciplinary links that exist in historical orthography, there is also a much deeper, fundamental reason for the importance of historical orthography as the subject matter for a handbook in linguistics: orthography constitutes the primary witness of the earliest linguistic past and, as such, historical orthography is of vital importance to anyone with an interest in many aspects of historical languages (Condorelli and Voeste 2020: 238, Condorelli 2022a: 1). For example, it is orthography, particularly spelling, that constitutes the basis for any speculation concerning the pronunciation of a given language in the periods preceding the invention of audio recording. Also etymologists, lexicologists and lexicographers draw upon spelling evidence when attempting to trace the histories of individual words and word families. Likewise, variation in orthographic features recorded in historical documents helps sociolinguists discover pertinent information about individual users of a language and the relations among them in terms of, for instance, social networks and other types of communities. Philologists interested in textual history can often find connections between specific texts mainly thanks to their shared orthographic characteristics. In turn, researchers specializing in corpus linguistics may find the preservation of orthographic features in corpora a challenging task, especially when this involves replacing and tagging the symbols which are no longer in use in modern languages. Thus, historical orthography indeed functions as a meeting point for various disciplines, bridging numerous fields which are seemingly not related.

The interest in the study of orthographic variation in our modern understanding started in the late nineteenth century, together with the appearance of dialectology. Traditional dialectologists paid attention to diatopically determined variation (Schneider 2002: 69), with spelling variation being the

most readily available and noticeable type. However, despite the importance and relevance of writing, orthography and historical orthography in linguistics, this area of investigation used to be most often considered as subsidiary to other components of linguistics or explicitly excluded from objects of linguistic study (Saussure 1993 [1916]: 41, Sapir 1921: 19–20, Bloomfield 1933: 21; see Stenroos 2006: 9, Rutkowska 2012: 225, 2013a: 37–38, Rutkowska and Rössler 2012: 229). The last thirty years, however, have witnessed profound changes in attitudes and research on writing systems. On the one hand, in the mainly German-centered theoretical tradition, the area of grapholinguistics has developed, raising the description of orthographic features to a full-right level of linguistic investigation, focusing primarily on synchronic aspects of orthographic systems, with much emphasis on the comparative perspective (for details, see Chapter 6, this volume). On the other hand, scholars have shown an increasing awareness of the importance of historical orthography as a discipline in its own right. Recent approaches to investigating historical orthography have been subject to technological advances, the use of new analytical methods, and theoretical experimentation (Condorelli 2020a: 2).

These innovations are especially owed to recent advances afforded by insights derived from historical sociolinguistics, which have given rise to a revolution in historical orthography. While attention has been paid to the importance of intrinsic (i.e. linguistic) determinants for the development of orthographies, the focus has recently moved to the correlation between orthographic practices and social variables, and with focus on the empirical basis for the studies (Condorelli 2020a: 1). The first signs of interest in orthographic variation within a strict diachronic sociolinguistic framework are from the end of the 1990s and the early 2000s (see especially Hernández-Campoy and Conde-Silvestre 1999, 2005, Conde-Silvestre and Hernández-Campoy 2004). Some of the areas that were investigated and discussed in the earliest relevant publications include the diffusion of standard spelling practices, and the influence of authors' age, gender, style, social status and social networks on orthographic developments. Some other areas of interest in the field include patterns about authorial profiles and their relationship with sociocultural and historical influences shaping historical orthography.

Further recent endeavors have explored connections between orthographic elements and various combinations of extralinguistic background features (for overviews, see Rutkowska and Rössler 2012, Condorelli 2020a, as well as Chapter 5 and Chapter 26 in this volume), including gender and text type (see, e.g., Sönmez 2000, Oldireva Gustafsson 2002, Sairio 2009), gender and authorship (see, e.g., Evans 2012, Hernández-Campoy 2016b), genre, text type, register and level of formality (Taavitsainen 2001, Markus 2006, Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2006b, Moreno Olalla 2020, Stenroos 2020b), typographical conjectures (see, e.g., Howard-Hill 2006, Agata 2011, Rutkowska 2013a, 2013b, 2020b, Shute 2017, Voeste 2021, Condorelli 2022b), paleographical

factors (see, e.g., Calle-Martín 2009, 2011a, 2011b, Grund 2011, Peikola 2011, Thaisen 2011, Llamas-Pombo 2012, Rogos 2013, Rogos-Hebda 2020) and transhistorical pragmatic aspects (Tagg and Evans 2020). Orthographic changes have also been investigated from the point of view of discourse communities (see, e.g., Taavitsainen 2004), community norms (see, e.g., Voeste 2010, Zheltukhin 2012), ideology (see, e.g., Villa 2012, 2015), code-switching (see, e.g., Zheltukhin 1996, McConchie 2011) and communities of practice (see, e.g., Rogos 2013, Rutkowska 2013b, Sairio 2013, Tyrkkö 2013, Conde-Silvestre 2019, 2020), together with attempts to compare writing features of scribes and printers across editions of the same text (see, e.g., Blake 1965, Aronoff 1989, Horobin 2001, Kopaczyk 2011, Peikola 2011, Rutkowska 2005, 2013a, 2015a, 2016, 2020a). Likewise, the long-established topic of diatopic orthographic variation has not ceased to spark researchers' interest in recent decades (see, e.g., Kopaczyk et al. 2018, Laing and Lass 2019, Stenroos 2020a, 2020b).

Research in historical orthography has also addressed the difficult topic of the relationship between graphemes and phonemes (see, e.g., Laing and Lass 2003, Lass and Laing 2010, Berger 2012, Bunčić 2012, Kopaczyk et al. 2018, Condorelli 2019, Lisowski 2020), as well as different spellings of lexical items and morphological categories (see, e.g., Laing and Lass 2014, Rutkowska 2013a, 2020a). Other apposite areas of discussion include differences in the amount of phonography and morphography in specific orthographies due to the competing influences of phonology and etymology (see, e.g., Baddeley 2012, Cerquiglini 2004, Michel 2012, Voeste 2012). More recent topics of investigation cover interrelations between regional and sociolinguistic variation and standardization (see, e.g., Sönmez 2000, Bunčić 2012, Llamas-Pombo 2012, Nevalainen 2012a, Voeste 2012, Vosters et al. 2014, Vosters and Rutten 2015), short forms of various types (see, e.g., Markus 2006, Kopaczyk 2011, Rutkowska 2013b, Honkapohja and Liira 2020, Rogos-Hebda 2020, Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2006b) and patterns related to punctuation and capitalization (see, e.g., Llamas-Pombo 2007, 2020, Voeste 2018b, Smith 2020b).

Overall, the attempts made toward reaching a bolder, more comprehensive outlook on historical orthography by exploring the areas mentioned above have been positive and encouraging. Today, work in historical orthography is published widely in international world-leading journals like *Diachronica*, *Folia Linguistica Historica*, *Language Variation and Change* and *Historische Sprachforschung/Historical Linguistics*. Research work related to diachronic orthography has also been published in major generalist journals like the *Journal of Linguistics* and *Language*. Some contributions have also been published in platforms closely related to historical sociolinguistics and especially *Written Language and Literacy*, the *Journal of Historical Sociolinguistics* and the *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* (Condorelli 2020a: 7). A growing number of language-specific books and long research articles are being dedicated

to topics included in this *Handbook*, some of which focus on the connection between spelling and paleography, typography and transmission from manuscript to print (see, e.g., Thaisen and Rutkowska 2011, Rutkowska 2013a, Hellinga 2014, Shute 2017, Subačius 2018, 2021, Condorelli 2020c, 2022a, 2022b).

The enthusiasm from the academic community for topics related to historical orthography, the extraordinary breadth and diversity of topics in the area, as well as the increased awareness of the importance of orthography for most areas in historical linguistics, are all convincing signs of the subject's maturity and the need for a large-focus, interdisciplinary handbook. The present volume is thus the first attempt to provide the international audience, including both researchers and students, interested in this subject with a handbook devoted specifically to historical orthography, and to make the first step toward research-oriented communication among those members of the academic community whose research involves, or at least touches upon, historical orthography.

The fact that historical orthography has become a mainstream subdiscipline of linguistics only relatively recently has been an additional motivating factor for the production of a handbook entirely devoted to the subject. The present *Handbook* has given scholars an opportunity to reflect about and formalize aspects of the discipline that have so far remained expressed only in the context of specific languages and case studies. The volume leans on the extensive formal knowledge already existing in the field of contemporary orthography and reflects on the application of some of the existing principles to historical questions and dimensions. It attempts to fulfill this task by bringing together in one place a compendium of key topics and issues in historical orthography. The *Handbook* presents an up-to-date, in-depth and comprehensive exploration of historical orthography, combining contributions by scholars of different generations, including both some of the foremost scholars and young researchers in the field, and concentrating on its scientific aspects. The volume touches on areas of inquiry that are applicable to a wide range of linguistic domains, thanks to the complex interrelation of orthographic systems with the phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon, as well as the semantics and pragmatics of a language (see Rutkowska and Rössler 2012: 213).

The *Handbook* is focused on historical orthographic elements and issues that are largely independent from niche case studies and small language groups. However, whenever contextualization in specific languages is useful and constructive for the development of a given topic, an effort has been made to allow for a broad coverage of language families by inviting authors who specialize in a wide variety of languages to contribute to the volume. Whenever possible, authors also represent a diversity of expertise and cultural backgrounds so as to avoid purely Eurocentric views. Thus, the contributors to the *Handbook* support their discussions with references to and examples from not

only Indo-European languages, such as Germanic, Romance and Balto-Slavic ones, but also from non–Indo-European languages. The chapters have been commissioned with the goal of becoming essential reading on both introductory and advanced courses in historical linguistics as well as on general linguistics modules that cover issues related to orthography, integrating existing volumes on the subject (e.g. Condorelli 2020a). Drafts were distributed for peer review among external reviewers and authors of individual chapters, thus enabling comparative insights to be reflected in the volume and also mitigating any glaring contradictions and disagreements among the authors. The chapters collected in the *Handbook* are ordered in a way that enables a unified narrative throughout, and is firmly grounded in the published literature on historical orthography and diachronic linguistics. The aim of the volume is that of tracing the development of historical orthography with special emphasis on the last century as a time that shaped our modern understanding of the subdiscipline, discussing the components of historical orthography as we understand it today and, ultimately, pondering the future of the field. The book also sets out to make productive links between cognate lines of research across different scholarly areas, and while its primary focus is in linguistics, it also lies at the intersection between literary studies, paleography, social history, sociopolitical research, and the history of writing and of the written text, including issues pertaining to, for example, book and script aesthetics, incunabula, typography and bookbinding.

While the *Handbook* definitely fulfills the purposes established above, there are other ambitions that we hope our volume will be associated with. The chapters of this *Handbook* have been developed to seek originality and completeness in two respects. Firstly, they aim to integrate the discussions and findings of different theoretical paradigms, methodological frameworks and contextual parameters to changes in historical orthography, thus addressing the tendency in diachronic linguistics for models and approaches to develop separate agendas. The unitary endeavor afforded by the rise of historical orthography as a self-standing scientific branch of linguistics aims to mitigate the scarcity of interdisciplinary dialogue existing among scholars with different backgrounds and training skills. Secondly, the chapters are written in such a way that they can be used as either pedagogical or scholarly resources, that is as textbook chapters to be discussed with both graduate and undergraduate students but also as research-oriented contributions, with a robust empirical basis, that scholars can consult and cite. The mixed format of the volume contributes to embracing the extent of knowledge in the field, as well as solidifying some of the existing theoretical and methodological foundations and exploring new territories. Some of the ambitions of the volume also include attempting to enhance terminological precision and to overcome the relative incompatibility of existing theoretical approaches to orthography and writing, both from a universal point of view and from a language-specific

perspective. We hope that the volume will further the understanding of the interrelation between linguistic and extralinguistic factors in the shaping of orthographic systems, and of the patterns of convergence and regularization of writing practices as a complex process of change on multiple linguistic and nonlinguistic levels.

Let us now focus on the overall structure of the present *Handbook*. The volume is divided into five different, complementary sections: Part I: Introduction, Part II: Structures and Theories, Part III: Organization and Development, Part IV: Empirical Approaches and Part V: Explanatory Discussions. Part I, which is where this introduction is situated, explains the key assumptions, purposes, ambitions and purposes of the book, as well as presenting an overview of the main research interests of historical orthography over the recent decades. Part II introduces the fundamental structures and theories of historical orthography, moving from the classification of early writing systems, the elements of writing systems, orthographic conventionality, early and contemporary theoretical approaches to understanding writing systems, including the most recent developments in grapholinguistics, through the typologies of existing writing systems. In Part III, the volume goes on to discuss aspects of the organization and development of writing systems, which comprise comparative historical perspectives, systems and idiosyncrasies, multilayeredness and multiaspectuality, adaptation of alphabetic writing systems, variation and change, as well as spelling standardization. After all the preliminary and theoretical aspects of historical orthography have been explored and explained, Part IV presents a range of empirical approaches, with the aim of illustrating the application of various theoretical approaches, analytical methods and models for studying orthography in specific languages and contexts, and so case studies constitute the main parts of the discussions in this section. The chapters tackle issues connected with studying epigraphic writing, the materiality of writing, data collection and interpretation, philological approaches, orthographic distribution, comparative and sociopragmatic methods, and issues inherent to reconstructing a prehistoric writing system.

Part V, the largest section in the *Handbook*, discusses factors that lie at the core of and explain the processes of change in historical orthography, with the intention of reassessing the traditional view of historical orthography and pointing to the most promising approaches in the field. This section comprises exploratory discussions on scribes and scribal practices, orthographic norms and authorities, networks of practice, literacy, sociolinguistic variables and implications of orthographic variation, orthography and language contact, discourse and sociopolitical issues, transmission and diffusion, as well as analogy and extension. Most contributions in this final part show the relevance of sociolinguistic and sociopragmatic frameworks to explaining the significance and various functions of orthographic variation, reflecting,