

Analyzing morphological structure – Nonstandard word spelling in German

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In standard written German, words are coded as unitary graphematic entities. This holds true for all words regardless of their morphological complexity. The examples under (1) show simplex words (1a), inflected word-forms (1b), derived (1c) and compound words (1d).

- (1) a *Tür* ‘door’, *grün* ‘green’, *leben* ‘to live’
- b *Türen* ‘doors’, *grüner* ‘greener’, *lebte* ‘lived’
- c *Türchen* ‘small door’, *grünlich* ‘greenish’, *beleben* ‘to stimulate’
- d *Haustür* ‘front door’, *Türschloss* ‘door lock’, *hellgrün* ‘light green’

Usually, German spelling rules do not allow for word-internal blanks or punctuation marks (such as hyphens or apostrophes) as can be found, e.g., in English compounds (*front-door*, *front door*) or genitive forms (*Linda’s house*). However, as a result of the spelling reform of 1996/2006 the use of word-internal apostrophes has been licensed in some and the use of hyphenated compound forms in many cases whereas blanks or upper-case letters are still excluded word-internally. Despite the official spelling rules a considerable number of nonstandard spellings can be found in present day German. For a compound word such as *Friseursalon* ‘hairdresser’s shop’, we may find spellings with a word-internal upper-case letter (2b), a word-internal apostrophe (2c), a word-internal hyphen (2d) or even a word-internal blank (2e).

- (2) a *Friseursalon*
- b *FriseurSalon*
- c *Friseur’salon*
- d *Friseur-Salon*
- e *Friseur Salon*

As for the apostrophe, Klein (2002:180) shows that the apostrophe is used word-internally before genitive (3) and plural markers (4), before diminutive suffixes (5), between the two constituents of a compound (6) and in some other cases (7-10). However, only the use of an apostrophe between a person’s name and a genitive-s as in (3) is authorized in standard German spelling.

- (3) *Wilma’s Waschmaschine* ‘Wilma’s washing machine’
- (4) *Hit’s* ‘hits (pl.)’, *PC’s* ‘personal computers’, *Nudel’n* ‘noodles’
- (5) *Schlöss’chen* ‘castle-dim.’
- (6) *großstadt’träume* lit. ‘city dreams’
- (7) *80’er Jahre* ‘the eighties’
- (8) *Bahnhof’s Imbiß* ‘snack bar at the station’
- (9) *damal’s* ‘then, at that time’, *freitag’s* ‘on fridays’
- (10) *Modetreff Bab’s* lit. ‘fashion meeting point Babs’ (*Babs*<*Barbara*)

In my poster, I will argue that nonstandard word spellings can be explained by considering the morphological structure of the words concerned. Nonstandard punctuation marks and blanks do not occur accidentally. In most cases, they are completely motivated: they are almost

exclusively used in between morphemes or words. Even in examples such as *Phil Collin's*, the occurrence of the apostrophe can be explained as a case of overgeneralizing the genitive apostrophe. It can therefore be assumed that writers use nonstandard marks to make the morphological structure transparent to their reader. However, whether word-internal punctuation marks and blanks are used or not depends on the nature of the morphological units a word-form is composed of. As an example, it can be stated that the apostrophe is often used to separate a person's name or a number from an inflectional or derivational affix (cf. 3, 7). Furthermore, nonstandard apostrophes often occur in the inflection of non-canonical words such as loans (*Lady's*) and abbreviations (*AG's*, *CD's*) (Scherer to appear). As for compounds, the type of punctuation mark or blank that is used highly depends on the degree of morphological disintegration of the compound concerned.

References

- Klein, Wolf P. (2002): Der Apostroph in der deutschen Gegenwartssprache. Logographische Gebrauchserweiterungen auf phonographischer Basis. In: Zeitschrift für germanistische Linguistik 30, 169-197.
- Scherer, Carmen (to appear): Das Deutsche und die dräuenden Apostrophe. Zur Verbreitung von 's im Gegenwartsdeutschen. To appear in: Zeitschrift für germanistische Linguistik.