04

Digital writing practices and media ideologies of German adolescents

04

Digital writing practices and media ideologies of German adolescents

Florian Busch

University of Hamburg

florian.busch@uni-hamburg.de

1. Introduction

This paper explores the media ideologies of German adolescents, which play a crucial role in naturalizing, rationalizing and justifying young people's media choices in their daily digitalized social interactions. I argue that digital writing practices can only be fully understood when taking the interdependencies between their underlying language ideologies and media ideologies into account. Moreover, the sociolinguistic differentiation of writing forms can be seen as interwoven with these systems of socially and culturally shared beliefs about communication. Rather than being determined by technical infrastructures, non-standard spellings and punctuation seem to be highly intentional in the shape of ideological-informed enregistered styles. From this perspective, digital media becomes a socially

meaningful sign of its own, presupposing and entailing contextual settings in interaction (such as formality and informality).

This paper addresses these issues by examining a corpus of *WhatsApp*-text-messaging enriched by group interview data of German adolescents discussing their media and linguistic choices and their underlying communicative strategies. These moments of media-ideological reflexivity offer interesting insights into the organization of young people's social lives by means of digitally mediated communication.

2. Metadiscourse on digital media and adolescents: A first example

The public discourse regarding digital writing practices has been investigated in several studies (cf. Thurlow 2006 & 2007, Brommer 2007, Squires 2010). Scholars' findings tend to stress the pessimistic attitudes in public opinion towards adolescents' communicative behavior as a potential danger to 'language' in its totality – misconstruing the restricted social contexts of stereotypical features of digital writing. There is an ongoing anxiety about teenagers losing their linguistic competences (discursively equalized with orthographic competences) because of their extensive digital writing. Next to these worries of declining structural linguistic abilities, concerns about the pragmatic competences needed for 'civilized' social interaction remain. As interperso-

nal-private communication increasingly takes place on digital online platforms, societies start negotiating the (new) norms of mediated interaction via metapragmatic discourse.

A striking example of these metadiscursive negotiations is provided by the German *State Office for Communication* of Baden-Württemberg (*Landesanstalt für Kommunikation, LFK*), a public department supervising private broadcasting stations. As part of their educational duty, the state office initiated a so-called *Medien-Knigge*-project ('media etiquette project'),[1] which is described on their website as the following:

> *Sowohl Jugendliche als auch Erwachsene benehmen sich häufig schlecht in Bezug auf den Umgang mit neuen Medien. Smartphones, Tablets und Apps tragen dazu bei, dass wir immer und überall unser Gerät in der Hand haben – oft auch in unpassenden Situationen. Das Projekt ‚Medienknigge' forderte Jugendliche (zwischen 12 und 16 Jahren) auf, ihren Alltag zu überdenken, sich Gedanken über den Umgang und das Miteinander mit Medien zu machen und ihre Vorschläge medial darzustellen.*[2]

'Both adolescents and adults often behave inappropriately when it comes to using new media. Smartphones, tablets and apps lead to us using our mobile devices anywhere and everywhere – often in inappropriate situations. The project *'Medienknigge'* called on young people (between 12 and 16 years) to reflect on their everyday lives,

---

[1] The book *Über den Umgang mit Menschen* [On Human Relations] by Adolph Freiherr Knigge, published in 1788, is known as *Knigge* in Germany. The book was widely received and has been reprinted in numerous editions. The *Knigge* derives its social value from the fact that it is associated with 'courtly behavior' in public perception and thus often stands *pars-pro-toto* for etiquette in general. This is expressed in the labeling of various etiquette guidebooks such as *Business-Knigge*, *Tie-Knigge*, or *China-Knigge*.

[2] See [https://medien-knigge.de/projekt/] (accessed 2 March 2018).

to think about how to use and interact with media and to digitally present their proposals.'

The central feature of the website is the so-called *Medien-Knigge-Meter* 'media-etiquette-meter' in which users are encouraged to participate. Users can upload their own 'rules of media etiquette' or just vote for the ones already uploaded by others. The outcome of this user voting is a top-10-list of 'rules' concerning an 'appropriate' handling of digital media. While some 'rules' deal with privacy and security issues, e.g. *Don't add your mobile number to your public Facebook account!*, the majority of these 'rules' can be labeled meta-communicative or rather metapragmatic rules, e.g. *Don't argue via mobile phone, deal with it in person!* The 'rule' with the highest ranking by 1448 users fits into this category as well: *Don't break up via SMS/WhatsApp!*

The *Medien-Knigge* seems interesting because it exposes the metapragmatic discourse on digital media from two perspectives. Firstly, there is a top-down-perspective initiated by the state office: Its website proclaims the condensed and thereby institutionalized judgment that there is an often problematic and inappropriate handling of digital media by adolescents. Thus, the website's educational goal is the reinforcement of 'media competence.'[3] This top-down-notion of media competence is fundamentally bound to metapragmatic typifications, in that it depends on the labeling of media usage with social values. Secondly, the participatory approach of the website offers us insights on how adolescents themselves take part in this metadiscourse from a bottom-up-perspective, creating their 'own' rules and revealing their beliefs within the framework of the project.

This perspective emphasizes the importance of shared metapragmatic beliefs about digital media choices for the daily organizations of social life, which can be described with the term of *digital literacy*. Taking the literacy perspective, communicative appropriateness is not only a top-down-value; it is constructed and iteratively re-constructed by metapragmatic discourse carried out in localized communities.

3. Mediation, media ideologies, and their sociolinguistic dimension

Digital literacy is much more than just the technical skill of using a set of electronic devices. Media are always embedded in a cultural system of socially organized practices of producing, disseminating and interpreting meaning. Being *digitally literate* means being able to "engage in particular *social practices*" by the means of digital tools (Jones & Hafner 2012: 12; emphasis in original). Rather than having a reductive notion of media as merely technical devices, the literacy perspective asks for a dynamic notion of media as socially structured procedures of semiotic materialization (cf. Schneider 2017).

Therefore, it may be useful to focus the discussion by turning to the concept of *mediation* as it is used in communication studies, linguistic anthropology and media linguistics (cf. Couldry 2008, Agha 2011, Kristiansen 2014, Androutsopoulos 2016). In its broadest sense, mediation "refers to the cultural, material, or semiotic conditions of any communicative

---

[3] Cf. [https://www.lfk.de/medienkompetenz-fortbildung.html] (accessed 02 March 2018).

action" (Androutsopoulos 2014a: 10). Given that every form of communication depends on some sort of mediation, i.e. material substance and structure, the concept describes the particular settings of semiotic materialization (e.g. what kind of participant structure is enabled by the medium? What is the temporality of its communication? Does it enable recontextualization?). The metadiscursive negotiations of specific communicative activities (e.g. breaking up), which materialize with particular semiotic tools (e.g. *WhatsApp*-text-messaging), implicitly deal with questions of mediation and re-mediation (cf. Gershon 2010a: 287 f.): How does the medium affect the social meaning of an intended activity, and how does it change when we use another medium? In this respect, metadiscourse such as the *Medien-Knigge* addresses the social value that is tied to specific media choices. Therefore, the interrelation of social activities and structures of semiotic mediation is moderated by a third dimension, i.e. media ideology (cf. Hanks 1996: 230; see Fig. 1).

The concept of media ideology, developed and elaborated by Gershon (2010a, 2010b, 2010c), draws on earlier work on language ideologies carried out in Linguistic Anthropology (Schieffelin et al. 1998, Blommaert 1999, Kroskrity 2000). In his influential article, Silverstein defines *linguistic ideologies* as "any sets of beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use" (Silver-

stein 1979: 193). In this sense, the notion of ideology is not meant to be political but refers to socially shared systems of assumptions about language structure and use. These assumptions become 'articulated', i.e. materialized, in metapragmatic discourse, when users implicitly and explicitly evaluate linguistic behavior. Hence, language ideology is essentially connected to sociolinguistic differentiation in that it functions as a rationalizing backdrop for the ascription of divergent social values to linguistic heterogeneity. As Irvine and Gal
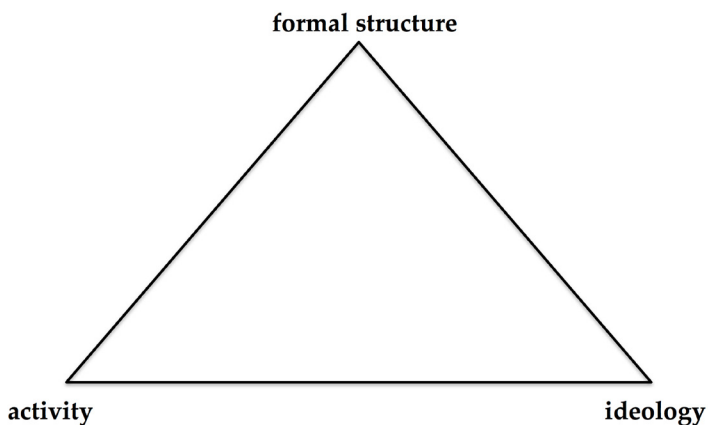

Fig.1. Three dimensions of communicative practice (Hanks 1996: 230)

put it, language ideologies are "the ideas with which participants and observers frame their understanding of linguistic varieties and map those understandings onto people, events, and activities that are significant to them" (Irvine & Gal 2000: 35).

Gershon (2010a) transfers this perspective to the socially shared beliefs about media repertoires and the evaluative practices of ascribing distinct social value to media

choices. Drawing on Gershon and Silverstein's definition, we can say, that media ideologies are 'any sets of beliefs about media articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived media structure and use' or, as Gershon summarizes, "[i]n short, media ideologies are what people believe about how the medium affects or should affect the message" (Gershon 2010b: 391).

Language ideologies and media ideologies are strongly intertwined in that they both can be subsumed under the umbrella term of *semiotic ideology* (Keane 2003 & 2018). Both types of ideology coin the normalizing perspectives of a population on how social interactions can or should be executed by means of a heterogeneous semiotic repertoire. As a language-ideological metadiscourse, media-ideological statements reflect people's communicative strategies and at the same time mold these strategies into continuous social practices (cf. Gershon 2010a: 284). This should not be misconstrued as determination through ideology. Rather than determining a particular media choice, media ideological values should be regarded as resources for emergent, situated communicative practices. For example, the shared media-ideological imperative of 'not-using-WhatsApp-for-breaking-up' can be intentionally violated for a particular communicative effect, e.g. for devastating one's future ex-partner. Furthermore, a characteristic feature of both language and media ideologies is their heterogeneity: They are "multiple, locatable, partial, positioned, and contested" (ibd.). The ideological rationalization of types of mediation is expected to differ between populations, which leads to competing ideologies and thereby potential communicative irritations, e.g. a metapragma-

tic disagreement whether text messaging is an appropriate way to contacting one's professor. In this respect, the underlying arguments of media-ideological ascriptions might differ, although they refer to the same sort of mediation. The ideological rationalization can selectively draw on some aspects of a medium's structure while ignoring others. Gershon, who studied the media ideologies surrounding breaking up, discusses the example of how her interviewees vary in their conceptualization of their cellphones:

> Yet the structure of the technology by no means determined how the students I interviewed understand what it meant to communicate by that particular medium, and thus what it might indicate when a conversational task (such as breaking up) moved from one medium to another. Not everyone understood how a medium affected a message in the same way. Some saw texting as intimate because one always carried one's cellphone on one's body, it was an ever present form of contact. Others saw it as distancing because every text message has a limit of 160 characters – how much can actually be said in any text? People's media ideologies affected which aspect of the structure of the technology mattered in an exchange. (Gershon 2010a: 394)

In this example, both individual media-ideological perspectives draw on the same media structures (cellphone), while rationalizing it in a contrasting manner (intimate vs. distancing). However, it is striking that the continuum between formality and informality seems to be at the heart of media-ideological metadiscourse. Accordingly, media ideologies are inherently relational. A medium can only be *more* formal *than* another – formality and

informality are no absolute values. On this basis a system of oppositions emerges:

A society's media repertoire is systematically organized by media-ideological distinctions. Such a system has implications for the social value of new media, in that "[e]ach new medium is instantly enmeshed in a web of media ideologies" (Gershon 2010b: 287). The appearance of a new medium triggers the metapragmatic reflexivity of its population in order to negotiate the media-ideological system as a whole:

> As media for communication proliferate, people are developing culturally specific, nuanced understandings of how these media shape communication and what kinds of utterances are most appropriately stated through which media. Just as people's ideas about language and how language functions shape the ways they speak, people's ideas about different communicative media and how different media function shape the ways they use these media. (ibd.)

Metadiscursive encounters such as the *Medien-Knigge* are good examples for these dynamics in the course of media proliferation. By adopting a sociolinguistic perspective, I suggest, the contemporary digital media proliferation and its corresponding metapragmatic discourse seem to be highly relevant because of their overlap with a "rise of writing" (Brandt 2015). While traditional mass literacy mainly referred to a reading literacy, digital media pioneered "writing as a mass daily experience" (ibd.: 3). Social Media Networks, instant-text-messaging, microblogs – the everyday encounters of reading *and* writing are manifold.[4] But the 'rise of writing' is not only striking in terms of quantity, it has far-reaching consequences for the quality of writing practices. As Androutsopoulos points out, this new mass literacy generates a diffusion of writing across new social contexts, traditionally rather associated with speech:

> Rather than being restricted to specific purposes and occasions (and segments of the population), language mediated by keyboards and screens is now being used by almost everyone and to all sorts of purposes, including spontaneous and informal networked writing […]. The widespread assumptions that authentic language in the community is limited to spoken language and that written language is the most homogenous, or invariant, area of language, seem no longer tenable. (Androutsopoulos 2016: 288)

Writing and our conceptualization of writing become emancipated from its traditional formal, often professional or even elitist settings (cf. Sebba 2003, Blommaert 2008). An unregimented writing characterized by spontaneity, interactional orientation and informal communicative purposes gives rise to variable spelling and creatively claims new orientations to orthographic norms (cf. Sebba 2012, Deumert 2014). Thus, a sociolinguistic differentiation of writing mirrors the digitalization of our social lives. This interconnection of "mediatization

---

[4] Yet, these digital writing practices become more and more linked to oral speech again, for example in the shape of audio messages on *WhatsApp* and *Facebook Messenger*, *Viber* calls, *Facebook* calls and so forth. In this respect it needs to be stressed, that digital writing practices are also characterized by multimodal media convergence. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

and sociolinguistic change" (Androutsopoulos 2014b) exhibits semiotic-ideological implications as well. The media-ideological metadiscourse on mediation 'appropriate-to-context' is interwoven with the language-ideological metadiscourse on writing style 'appropriate-to-context'. Therefore, the question of how a population socially organizes its semiotic repertoire can only be answered by focusing on both types of metapragmatic reflexivity.

4. Media-ideological registers of writing

To theorize the ideological interrelation of mediation and writing style, the linguistic-anthropological concept of enregisterment seems to be a productive approach. Enregisterment refers to "processes and practices whereby performable signs become recognized (and regrouped) as belonging to distinct, differentially valorized semiotic registers by a population" (Agha 2007: 81). In Agha's understanding registers are "reflexive model[s] of behavior" (ibd.: 147) in which a repertoire of semiotic features (i.e. co-occurrence style) gets metapragmatically connected to social values (e.g. social identities, types of activity, interpersonal stances, etc.). Materialized (patterns of) signs only become socially meaningful when people's metapragmatic awareness typifies them *as* socially meaningful. Again, this process is fundamentally dependent on ideology in that people's shared beliefs about

semiotic heterogeneity reanalyze and naturalize variation into distinct semiotic registers.

As Agha points out, semiotic registers are typically "cross-modal" (ibd.: 22) formations: linguistic and non-linguistic signs form a socially coherent repertoire. Assuming that media choice functions as an ideology-moderated, socially meaningful sign in its own right (presupposing and entailing a certain social context), we can focus on the *enregisterment of mediation*. Following this idea, the interrelation of media and digital writing practices can be regarded as cross-modal registers – or rather clumsily but accurately as *media-ideological registers of writing*.

Referring to the triangle of communicative practice (cf. Hanks 1996: 230; see Fig. 1), such media-ideological registers of writing can be illustrated as an interplay of two triangles, resulting in four constituting dimensions:
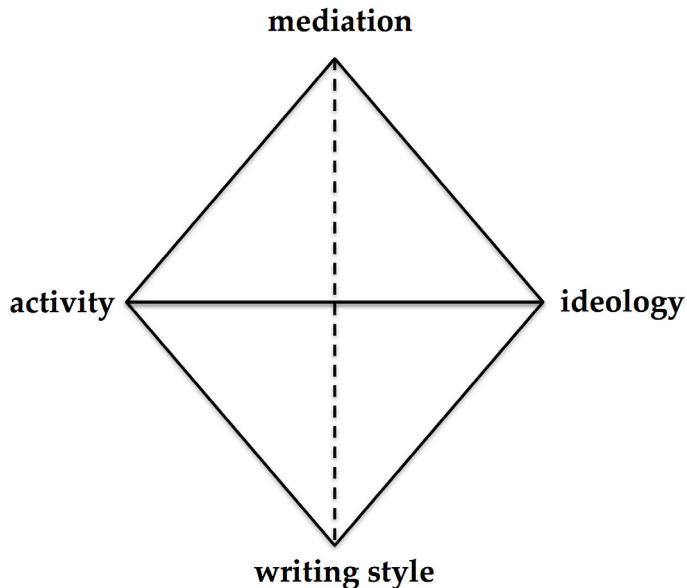
Fig. 2. Dimensions of media-ideological registers of writing

ideology, activity, mediation, and writing style (see Fig. 2).

We can see that the dimension of *(semiotic) ideology* includes both media ideologies as well as language ideologies. These metapragmatic ideologies clasp the register model by evaluating structures of mediation as well as patterns of written linguistic features (i.e. writing styles) and linking them to social activities.

The realm of *activity* is the realm of interaction-in-context, where enregistered structures of mediation but also enregistered linguistic styles "formulate […] a sketch of the social occasion […], indexing stereotypic features such as interlocutors' roles, relationships, and the type of social practice in which they are engaged" (Agha 2007: 148).

Mediation refers to the structures and processes of semiotic materialization. During the process of media-ideological enregisterment these structures become socially meaningful in that they are stereotypically linked to social activities (e.g. formal job applications are linked to business letters; making social appointments with close friends is linked to digital instant-text-messaging, and so forth).

The sociolinguistic differentiation of digital mass literacy is represented in the dimension of *writing style*. Sets of graphic features (including orthographic and heterographic spellings, patterns of punctuation, integrated pictographic features, typography, etc.) become metapragmatically linked to social activities (e.g. formal job applications are linked to orthographic spellings; making social appointments with close friends to abbreviations and emojis, and so forth).

One key observation that needs to be stressed is the indirect interconnection between mediation and writing style (illustrated by the dashed line in Fig. 2). Rather than being modeled after a media-technological determinism, the stereotypical correlations between a particular medium and a particular writing style become moderated by semiotic ideology and social activities (e.g. business letters are stereotypically correlated with orthographic spellings; digital instant-text-messaging with abbreviations and emojis, and so forth). This dynamic model copes with the fact that registers function as communicative resources, which are always available for creative tropes and register stylizations (e.g. job applications including non-standard spellings and emojis for intended pragmatic effects; orthographic, elaborated texts via *WhatsApp* in interactional moments of controversy, and so forth).

From an integrated perspective, media-ideological registers are sets of cross-modal signs selected from the media and the written-linguistic repertoire of a community. These selections are motivated by emic models of social ascriptions moderated by semiotic ideology. Hence, the analysis of register models fundamentally depends on ethnographic methods for reconstructing people's metapragmatic reflexivity and their semiotic-ideological metadiscourse. This will be further illustrated in the following section.

5. Register awareness in digital writing of German adolescents

The digital 'rise of writing' had a strong impact on German adolescents' daily social lives. An annual representative study of adolescents' media use found that 94% of German teenagers were users of the text-messaging application *WhatsApp* in 2017 (mpfs 2017: 35). The following exemplary case study is an excerpt from a

broader sociolinguistic investigation on how this extensive digital writing leads to a differentiation in writing styles. The overarching project deals with how adolescents' metapragmatic reflexivity creates (media-ideological) registers of writing and how these register models are brought into interaction (Busch, forthcoming). The study draws on different types of data, collected in four high schools in northern Germany during the years 2015 and 2016. This paper focuses on a partial data set which is based on a corpus of 61 informal *WhatsApp* chat logs and seven group interviews with adolescents between of 12 and 19 years. The interview groups were divided according to age and gender. By means of an interview guideline, the participants were questioned on their general metapragmatic awareness of variation in writing as well as on writing practices such as phonetic spellings, letter repetition, letter substitution, and non-standard punctuation, but also on their reflections regarding media choices and their underlying media ideologies. These metapragmatic statements function as a contextualizing backdrop to the linguistic analysis and interpretation of the collected chat logs.

The two types of data inform the following discussion of the participants' media-ideological reflexivity. Firstly, there are traces of media-ideological metadiscourse within the *WhatsApp* data. Secondly – and much more explicitly – reflections on media and linguistic choices can be found in the recorded group interviews. Both types of data offer insights into the dynamics of media ideology and its overlap with language ideology and linguistic choices.

5.1 Media-ideological metadiscourse in WhatsApp chat logs

A general characteristic of semiotic ideologies is their tendency to be invisible, often naturalized as common-sense-knowledge, which does not require further discussion. Semiotic ideology can be imagined as transparent strands functioning as guidance of semiotic choices. This is especially the case when referring to media ideology, since it relies on the strong media-ideological imperative of 'only-an-invisible-medium-is-a-good-medium' (cf. Krämer 1998: 74). Drawing on ethnomethodological "breaching experiments" (Garfinkel 1967), it is evident that communicative moments trigger the interactional exploration of the unsaid, in which these common-sense assumptions are violated. To this effect, the explicit discussion of media choices within the *WhatsApp* data is strongly connected to moments of interpersonal crisis among participants. Media choice is mentioned exclusively in a negative manner, i.e. when evaluated as 'inappropriate'. An example is provided by the fourteen-year-old Anne.[5] In the following message Anne responds to accusations by her friend Lisa. Lisa accused Anne of having gossiped about her with Nelly. Anne justifies herself by stating that this is a misunderstanding.

(1) *WhatsApp*-chat – Anne/Lisa (14-years-old).[6]

18:35:07, Anne:

Nelly hat mich gefragt was wir besprochen haben .....
da wir ja eigendlich nicht über sieh gesprochen haben

---

[5] All participant's names are pseudonymized.

[6] The spelling of all *WhatsApp* data has been retained and, if possible, emulated in my English translation.

dachte ich das wäre nicht schlimm ..... ich glaube das alles ist ein missverständniss vllt hat nelly sachen anders verstanden denn ich habe geschrienebn auch gesprochen aber halt auch geschrieben und beim schreiben versteht man manche dachen eben falsch ich rufe sie mal an aber ich glaube es ist besser wenn wir morgen in der schule reden und nicht auf whatsapp denn da versteht man alles falsch .... ok ich bin gleich wieder on sprech kurz mit ihr bis gleich

'Nelly asked me what we discussed ..... since we did not really speak about her I thought it wouldn't turn out bad ..... I think all of this is a misunderstanding, Nelly probably understood things differently because I was writing also speaking but also writing and when writing one just gets some things wrong, I will call her but I think it would be better if we talk tomorrow at school and not on whatsapp because there you get everything wrong .... ok I'll be back online in a bit talking with her shortly be right back'

Anne's strategy of stating a misunderstanding is strongly based on the evaluation of media choices. Media gets evaluated concerning its 'potential of misunderstanding' – the further away a medium is from face-to-face-conversation, the greater the inherent danger of *misunderstanding*. In this sense, Anne constructs a ranking of media choice concerning its appropriateness in precarious interpersonal situations, beginning with the worst option (writing), turning to the compromise solution (speaking via phone), and finally promising the optimal solution (talking face to face at school). The starting point of these ascriptions is always the structure of mediation (especially regarding spatial co-presence vs. spatial separation, temporal synchronicity vs. temporal asynchronicity, written mode vs. spoken mode), which becomes attributed to

social activities moderated by media ideology. The data demonstrates that the media-ideological organization is repeatedly ordered by these kinds of rankings. At the same time, the ideological character of these enregisterments of mediation becomes striking when turning to interactional sequences of competing media-ideological rationalizations. One of these moments can be found in the chat log of the seventeen-year-olds Melanie and Jonas, who are engaged in a romantic relationship. Melanie is irritated after Jonas just left the class without saying good bye, so she asks for an explanation via *WhatsApp*.

(2) *WhatsApp*-chat – Melanie/Jonas (17-years-old).

22:12:23, Melanie:

> *Wieso bist du nach Psychologie dann so schnell weggegangen?*
> 'Why did you leave so quickly after the psychology course?'

22:15:39, Jonas:

> *Hatte um halb sechs einen Arzttermin*
> 'Had a medical appointment at half past five [i.e. 5.30]'

22:16:08, Melanie:

> *Ach so*
> 'Oh, right'

22:47:06, Melanie:

> *Was ist dein Problem?'*
> What's your problem?'

09:33:37, Jonas:

> *Du willst das über whatsapp klären ?*
> 'You want to discuss it via whatsapp?'

09:51:49, Melanie:

> *Ich würde gerne erst einmal wissen, was es zu klären gibt*
> 'First off I would like to know what there is to discuss'

11:57:55, Melanie:

> *Ok dann wohl nicht*
> 'Okay I guess not'

11:59:01, Jonas:

> *Hä*
> 'Huh'

11:59:09, Jonas:

> *Ich will einfach nicht über whatsapp darüber reden*
> 'I just don't want to talk about it via whatsapp'

12:30:32, Melanie:

> *Ja aber du kannst mir doch einmal sagen worüber du mit mir reden möchtest*
> 'Yeah, but you can tell me what you want to talk about with me'

15:55:57, Melanie:

> *Ich hab keine Lust dir hinterher zu rennen und zu fragen was los ist. Wenn du ein Problem mit mir hast kannst du mir ja schreiben, mich anrufen und in der Schule ansprechen aber böse Blicke helfen glaub ich jetzt auch nicht so weiter Ich find es unnötig einfach nicht zu antworten*
> 'I don't feel like running after you and asking what's going on. If you have a problem with me you can write me, call me and talk to me at school, but mean looks don't help at all I think I think it's unnecessary to just not answer'

After half an hour has passed without any further explanation by Jonas, Melanie calls a spade a spade and directly asks: *What's your problem?* Jonas blocks this relatively open attack by metapragmatically evaluating it as inappropriate regarding its mediation: *You want to discuss it via whatsapp?* While Melanie wants to primarily discuss their interpersonal problem early, Jonas does not deviate from his point of view – he just repeats his metapragmatic statement: *I just don't want to talk about it via whatsapp.* Even the apparent compromise that Melanie suggests (*I would [only] like to know what there is to discuss*) does not help to align their competing media-ideological evaluations. In the end, Melanie implicitly argues against Jonas's media-ideological constraints, by enumerating all his possible media choices (*write me, call me and talk to me at school*) and by clarifying she does not care about mediation as long as verbal communication is happening. However, at the same time, it is striking that Melanie reproduces the apparently socially shared media ranking that was already analyzed in Anne's example. Melanie seems to be aware of media-ideological rankings of intimacy/social distance even though she does not commit herself to these assumptions in this particular socially-situated interaction. In any case, we can state that media choice is metapragmatically reflected regarding its enregisterment with social relations. However, depending on the peer group, the social value enregistered with a medium may differ. While *WhatsApp* is ascribed the attribute of 'being impersonal' in some communities, for example, there is the quite opposite conceptualization in many teenage peer-groups, in which digital networks play a crucial role in constituting communities of practice. To what extent *WhatsApp* can be interpreted as a 'social yardstick' in some of these communities becomes clear in an interaction with fourteen-year-olds Lisa and Anne, who already provided the first example:

(3) WhatsApp-Chat – Anne/Lisa (14-years-old).

21:26:46: Lisa:

Bist du eigentlich noch in jorge??

'Are you still into jorge??'

21:26:28: Anne:

Wieso

'Why'

21:29:39: Anne:

Wieso möchtest. Du das wissen

'Why do you want to know that'

21:31:19: Lisa:

Weil du ihn dan ja bei wgatsapp haben köntest

'Because you could have him on whatsapp'

21:30:51: Anne:

hast du ihn

'do you have him'

21:32:12: Lisa:

Nein

'No'

21:32:18: Anne:

Dann möchte ich ihn auch nicht (das bedeutet aber nichts)

'Then I dont't want him either (but that doesn't mean anything)'

21:32:34: Anne:

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

'!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!'

Lisa's question whether Anne is *still into jorge* is part of the social practice of observing one's friends' romantic interests within the school community. The verbal construction of *person X is into person Y* is the contracted linguistic distillate of this practice, repeated over and over again. After Anne hesitates to answer, Lisa reveals her plan: If Anne indeed still is *into jorge* she *could have him on whatsapp*. The mere technical addition of a new contact has its own social value (besides the actual communicative interaction with that contact), it functions as a social index to a certain kind of social relationship. Just as some people do not consider their romantic relationship over until they have removed each other as *Facebook* friends (cf. Gershon 2010c),[7] so do Lisa and Anne show an understanding of what it means socially to collect contacts in their *WhatsApp* accounts. Even though Anne insists that her negative answer *doesn't mean anything*, it quite clearly stresses the opposite of that statement. Especially the extensive iteration of exclamation marks presupposes that the decision of adding or not adding a boy to her contacts on *WhatsApp* is in fact immensely meaningful. Again, this example shows the semiotic value of the medium – it is a semiotic structure of its own, charged by ideological rationalizations.

By drawing these exemplary discussions back to the model of media-ideological registers of writing (Fig. 2), there have still only been three out of four dimensions investigated so far: Mediation, activity, and (media) ideology. In order to relate these three aspects to the fourth dimension of writing style, the group interview data becomes essential.

---

[7] The interviewees of Gershon even coined "the common phrase [...] 'It's not official until it's Facebook official'" (Gershon 2010b: 397).

5.2 Media-ideological metadiscourse in group interviews

Similar to the chat log interactions, meta-pragmatic reflexivity on media choices can be found in the group interview data. But unlike the *WhatsApp* interactions, the interview questions elicit participants' explicit reflections on the entanglement of written-stylistic and media choices. Hence, the following discussion showcases a sample of interview excerpts, in which the participants comment on the interconnection of language and media ideologies. Typically, these interconnections are described on the basis of comparative oppositions, as can be seen in the case of sixteen-year-old Benni when he compares his writing of e-mails to his interaction on *WhatsApp*.

(4) Interview 7 – Benni/Jan (16-years-old).

Benni:

> *Wenn man jetzt den Unterschied zwischen E-Mail und WhatsApp nimmt, klar ist da ein großer Unterschied. Zumal, wenn ich eine E-Mail schreibe, dann hat es eigentlich immer was mit formelleren Dingen zu tun. Aber selbst wenn ich jetzt, sagen wir, ich würde Jan über E-Mail schreiben – was eigentlich nie passieren würde – aber ich würde es machen, wäre schon was anderes. Ohne Smileys auf jeden Fall.*
>
> 'Now, if you take the difference between email and WhatsApp, obviously there's a big difference. When I write an e-mail, it's always something more formal. But even if I, say, were to write Jan via e-mail – which would never happen – but if I did, it would be something else for sure. Definitely without smiley faces.'

First, Benni describes the enregisterment of e-mail with formal activities. In his prototypical perception writing an e-mail *it's always something more formal*. This media-ideological enregisterment seems to be so fixed that even the mere thought of writing an e-mail to his close friend Jan seems absurd to Benni – it *would never happen*. After considering the hypothetical possibility further, Benni concludes that his writing style would remain committed to the style demanded by writing an e-mail, *definitely without smileys*. Thus, Benni describes a double-enregisterment of the medium. There is a primary enregisterment of the e-mail with formal activities which leads to the indirect interconnection with a specific writing style (i.e. graphic/writing features enregistered with formal activities in their own right). The more e-mail as a medium is prototypically regarded as a formal medium, the stronger the link between e-mail and a particular style of writing becomes (the dashed line in Fig. 2). Therefore, this interconnection of e-mails and features of formal writing can be understood as the result of a secondary enregisterment.

In the further course of the interview, a contrasting hypothetical scenario is introduced. What would happen if Benni and Jan were *forced to write to [their] teacher via WhatsApp*?

(5) Interview 7 – Benni/Jan (16-years-old).

Interviewer:

> *Wenn ihr dazu gezwungen werden würdet, eurem Lehrer bei WhatsApp zu schreiben, wie würde das dann aussehen?*
> 'If you were forced to write to your teacher via WhatsApp, what would that look like?'

Benni:

> *Keine Emojis.*
> 'No emojis.'

Jan:

> *Absolut wie ein Brief. Wie eine E-Mail mit Einleitung, Hauptteil, Schluss.*
> 'Definitely like a letter. Like an e-mail with an introduction, main part, conclusion.'

Of course, this kind of question is highly hypothetical, but it helps to elicit reflections on the intersection of media and language ideology. Compared to Benni's reflections on 'writing an e-mail to a close friend' it seems that the enregistered value of formality is always noticed as primary, be it on the side of mediation or on the side of social activity. Benni and Jan's answer is typical for the group interview data, in that it focuses on the formal social relation in context rather than on the stereotypical enregisterment of the medium. Both immediately agree that recipient design is the most important aspect when texting with one's teacher. This strongly aligns with the underlying questions of re-mediation: The recipient design evokes a particular linguistic (in this case explicitly textual) structure (*introduction, main part, conclusion*), which is strongly enregistered with another medium (*definitely like a letter*). In fact, Benni and Jan would write a virtual letter in the disguise of a *WhatsApp*-message.

Interview excerpts such as these prove a highly elaborated metapragmatic awareness, which enables to strikingly flexible linguistic practices. The next example also shows this complexity of metapragmatic awareness, especially regarding recipient design. The fourteen-year-olds Lea and Anne reflect on the linguistic as well as the medial differences in relation to different groups of addressees.

(6) Interview 3 – Lea/Anne (14-years-old).

Lea:

> *Ähm, also wenn man jetzt zum Beispiel mit Lehrern oder auch mit Leuten, die man nicht so kennt, schreibt, ist es halt so, dass man lange Texte schreibt, finde ich. Ganze Sätze. Und mit besten Freunden halt so 'Hi wg' oder halt so Abkürzungen. Aber wenn ich jetzt jemanden ganz neuen kennenlerne über halt zum Beispiel WhatsApp, dann schreibe ich 'Hallo, wie geht's dir' und dann noch einen Smiley noch dahinter. 'Ich bin's, Lisa aus der alten Klasse' sowas halt.*
> 'Um, so if one texts for example with teachers or with people one does not know very well, it's just that one writes long texts, I think. Whole sentences. And with best friends it's more like ‚Hi HRY' or just abbreviations. But when I get to know somebody new, for example via WhatsApp, I write ‚hello, how are you' and then a smiley behind that. ‚It's me, Lisa from your old class', stuff like that.'

Anne:

> *Also ich finde, mit besten Freunden schreibt man auch nicht so viel auf WhatsApp. Wenn man mit allerbesten Freunden schreibt, schickt man sich so manchmal, also wenn der eine nur eine Kamera dabei hat, schickt man sich dann die Bilder rüber oder so.*
> 'Well, I think with best friends one doesn't write that much via WhatsApp. If one is texting with very best friends, one sometimes sends, like if one only has a camera with you, then you send photos or something.'

Lea:

> *Und Sprachnachrichten.*
> 'And voice messages.'

Anne:

> *Ja, Sprachnachrichten. Aber mit aller-besten Freunden telefoniert man eigent-lich am meisten oder schickt Snaps.*
> 'Yes, voice messages. But with very best friends you actually mostly phone or send snaps.'

Lea:

> *Und ich würde jetzt auch nicht mir Leuten, die ich noch nicht gut kenne, Sprachnach-richten machen. Also da immer schreiben und mit guten Freunden, also mit wirklich richtig guten Freunden fast nur Sprachnachrichten.*
> 'And I would not record voice messages for people I do not know well yet. So there I always write and with good friends, like with really really good friends, almost only voice messages.'

Similarly to the metapragmatic rankings of mediation, discussed in the last section, the interviewees develop differentiated categories of addressees (defined by social relations), each enregistered with different sets of linguistic features as well as structures of mediation. Based on *WhatsApp*'s technical affordances Lea and Anne engender a proper architecture of four media-ideological regis-ters of writing:

1. *People one does not know very well* get *long texts* with *whole sentences.*

2. New, rather unfamiliar people get a ded-icated, more accurate written message without abbreviations, but including *smileys* out of courtesy.

3. Best friends get abbreviations (*HRY – how are you*) and rather short texts, but writing is not the primary mode of communi-

cation anymore. Best friends are more likely to get *voice messages* and *photos*.

4. *Very best friends* and *really really good friends* get *phone* calls, *voice messages*, and photos via another medium (*snaps* [in *Snapchat*]).

A striking aspect of this four-level-catego-rization is not only that the enregisterment of addressees and linguistic/medial structures is thoroughly ideological, the construction of the social groupings is also based on ideological rationalizations. For example, the defining characteristics of a *very best friend* might differ between peer groups and age cohorts. Furt-hermore, the linguistic as well as the media choices can be grasped as communicative resources for actively constructing *a very best friend*, i.e. a person who receives abbreviations, voice messages and photos via *WhatsApp*. In this sense, the four dimensions of media-ideo-logical registers of writing are bi-directionally interconnected.

6. Conclusion

In this paper I explored some issues at the intersection of media and language ideologies and their impact on digital writing practices of German adolescents. I have argued that the concept of media ideologies is a necessary theoretical tool to investigate sociolinguistic differentiation in the digital age of mass lite-racy. The model of media-ideological registers of writing can offer an analytical orientation to explore such differentiation regarding the four dimensions *ideology*, *activity*, *mediation*, and *writing style*. As the exemplary analysis of *WhatsApp* chat logs and group interview data

revealed, register models are highly flexible in interaction and characterized by the bi-directional interconnections of their constituting dimensions. A particularly important insight concerns the interrelation between writings styles, i.e. linguistic choices, and mediation. Unlike implicitly media-deterministic approaches this paper pointed to the indirect interconnection between both dimensions – always moderated by semiotic ideologies and oriented towards social activities. Media do not work as mere technical devices, they are semiotic resources embedded in social practices. Drawing on the investigated group interview data, the linchpin of digital registers of writing seems to be the recipient design. Patterns of social relations become metapragmatically relevant and ideologically motivate choices of mediation and writing styles. Furthermore, the ideological dependency manifests itself in the fact that register models can vary greatly between communities of practice. While abbreviations and short digital messages socially indicate a trusted and friendly relationship within an adolescent's peer group, it is very likely that completely opposite linguistic features are enregistered with 'friendship' and 'familiarity' within a group of more conservative adults for example. Therefore, 'appropriateness' not only depends on situational context, but it even more so depends on social communities and their metapragmatic reflexivity.

References

Agha, Asif. 2007. *Language and Social Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.

Agha, Asif. 2011. Meet mediatization. *Language & Communication* 31.3: 163–170.

Androutsopoulos, Jannis. 2014a. Mediatization and sociolinguistic change. Key concepts, research traditions, open issues. In Jannis Androutsopoulos (ed.), *Mediatization and Sociolinguistic Change*, pp. 3–48. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter.

Androutsopoulos, Jannis (ed.). 2014b. *Mediatization and Sociolinguistic Change*. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter.

Androutsopoulos, Jannis. 2016. Media, mediation and mediatization. In Nicolas Coupland (ed.), *Sociolinguistics. Theoretical Debates*, pp. 282–302. Cambridge: Cambridge University.

Blommaert, Jan (ed.). 1999. *Language Ideology Debates*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Blommaert, Jan. 2008. *Grassroots Literacy. Writing, Identity, and Voice in Central Africa*. London et al.: Routledge.

Brommer, Sarah. 2007. ‚Ein unglaubliches Schriftbild, von Rechtschreibung und Interpunktion ganz zu schweigen'. Die Schreibkompetenz der Jugendlichen im öffentlichen Diskurs. *Zeitschrift für germanistische Linguistik* 35.3: 315–345.

Brandt, Deborah. 2015. *The Rise of Writing. Redefining Mass Literacy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.

Busch, Florian. forthcoming. *Schreibrepertoires von Jugendlichen. Kontexte, Formen, metasprachliche Reflexionen*. Universität Hamburg: PhD Dissertation.

Couldry, Nick. 2008. Mediatization or mediation? Alternative understandings of the emergent space of digital storytelling. *New Media Society* 10: 373–391.

Deumert, Ana. 2014. *Sociolinguistics and Mobile Communication*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University.

Garfinkel, Harold. 1967. *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Gershon, Ilana. 2010a. Media Ideologies. An introduction. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 20.2: 283–293.

Gershon, Ilana. 2010b. Breaking up is hard to do. Media switching and media ideologies. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 20.2: 389–405.

Gershon, Ilana. 2010c. *The Breakup 2.0. Disconnecting over New Media*. Ithaca: Cornell University.

Hanks, William F. 1996. *Language and Communicative Practices*. Boulder, Colorado; Oxford: Westview.

Irvine, Judith T. & Susan Gal. 2000. Language ideology and linguistic differentiation. In Paul V. Kroskrity (ed.), *Regimes of Language. Ideologies, Polities, and Identities*, pp. 35–84. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.

Jones, Rodney H. & Christoph A. Hafner. 2012. *Understanding Digital Literacies. A Practical Introduction*. New York: Routledge.

Keane, Webb. 2003. Semiotics and the social analysis of material things. *Language & Communication* 23.2/3: 409–425.

Keane, Webb. 2018. On semiotic ideology. *Signs and Society* 6.1: 64-87.

Krämer, Sybille. 1998. Das Medium als Spur und als Apparat. In Sybille Krämer (ed.), *Medien – Computer – Realität. Wirklichkeitsvorstellungen und neue Medien*, pp. 73–94. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.

Kristiansen, Tore. 2014. Does mediated language influence immediate language? In Jannis Androutsopoulos (ed.), *Mediatization and Sociolinguistic Change*, pp. 99–126. Berlin/New York: de Gruyter.

Kroskrity, Paul V. (ed.). 2000. *Regimes of Language. Ideologies, Polities, and Identities*. Santa Fe: School of American Research.

mpfs (eds.). 2017. *JIM-Studie 2017. Jugend Information, (Multi-)Media. Basisuntersuchung zum Medienumgang 12- bis 19-Jähriger*. Stuttgart: Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest. [https://www.mpfs.de/fileadmin/files/Studien/JIM/2017/JIM_2017.pdf] (accessed in February 2018).

Schieffelin, Bambi B., Kathryn A. Woolard & Paul V. Kroskrity (eds.). 1998. *Language Ideologies. Practice and Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schneider, Jan G. 2017. Medien als Verfahren der Zeichenprozessierung. Grundsätzliche Überlegungen zum Medienbegriff

und ihrer Relevanz für die Gesprächs-forschung. *Online-Zeitschrift zur verbalen Interaktion* 18: 34–55. [http://www.gespraechsforschung-online.de/2017.html] (accessed in February 2018).

Sebba, Mark. 2003. Spelling rebellion. In Jannis Androutsopoulos & Alexandra Georga-kopoulou (eds.), *Discourse Constructions of Youth Identities*, pp. 151–172. Amster-dam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Sebba, Mark. 2012. Orthography as literacy. How Manx was 'reduced to writing'. In: Allexandra Jaffe, Jannis Androutspou-los, Mark Sebba & Sally Johnson (eds.), *Orthography as Social Action. Scripts, Spelling, Identity and Power*, pp. 161–175. Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Silverstein, Michael. 1979. Language structure and linguistic ideologies. In Paul Clyne, William F. Hanks & Carol Hofbauer (eds.), *The Elements*, pp. 193–248. Chi-cago: Chicago Linguistic Society.

Squires, Lauren. 2010. Enregistering internet language. *Language in Society* 39.4: 457–492.

Thurlow, Crispin. 2006. From statistical panic to moral panic. The metadiscursive con-struction and popular exaggeration of new media language in the print media. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communica-tion* 11.3: 667–701.

Thurlow, Crispin. 2007. Fabricating youth. New-media discourse and the technolo-gization of young people. In Sally John-son & Astrid Ensslin (eds.), *Language in the Media. Representations, Identities, Ideologies*, pp. 213–233. London, New York: Continuum.