

# Think Global, Write Local – Patterns of Writing Dialect on SNS

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## Abstract

Social Network Sites (SNS) claim that they are on a mission to connect the world. They facilitate communication among people wherever they are located. Consequently, many users of SNS communicate with a broad and heterogenic group of friends on different occasions and thereby express various aspects of their identities (such as gender, age, ethnic background etc.). One aspect may also be a local identity.

Users of SNS can show their local identity linguistically by using a regional variety. Sometimes, the use of single regionally marked words or sporadic regiolectal spellings are sufficient to identify the regional background of the writer (Androutsopoulos and Ziegler, 2003); in other cases entire text messages and conversations appear in dialectal spellings meaning that the dialect appears as the main variety of the conversation (Siebenhaar, 2008). The extent of dialect use in computer-mediated communication (CMC) may depend on various factors such as the individual dialect skills, the vividness and prestige of the respective dialect in the community, emotional involvement in the given topic, age, gender, the intended recipient, and other factors probably interacting with each other (Peersman et al., 2016).

The use of regional dialects in written CMC is one reason (amongst others) why language in CMC often differs from the respective standard languages. Since no orthographic rules are usually available for writing in dialect, it is up to the users to represent their dialect in a proper but readable and comprehensible way. Users have to construct their regiolectal language variety on the basis of the orthography of the respective standard language, which usually allows also for variation. One reason for this may be various adequate possibilities to represent a dialect word within a given writing system (e.g. German, cf. Dürscheid and Stark (2013)). Another reason may be the (sometimes very slight) phonetic differences between regionally close dialects that writers want (or do not want) to turn up in the dialect respelling (Sebba, 2007). Therefore, dialect respellings are not always coherent (neither with respect to a group of dialect speakers nor with respect to individual writers) but usually appear in various forms (Müller, 2011). However, unifications of respellings in CMC are described for pidgin languages (Heyd, 2016) and also occur in dialectal CMC (Topinke, 2008).

Over the last decade, researchers started to compile corpora containing different genres of CMC. Such CMC corpora enable a systematic analysis of the way dialect features are reflected in written communication. In my talk, I will focus on patterns of the regional dialect(s) in the DiDi Corpus, a collection of Facebook messages from around 100 South Tyrolean writers (<http://www.eurac.edu/didi>). I will provide examples of regional features, analyse the distribution of such features, and discuss challenges of identifying local writings on SNS.

**Keywords:** orthography, dialect writing, facebook messages

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