

**“Ohne mehr für Heute grüße ich alle Leute” –
Letter Closings in 19th-century German Personal Correspondence**

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Closing sequences in written correspondence comprise the speech act set ‘farewell’, preceded by the ‘pre-farewell’, with which the writer initiates the closing by breaking the previous flow of information (House et al. 2023). German letters are notable for their longer, more elaborate and more differentiated closings compared to their English counterparts (House et al. 2023: 149). Beyond contrastive perspectives, previous studies suggest a shift in German closing formulae during the 19th century from assurances of servitude to expressions of respect and affection (Schröter 2016).

This study draws on a corpus of over 1,000 letters written by emigrants to the United States (e.g., Elspaß 2005), soldiers (Neumann 2019), and patients in psychiatric hospitals (CoPaDocs, Schiegg 2022), all addressed to family and friends of the mostly non-proficient writers.

In addition to tracing diachronic developments, I analyse, how gender, regional background, writing experience and social distance between writer and addressee shaped these closing formulae. The study further explores whether and how the content of the letter, such as high-imposition requests, can influence the closing formulae.

By examining the language of ordinary people, the study sheds light on the pragmatics of leave-taking, revealing how especially non-proficient writers navigated and contributed to shifting conventions of letter closings during the 19th century, adapting traditional forms to express evolving personal relationships and social ties.

References

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