Association for Written Language and Literacy
Ассоциация письменного языка и письменности
Ενωση για τη γραπτη γλωσσα και τη βασικη εκπαιδευση
书面语言和识字协会
Association for Written Language and Literacy

AWLL Newsletter: Number 5: 15 November 2018

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On distribution of fifth AWLL newsletter [Terry Joyce (newsletter editor)]

When the AWLL newsletters were launched four years ago to the day (20141115), it was with an aspiration to distribute them twice a year. However, as various circumstances (mostly work commitments and content-timing issues) have often conspired, regrettably, to make their appearances rather less frequent, I am particularly pleased to be able to distribute this 5th newsletter according to that schedule, at six months after the 4th of May 2018!

One of the main items of the 4th newsletter was the first call for papers for AWLL's 12th International Workshop, *Diversity of writing systems: embracing multiple perspectives*, to be held at the Faculty of Classics at the University of Cambridge on 26-28 March 2019. Thus, I am also pleased to be able to report on the most positive response to the CfPs, with a considerable number of abstract submissions received. Moreover, as the programme committee is close to finalizing the selection process, applicants may continue to expect to be notified by the end of this month. Also, with fortuitous timing, as the announcement below from its guest editors, Merijn Beeksma and Martin Neef, informs, the latest special issue of *Written Language & Literacy* (21:1) has just been published, which is the collection of papers from the AWLL10 workshop (Nijmegen, 2016).

Kindly prepared by attending AWLL members, this newsletter includes two brief reports for academic meetings of related interest (*/gʁafematik/ 2018 conference* by Keisuke Honda & Martin Evertz, and *Writing conventions and pragmatic perspectives workshop* by Dimitrios Meletis, respectively). Following a short note about a recent update of the *Online Research Bibliography of Written Language and Literacy* available at the AWLL website, this newsletter also continues its

regular features of *Introducing writing systems*, with the third installment on the Japanese writing system, and of *Thought-provoking quotations and observations.*

I hope that you will find this 5th newsletter of interest.   Any comments, ideas, or items for future newsletters are always most welcome; just email them to terry@tama.ac.jp.   I sincerely hope that it will indeed be possible to continue sharing future newsletters every six months! Past newsletters are available at http://faculty-sgs.tama.ac.jp/terry/awll/newsletters.html

AWLL10 special issue of *Written Language & Literacy* 21:1 (2018)
[Merijn Beeksma & Martin Neef (special issue editors)]

We are most pleased to announce the publication of the latest *Written Language & Literacy* special issue (21:1), which became available just last week.   This special issue, *Understanding writing systems*, consists of five papers from AWLL's 10th workshop held at Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands in May 2016.   As we briefly note within our introduction paper, it was especially fitting that AWLL's landmark 10th workshop took place in Nijmegen, where Anneke Neijt (AWLL's president 2004-2016) convened the first workshop back in 1997.

The papers of this special issue collection epitomize the workshop's theme in their contributions to various theoretical aspects of understanding writing systems.

Beeksma, Merijn, & Neef, Martin. (2018). Introduction: Understanding writing systems.   *Written Language & Literacy*, 21(1), 1–2. doi:10.1075/wll.00007.int

Sampson, Geoffrey. (2018). From phonemic spelling to distinctive. *Written Language & Literacy*, 21(1), 3–25. doi:10.1075/wll.00008.sam

Buckley, Eugene. (2018). Core syllables vs. moraic writing. *Written Language & Literacy*, 21(1), 26–51. doi:10.1075/wll.00009.buc

Meletis, Dimitrios. (2018). What is natural in writing? Prolegomena to a Natural Grapholinguistics. *Written Language & Literacy*, 21(1), 52–88. doi:10.1075/wll.00010.mel

Symanczyk Joppe, Vilma. (2018). Optimal spaces and hyphens: A constraint-based analysis of compound   word   formation.   *Written   Language   &   Literacy*,   21(1),   89–110. doi:10.1075/wll.00011.sym

Verheijen, Lieke. (2018). Orthographic principles in computer-mediated communication: The SUPER-functions of textisms and their interaction with age and medium. *Written Language & Literacy*, 21(1), 111–145. doi:10.1075/wll.00012.ver

[Editor note: Information and links to *Written Language & Literacy* special issues related to past AWLLL workshops can be found at http://faculty-sgs.tama.ac.jp/terry/awll/publications.html]

Brief report of */gʁafematik/ 2018 conference* [Keisuke Honda & Martin Evertz]

The first /gʁafematik/ conference took place on the Brest Campus of IMT Atlantique, France, over June 14-15, 2018.   With its theme of *Graphemics in the 21st century – From graphemes to knowledge*, the conference was convened to "bring together disciplines concerned with writing

systems and their representation in written communication" (as quoted from the conference's official website).   The conference was attended by approximately 30 scholars, specialists and students from Africa, Asia, Europe, Near East, North America and Oceania.

The event featured two keynote lectures, delivered by Professor Florian Coulmas (University of Duisburg-Essen) on the first day and by Professor Christa Dürscheid (University of Zurich) on the second day.   The conference also consisted of 20 oral presentations in total.   The presentations addressed aspects of graphemics and writing systems from the perspectives of a wide range of disciplines, including communication studies, computer science, information technology, linguistics, orthography development, palaeography, semiotics and typography.   The presenters included three AWLL members.   Video recordings of the keynote lectures and the presentations have been uploaded as a YouTube playlist, entitled /gʁafematik/ 2018 Conference (URL provided below).   Moreover, the presenters have been invited to submit full manuscript versions of their presentations to be subsequently published in the conference proceedings.

The participants were able to enjoy the interesting talks and lively discussion within the modern lecture hall of the Pôle numérique Brest Iroise.   They were also able to exchange ideas and information in a more casual atmosphere during the coffee and lunch breaks, as well as over a delicious conference dinner at Offside Bay in the city centre.   Thanks to the hard work of the organisers, /gʁafematik/ provided a valuable opportunity for researchers with a shared interest in writing systems to interact with each other in an international and multidisciplinary setting.

At the end of the two-day conference, the organisers announced that they are planning to convene a second /gʁafematik/ conference in the early summer of 2020.

The conference programme is available at:

http://conferences.telecom-bretagne.eu/grafematik/

The YouTube playlist of lectures and presentations can be accessed at:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLJABkUSif0d8APXrOaZ2N96B5p2_0pAq9

Brief report of *Writing conventions and pragmatic perspectives workshop*
[Dimitrios Meletis]

On the September 13th and 14th, the Society for Indo-European Studies held its Writing conventions and pragmatic perspectives workshop at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (Belgium). The workshop was organized by Emmanuel Dupraz, Theresa Roth, and Valentina Belfiore.   As its title conveys, rather than purely linguistic aspects, the workshop's focus was on the pragmatic dimensions of writing, and, specifically, on the pragmatics surrounding the materiality of writing, where features, such as indentations, paragraphs, and writing direction, can "provide the reader with an autonomous [indication] on the pragmatic scope of the text" (as the call for papers expressed it).   In total, there were 17 oral presentations (given by Valetina Belfiore and Emmanuel Dupraz, Enrico Benelli, Alderik H. Blom, Carmen Brandt, Anja Busse, Carlo Consani, Götz Keydana, Rosemarie Lühr, Katherine McDonald, Annick Payne, Luca Rigobianco, Ondřej Šefčík, Zsolt Simon, Anja Voeste, Christine Wallis, Dagmar Wodtko, and Nicholas Zair) and two

poster presentations (given by Malgorzata Zadka and Dimitrios Meletis). The workshop consisted of three sections that, respectively, centered on antiquity (with presentations focusing on Italic, Greek, and Anatolian), the Middle Ages, and the modern age. The languages of the workshop were Italian, German, and English.

Beyond demonstrating that writing is a central object of study within most philological disciplines, the workshop's contributions also highlighted the value of exploring other approaches to the study of writing, to complement more 'traditional' linguistic treatments. Rather than merely considering the linguistic fit of a writing system (i.e., in terms of relationships between visual units, phonology, and morphology, respectively), the pragmatics of writing in context draws attention to the materiality of writing (i.e., its visual forms), in ways that can elucidate the mutual interactions between the linguistics, the pragmatic and the material aspects of writing. Moreover, the contributions to the workshop also provided clear evidence for the striking commonalities that diverse historical writing systems have displayed, such as in their techniques to solve the issue of word separation. Such observations underscore both the special relevance of the pragmatic and material aspects of writing and that such features can be studied as systematically as the purely linguistic properties that are the usual focus of writing systems research. More workshops with specialized themes, such as the Writing conventions and pragmatic perspectives workshop, are needed in order to allow scholars from various disciplines to share their unique perspectives on writing. Putting these perspective together can potentially shed more light on the general characteristics of writing and can only strengthen the theoretical core of writing systems research.

Updated version of ORBWLL available [Terry Joyce]

While admittedly much overdue, I am pleased to announce that an updated version of the *Online Research Bibliography of Written Language & Literacy* (ORBWLL) database was recently made available (http://faculty-sgs.tama.ac.jp/terry/awll/orbwll/index.html).

Based on 2,500 source bibliographies, the latest version consists of 6,599 references and 44,375 citations. At this point, the latest version is only available as a PDF file (online access, which will be updated as soon as possible (with continued appreciation to Bor Hodošček for technical support) continues to provide access to the prior version). Recommendations for source bibliographies to include are always most welcome, as is all feedback on any inaccuracies discovered, so that they may be corrected.

Introducing writing systems: Japanese [3] [Terry Joyce & Keisuke Honda]

In tendering some general remarks about the visual complexity of kanji, our previous installment sought to emphasize that, even though stroke counts, referring to the number of dots and lines in a kanji, vary markedly (range, 1-29; average, 10.5 for the official 2,136 jōyō kanji), most kanji conform to just three basic configurations (left-right, top-bottom and enclosure-enclosed). As those configurations are closely connected to the principles of kanji

formation, starting with a simple outline here, we will describe those principles over the next few installments (including some remarks about terminology issues, associated with *pictographic* and *ideographic*, for example, used here only in their narrower technical senses).

A traditional classification of principles is known as 六書 /liùshū/ (Japanese /ʀɪᴋᴜsʜo/) 'Six Scripts', which the Chinese scholar 許慎 /Xǔ Shèn/ (Jp /ᴋʏosʜɪɴ/) introduced in his 説文解字 /Shuōwén jiězì/ (Jp /sᴇᴛsᴜᴍoɴ ᴋᴀɪᴊɪ/) dictionary, compiled in the early second-century. However, while it warrants mention for its historical import, we would stress immediately how it is also highly misleading, because two of its six principles are in reality principles of usage, not of formation. In addition to distinguishing the two usage principles, it is also beneficial to differentiate between the two principles for forming simple kanji, which are relatively few in number, and the two more productive principles underlying structurally complex kanji.

The first principle is 象形 /sʜōᴋᴇɪ/ 'pictographic'; stylized, simple pictures of the physical objects they represent (e.g., 木 /ki/ 'tree'). The second principle is 指事 /sʜɪᴊɪ/ 'ideographic'; schematic denotations of simple concepts (e.g., 一 /ɪcʜɪ/ 'one'). Because these principles are highly restricted in scope, structurally simple kanji only account for a relatively small proportion of jōyō kanji.

The two principles for structurally complex kanji essentially involve combining simple kanji, sometimes recursively, and usually involving form modification. The third principle is 会意 /ᴋᴀɪɪ/ 'semantic compound'; where the meaning is a function of the component meanings (e.g., 林 /hayashi/ 'woods; grove'. The fourth principle is 形声 /ᴋᴇɪsᴇɪ/ 'phonetic compound'; combinations of a 部首 /ʙᴜsʜᴜ/ 'radical; semantic determiner' and an 音符 /oɴᴘᴜ/ 'phonetic determiner' (e.g., 時 /ᴊɪ/ 'hour; time' consisting of the semantic determiner 日 ('sun; day') + the phonetic determiner 寺 /ᴊɪ/ 'temple').

As already noted, the traditional classification also includes two principles of usage rather than formation, but they are still of considerable importance for understanding kanji. The first usage principle is 仮借 /ᴋᴀsʜᴀ/ 'phonetic borrowing'; essentially, the rebus principle where a kanji came to represent a new meaning due to some degree of phonological overlap. The second usage principle is 転注 /ᴛᴇɴcʜū/ 'derivation'; basically, the notion of semantic shift where a kanji came to represent some new meaning as an extension of its original meaning.

Next time, we will focus on the first two principles of structurally simple kanji with a few more examples!

Thought-provoking quotations and observations [5]

While readily conceding that the three thought-provoking quotations brought together for this newsletter vary in terms of length, focus and tone (as do their sources), still, they are at least connected in terms of their shared motivations to reflect and disseminate on the importance and nature of writing.

The first quotation comes from the flyer abstract for a presentation given very recently by Coulmas, entitled *Revisiting 'The tyranny of writing'* (see also Coulmas, 2018), which outlines

Ferdinand de Saussure's critique of writing and its implications for modern linguistics.*

> As in other scientific disciplines, in linguistics, too, writing is a major tool. However, what distinguishes the role of writing in linguistics from other fields of scholarship is that it relates to the object of investigation in complex ways concerning both the scientific analysis of language and the social conditions of its use. In literate society it is imperative to understand what the "tyranny of writing" meant for the study of language when Saussure first used this term a century ago, and what it means today (Coulmas, 2018 November).

The second quotation comes from Danesi's (2017) book *The semiotics of emoji: The rise of visual language in the age of the internet.*

> Used initially in Japanese electronic messages and Web pages, but now used by anyone, irrespective of language or cultural background, the emoji code harbors within it many implications for the future of writing, literacy, and even human consciousness. ... the emoji code may well be an indication of how writing and literacy are evolving; on the other hand, emoji may just be a passing fad. Either way, the study of the emoji phenomenon is, clearly, a rather significant one (Danesi, 2017: vii).

If the phenomenon of emoji could indeed foster deeper understandings of how writing functions, that would certainly be particularly significant. However, if the phenomenon were to merely perpetuate misunderstandings, such ones associated with the highly restricted nature of pictography, that could potentially further obfuscate matters.

The third extract comes from early in Daniels' (2018) book *An exploration of writing.*

> In autumn 2013, I went to a (rare!) lecture on writing systems theory at a well-known linguistics department in the New York City area. After an initial survey of the neglect of writing within general linguistics, the speaker presented some new ideas, touching on a wide variety of the world's writing systems. But during the question period, a linguist in the audience—a syntactician—asked in effect, "But what's the point of all this? Isn't it just a bunch of disparate facts that don't cohere into something that gives us insight into the nature of language or writing?" The speaker didn't really have an answer (after all, facts about writing systems are interesting for their own sake, or you wouldn't have picked up this book), but I *do* have an answer to that question, and I'm taking the opportunity in this book to set out some of those very disparate facts that do in fact contribute to a coherent view of the nature of writing (Daniels, 2018: 4-5, italics in the original).

In the light of positive evidence for a growing interest in writing systems research, we might perhaps hope that the syntactician's question is now rather obsolete. However, given that we might also be pondering about how we would respond if posed the question, clearly, there is considerable merit in reading and deliberating over the answer and facts that Daniels has tendered for consideration.

*Of course, these implications, as resonated in Bloomfield's (1933: 21) famous quote "Writing is not

language, but merely a way of recording language by means of visual marks", led to the "neglect of writing" in the background of the third extract (see under 'Details' in Daniels (2018: 2)).

Bloomfield, Leonard. (1933). *Language.* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Coulmas, Florian. (2018). Revisiting the 'tyranny of writing'. In Constanze Weth & Kasper Juffermans (Eds.), *The tyranny of writing: Ideologies of the written word* (Bloomsbury advances in sociolinguistics) (pp. 19-30). London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Coulmas, Florian. (2018, November). Revisiting 'The tyranny of writing'. Presentation given at *Symposium "What does writing mean for language?",* 10th November 2018, Sophia University, Tokyo, Japan.

Danesi, Marcel. (2017). *The semiotics of emoji: The rise of visual language in the age of the internet* (Bloomsbury advances in semiotics). London & New York: Bloomsbury.

Daniels, Peter T. (2018). *An exploration of writing.* London: Equinox Publishing.

Miscellaneous matters

Calls for various related conferences, events, special issues

Terrence Kaufman Collections
Archive of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America (AILLA)
https://www.ailla.utexas.org/

Workshop on Current Statistical Modeling Strategies
University of Barcelona: 18-19th January 2019
www.statsworkshopbcn.com

Exploring the Social and Cultural Contexts of Historic Writing Systems
University of Cambridge: 14-16th March 2019
https://crewsproject.wordpress.com/social-and-cultural-contexts-of-writing/