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 14: 15 May 2023

[Click on topic to navigate to relevant section; click on text of any section banner to return to content listing]

On distribution of the 14th AWLL newsletter [Terry Joyce (newsletter editor)]

After encountering a series of dead ends in seeking a European location for AWLL14 for this fall, I am delighted to announce that, thanks to an unexpected source of support coming to the rescue only very recently, AWLL14 will convene on Temple University's Rome campus over the three days of 10-12 November 2023. Hence, the main news item for this 14th newsletter (NL14) is the first call of papers for AWLL14 (also available as a separate PDF at the AWLL website).

NL14 also features a report from Robert Crellin and Jonathan Prag about the interesting workshop they recently organized on *Abbreviations in Ancient and Medieval European writing systems* as part of the Crossreads Project (https://crossreads.web.ox.ac.uk/). There are also further installments for both of the newsletter's *Introducing writing systems* serializations; the 12th piece for the *Japanese* series, by Keisuke Honda and I, turns to the Japanese writing system's fourth component script of rōmaji and the third piece for the *Brahmic* series by Anurag Rimzhim makes some observations about the graphematic representation of word-final consonants (*Introducing writing systems* serializations for other writing systems would be most welcome for future newsletters). With limited time because of AWLL14 preparations, there is just one item under the *Thought-provoking quotations and observations* section but, hopefully, the linguistic landscape example has some appeal. NL14 concludes with its regular *Miscellaneous matters* section with details for a few recent publications by AWLL community members.

Any comments, ideas, or items for future newsletters are always most welcome; just email them to terry@tama.ac.jp.

Past newsletters are available at http://faculty-sgs.tama.ac.jp/terry/awll/newsletters.html

AWLL14: First call for papers [AWLL14 organizers]

Writing/reading interface

14th International Workshop on Writing Systems and Literacy

10-12 November, 2023

Temple University Rome, Rome, Italy

First call for papers

Extending the Association of Written Language and Literacy's (AWLL) tradition of international conferences devoted to writing systems, AWLL14 will convene to facilitate researchers from various backgrounds in exploring together their shared interests in understanding how the complex interface between writing and reading plays out across the diversity of writing systems. In that spirit, this call invites abstract submissions that address relevant research questions, including (but not limited to) the following:

- What are the roles of phonological awareness and morphological awareness in both learning to write (encode) and read (decode) in different writing systems?
- To what extent can cross-linguistic studies help differentiate between universal and language-specific aspects of visual word recognition and processing?
- What historical conventions, sociolinguistic practices or technological aspects shape the writing/reading interface at different levels of written language?
- How can awareness of the interface between writing and reading benefit the teaching of both reading and writing?
- How do the developmental processes of written text production and comprehension influence each other?
- How will novel AI technologies influence the writing/reading interface?

The 3-day program will feature three keynote speakers, a series of oral and poster sessions, AWLL's business meeting and conclude with a panel discussion.

Keynote speakers:

Vito Pirrelli, CNR Pisa, Italy

Kathy Rastle, Royal Holloway University of London, UK

David Share, University of Haifa, Israel

Organizers: Terry Joyce (Tama University, Japan; Temple University Japan), Lynne Cahill (University of Sussex, UK), Dorit Ravid (University of Tel Aviv, Israel)

Program committee: Terry Joyce, Lynne Cahill, Dorit Ravid

Important dates:

First call for papers: Mid-May 2023

Second call for papers: 10 June 2023

Submission deadline: 10 July 2023

Notification of acceptance: 10 August 2023

Submission guidelines:

Applicants for both oral and poster presentations should submit **anonymized** abstracts of **no more than 300 words** (not including up to 3 references) and an indication of presentation preference as a Word file. Oral presentation will be up to 30 minutes (inclusive of time for questions and discussion).

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Workshop report: Abbreviations in Ancient and Medieval European writing systems [Robert Crellin & Jonathan Prag]

Abbreviations are a significant part of many of the world's writing systems. Yet despite their ubiquity especially in Latin inscriptions, in Ancient Greek and Latin they are understudied in their own right: research has instead tended to focus on diagnostic applications, such as dating particular inscriptions.

In view of this lack of research Jonathan Prag (PI: Crossreads Project, https://crossreads.web.ox.ac.uk/) and Robert Crellin organised a workshop (18 – 19 April, Merton College, Oxford) bringing together scholars from adjacent fields to establish the current state of the art in terms of understanding in each field, and (perhaps) outline new ways of approaching the issue in the future.

Sessions were held on graphematics, epigraphy, medieval manuscripts, numismatics and NLP in papyrology and epigraphy. By way of introduction, Jonathan Prag and Robert Crellin, assisted by Simona Stoyanova, (Oxford) gave an overview of the phenomenon of abbreviation in Greek and Roman Sicily. Yannis Haralambous (IMT Atlantique) then outlined the important graphematic issues relating to abbreviations. Talks on epigraphy were given by Marietta Horster (Mainz, Greek and Latin), John Bodel (Brown, Latin), Aitor Blanco Pérez (Navarra, abbreviations in Greek inscriptions from the Greek East) while Jerome Mairat (Oxford) and Suzanne Frey-Kupper (Warwick) spoke on abbreviations on coins in both the Greek and Roman worlds.

Abbreviatory practices in medieval manuscripts were addressed in four talks: Teresa Webber (Cambridge) spoke on the situation in medieval Latin manuscripts; Alpo Honkapohja (Oslo) on some issues in the typology of abbreviations in medieval sources; Colleen Curran (TCD) on early medieval insular abbreviations, and Sebastian Dows-Miller on abbreviations in medieval French manuscripts.

Finally, Isabelle Marthot-Santaniello (Basel), Nina Sietis (Cassino and Southern Latium) and Audric Wannaz (Basel) spoke on applying Natural Language Processing techniques to the analysis

of abbreviations in papyri, while Thea Sommerschield (Venice) discussed the treatment of abbreviations in the creation of machine-learning models for the geographical attribution of Latin inscriptions (and in future for text restoration tasks).

Discussion was wide-ranging, yet some common themes and questions were readily discerned:

- Motivations: We observed that the use of abbreviation is very frequently attributed to the desire to save space and time on the part of the writer. However, in many cases (e.g. monumental inscriptions) this seemed an unlikely explanation, given the great expense involved in creating the monument in the first place. In these cases, at least, other factors, such as greater accessibility to readers was suggested; but mediaeval manuscript studies also highlighted the variability of practice between individual scribes.

- Materials: The relationship between the physical nature of the objects and tools used in writing and abbreviation came up in a range of contexts, as did the spatial context on the page/surface (e.g. line-ends).

- Readership: Do abbreviations make texts harder or easier to read? Abbreviation might be assumed to make reading harder; however, for illiterate audiences, abbreviation might in fact make reading (part of) what is written easier, insofar as the abbreviation is treated can be treated as an arbitrary geometical shape with a readily identified meaning in context.

- Terminology: The use of terms was observed to differ between fields. For example, the term 'ligature' is used in different ways in epigraphy and papyrology.

- Typology: What counts as an abbreviation differs across fields. In particular, the place of monograms appeared to be intermediate between abbreviation and other forms of writing.

- Analytical methods: The increasing potential for the application of quantitative approaches to analysing abbreviations was discussed and exemplified several times, as were the associated challenges of systematic encoding.

A publication is planned summarising the status quo in the fields covered, and outlining (the many) avenues for future work, not least in bringing more of the world's writing systems into consideration. The organisers would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who took part for a profoundly interesting workshop.

[Editor comment: Readers are encouraged to check out Robert's related short essay *Typology of Latin abbreviations etc.*; an interesting contribution to newsletter 12]

Introducing writing systems: Japanese [12] [Terry Joyce & Keisuke Honda]

Following on from several installments on morphographic kanji and some on syllabographic hiragana and katakana (see newsletters 4~8 and 9~11, respectively), we now turn our attention to the fourth component script of the contemporary Japanese writing system; namely, the segmental Latin script. Of the many Japanese designations available for this script, which vary in formality and nuance—from アルファベット /arufabetto/ 'alphabet', ＡＢＣ /ēbīshī/ 'ABC', ラテン文字 /raten moji/ 'Latin letters', 英字 /eiji/ 'English letters', to 欧字 /ōji/ 'European letters'—this feature adopts the conventional term of ローマ字 /rōmaji/ 'Roman letters'. Rōmaji were first introduced to Japan by Christian missionaries in the mid-16th century, but they can only be considered a component script since the mid-20th century when first taught at elementary schools (currently in grade 4). While they remain the most peripheral in nature, rōmaji are an increasingly visible component of the JWS. After outlining their historical adaptation, this installment focuses on their primary use of transcription to use graphematically represent the Japanese language, known as romanization; for example, when 日本語 /nihongo/ 'Japanese language' is transcribed as <nihongo> (transcription examples are offset within angle brackets, <>).

The first systematic attempts at romanization were undertaken by early missionaries to Japan in the mid-16th century based on the Spanish and Portuguese orthographic conventions of that time. In addition to producing transcriptions of existing Japanese texts, the missionaries also translated religious and literary texts into romanized Japanese. In the early 17th century, the shogunate prohibited Christianity and ushered in a period of national isolation during which the only Westerners permitted limited access were Dutch traders. Commerce and cultural exchanges gave impetus to new romanization endeavors according to Dutch orthographic conventions. When Japan reopened in the mid-19th century, communication with the West became a matter of great urgency to propel the country's modernization. In that context, many proposals for standardizing Japanese romanization were advanced, of which three remain in contemporary use; namely, the ヘボン式 /hebon-shiki/ 'Hepburn system', the 日本式 /nihon-shiki/ 'Japan system' and the 訓令式 /kunrei-shiki/ 'Government-ordnance system'. As all three romanization systems include both lower- and upper-case forms, the following descriptions use only lower-case graphs to illustrate the system contrasts.

Created by the American medical missionary James Curtis Hepburn (1815-1911), the hebon-shiki seeks to transcribe Japanese pronunciations with vowel sounds according to Latin orthographic conventions and consonant sounds according to English spelling conventions. A modified version uses the standard graphs <a e i o u> for short vowels, adds either macrons <ā ē ī ō ū> or circumflexes <â ê î ô û> for long vowels, and uses the single letters <b d f g h j k m n p r s t w y z> and certain letter-combinations <ch by gy ky my ny py ry sh> for consonants. Examples of romanization according to the hebon-shiki are shown below, in a table that also highlights the contrasts across the three systems (hebon-shiki, green; nihon-shiki, blue; kunrei-shiki, orange).

Table of romanization examples according to the three contemporary systems

			Hebon-shiki	Nihon-shiki	Kunrei-shiki
週刊誌	/shūkanshi/	'weekly magazine'	<shūkanshi>	<syûkansi>	<syûkansi>
時間表	/jikanhyō/	'timetable'	<jikanhyō>	<zikanhyô>	<zikanhyô>
地続き	/jitsuzuki/	'adjoining land'	<jitsuzuki>	<dituduki>	<zituzuki>

Note: Color highlighting of contrasts: hebon-shiki, green; nihon-shiki, blue; kunrei-shiki, orange

Proposed by the Japanese physicist Aikitsu Tanakadate (1856-1952), the nihon-shiki employs the standard graphs <a e i o u> for short vowels, adds circumflexes <â ê î ô û> for long vowels, and uses the single letters <b d g h k m n p r s t w y z> and letter-combinations<by dy gy hy ky my ny py ry sy ty zy> for consonant sounds.   Although the nihon-shiki is similar to the hebon-shiki in terms of vowel notation, its treatment of consonants differs in blending a diachronically-oriented approach to some aspects with a more abstract analysis of others.   For example, the nihon-shiki represents the alveolar fricative /sh/ as <s> immediately before the high front /i/, and as <sy> before all other vowels /a e o u/; a convention that reflects how [ɕ] is allophonic with [s] in the former case but phonemic in the cases.   Thus, Tanakadate's approach is more abstract than Hepburn's, which uses <sh> for both cases to represent the surface pronunciation.   The diachronic aspect of the nihon-shiki lies in its differentiated uses of <zi> and <di> for /ji/ and <zu> and <du> for /zu/ to distinguish between [ʑ] and [dʑ], which were historically contrastive but have coalesced into a single phoneme in contemporary Japanese.   The distinction is not marked in the hebon-shiki that uses consistently <ji> and <zu> to represent pronunciations.   The contrastive features of the nihon-shiki are highlighted by blue font within the example table.

First promulgated in 1937 and subsequently sanctioned again with slight revisions in 1945, the Japanese Government has propagated the kunrei-shiki as the romanization system for use in official documents and educational contexts.   Kunrei-shiki is nearly identical to nihon-shiki, with the only difference being the dropping of the diachronic convention for consonants.   For instance, in the table of examples, the moras /ji/ and /zu/ are consistently represented as <zi> and <zu>, respectively, regardless of any historical contrasts.   The contrastive features of the kunrei-shiki are highlighted by orange font within the example table.

Today, the hebon-shiki is still widely used for transcribing proper nouns, but the kunrei-shiki is taught in school and is used for official documents.   Input methods for computers and electronic devices can handle all three romanization systems, albeit with partly modified versions of hebon-shiki and nihon-shiki.   Accordingly, after initially inputting rōmaji, which is converted automatically into hiragana, a user selects the target graphematic representation from a scroll-menu (e.g. <nihongo> ➔ <にほんご> ➔ <日本語>).

The next installment will continue to outline the other uses of rōmaji within the JWS beyond romanization.

Introducing writing systems: Brahmic [3] [Anurag Rimzhim]

In the first two installments of this series on Brahmic writing systems, I described the structure of the $(C_n)V$ akshara; the basic written unit.   I also explained that although the ‹Cə› akshara has an inherent /ə/ vowel, the vowel is dropped when (i) a diacritic is used to represent another vowel and (ii) a ‹Cə› akshara appears in a syllable-final position (due to a phenomenon known as schwa deletion).   This implies that, in many instances, ‹Cə› aksharas only represent consonant phonemes, which endows Brahmic writing systems with a predominantly alphabetic character. This interpretation is also consistent with the fact that, because most phonemes (excluding schwa) have distinct written units, aksharas that are a grouping of open-syllabic letters are predominantly transparent.

In this installment, I focus on the graphematic representation of word-final consonants, which from the perspective of defining akshara, constitutes further support for the alphabetic nature of ‹Cə› akshara.   To that aim, I also highlight the disparities between akshara and syllables, which further underscore the alphabetic, rather than aksharic, nature of Brahmic writing systems.

In the very first installment, I described aksharas as representing open syllables with any codas or post-vocalic consonants becoming part of a subsequent akshara.   For example, /hin.di/ is written as ‹हि*न्दी› ‹hi*ndi›, where the first akshara represents /hi/ and the second /ndi/ (note that syllable and akshara boundaries are being marked with a period and with an asterisk, respectively).   As already mentioned, schwa deletion occurs when a ‹Cə› akshara appears in a syllable-final position.   Taking these two observations together, it is evident that any definition of an akshara must acknowledge instances where ‹Cə› only represents a consonant phoneme ‹C›. Moreover, it is important to make a distinction between syllable-final and word-final instances. If a ‹Cə› akshara is appearing in a syllable-final position, it can be followed by another syllable. In contrast, when a ‹Cə› akshara appears in a word-final position (i.e., *cannot combine with a following akshara*), it only represents a single-coda consonant.   For example, in the case of बन्धन /bən.dʰən/ 'fastening; bond', which is written with three aksharas ‹bə›, ‹ndʰə› and ‹n›as ‹bə*ndʰə*n›, where the schwa of the final न /nə/ akshara is deleted to only represent /n/.   If we refer to this distinct written unit as an akshara, then our akshara definition must be appropriately inclusive of such cases.

Given that syllabic groupings of akshara are generally transparent, there is a high degree of correspondence between written and spoken Hindi.   However, it is important to stress that this correspondence is not at the akshara-to-syllable grain-level.   To illustrate that, consider the Hindi word आत्मा /āt.mā/ 'soul'.   It consists of two syllables, /āt/ and /mā/, which are represented by the aksharas /ā/ and /tmā/.   However, it warrants emphasizing that the syllable and akshara boundaries do not match here; such disparities can result in phonotactically illegal onsets, such as /tm/.   Syllable-akshara disparities (Rimzhim et al., 2014) arise because aksharas do not permit codas (apart from nasals), but combinations of up to three codas are permissible in spoken Hindi.

Syllable-akshara disparities reflect diachronic changes in spoken languages that have diverged from their writing systems.   It is beneficial to consider the sound changes that have occurred in

Indo-Aryan languages. When Brahmi was first adapted as a writing system for Middle Indo-Āryan languages (600 BCE – 1100 CE), they consisted of mainly open syllables. At that time, written akshara corresponded closely to the spoken languages at both syllabic and phonemic levels, but, gradually over time, modern or New Indo-Āryan languages (1100 CE onwards) came to have many closed syllables. However, given the inherently conservative nature of writing systems, Brahmi writing systems, where the akshara written units were adapted to match well for Middle Indo-Aryan languages with mostly open syllables, are now being used to represent Modern Indo-Aryan languages with many closed syllables.

In this installment, I have sought to argue that, rather than operating at the level of akshara–to–open-syllable mappings, the graphematic representation of Indo-Aryan languages are generally consistent at the level of grapheme–to–phoneme mapping. Thus, letters are more transparent when transcribing Hindi.

Thought-provoking quotations and observations [14]

Recent linguistic landscape example of typographic effect shared by Terry Joyce

With immediate apologies for my poor skills with a smartphone camera (in failing to capture the whole train advertisement-flyer, which has already been discontinued!), still, with just a small part of the right edge missing, I hope that the flyer image and a closer image of one kanji below are sufficient to convey the gist of the interesting typographic effect. The ad is from the Tokyo Chamber of Commerce and Industry for this year's "Certification Test for Environmental Specialists [Eco Test]" <eco 検定 (環境社会検定試験)> /eco kentei (kankyō shakai kentei shiken/. The main message text is repeated below the image, together with a gloss and translation.
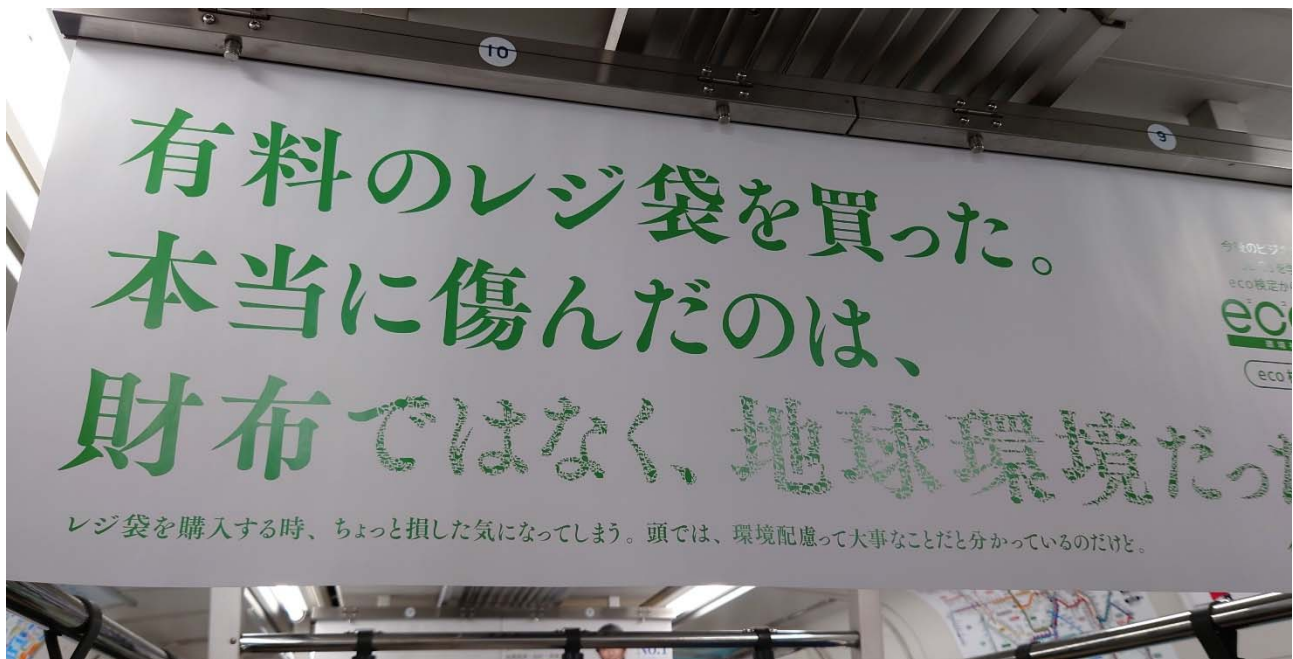
有料のレジ袋を買った。本当に傷んだのは、財布ではなく、地球環境だった。
/yūryō no rejifukuro o katta. hontō ni itanda no wa, saifu dewa naku, chikyū kankyō datta/
I bought a check-out bag. What was really hurt was not my wallet but the planet.

Accentuating the notion of damage to the planet, the final part of the message is much fainter in appearance, as if degraded (damaged).   Below, a close-up of 球 /kyū/ (second constituent of 地球 /chikyū/ 'earth, planet') shows how the fainter effect is being realized by a careful arrangement of animal and flora silhouettes.   An interesting application of the perceptual principle of global versus local processing!

Miscellaneous matters

Sundry information about related conferences, projects, etc.

ACL Workshop on Computation and Written Language (CAWL)
Toronto, Canada; 14-15 July 2023
https://cawl.wellformedness.com/

30th Annual Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Reading
Port Douglas, Queensland, Australia; 20-22 July 2023
https://www.triplesr.org/index.php

16th International Cognitive Linguistics Conference
HHU Düsseldorf, Germany; 7-11 August 2023
https://iclc16.com

Comparative Punctuation Worldwide
Regensburg, Germany, 22-24 September 2023
https://www.uni-regensburg.de/language-literature-culture/compunc/home/index.html

Online book release [project by Design Regression; funded by Google Fonts]
Dyson, Mary. (2023). *Legibility: how and why typography affects ease of reading.*
    https://legible-typography.com/en/

Research Associate Post on Cursive Writing (focus on Phoenician, archaeological perspectives), VIEWS project, University of Cambridge
Applications are sought for a Research Associate to join the 'Visual Interactions in Early Writing Systems' Project (VIEWS), led by the Principal Investigator Dr Philippa Steele.   The successful

applicant will conduct research on a pre-determined case study, namely a social archaeology of cursive writing with a primary focus on Phoenician. The successful candidate will have prior experience of Phoenician writing and a research focus in some area of archaeological research. This also provides an opportunity for comparative study of other ancient or later writing traditions, depending on the candidate's interests.

Closing date: midnight (BST) on Friday 16 June 2023.

For further information please visit the project website:

https://viewsproject.wordpress.com/vacancies/

Interested candidates will also need to view the further particulars and apply online via the vacancy page:

https://www.jobs.cam.ac.uk/job/40541/

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Recent publications by AWLL core community members

As customary, the *Miscellaneous matters* section concludes with a list of recent publications (i.e., since the last newsletter) by AWLL community members, which is followed by a 'mini-flyer' for one recent book.

AWLL mailing list is open to anyone interested in receiving occasional information emails, but the core community is based primarily on participation at AWLL workshops. Participants at the three most recent workshops (AWLL11 in 2017, AWLL12 in 2019 and AWLL13 in 2021) are eligible to have a brief member profile at the community page of the AWLL website and to also have recent publications included under this section of future newsletters (for further information, go to http://faculty-sgs.tama.ac.jp/terry/awll/community.html).

Judson, Anna P. (2022). Learning to spell in Linear B: Orthography and scribal training in Mycenaean Pylos. *The Cambridge Classical Journal*, 68, 133–163.
https://doi.org/10.17613/58e4-y607

Myers, James. (2022). Teaching Chinese character grammar. 臺大華語文學習與科技 [Chinese Language Learning and Technology], 2(2), 1–37.
https://doi.org/10.30050/CLLT.202212_2(2).0001

Roberts, David, Harley, Matthew, & Walter, Stephen L. (2022). The contribution of full tone marking to oral reading fluency and comprehension in Yoruba and Ife. *Written Language & Literacy*, 25(2), 253–282. https://doi.org/10.1075/wll.00069.rob

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