

24.93 “The search for meaning”

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<https://kvf.me/fyd>

Lecture 5/11

True writing

Symbols represent elements of language rather than directly representing things in the world. True writing is

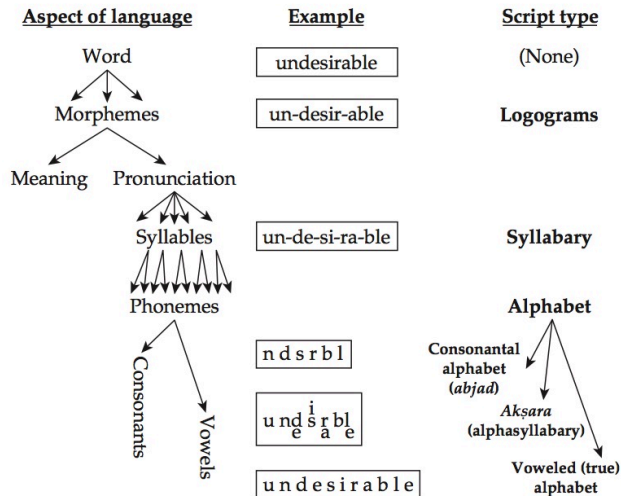
GLOTTOGRAPHIC!

Writing systems often contain some ideographs

5 - *five, fünf, cinque, etc.*

\$ - *dollars*

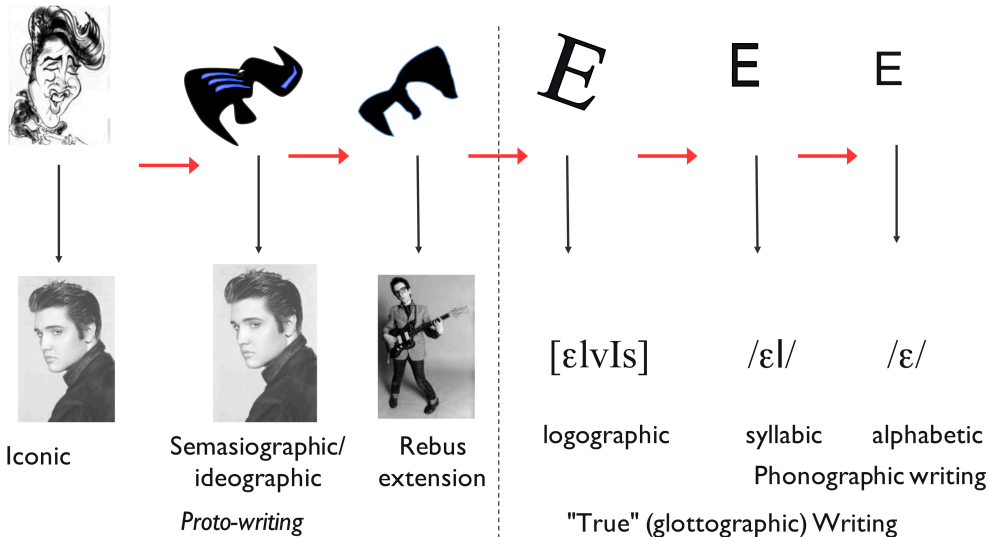
Types of true writing systems



The Rebus Principle

























- A picture conjures up a word.
- It then can stand for words that sound the same.
- Additional signs may give clues.

Nunberg's Elvis example





Cuneiform

Proto-cuneiform c.3000 BC	Early cuneiform c.2400 BC	Late (Neo-Assyrian) cuneiform c.700 BC	Transcription and meaning
			sag "head"
			ka "mouth"
			du/gin/gub "go/walk/stand"
			gud "ox"
			udu "sheep"
			ku "fish"
			dug "pot"
			gi "reed, to render"

Phoenician	Name	Phoenetic value	Early Greek	Classical Greek	Name
𐤀	aleph	ʾ	Α	Α	alpha
𐤁	beth	b	Β	Β	beta
𐤂	gimel	g	Γ	Γ	gamma
𐤃	daleth	d	Δ	Δ	delta
𐤄	he	h	Ε	Ε	epsilon
𐤅	waw	w	Ϝ		digamma
𐤆	zayin	z	Ζ	Ζ	zeta
𐤇	heth	h	Η	Η	eta
𐤈	teth	t	Θ	Θ	theta
𐤉	yod	y	Ι	Ι	iota
𐤊	kaph	k	Κ	Κ	kappa
𐤋	lamed	l	Λ	Λ	lambda
𐤌	mem	m	Μ	Μ	mu
𐤍	nun	n	Ν	Ν	nu
𐤎	samekh	s			xi
𐤏	ayin	ʿ	Ο	Ο	omicron
𐤐	pe	p	Π	Π	pi
𐤑	sade	s	Ρ		san
𐤒	qoph	q	Φ		qoppa
𐤓	resh	r	Ρ	Ρ	rho
𐤔	sin	sh/s	Σ	Σ	sigma
𐤕	taw	t	Τ	Υ	tau
				Χ	upsilon
				Ω	chi
					omega

Chinese

媽

Skipping a lot of history & geekery

Two further topics

- trade-offs
- the effects of literacy on oral culture

Distance between speech stream and script

- “Chinese”: same script for different languages
- English: plus morphophonemicity

English orthography is morphophonemic

The second “c” in these words represents three different sounds:

- electric
- electrician
- electricity

Compare German orthography

- elektrisch
- Elektriker
- Elektrizität

Trisyllabic laxing

insane – insanity

grave – gravity

serene – serenity

divine – divinity

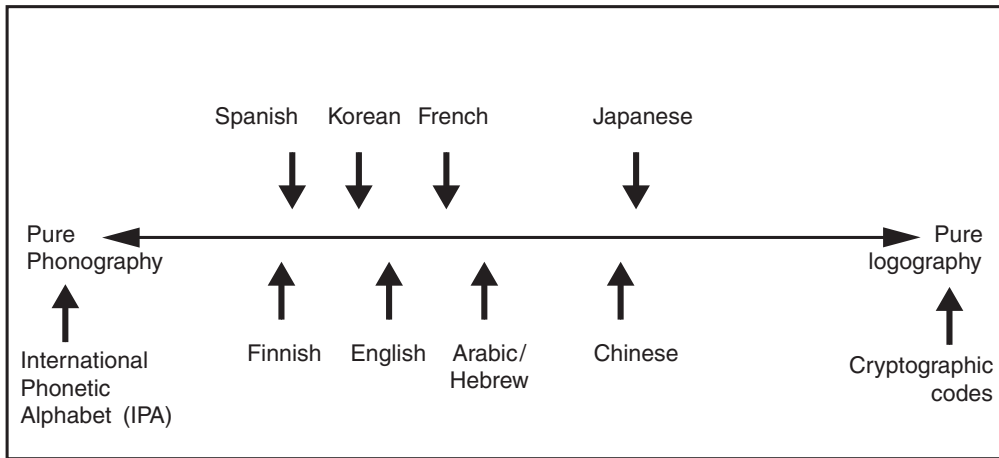
virtuoso – virtuosity

contrite - contrition

Etymological spelling

- dette -> debt
- doute -> doubt
- receite -> receipt
- samon -> salmon

How phonetic is a script?



Languages and scripts

Chinese and English aren't the only cases where one writing system is used for more than one language (or at least wildly different dialects).

Scripts adjusted for new languages

<i>Developed for...</i>	<i>Used for...</i>
Sumerian	Akkadian Hittite
Chinese	Japanese Korean Vietnamese (formerly)
Arabic	Persian Urdu Turkish (formerly)
Hebrew	Yiddish Ladino
Latin	English and hundreds more

Same language, different scripts

<i>One language...</i>	<i>Different scripts...</i>
Hindi	Devanagari
Urdu	Arabic
Serbian	Cyrillic
Croatian	Latin
Turkish (pre-1928)	Arabic
Turkish (post-1928)	Latin
Vietnamese (pre-1910)	Chinese
Vietnamese (post-1910)	Latin
South Korean (less and less)	Chinese plus <i>hangul</i> alphabet
North Korean (post-1949)	Pure <i>hangul</i> alphabet
Egyptian	Hieroglyphs
Coptic (Late Egyptian)	Coptic alphabet (from Greek)

What effects does literacy have?

ORALITY and LITERACY



The Technologizing of the Word

Cicero thought of, however, as itself a text), and Josephus even suggested that Homer could not write, but he did so in order to argue that Hebrew culture was superior to very ancient Greek culture because it knew writing, rather than to account for anything about the style or other features in the Homeric works.

From the... deep immed... the inter-
ferred with... the Homeric... for what
they in f... the Iliad and... they have
been com... ded from ant... the present
as the m... y, the true... the most in-
spired se... in the we... age. To
account... eived ex... ch age has
been inc... terpret the... better what
it conce... ts to be... ing at.
Even wh... ntic Movement... terpreted
the 'pr... as a good rather... regrettable
stage of culture, scholars and... generally
still t... to inute to... mitive... y qualities
that the... ound... mental... congenial.
More th... t... the A... can classic-
ist Milman... t... undercutting
this cultural chauvinism as... into the
'primitive'... of this poetry's own
terms, even when the... the received
view of what poetry and poets ought to be.

Walter J. Ong

... vaguely adumbrated Parry's in that
... poems had often

Two bible translations

- In the beginning God created heaven and earth. And the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God moved over the waters.
- In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters.

As early as Hammurabi's Code of Lawlike

If after the sheep and goats come up from the common irrigated area when the pennants announcing the termination of pastuuring are wound around the main city gate the shepherd releases the sheep and goats into a field the shepherd shall guard the field.

(Middle Babylonian, 1800 BC)

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(Middle Babylonian, 1800 BC)

Finally ...

Want to be famous?

Name of script	Where found	Earliest known	Script known?	Language known?
Proto-Elamite	Iran/Iraq	c. 3000 BC	Partially	No
Indus	Pakistan/N.W. India	c. 2500 BC	No	*
'Pseudo-hieroglyphic'	Byblos (Lebanon)	2nd mill. BC	No	No
Linear A	Crete	18th cent. BC	Partially	No
Phaistos Disc	Phaistos (Crete)	18th cent. BC	No	No
Etruscan	N. Italy	8th cent. BC	Yes	No
Olmec	Meso-America	c. 900 BC	Partially	No
Zapotec	Meso-America	c. 600 BC	Partially	Partially
Meroitic	Ṭeroe (Sudan)	c. 200 BC	Yes	No
Isthmian	Meso-America	c. AD 150	*	*
Rongorongo	Easter Island	pre-19th cent. AD	No	Partially

13. In this table of the major undeciphered scripts, an asterisk * indicates cases in which there is no scholarly consensus on the nature of the script and/or its underlying language

From my trip to Crete





THE PHAISTOS DISC

The enigmatic inscribed clay Phaistos Disc takes pride of place in the history of Cretan scripts. It bears forty-five pictorial signs, arranged in different combinations into sixty-one groups, separated by incised lines, presumably representing words. The signs were stamped in a spiral configuration on both sides of the disc by seals on soft clay.

Experts have not yet come to any definitive conclusions regarding the contents of the inscription and its relationship to Cretan scripts. The repetition of certain combinations of signs provides the most persuasive evidence that the inscription is a hymn or a text of magic character. Early 17th century BC.

Unearthing Crete's Minoan past on Mt Psiloritis



Archaeologists working on the small Zominthos plateau in the foothills of Mount Psiloritis on Crete discovered a tablet inscribed in Linear A – a writing system used by the ancient Minoans from around 1800 to 1450 BCE – in what was once an archive of a building complex, during this season's excavations. The tablet was used for accounting purposes.

[Culture Ministry via ANA-MPA]

Possible topics

- language surrogates (whistling, talking drums, ...)
- animal communication
- language & thought
- language & society
- swearing, cursing
- AMA