

# Traditions in the study of writing worldwide

Thematic workshop at the **Sixteenth International Conference on the History of the Language Sciences** [Tbilisi, August 26–30, 2024]

Organized by **Dimitrios Meletis** (*University of Vienna*) · [dimitrios.meletis@univie.ac.at](mailto:dimitrios.meletis@univie.ac.at)

Following influential work by the likes of Ferdinand de Saussure, Hermann Paul, Leonard Bloomfield, and verdicts such as “[w]riting is not language, but merely a way of recording language by means of visible marks” (Bloomfield 1933: 21), linguistic research has traditionally focused on spoken language, with the study of writing existing largely at the discipline’s periphery. With the exception of few efforts (such as Cram & Neis 2018), this is echoed by the fact that while writing as a medium is acknowledged as an important driver in the development of linguistics (see several chapters in Waugh, Monville-Burston & Joseph 2023), research focusing on writing as a system and subject in and of itself has remained a blind spot in historiographic accounts of linguistics. Unsurprisingly, thus, a “comprehensive history of grapholinguistics has yet to be written” (Barbarić 2023: 124). To be truly comprehensive, such a history needs to be comparative and thus inclusive of different scholarly traditions. Thus far, the focus of the few historiographic accounts has been firmly on Western, and predominantly English- and German-language research (see, for example, the reconstructions in Schlieben-Lange 1994; Spitzmüller 2013). Tracing the history of the study of writing *worldwide* is admittedly challenging because relevant research on writing as a multifaceted subject is scattered not only across different disciplines – such as linguistics, anthropology, and psychology – but also across different traditions within those disciplines, traditions that have their own theoretical paradigms, methods, and terminology and present and publish their research in their specific contexts and – crucially – in their own languages. This creates paradigmatic, methodological, and first and foremost linguistic boundaries that remain, in many cases, uncrossed (see Meletis 2021), resulting in unproductive situations in which different traditions address the same questions (e.g., the relationship between speech and writing or the definition of the *grapheme*) without referring to one another.

This workshop aims to cross those boundaries by bringing together scholars from different traditions in the study of writing to reconstruct and gather diverse historical trends and perspectives that, going forward, can inform and cross-fertilize each other, resulting in a merging of different strands of grapholinguistics. To achieve this, instead of talks focusing on specific phenomena of writing or singular moments

in the history of studying it, we invite broader contributions that provide historiographic overviews of a given tradition of the study of writing by highlighting its (1) **most important research questions**, (2) **central scholars**, and (3) **most important literature**. An example title for a talk would be “The francophone tradition of studying writing”; in which an overview is given of the history of French-language linguistic research on writing (and not only work focusing on the French writing system, but also writing and writing systems in general, cf. Catach 1997). Ideally, the contributions will allow us to compile a program that gives as broad an international picture of the history of grapholinguistics as possible.

Please send an abstract consisting of around **400 words** (note that references are not included in this count) to [dimitrios.meletis@univie.ac.at](mailto:dimitrios.meletis@univie.ac.at). The submission deadline for abstracts is **March 1st, 2024**, and notification of acceptance will be sent by March 15th, 2024.

The workshop will be held in **English**. Presentation slots will consist of **20- to 25-minute talks** followed by 5 to 10 minutes of questions and discussion. Due to the conference organizers' wishes, the workshop is **in-person only**.

A selection of papers will be part of a subsequent, peer-reviewed publication.

Please note that if more than one abstract is submitted for the same research tradition (e.g., the Japanese-language study of writing), depending on the degree of thematic overlap in the submitted abstracts, it is possible that only one of them is accepted.

## References

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- Catach, Nina. 1997. Les Histoires de l'Écriture: Panorama critique. *Histoire Épistémologie Langage* 19.2: 177–185.
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- Meletis, Dimitrios. 2021. On being a grapholinguist. In Yannis Haralambous (ed.), *Grapholinguistics in the 21st Century, Proceedings, Part I, Paris, France, 2020*, (= Grapholinguistics and Its Applications; 4), 125–141. Brest: Fluxus Editions.
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- Waugh, Linda R., Monique Monville-Burston & John E. Joseph (eds.). 2023. *The Cambridge history of linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.