

## How we model writing

### The relationship between language, speech, and writing in a universal model of writing

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There exists no model of writing that can handle the typological diversity of the world's writing systems. Thus, different studies presuppose different conceptualizations of writing, becoming incomparable in the process.

A problem inherent in the modeling of writing is the question of the relationship between language, speech, and writing. In this context, predominantly Eurocentric efforts to define a graphematics autonomous from phonology have been misguided. This becomes evident when the approach is extended to non-phonographic writing systems, which yields the following question: if writing in morphographic systems such as Chinese is clearly dependent on morphology, why should writing in phonographic systems not be dependent on phonology, which is vehemently rejected by autonomists?

In this talk, I argue that writing and speech are two modalities of an abstract, amodal language system. What characterizes them and renders them so distinct is their materiality – visual on the one hand, acoustic on the other. They are not dependent on each other, but they are equally dependent on abstract linguistic levels such as phonology and morphology. Crucially, phonology does not equal speech, but is interpreted amodally, offering minimal lexical contrasts that can be either spoken or written. Thus, while writing is always independent of speech, it can be dependent on phonology. Systems such as Chinese, however, can bypass this (direct) connection to phonology and relate to morphological units instead. Consequently, *minimal* lexical contrasts cannot be expressed in these systems. Ultimately, what has been termed *grapheme* in the autonomous approach and defined in analogy to the phoneme is exposed as an alphabetocentric concept not viable for a universal model of writing.

Using a variety of examples from diverse writing systems, I propose such a model that accounts for typological diversity and offers both graphetic and graphematic concepts and terminology for the description and comparison of historical and contemporary writing systems.