

Writing de/*scrib*/ing itself

How the duality of writing as a metalinguistic instrument and research object challenges a Descriptive Grapholinguistics

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In the study of language, the visual has arguably always been primary, with the written modality serving as the metalinguistic lens through which scholars of linguistics and neighbouring disciplines could view language – both spoken language and language as an abstract amodal system. Despite this *written language bias* (Linell 2005), writing – as its own system – remained invisible, resulting in a neglect of writing – and especially its materiality – as a valid research subject of linguistics. This is still palpable even after material and visual turns and the steady emergence of an interdisciplinary *grapholinguistics* (Meletis/Dürscheid 2022). In this talk, it is argued that one reason for this is that the written modality must assume a dual role: it is the medium and instrument of de-*script*-ion in its own study (Meletis 2020). For example, a graphic analysis and comparison of scripts in terms of abstract (but at the same time material) features such as [curved] or [straight], which has been attempted various times (cf., e.g., Bhatt 1988; Watt 1988), raises the question of how writing can reasonably describe originally visual – or even written – phenomena. Arguably due to the graphic diversity of the world's myriad scripts, which itself is made possible by the articulatory 'boundlessness' of writing by hand as well as creating written marks using various technology, there is no 'International Graphetic Alphabet' analogous to the IPA (Crystal 1997) as of yet, i.e., no uniform method of visually and/or tactically describing marks of writing. However, such a method would prove fruitful in the study of graphic universals observed in writing (such as the topological configurations described by Changizi et al. 2006 or a preference for cardinality, cf. Morin 2018), which in turn reveal how visual and cognitive human processing pressure is continually forming one of the core modalities we communicate with daily (Dehaene 2009).

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