

Good how language relates to writing: cultural relationships in historical contex...

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How is language related to writing? Human civilization has miraculously journeyed from pictographs, to alphabets, and through an exciting myriad of richly endowed spoken languages from around the world. The topic initiates an interesting discussion. It correlates to culture, communications, and ancient art origins - all within the historical context. Fascination, pertaining to an exploration of the world of language and writing interrelationships, fosters in-depth thinking and a curiosity about visual forms. This paper largely discusses the history of writing with a commentary on pictography and alphabets. The idea embodied in the research required for this document seeks to nurture a better understanding of how language relates to writing. Dr. Johanna Drucker, Professor at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), stated " I think there are two histories when we talk about the history of the alphabet. There's the history of letterforms and how they came into being," and the ideas that connect to them (" Art Meets Technology: The History and Effects of the Alphabet," 2014). This research paper inspects the history of writing, pictography, and the alphabet relationship to language development while highlighting the unexpected nuances of linguistic metaphor and myth.

It is important to identify, and explain the major relationships between language and writing. According to one historian's point of view, " Language existed long before writing did" (" The History of Writing," 2014). In other words, language came first. This idea makes sense. Therefore, human beings used the power of speech long before they pursued written formats. But we needed a way to convey recorded messages. Therefore, pictography entered the scene. What is a pictogram? According to researcher Elif Ayiter, a

pictograph or pictogram “ is a symbol representing a concept, object, activity, place or event by illustration” (Ayiter, 2014, “ The History of Visual Communication”). These graphic art forms represent a kind of writing that transmits ideas, through drawing. University of Chicago Assyriologist, Jay Gelb, theorizes that writing was “ invented in Mesopotamia,” then spread to Egypt and China (Kott, 2007, “ The Origins of Writing”). An early settlement in fourth millennium B. C. produced a clay administrative tablet, herein shown courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum. Ancient Mesopotamia is popularly accepted as a main place of origin, whereby many pictographs exist.

However, Mesopotamia does not represent the only area of the world where ancient pictography existed. Cultures from all over the world reflected some kind of ‘ ideograms,’ from 9000 B. C. forward, such as an example of Chinese calligraphy might offer. Scholars Taher Ghasimi, Cyrus Barfi, and Reza Norouzi reported on a recently discovered set of pictograms from Iran. Ghasimi et al. (2014) state that “ an archaeological survey” uncovered “ animal and geometric motifs” in the Fars Province of the Southern region of Iran (p. 199). The Abdozou Rockshelter finger paintings found in the red-ochre of Iran also showed dot designs. A portion of it is shown herein, courtesy of Ghasimi et al. (2014). As the earliest forms of writing, these various types of pictographs, perhaps expressed verbal communications in physical form. The writings converge an ancient historical context to recordings of an administrative or poetic nature. The purpose could have been as complex as Egyptian hieroglyphs, depicting stories of kingdoms and worship or as simple as if to say: “ I was here!” Ancient France also had

pictograms, but the pictographic evidence actually coincides with cuneiform. Cuneiform has been described by some scholars as the very first writing system.

However, most research scholars agree that the first forms of writing – whether pictograms, dot etchings, or animal sketches – held an administrative purpose of counting inventories, or documenting their assets. In those times the so-called assets of people did not include money funds in 401K accounts, or company stock holdings. Their assets consisted of cattle, grains, goats, oil and other such valuable staple goods for living. Primarily then, the origins of the first writings were born out of “ economic necessity” according to ‘ Smart History’ and “ was a tool of the theocratic (priestly) ruling elite who needed to keep track of the agricultural wealth of the city-states” (“ Cuneiform and the Invention of Writing,” 2014). Cuneiform represents a unique style of clay imprinting that is very easy to recognize. The technique used in creating cuneiform tablet writing stemmed from the usage of extraction of a cleanly-cut reed from the Tigris or Euphrates River. Smart History (2014) explains the situation of how it worked. The edge was press-cut, and pushed “ down into a soft clay tablet,” to “ make a wedge shape” (“ Cuneiform and the Invention of Writing,” 2014). The same aforementioned source cites this original written language, of cuneiform, as originating in circa 3200 B. C. E. It is important to note that not all scholars agree.

Before leaving the commentary of cuneiform behind, it is critical to understand that the meanings of this graphic form of writing could hold several ideas in a single ‘ sign,’ or imprint. Typically pressed into clay tablets,

a single cuneiform ' sign' might represent as many as four meanings, according to Smart History (2014). And yes, make no mistake, the symbols did correspond to a vocal language in terms of sounds and syllables. The research scholars at Smart History (2014) state " A cuneiform syllable could be a vowel alone, a consonant plus a vowel, a vowel plus a consonant and even a consonant plus a vowel plus a consonant. There isn't a sound that a human mouth can make that this script can't record" (" Cuneiform and the Invention of Writing," 2014). The incredible flexibility and sophistication of the system proved useful across a range of ancient historical peoples. These people identified a broad range of groups such as, Hittite, Palaic, Amorite, Akkadian, Sumerian, Elamite, and more. The amazing quality about cuneiform is their portability, as they could actually be placed in matching clay envelopes and transported to recipients. An interesting specimen of early writing from the period of King Darius represents an Old Persian, blue ornamental object containing inscriptions reminiscent of cuneiform. The picture comes courtesy of the University of Chicago (Oriental Institute Museum) show. The text is scripted in " blue-frit" reads " made in the house of Darius the King" (Kott, 2007, " The Origins of Writing"). If you are beginning to think of Biblical origins of language as correlated to writing, you are on the right path. Inevitably, ancient cultural experiences cannot ultimately be separated from religion.

In terms of offering an overview, at this point, the scholar Gelb believes that there were four early systems of writing. These include Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Chinese, and Mesoamerican although the Asian model was " structurally different," as well as " geographically distant from the ancient

Middle East" (Kott, 2007, " The Origins of Writing"). Reverting to the concepts embraced by Dr. Johanna Drucker of UCLA, early alphabets involved both letter-forms and the ideas being communicated by them. Scholars do not all agree on the exact historical route in which the alphabet systems developed. However most agree that the cuneiform writing system presented an easily accessible format. Ayiter (2014) explains " Clay was chosen as the standard medium of writing, for it was readily available, malleable, and recyclable, yet durable when dried in the sun or baked. Reeds, which grow abundantly in marshes and along riverbanks, were used to make writing implements called reed styli. For most types of records and documents, clay was formed into rectangular tablets, but for certain purposes cones, balls, prisms, and other shapes were used" (" The History of Visual Communication"). The researchers at Smart History insist that early writings generally represented forms of accountancy, in terms of keeping records of their cattle and such. This discussion would not be complete without a mention of Egyptian hieroglyphic pictograms. They represent the most well-known and popularly acknowledged form of pictography. An example, courtesy of Ayiter (2014), shows Egyptian hieroglyphs as mostly figurative events that could be representative of real - or imaginary events. You must also keep in mind that according to Ayiter (2014) " The use of Aramaic became widespread under the Assyrian Empire and the Aramaean alphabet gradually replaced cuneiform. The last known cuneiform inscription, an astronomical text, was written in AD 75" (" The History of Visual Communication"). Drucker contends and recognizes that early alphabet inscriptions expressed ideas of magical, religious, and interpretive purposes

(" Art Meets Technology: The History and Effects of the Alphabet," 2014). Dr. Drucker describes the alphabet historically, as an evolution that is a " synthesis of two early writing systems, Egyptian hieroglyphics and various forms of cuneiform" (" Art Meets Technology: The History and Effects of the Alphabet," 2014). Drucker explains that the alphabet came into existence from the 1700 B. C. era. She thinks its actual formation evolved from trading route activities around 700 B. C. and became encoded with symbols and signs thereafter. In terms of visual symbols, oddly enough, Dr. Drucker must grab the historical gaze from Biblical and Hebraic roots.

The entire notion of pictography, writing, alphabets, and language as connected to an ancient Hebrew culture fuels the imagination of many research scholars. Jeff Benner is the founding scholar of the ' Ancient Hebrew Research Center,' and posits that the origin of the Hebrew language had precursors embedded in the pictographs of the Egyptians, Sumerians, and Semitic cultures. Benner (2014) maintains that, linguistically speaking, " the development of the first true alphabet" may be attributed to the Phoenicians (" The Origin of the Hebrew Alphabet"). While we repeatedly acknowledge that not all scholar will agree, Brenner (2014) conveys " The actual origin of the alphabet cannot be proven, but if the origin of the Hebrew language is from God, then the Hebrew alphabet must have also come from God" (" The Origin of the Hebrew Alphabet"). This concept drives an interesting notion, but the academic opinion of UCLA's Dr. Johanna Drucker further unravels an explanation. Drucker (2014) comments on the interpretation of " letters as visual symbols," stating " Certainly what we do know is that the letters, that the names the letters of the alphabet have within the Hebrew naming

system, aleph and beth and gimel, those are all names of objects that are common objects within a nomadic desert culture. You could look around the camp of Semitic tribes and you would see every item that is named within that alphabet system" (" Art Meets Technology: The History and Effects of the Alphabet," 2014). The pertinent point is that an erudite approach can be taken apart from a religious perspective.

Donald Ryan of ' Historian' (2014) offers an example of how a pictograph symbol combines with a meaning, and sound in language. He states " Egyptian hieroglyphs such as which was pronounced r'i meaning ' mouth' became the pictograph for the sound of R with any vowel," and likewise the pictogram for ' water' pronounced as nu " became the symbol for the consonantal sound of N" (" The History of Writing"). These keys engage proofs of how an alphabet developed to connect the sounds of language to a systems of writing. The final section of the thesis involves the " unexpected nuances of linguistic metaphor and myth." The first part of the concept suggests that language (and writing) has a nuance of a real emotion-body connection. The second part sees language as a metaphor or myth. Caller (2014), in a book review of Dr. Richard Watts work ' Language Myths and the History of English,' discusses how language is used to perpetuate myths in our society. Caller (2014) says that myths " about language" are understood by Watts as the basis to " gradually become dominant or hegemonic discourses" (p. 151). In other words, Watts perceived the English language as a way the power structures throughout history have controlled " a process of selection, ordering, interpretation, and evaluation of details into a coherent narrative"

(p. 152). These fancy words are simply saying that the elite have always used ' language' to control society. A deep view of how language and writing converges is more accurate.

There is a body-mind-emotion connection to language and writing explored by an investigation by Toril Swan. In a journal article entitled, *Metaphors in Body and Mind in the History of English*, Swan (2009) says " Cultural models," are what " enable us to share understanding within a culture" (p. 461). Think about this. In computer-language, in social media terms, the word or symbol " Lol" means to laugh aloud. Everyone in today's modern Internet culture understands this. Yet, the " Lol" designation does not (neither cannot) represent a certain voice or sound of the particular laughter in question. Nevertheless, the meaning is present. The other aspects of Swan's theory considers that language, including the written word, expresses human feeling and emotions. Swan insists that there is evidence bearing this fact out because the human body is a kind of reservoir, cradling emotions. Swan (2009) states " a great deal of evidence has been amassed to suggest that the human body is indeed a very important source for language or linguistic expressions" (p. 461). It is undeniable that " in many cultures, the heart plays an important part as a conceived source of emotions and feelings" (Swan, 2009, p. 461). His other philosophical contention is that the English language, from a Westernized perspective, separates the soul from our material selves. Swan thinks that any reference to one's ' soul' can only be characterized as emotional. The example he provides is the heart being the seat of " feelings," while the " head" encases our " intellect" (p. 463). Language apparently, as relative to writing, can

harbor many concepts.

In conclusion, the historical and cultural context of how language relates to writing involves art, emotion, communication, and human expression that articulates sound into a recordable physical format. It is a very compelling notion that, in today's world, the modern digital icons and avatars are our culture's pictograms. Language and writing will always be inextricably bound.

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