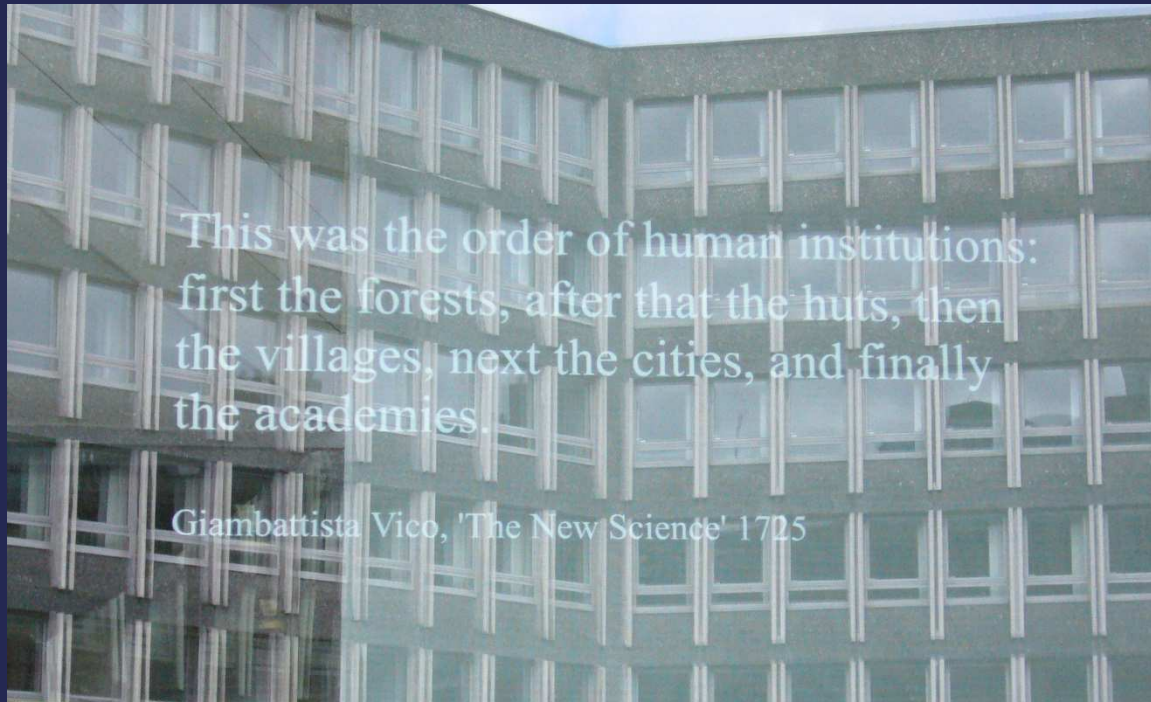


# WRITING AND LITERACY



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# WRITTEN VS. SPOKEN LANGUAGE IN LINGUISTICS: OVERVIEW

- Language studies before (modern) linguistics: writing is more important
- Western linguistics ~1870-1970: speaking is more important
- Some problems; the "written language bias"
- Writing and speaking as different, but equally important systems (functional approaches); differences between spoken and written language/communication/texts
- The spoken vs. written distinction is less important than other dimensions (corpus linguistics)

# LANGUAGE STUDIES BEFORE MODERN LINGUISTICS

- **Philology: Study of language and literature**
  - Study of selected written texts of selected languages
  - *grammar* < Latin *ars grammatica* < Greek γραμματικὴ τέχνη 'art of letter' [!]
  - Everyday, colloquial use of language was not studied
- **Philosophy: Thinking about language**
  - Sentences made up by the philosopher, no study of real texts
  - General observations

# CHANGES IN THE LATER 19TH CENTURY

- 19th century linguistics = historical linguistics
- "Neogrammarians": sound laws
- Idea of language as a natural phenomenon that can be studied as other natural phenomena
- Beginning of phonetics, accurate description of sounds
- First technologies for recording speech

=> "real language" is spoken, writing is secondary

# PREVALENT VIEW ~1870-1970

Neogrammarians (Hermann Paul);

European structuralism (Ferdinand de Saussure);

American structuralism (Leonard Bloomfield);

Generative Grammar (Noam Chomsky), and others:

- Spoken language is primary, written language is secondary.
- Writing is not language, only speaking is language.
- Spoken language is the main (only) subject of linguistics.
- Written language depends on spoken language.
- Writing is the (incomplete, imperfect) fixation of spoken language.

# WRITING IS NOT LANGUAGE: HERMANN PAUL (NEOGRAMMARIAN)

Hermann Paul, *Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte* (1880)

- § 262. [...] Es ist wichtig für jeden Sprachforscher niemals aus den Augen zu verlieren, dass das Geschriebene nicht die Sprache selbst ist, dass die in Schrift umgesetzte Sprache immer erst einer Rückumsetzung bedarf, ehe man mit ihr rechnen kann. Diese Rückumsetzung ist nur in unvollkommener Weise möglich [ ...]

It is important for every linguist to remember that what is written is not language itself, that language transposed into writing always needs to be re-transposed before one can deal with it. This re-transposition is possible only in an imperfect way.

# FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE: WRITING IS SECONDARY

Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique generale*, 1915. Chapitre 4, § 2; English translation by Wade Baskin (1959)

- Language and writing are two distinct systems of signs; the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first. The linguistic object is not both the written and the spoken forms of words; the spoken forms alone constitute the object.
- But the spoken word is so intimately bound to its written image that the latter manages to usurp the main role. People attach even more importance to the written image of a vocal sign than to the sign itself. A similar mistake would be in thinking that more can be learned about someone by looking at his photograph than by viewing him directly.

# AMERICAN STRUCTURALISTS (AND SOMEONE MUCH OLDER)

Leonard Bloomfield, *Language*, 1933

- writing is not language, but merely a way of recording language by visible marks

Paul Postal (1966)

- writing is a crude way of representing linguistic structure rather than a sign system with a direct relation to the world

Aristotle, *De interpretatione*:

- Words spoken are symbols or signs of affections or impressions of the soul; written words are the signs of words spoken. (cited from Olson 1995).



# LINGUISTS VS. LAYMEN

Charles F. Hockett, *A course in modern linguistics*, 1958

- 1.2 [...] The linguist distinguishes between language and writing, whereas the layman tends to confuse the two. The layman's terms "spoken language" and "written language" suggest that speech and writing are merely two different manifestations of something fundamentally the same. Often enough, the layman thinks that writing is somehow more basic than speech. Almost the reverse is true. [...] The change of orientation which is required in this connection is not an easy one to make. Old habits die hard. Long after one has learned the suitable technical vocabulary for discussing language directly, rather than via writing, one is still apt to slip. It should afford some consolation to know that it took linguistic scholarship a good many hundreds of years to make just this same transition.

# FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE

- Thus language does have a definite and stable oral tradition that is independent of writing, but the influence of the written form prevents our seeing this. The first linguists confused language and writing, just as the humanists had done before them. Even Bopp failed to distinguish clearly between letters and sounds. His works give the impression that a language and its alphabet are inseparable. [...] Scholars still confuse language and writing. Gaston Deschamps said that Berthelot "had saved French from ruin" because he had opposed spelling reform! (24-25)

# LINGUISTS VS. LAYMEN

- Although the bias that speech is primary over writing has been extremely important in guiding research efforts within linguistics, it has not been widely accepted outside of linguistics. In fact, the historical view that written, literary language is true language continues as the dominant lay perception to the present time. (Biber 1988: 6)

# ARGUMENTS FOR THE PRIMACY OF SPEECH OVER WRITING

- All human communities have spoken language, but only a minority regularly uses their language in writing.
- Language (speech) developed long before writing.
- Children first acquire spoken language, only later writing.
- The acquisition of spoken language proceeds naturally and does not need formal instruction.
- Speech is embodied - we don't need any further instruments or materials.

## PER LINELL (1982; ONLINE)

- Communication through speech is a resource available for all normally equipped human beings across different social groups and cultures. It is acquired under rather different conditions than writing. Its ontogenesis is part of the normal individual's *primary socialization*, which starts and largely develops in early childhood as an integrated element of habitual activities in everyday culture. To a large extent it then remains a feature of the private sphere of people's lives. Knowledge of one's spoken language is an inalienable element of one's knowledge of everyday culture

## (LINELL)

- [...] the acquisition of written language belongs to the so-called *secondary socialization*, in which school and other cultural institutions play a very important instrumental part. Schooling and education are unevenly distributed in most (all?) societies. [...]
- Written language is mainly used in the non-private life sphere, and, again unlike spoken language, it is not integrated with everyday knowledge and culture but is associated mostly with various kinds of abstract knowledge separate from the world of direct experience.

## BUT: LINGUISTS STILL THINK IN TERMS OF WRITTEN LANGUAGE (LINNELL)

- [...] our conception of language is deeply influenced by a long tradition of analyzing only written language, and [...] modern linguistic theory, including psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics, approaches the structures and mechanisms of spoken language with a conceptual apparatus, which - upon closer scrutiny - turns out to be more apt for written language in surprisingly many and fundamental aspects. I will refer to this situation as *the written language bias* in linguistics. (Linnell 1982, online: <http://langs.eserver.org/linell/chapter01.html>)

- „European linguistic thought formed and matured over concern with the cadavers of written languages – almost all its basic categories, its basic approaches and techniques were worked out in the process of reviving these cadavers.” (Volosinov 1973:71, cited from Linell)
- "mainstream linguistic theorizing in syntax [...] is based almost entirely on the kind of language that is characteristic of formal, written discourse, rather than upon any of the other types" (Derwing 1992)
- „the models provided by our script tend to blind us toward other features of language that are equally important to human communication” (Olson 1995)

**Examples?**



# ALTERNATIVE TO THE PRIMACY OF SPEECH IN LINGUISTICS

Prague functional linguistics (Jozef Vachek);

Variational linguistics and corpus linguistics (Douglas Biber);

Discourse analysis and text linguistics (Deborah Tannen, William Chafe)

- Speaking and writing have different functions, therefore spoken and written language are different.
- Each system can and should be studied in its own right.
- There are oral and literate strategies associated with the production of typical spoken and written texts.
- Spoken vs. written is only one of several dimensions that influence text production together with others (such as formal vs. informal, spontaneous vs. planned).

# PRAGUE FUNCTIONALIST LINGUISTICS

- The Praguian functionalist approach stands out most forcefully in its application to problems of written language. As was repeatedly stressed by the Praguians, the spoken and written norms of language are functionally differentiated: the former serves a ready and immediate reaction to extralingual reality, the latter enables the language user to react to it in a documentary and easily surveyable manner. [...] The functional specificity of the written norm results in a certain degree of autonomy from its corresponding spoken norm. [...] Thus the functionalists' conception of the written norm provides deeper insight into the functioning of language.

Jozef Vachek: Written language seen from the functionalist angle. In *Functionalism and linguistics*, Amsterdam 1987, p. 395.

# VARIATIONAL AND CORPUS LINGUISTICS

Douglas Biber, *Variation across speech and writing*, 1988

- the two modes of communication have quite different strengths and weaknesses, and they therefore tend to be used in complementary situations. From this perspective, neither can be said to be primary; they are simply different. The linguistic characteristics of each mode deserve careful attention, and the relationship between the two modes must be investigated empirically rather than assumed on an a priori basis. (9)

# EXERCISE

Listen to the two examples and note all characteristics of spoken language that you notice.

First example: Turkish



Second example: Polish



Third example: English



Source: <http://www1.uni-hamburg.de/exmaralda/files/demokorpus/corpus.html>

# HOW TO TRANSCRIBE SPEECH?

[1]

louder  
**X [v]** So it starts out with: A roo ster crows. ((1,4s)) ((breathes in)) And then you see  
**X [nv]** rHA on rKN, lHA on ISH rHA up and to the right rHA stays up rHA back down rKN,  
**X [nv]** HE nods once  
**X [nv]** emphasizes the crow

[2]

**X [v]** ehm a maan in maybe his fifties. ((breathes in)) And so hee climbs up a tree.  
**X [nv]** moves lHA on ISH rHA to the right bHA up, rHA rubs NO lHA describes  
**X [nv]** aproximately fifty describes the

[3]

**X [v]** And he starts... With a ladder. And he starts picking pears • off the tree.  
**X [nv]** a circle bFA up, in front of BR rHA goes up lFA three times up and down in front of BR  
**X [nv]** tree acitivity of picking

[4]

**X [v]** ••• And he puts the pears into an a pron. Okay? ((breathes in))  
**X [nv]** bFA simultaneously, up and down in front of BR bHA rest in front of BR rHA rubs NO,  
**X [nv]** puts pears into an apron  
**Y [v]** • Okay.

[14]

<b>MOD [v]</b>	<b>dinleyin şimdi!</b>	<b>Şu anda beni dinleyin!</b>		
<b>MOD [de]</b>	<i>mir jetzt zu!</i>	<i>Hören Sie mir in diesem Moment zu!</i>		
<b>MOD [en]</b>	<i>me now!</i>	<i>Listen to me at the moment!</i>		
<b>ANR [v]</b>	<b>çocuk oldu.</b>	<b>Ben eli sekiz yaşındayım</b>	<b>Rente</b>	<b>alabilir miyim burd</b>
<b>ANR [de]</b>	<i>Kind bekommen.</i>	<i>Ich bin achtundfünzig Jahre alt.</i>	<i>Kann ich hier meine Rente bekommen?</i>	
<b>ANR [en]</b>	<i>here.</i>	<i>I am fifty-eight years old.</i>	<i>May I get my pension here?</i>	
<b>MOD [k]</b>		louder, faster		
<b>ANR [k]</b>			in german for: pension	for: burada

[15]

<b>MOD [v]</b>	<b>Ş şu anda beni dinleyin! •• Bir: •• <u>Yavaş</u> konuşmaya çalışın. Tane tane</b>
<b>MOD [de]</b>	<i>Hören Sie mir in diesem Moment zu! •• Erstens: •• Bemühen Sie sich, langsam zu sprechen. Bemühen Sie sich</i>
<b>MOD [en]</b>	<i>Listen to me at this moment! •• First: •• Attempt to speak slowly. Attempt to speak step</i>
<b>ANR [v]</b>	a?
<b>ANR [de]</b>	
<b>ANR [en]</b>	
<b>MOD [k]</b>	slower

[16]

<b>MOD [v]</b>	<b>konuşmaya çalışın. Hiç anlamıyorum sizi. •• Benim za/ Ben size zaman</b>		
<b>MOD [de]</b>	<i>nacheinander zu sprechen. Ich verstehe Sie überhaupt nicht. •• Meine Zei/ Ich werde Ihnen Zeit zuteilen.</i>		
<b>MOD [en]</b>	<i>by step. I don't understand you at all. •• My tim/ I will give you time.</i>		
<b>ANR [v]</b>	<b>Hı</b>		
<b>ANR [de]</b>	<i>Hm</i>		
<b>ANR [en]</b>	<i>Yes.</i>		
<b>MOD [k]</b>		louder	for:
<b>ANR [k]</b>		affirmative	

[17]

# HOW DO SPOKEN AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE DIFFER?

## Dimensions:

- graphic vs. phonetic (+ vs. signed)
- planned vs. spontaneous
- public vs. private (unknown vs. known participants)
- distant vs. close (+/- shared situation)
- monologic vs. dialogic (individual vs. cooperative activity)
- ...

What combinations of these dimensions are possible?

Find examples!

## Graphic (vs. phonetic) entails:

- lack of prosody, loudness, tempo ... (partly compensated by graphic means)
- not combined with gesture (but maybe with illustrations etc.)
- discreet (vs. continuous)
- reader can control reception (read slowly, fast, skip words etc.)
- writer can control production, revision possible
- stable (speech fades away, writing remains)  
=> **written text as a product**  
**vs. speaking as an activity**
- ...