

WRITING AND LITERACY



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LAST WEEK: LITERACY VS. ORALITY (WALTER ONG AND OTHERS)

"We know that all philosophy depends on writing because all elaborate, linear, so-called "logical" explanation depends on writing.

[...] the elaborate, intricate, seemingly endless but exact cause-effect sequences required by what we call philosophy and by extended scientific thinking are unknown among oral people" Ong 1986 (2001)

"old" literacy studies

TODAY:SYLVIA SCRIBNER & MICHAEL COLE. 1981. UNPACKAGING LITERACY.

1. Why are the authors as psychologists interested in studies on writing and literacy, and what do they criticize in the studies by Havelock, Goody, Ong, and others?

- Studies of cultural history do not explain individual development;
- These studies were speculative, not empirically based;
- Different factors may be involved, not only literacy.

"At a minimum, we would want evidence that the consequences claimed for literacy can be found in comparisons of literate and non-literate adults living in the same social milieu, whose material and social conditions of life do not differ in any systematic way." (126)

"PROTOTYPICAL" WRITING AND PROTOTYPICAL WRITTEN TEXTS

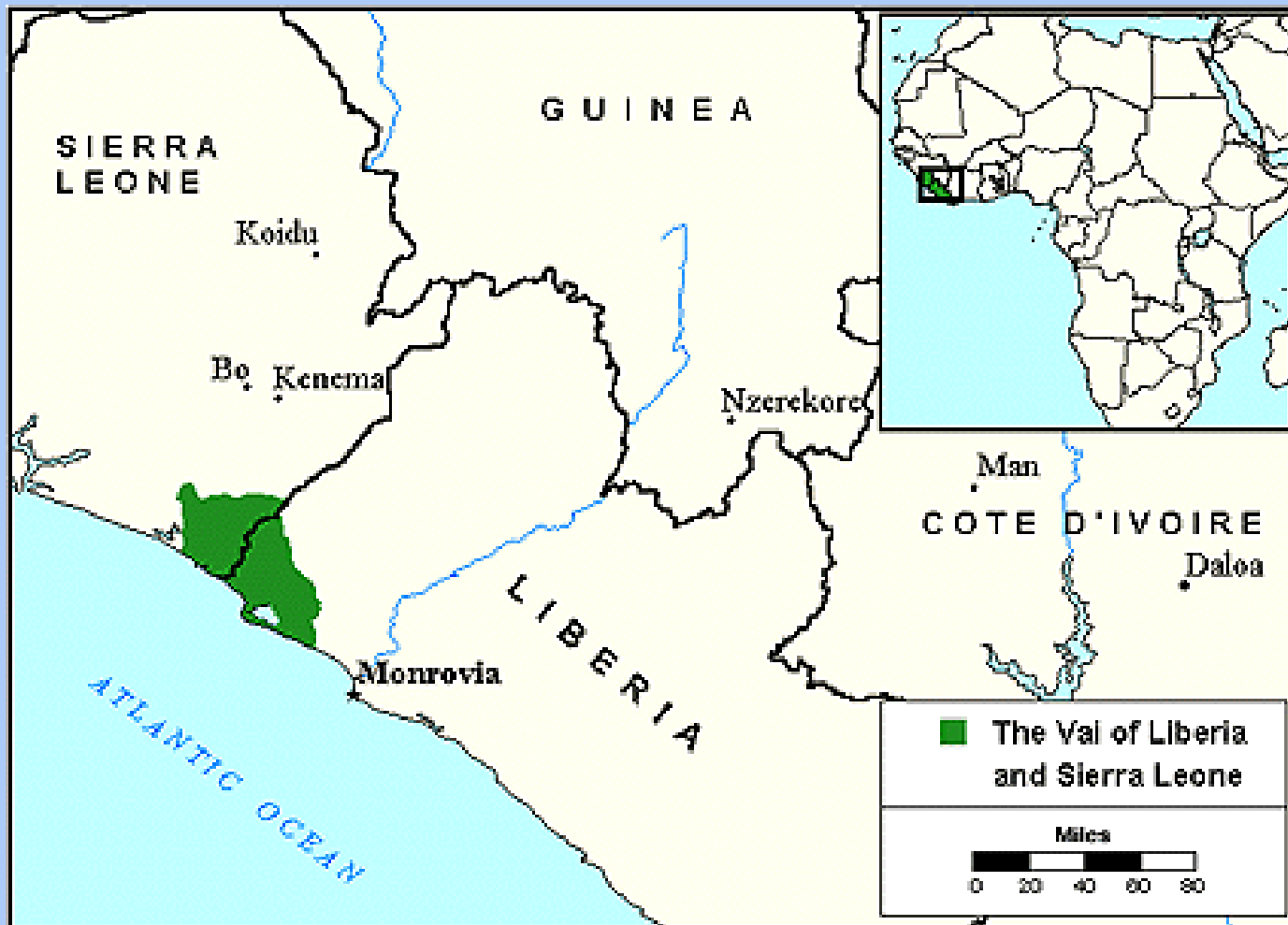
2. What kind of text and what kind(s) of writing have been taken as the prototype in former studies on writing?

- **expository text**
- **transactional writing** : "... the typical language of science and of intellectual inquiry... of planning, reporting, instructing, informing, advising, persuading, arguing and theorizing";
- **essayist text**
- **epistemic writing** – writing that carries the function of intellectual inquiry;
- **school-based writing**

Can you think of other types of writing?

- "What is missing in this picture is any detailed knowledge of the role and functions of writing outside of school, the aspirations and values which sustain it, and the intellectual skills it demands and fosters." (127)

3. WHY DID THE AUTHORS SET OUT TO INVESTIGATE THE VAI PEOPLE IN NIGERA?



VAI SCRIPT

▶	𐎄	𐎆	𐎇	𐎈	𐎉	𐎊	𐎋	𐎌	𐎍	𐎎	𐎏	𐎐	𐎑
pi	pa	pu	pe	peh	poh	po	bi	ba	bu	be	beh	boh	bo
𐎒	𐎓	𐎔	𐎕	𐎖	𐎗	𐎘	𐎙	𐎚	𐎛	𐎜	𐎝	𐎞	𐎟
bi	ba	bu	be	beh	boh	bo	mbi	mba	mbu	mbe	mbeh	mboh	mbo
𐎠	𐎡	𐎢	𐎣	𐎤	𐎥	𐎦		𐎧		𐎨	𐎩	𐎪	𐎫
kpi	kpa	kpu	kpe	kpeh	kpoh	kpo		mgba		mgbe	mgbeh	mgboh	mgbc
𐎬	𐎭	𐎮	𐎯	𐎰	𐎱	𐎲	𐎳	𐎴	𐎵	𐎶	𐎷	𐎸	𐎹
gbi	gba	gbu	gbe	gbeh	gboh	gbo	fi	fa	fu	fe	feh	foh	fo
𐎺	𐎻	𐎼	𐎽	𐎾	𐎿	𐏀	𐏁	𐏂	𐏃	𐏄	𐏅	𐏆	𐏇
vi	va	vu	ve	veh	voh	vo	ti	ta	tu	te	teh	toh	to
𐏈	𐏉	𐏊	𐏋	𐏌	𐏍	𐏎	𐏏	𐏐	𐏑	𐏒	𐏓	𐏔	𐏕
di	da	du	de	deh	doh	do	li	la	lu	le	leh	loh	lo
𐏖	𐏗	𐏘	𐏙	𐏚	𐏛	𐏜	𐏝	𐏞	𐏟	𐏠	𐏡	𐏢	𐏣
dj	dja	dju	dje	djah	djoh	djo	ndj	nda	ndu	nde	ndeh	ndoh	ndo
𐏤	𐏥	𐏦	𐏧	𐏨	𐏩	𐏪	𐏫	𐏬	𐏭	𐏮	𐏯	𐏰	𐏱
si	sa	su	se	seh	soh	so	zi	za	zu	ze	zeh	zoh	zo
𐏲	𐏳	𐏴	𐏵	𐏶	𐏷	𐏸	𐏹	𐏺	𐏻	𐏼	𐏽	𐏾	𐏿
ci	ca	cu	ce	ceh	coh	co	ji	ja	ju	je	jeh	joh	jo
𐏿	𐐀	𐐁	𐐂	𐐃	𐐄	𐐅	𐐆	𐐇	𐐈	𐐉	𐐊	𐐋	𐐌
nji	nja	nju	nje	njah	njoh	njo	yi	ya	yu	ye	yeh	yoh	yo
𐐍	𐐎	𐐏	𐐐	𐐑	𐐒	𐐓	𐐔	𐐕	𐐖	𐐗	𐐘	𐐙	𐐚
ki	ka	ku	ke	keh	koh	ko	jgi	jga	jgu	jge	jgeh	jgoh	jgo



𐎠𐎡 𐎢𐎣 𐎤 𐎥 𐎦 𐎧 𐎨 𐎩 𐎪 𐎫 𐎬 𐎭 𐎮 𐎯 𐎰 𐎱 𐎲 𐎳 𐎴 𐎵 𐎶 𐎷 𐎸 𐎹

FOR SO THAT I MAY MY CASSAVA DIG (AND) CARRY IT
 TO SELL THE CASSAVA I PLANTED LAST YEAR IT YIELDED WELL
 AND SO I WANT TO SELL IT I HEARD THAT
 THEY ARE CASSAVA BUYING DOLLARS THREE FOR (AT) MONROVIA
 RIGHT NOW SO PLEASE HAVE MUSULENG (PARTICLE) BAG
 THAT BUSINESS BE SERIOUS ABOUT (IT) GREET YOU PLENTY
 ALL THE FAMILY GREET PLENTY (PARTICLE)
 AM KAIKPANDA (AT) KOBOLIA

Figure 9.1. A sample letter in Vai script with segmentation indicated

Table 6.6 Characteristics of literacies

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Vai script</i>	<i>Arabic</i>	<i>English</i>
<i>Script</i>	<i>Syllabary</i>	<i>Alphabet</i>	<i>Alphabet</i>
<i>Language</i>	<i>Native</i>	<i>Foreign</i>	<i>Foreign</i>
<i>Teacher-student</i>	<i>Personally selected, one to one</i>	<i>Family selected, group</i>	<i>Assigned by school location</i>
<i>Dominant teaching method</i>	<i>Decoding-encoding</i>	<i>Memorization</i>	<i>Decoding-encoding</i>
<i>Social context</i>	<i>Home and everyday settings</i>	<i>“Class” setting</i>	<i>Class in organized school</i>
<i>Related knowledge transmitted</i>	<i>No systematic knowledge transmission</i>	<i>Religious knowledge—Islam</i>	<i>Systematic secular subject matter</i>
<i>Cultural orientation</i>	<i>Traditional</i>	<i>Traditional</i>	<i>Modern</i>

Scribner, Sylvia & Michael Cole. [1981] 1999. *The psychology of literacy*. Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, p.87

METHODS AND RESULTS OF THE STUDY

5. Explain the following sentence in your own words:

"[...] in [...] multiliterate societies, functions of literacy tend to be distributed in regularly patterned ways across the scripts, bringing more clearly into prominence their distinctive forms of social organization, and transmission and functions."

Illustrate with examples from the Vai.

Table 6.3 Uses of scripts

	Percent reporting		
	<i>Vai script</i> (<i>N</i> = 107)	<i>Arabic</i> (<i>N</i> = 85)	<i>English</i> (<i>N</i> = 47)
1. Correspondence			
Writes letters	93 ^a	31	87
To friends, relatives	72	26	64
To strangers	21	5	23
Has written a letter for someone else	61	4	51
Reads letters	97	33	96
From friends, relatives	71	29	74
From strangers	26	4	22
2. Record keeping (personal)	78	32	53
Family events	71	29	47
Work/business/financial	52	11	30
Legal	10	4	0
Other	15	7	13
3. Town records, business	63	26	21
4. Technical plans, diagrams	38	26	19
5. Literary and historical material	53	22	53
6. Religious uses	55	100	77
7. Writes other language in script	54	19	19
English	50	2	—
Vai	—	13	13
Arabic	47	—	11
Other tribal	11	4	2
8. Has taught script	44	19	17
9. When last wrote			
Within past week	64	45	79
More than 1 week up to 1 month	21	24	23
1-2 months	14	17	9
Over 2 months	7	4	2

Scribner, Sylvia & Michael Cole. 1999. *The psychology of literacy*. Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, p.72

METHODS AND RESULTS OF THE STUDY

4. Which methods were used in the investigation?

see

<https://oralityandliteracy.wordpress.com/the-vai-project/>

Broad category of effect		Type of literacy			
		English/ school	Vai script	Qur'anic	Arabic language
Categorizing	Form/number sort	Shaded	Shaded		Shaded
	Incremental recall			Shaded	Shaded
Memory	Free recall	Shaded			
	Sylogisms	Shaded			
Encoding and decoding	Rebus reading	Shaded	Shaded		Shaded
	Rebus writing	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
Semantic integration	Integrating words	Shaded	Shaded		
	Integrating syllables		Shaded		
Verbal explanation	Communication game	Shaded	Shaded		
	Grammatical rules	Shaded			
	Sorting geometric figures	Shaded			
	Logical sylogisms	Shaded			
	Sun-moon name-switching (Because of ambiguities in this task, we include only those literacy effects appearing in more than one administration)	Shaded			

Figure 14.1. Schematic representation of effects associated with each literacy

Scribner, Sylvia & Michael Cole. 1999. *The psychology of literacy*. Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, p.72

6. WHAT IS THE MAIN RESULT OF SCRIBNER & COLE'S STUDY?

- "In fact, we found **no evidence** of marked differences in performance **on logical and classificatory tasks** between nonschooled literates and nonliterate." (133)
- "Taken as a group, these three sets of studies provide the strongest experimental evidence to date that activities involved in reading and writing may in fact promote **specific** language-processing and cognitive **skills**." (134)

- **"The consequences we were able to identify are constrained by the type of practices common in Vai society. We did not find, for example, that performance on classification tasks and logic problems was affected by nonschooled literacy. This outcome suggests that speculations that such skills are the "inevitable outcome" of learning to use alphabetic scripts or write any kind of text are overstated." (136)**

- **"Our evidence leaves open the question of whether conceptual or logical skills are promoted by experience with expository text; in fact if our argument that specific uses promote specific skills is valid, we should expect to find certain skills related to practice in written exposition. The challenging question is how to identify these without reintroducing the confounding influence of schooling." (136)**

7. WHAT CONSEQUENCES MAY THE STUDY HAVE FOR TEACHING WRITING IN THE USA?

- "... it is reasonable to suppose that there is at least as wide a range of individual aspirations and social practices capable of sustaining a variety of writing activities in our own society as among the Vai. [...]

It seems premature to conclude that only schools and teachers are concerned with writing and that writing would perish in this era of television if not artificially kept alive in academic settings." (135)