

Comparative Literature 9601B: From Language to Writing to Writing Systems

WEDNESDAYS 1 to 4 PM

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Please note that due to the exceptional circumstances brought on by the covid-19 crisis, this syllabus is provisional and subject to changes as the health and safety situation may require. The university has indicated that the first weeks of Winter term will need to be online. If we are able to meet in person with masks and social distancing later in the term, our meetings will be in Physics and Astronomy Building 148.

Course description and rationale:

Philosophers and others have consistently asserted that the development of language and the invention of writing signaled huge cognitive shifts in the evolution of (or towards) humanity. This course will ask many questions about these various developments. For example, was the advent of speech the stage at which humanity began? Or did true civilization only arise with the invention of writing? Are there different cognitive implications as a result of different descendant writing systems?

This seminar will move through these three stages, investigating the theories and the debates that have arisen (usually with no firm conclusion). Did a nascent ability to conceptualize lead to speech (Logan, Hockett, etc.) or did speech cause conceptualization (Pinker, Donald, Deacon, etc.)? What caused writing to come about, why was it needed, what did it entail, and what were its implications both for the first people to have it and for subsequent ages? Finally, what has led to the creation of very different writing systems – pictogrammic, ideogrammic, alphabetic, iconic – and how have they been viewed by scholars? Regarding this last stage we will engage specifically with contacts between alphabetic and non-alphabetic writing systems and with Eurocentric assumptions about the superiority of alphabetic writing as well as recent criticisms of such a view.

Required Work:

Class Participation 20%: Your first responsibility is to be present to class and to be well prepared. Participation entails not only reading the weekly material but also taking notes on it as an aide-mémoire. Before coming to class you will have *thought about* the texts we have read and you will be ready to discuss them. Participation grades will be based on the degree of preparation and the nature (quality and quantity) of classroom contributions. If you do not speak up, your grade will be adversely affected.

Assignments 20%: These are short 150-200, *typed* summaries of the day's readings. These must be uploaded to the OWL in advance of each class. The summaries are simply to outline the main arguments of the readings for the week. No late summaries will be accepted. All students will be required to submit a summary each week, with the exception of Week 1 (13 January).

Seminar report 20%: You will be expected to report on and analyze the week's readings once during the term. I will circulate a sign-up sheet on 20 January. You will be held *strictly* to a 30-minute limit. You can work from notes and you can present items in Powerpoint, but you are *not* simply to read a written text (!); I will allow for some discussion at the end of each report. Because of the enrolment numbers, there may be more than one presentation in any given week. Your seminar report may well become the nucleus for the research paper, but this is by no means a requirement.

Research Paper 40%: This is a major essay (around 20 typed pages), with full critical apparatus (notes, works cited, etc--see MLA Style book), which scrutinizes some issue/text/aspect that has come to light during the course. You are *strongly encouraged* to come talk with me about potential paper topics--but only after you have delineated several *in writing*. At the very latest, you must inform me of your topic *in typewritten form* by Week 10 (17 March). As already noted, the topic can grow out of the seminar discussion you have led. All essays are due one week after the final day of classes for Winter term (16 April). Late papers will be penalized 3%/day.

All written work is to be submitted as an attachment on OWL (Assignments) in WORD, Times New Roman, 12 pt.

Approximative Program
(This program is provisional)

Week 1: 13 January: Why I am teaching this course (AKA Western notions of alphabetical superiority).

Week 2: 20 January

Readings:

1. Havelock, Eric. *The Muse Learns to Write*. (eBook online, Western Libraries), Chapter 7, 10.; *Origins of Western Literacy*, chapter 3.
2. Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy*: pp. 27-30; 78-103 (eBook online, Western Libraries).
3. Gelb, pp. 1-23. (Online course readings, Weldon library).
4. Halverson, John. "Havelock on Geek Orality and Literacy." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53 (1992): 148-163. On OWL.

Optional: Robert K. Logan, *The Alphabet Effect*, 106-17.

Optional: J. Peter Denny, "Rational Thought in Oral Culture and Literate Decontextualization" In *Orality and Literacy*. David R. Olson and Nancy Torrance, eds. Cambridge UP: 1991. 66-89.

Week 3: 27 January: **How/Why did language arise? (1)**

1. Piattelli-Palmarini, M. (1989) "Evolution, selection, and cognition: From "learning" to parameter setting in biology and the study of language", *Cognition* 31:1-44. (On OWL and on course readings)
 2. Pinker, Steven. & Bloom, P. (1990). "Natural language and natural selection." *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 13 (4): 707-784. (on OWL).
 3. Pinker. "Language as an Adaptation to the Cognitive Niche." *Language Evolution* (UWO libraries, online), ch. 2.
 4. Hurford, James. "The Language Mosaic and its Evolutions." *Language Evolution* (UWO libraries, online), ch. 3.
- Optional: Hockett, Charles, 1960. "The origin of speech." *Scientific American* 203: 88-111.

Week 4: 3 February: **How/Why did language arise? (2)**

1. Donald, Merlin. *The Origins of the Modern Mind*. Cambridge: Harvard UP. 1991. Pp. 148-161; 162-171; 197-208; 233-241; 261-275. On OWL.
2. Hauser and Fitch. "What are the Uniquely Human Components of the Language Faculty?" *Language Evolution*, ch. 9. (UWO libraries online)
3. Corballis, Michael. "From Hand to Mouth: The Gestural Origins of Language." *Language Evolution* ch. 11. (UWO libraries online)

Optional: Michael Airbib. "The Evolving Mirror System: A Neural Basis for Language Readiness." *Language Evolution*, ch. 10.

Week 5: 10 February: **What was the first language/speech?**

1. Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Essay on the Origin of Languages and Writings Related to Music. The Collected Writings of Rousseau*. Vol 7. Trans. John T. Scott. Hanover: UP of New England. Ch.1
2. Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Second Discourse*.
3. Herodotus. 2.2 (On experiment of King Psammeticos to discover original language)
4. Michael Studdert-Kennedy and Louis Goldstein. "Launching Language: The Gestural Origin of Discreet Infinity." *Language Evolution*, ch. 13.
5. Logan, Robert K. *Extended Mind: The Emergence of Language, The Human Mind, and Culture* (UWO libraries online) (UTP, 2017)

Week 6: 17 February (Reading Week: No Class)

Week 7: 24 February: **What constitutes writing?:**

1. Robert K. Logan, *The Alphabet Effect*, 106-17.

2. Boone, Elizabeth Hill. "Introduction: Writing and Recording Knowledge." In Boone, Elizabeth Hill and Walter D. Mignolo, eds. *Writing without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica and the Andes*. Durham: Duke UP, 1994. 3-26.
 3. De Francis, John. 1989. *Visible Speech: The Diverse Oneness of Writing Systems* Honolulu: U of Hawaii P. Chapters 6&7.
 4. Sampson, Geoffrey. *Writing Systems*. 2nd edition. Sheffield: Equinox, 2015. Chaps. 1 and 2 ("Introduction" and "Theoretical Preliminaries")
- Optional: Boone, Elizabeth Hill. *Stories in Red and Black: Pictorial Histories of the Aztecs and Mixtecs*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2000.

Week 8: 3 March: **Origin of writing:**

- 1 Robinson, Andrew. *Writing and Script*. (online at library). Chapter 1: "Writing and its Emergence"
2. Robinson, Andrew. *Writing and Script*. (online at library). Chapter 2: "Development and Diffusion of Writing."
3. Harris, Roy. 1986. *The Origin of Writing*. La Salle (Ill): Open Court. Chapters to be assigned.
4. Plato, *Phaedrus*.

Recommended : Finkel, Irving, and Jonathan Taylor. 2015. *Cuneiform*. Los Angeles : Getty Publications.

J.T. Hooker. 1990. *Reading the Past: Ancient Writing from Cuneiform to the Alphabet*. U of California P.

Week 9: 10 March: **How does writing change cognition?**

- Harris, Roy. "How Does Writing Restructure Thought?" *Language & Communication*, Vol. 9, No. 2/3, pp. 99-106, 1989.
- Ong, Walter. 1982. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London: Routledge. Chapt. 4 ("Writing Restructures Consciousness")
- Goody, Jack, and Ian Watt. 1963. "The Consequences of Literacy." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 5: 304-345.

Optional: Goody, Jack, ed. 1968. *Literacy in Traditional Societies*. London: Cambridge UP.

Optional: Goody, Jack. 1987. In *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral*. (says sequentiality necessary)

Week 10: 17 March:

Integrationist approach:

1. Menary, Richard. 2007. "Writing as Thinking" *Language Sciences* 29. 621–632.
2. Zinna, Alessandro. 2011. "The object of writing." *Language Sciences*. Volume 33, Issue 4, July 2011, Pages 634-646.

3 Love, Nigel. "Cognition and the Language Myth." *Language Sciences* 26 (2004): 525-544. On OWL.

4. Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1955. « Léçon d'écriture. » *Tristes Tropiques*. Paris: Plon. 347-360. English translation on Library, Course readings

Optional: Cognitive processing in various orthographies. In, Chu-Chang, M., ed. *Asian and Pacific-American perspectives in bilingual education: comparative research*. New York: Columbia University Press: 1982. 73-96

Optional : Derrida, Jacques. *De la grammatologie*. Excerpts.

Week 11: 24 March: **Non-alphabetical writing :**

Chinese :

DeFrancis, John. 1984. *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy*. Honolulu: U of Hawaii P. Chapters 5&6.

Meso-american :

Houston, Stephen. "Literacy among the Pre-Columbian Maya : A Comparative Perspective." In Boon, Elizabeth Hill and Walter D. Mignolo, eds. *Writing without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica and the Andes*. Durham: Duke UP, 1994. 27-49. (On Library, Course Readings)

Asemic writing :

Schwenger, Peter. *Asemic : The Art of Writing*. Chapter 1 (On OWL).

Week 12: 31 March: **The Alphabet**

1. Robinson, Andrew. *Writing and Script*. (online at library). Chapter 6: "Alphabets"
2. Diring, David. 1953. *The Alphabet : A Key to the History of Mankind*. 2nd ed. London : Hutchinson's Scientific and Technical Publications. Pages : _____
3. De Kerckhove, Derrick, and Charles J. Lumsden, eds. 1988. *The Alphabet and the Brain*. Berlin: Springer-Verlag. Pages: _____
4. Healey, John F. 1990. "The Early Alphabet." In *Reading the Past: Ancient Writing from Cuneiform to the Alphabet*. Intro., J.T. Hooker. Berkeley: U of California P. 197-257.

Optional: Geoffrey, Lewis. *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success*. Oxford UP, 1999. Weldon library online.

Week 13: 7 April: **East vs. West writing systems; ideographic writing; pictographic writing.**

Cushman, Ellen. *The Cherokee Syllabary: Writing the People's Perseverance*. Pages TBA

DeFrancis, John. 1984. *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy*. Honolulu: U of Hawaii P. Pages TBA.

---. 1989. *Visible Speech: The Diverse Oneness of Writing Systems* Honolulu: U of Hawaii P. Pages TBA.

It is the student's responsibility to familiarize him/herself with the Statement on Academic Offences (scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf)

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a major academic offense (see Scholastic Offense Policy in the Western Academic Calendar). Plagiarism is the inclusion of someone else's **verbatim** or **paraphrased** text in one's own written work without immediate reference. Verbatim text must be surrounded by quotation marks or indented if it is longer than four lines. A reference must follow right after borrowed material (usually the author's name and page number). Without immediate reference to borrowed material, a list of sources at the end of a written assignment does not protect a writer against the possible charge of plagiarism. All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

Absenteeism

For UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and a downloadable SMC see: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf [downloadable Student Medical Certificate (SMC): <https://studentservices.uwo.ca/> under the Medical Documentation heading]

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department.

For assignments worth less than 10%, the student will work out a reasonable solution directly with the professor.

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help

Etiquette for any online meetings:

Some components of this course may involve online interactions. This may include “office hours” or class meetings (certainly, the first weeks of the Winter, 2021, term will be online). To ensure the best experience for both you and your classmates, please honour the following rules of etiquette:

- please “arrive” to class on time
- please use your computer and/or laptop if possible (as opposed to a cell phone or tablet)
- ensure that you are in a private location to protect the confidentiality of discussions in the event that a class discussion deals with sensitive or personal material
- to minimize background noise, kindly mute your microphone for the entire class until you are invited to speak, unless directed otherwise
- [suggested for classes larger than 30 students] In order to give us optimum bandwidth and web quality, please turn off your video camera for the entire class unless you are invited to speak
- [suggested for cases where video is used] please be prepared to turn your video camera off at the instructor’s request if the internet connection becomes unstable
- unless invited by your instructor, do **not** share your screen in the meeting

The course instructor will act as moderator for the class and will deal with any questions from participants. To participate please consider the following:

- if you wish to speak, use the “raise hand” function and wait for the instructor to acknowledge you before beginning your comment or question
- remember to unmute your microphone and turn on your video camera before speaking
- self-identify when speaking.
- remember to mute your mic and turn off your video camera after speaking (unless directed otherwise)

General considerations of “netiquette”:

- Keep in mind the different cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students in the course.
- Be courteous toward the instructor, your colleagues, and authors whose work you are discussing.
- Be respectful of the diversity of viewpoints that you will encounter in the class and in your readings. The exchange of diverse ideas and opinions is part of the scholarly environment. “Flaming” is never appropriate.
- Be professional and scholarly in all online postings. Cite the ideas of others appropriately.

Note that disruptive behaviour of any type during online classes, including inappropriate use of the chat function, is unacceptable. Students found guilty of Zoom-bombing a class or of other serious online offenses may be subject to disciplinary measures under the Code of Student Conduct.

If we have to go to online class sessions, the remote learning sessions for this course will be recorded. The data captured during these recordings may include your image, voice recordings, chat logs and personal identifiers (name displayed on the screen). The recordings will be used for educational purposes related to this course, including evaluations. The recordings may be disclosed to other individuals under special circumstances. Please contact the instructor if you have any concerns related to session recordings.

Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation, or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor.

Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

Academic Consideration for Student Absence

Students will have up to two (2) opportunities during the regular academic year to use an on-line portal to self-report an absence during the term, provided the following conditions are met: the absence is no more than 48 hours in duration, and the assessment for which consideration is being sought is worth 30% or less of the student's final grade. Students are expected to contact their instructors within 24 hours of the end of the period of the self-reported absence, unless noted on the syllabus. Students are not able to use the self-reporting option in the following circumstances:

- for exams scheduled by the Office of the Registrar (e.g., December and April exams)
- absence of a duration greater than 48 hours,
- assessments worth more than 30% of the student's final grade,
- if a student has already used the self-reporting portal twice during the academic year

If the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence are *not* met, students will need to provide a Student Medical Certificate if the absence is medical, or provide appropriate documentation if there are compassionate grounds for the absence in question. Students are encouraged to contact their Faculty academic counselling office to obtain more information about the relevant documentation.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds, or for other reasons. **All documentation required for absences that are not covered by the Self-Reported Absence Policy must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's Home Faculty.**

For Western University policy on Consideration for Student Absence, see [Policy on Academic Consideration for Student Absences - Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs](#) and for the Student Medical Certificate (SMC), see: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf.

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

Western University is situated on First Nations territory. The Great Lakes woodland region of Turtle Island has been home to many Nations over centuries, and at different times, including the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Chonnonton (Neutral) peoples. The Huron-Wendat peoples also have a history of living in this territory. The Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum has served as an agreement between the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabek for the sharing of hunting territory, thus ensuring the viability of this land into the future. After contact, treaty-making between the Anishinaabek and Britain took place. In the London area, there were the Treaty 6 London Township, Treaty 7 Sombra Township, and Treaty 21 Longwoods. By recognizing First Nation peoples' relationships to this land and London, Ontario, Canada, we make explicit Indigenous peoples' ongoing presence on this land and in this place, and their rights to self-determination.