

Revisiting the ‘Tyranny of Writing’

Florian Coulmas

‘We generally learn about language only through writing.’

(Ferdinand de Saussure)

The study of language, as the study of any subject, is dependent on writing because the scientific enterprise is. The scientific world view assumes that the things and events that constitute the universe are understandable. Another fundamental assumption is that knowledge accumulates and progresses, that is, we know more now than people knew in Aristotle’s time. In the absence of writing people are not ignorant, but for science as we understand it, writing is indispensable. It enables scientific insights to be given permanence, separating message from messenger, text from author, judgement from judge, sentence from speaker. And it allows us to critically assess, take issue with, and build on the knowledge of our forebears. This chapter discusses the question of what writing means for the study of language, taking as its point of departure Ferdinand de Saussure’s critique of spelling conventions and its consequences for the evolution of modern linguistics. As in other scientific disciplines, in linguistics, too, writing is a major tool. However, what distinguishes the role of writing in linguistics from other fields of scholarship is that it relates to the object of investigation in complex ways concerning both the scientific analysis of language and the social conditions of its use. In literate society it is imperative to understand what the ‘tyranny of writing’ meant for the study of language when Saussure first used this term a century ago, and what it means today.

1 Introduction

At the outset of chapter VI of the *Course in General Linguistics* Saussure remarks that ‘we generally learn about language only through writing’ (1959: 23). Rather than being a factual observation, this is the introduction of a critique of linguistics which, as he saw it, suffered from ‘the tyranny of writing’ or *la tyrannie de la lettre*. Wade Baskin’s rendition of Saussure’s term in the English translation of his unmatched *Course in*

General Linguistics as *the tyranny of writing* has a slightly different meaning. ‘*La lettre*’ is a noun defined in the Larousse dictionary as

chacun des signes graphiques don l'ensemble constitue un alphabet et qui, seul ou en combinaison avec d'autres, correspondent à un son de la langue,

[Each of the graphical signs which taken together constitute an alphabet corresponds, alone or in combination with others, to a sound of the language.]

whereas *writing* is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as

1. *the activity of writing,*
2. *a sequence of letters, words or symbols marked on a surface, and*
3. *written work.*

Hence, when it comes to ‘tyranny’, we have an object, in French, and an activity and variously defined objects, in English. Rather than dwell on this apparent difference, however, I want to examine what exactly Saussure considered tyrannical about writing and letters. To begin with, let me say that Saussure is hard to argue with. Over a century’s time his ideas about language have lost nothing of their sagacity; his observations are keen and well-informed; and his theory is an utterly convincing integrated whole. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that everyone doing linguistics today is indebted to his wisdom.

2 What Saussure said

That said, let us re-examine chapter VI of the *Course* titled ‘Graphic representation of language’. At issue here are difficult questions concerning the ontological status of language and writing that are at the heart of our understanding of what linguistic theory should be about. The very title of the chapter I just quoted is indicative of the direction of Saussure’s thinking: There is language, and there is representation. As Saussure sees it, there are two distinct systems of signs, language and writing, and the latter’s sole purpose is to represent the former. Hence, he argues that ‘the linguistic object is not both the written and the spoken forms of words; the spoken forms alone constitute the object’ (Saussure 1959: 24).

Saussure’s purpose, we must not forget, was to lay the foundations of a new theory of language that was at variance with traditional philological studies. ‘The first linguists’, he criticized, ‘confused language and writing, just as the humanists had done before them’ (1959: 24). Worse, they recognized an influence of writing on language. He writes: ‘Take the notion that an idiom changes more rapidly when writing does not exist. Nothing could be further from the truth’ (1959: 24), but continues right there: ‘Writing may retard the process of change under certain conditions.’ And on the next page asks: ‘How is the influence of writing to be explained?’ If no influence existed, there was not only no need to explain it, but also every attempt to do so would be

bound to fail. Saussure further speaks of 'the undeserved importance of writing' which makes 'people forget that they learn to speak before they learn to write, and the natural sequence is reversed' (Saussure 1959: 25).

The key term here is 'natural sequence'. As Saussure defines it, language is 'deposited in the brain of each individual' (1959: 23). Clearly, whatever it is that is deposited there, it cannot be letters, but it cannot be sounds either which in his diction belong to *parole* rather than *langue*. It can only be the abstract units of *la langue* which could be given expression by means of either phonic or graphic signs. Actually, Saussure admits as much when he discusses the Chinese writing system which according to him is to the Chinese 'a second language' (Saussure 1959: 25). By nonetheless insisting that 'the linguistic object is not both the written and the spoken forms of words [but] the spoken form alone (ibid.: 24) he demonstrates that his thinking is firmly grounded in the alphabetic, not to say alphabetocentric, tradition of Western scholarship. He takes it for granted, as the Greek and Latin alphabets suggest, that the sole purpose of writing is to map speech and that, accordingly, letters are but substitutes of sounds. Had he also taken non-alphabetic writing systems into consideration, he might have admitted the possibility that writing, rather than being a mere substitute, is a supplement of speech that opens up new modes of human communication that speech – or a mere surrogate thereof – cannot achieve.

Language is a defining characteristic of humanity, a natural faculty that cannot be subject to the influence of an artefact, which writing indubitably is. Yet, by asking 'how the influence of writing is to be explained', Saussure implicitly concedes that there is an influence. Rather than denying that writing has an effect on language, he objects to its 'undeserved importance' (ibid.). 'Undeserved' could mean one of two things or, perhaps, both: undeserved in scholarship or undeserved in actual fact, that is in the evolution of language. Some observations Saussure cites to bolster his argument suggest that he means undeserved not just on the level of inquiry, but on the level of actual facts, too. In any event, his argument is based on what he considers the natural order of things, about which his predecessors had different ideas. He explicitly mentions the humanists; so let us revisit one of them.

3 Antonio de Nebrija's idea of writing

Antonio de Nebrija (1441–1522) was a *letrado*, a 'Renaissance man of letters', and letters were what he considered important. In the fateful year of 1492 he famously published the first grammar of a European vernacular ever, the *Gramática de la lengua Castellana*, where he declares:

Among all the things that human beings discovered through experience, or that were shown to us by divine revelation in order to polish and embellish human life, nothing was more necessary, nor benefited us more, than the invention of letters. Such letters, which by a common consent and the silent conspiracy of all nations have been accepted, have been invented – according to those who wrote about antiquity – by the Assyrians; with the exception of [Gellius], who attributed the invention of letters to Mercury in Egypt. (Nebrija 1492, I, ch. 2: 14; quoted from Mignolo 1992: 188)

Regarding the spreading of letters Nebrija speaks of ‘a common consent and the silent conspiracy of all nations.’ What kind of ‘conspiracy’ that might be is a question to which we will return later. Suffice it at this point to notice that Nebrija puts himself in the classical, that is, Aristotelian tradition, describing the letter as a ‘trace or figure to represent the voice.’ Letters were an important invention, beneficial to embellish human life, but ontologically that which they represent is more important or essential to human nature. So far, Nebrija’s understanding of letters seems to follow Aristotle’s (1938: 115) notion of letters as a secondary system of signs: ‘Words spoken are symbols of affections or impressions of the soul; written words are symbols of words spoken.’ However, Nebrija is concerned with letters not just as images of spoken sounds, but as models as well. In his Castilian orthography *Reglas de ortografía en lengua castellana* (1517) he complains that ‘these days no one writes our language purely, due to the lack of some letters which we pronounce but do not write, and others, on the contrary, which we write but do not pronounce’ (Mignolo 1992: 190). This is not as it should be, for a close match between letters and sounds, according to Nebrija, is the very *raison d’être* of letters.

He was not guilty as charged by Saussure; he did not confuse language and writing, but his idea about the relationship between the two was different. Like Saussure, Nebrija distinguished between letters and sounds and detected discrepancies between them, but while Saussure complains that ‘visual images lead to wrong pronunciations ... mistakes [that] are really pathological’ (Saussure 1959: 31), Nebrija recognized in *grammar* (in the sense of letters) a means not just ‘to polish and embellish human life’ but to preserve the meaning of the divine word, thanks to the equivalency between the spoken word and the letters representing it:

So that those words which God first made known through Moses and other prophets and hagiographers ... would not be erased by the long passage of time, they were entrusted and commended to grammar, the preserve of letters. (Nebrija 1503, *De vi ac potestate litterarum*, quoted from Rojinsky 2010: 117)

Nebrija welcomes the stability that language is afforded by letters. They were ‘a trace or figure by means of which the voice is represented’ (*Reglas de Ortografía en la lengua castellana*, Mignolo 1992: 189), which in his view meant representing an ideal state of the language, a state that should be preserved, because it embodied the word of God. Rather than condemning the influence that writing might exert on language, Nebrija sees in it the embodiment of language as it should be. The observed discrepancy between writing and pronunciation should be corrected by adjusting the pronunciation rather than the spelling. According to the second principle of his orthography, we should ‘write as we pronounce and to pronounce as we write’, for otherwise the letters ‘would have been invented in vain’. This is a step away from the Aristotelian conception of letters as mere secondary symbols. His daring project of a vernacular grammar was intended to raise Castilian on a level with the languages of scripture. Grammar, the art of letters, as he put it in the prologue to his Castilian grammar, was a means of transforming the unruly vernacular into an artefact, protecting it against decay. Although invented in order to represent voice, letters under his hands thus acquire

ontological independence and are attributed 'a clear priority over the voice', as Mignolo (1992: 189) has convincingly argued.

4 God, nature and society

It is with this notion that Saussure takes issue, because he considers it pathological that 'some Parisians already pronounce the *t* in *sept femmes*' (1959: 32). 'Mispronunciations due to spelling', he complains, 'will probably appear more frequently as time goes on' (1959: 31). Pathology is a deviation from a healthy normal condition of a natural organism. Saussure's example is very instructive, for during the one hundred years that separate us from his observation the pronunciation of *sept* with a final voiceless stop has become the norm, however pathological or healthy.

The question that arises is whether what Saussure concludes from his observation is compelling – namely the conclusion that 'the pronunciation of a word is determined, not by its spelling, but by its history' (1959: 31). If so, should we then ignore phonic deformations 'that do not stem from its natural functioning' such as *sept*? If it is true that in French the *t* got pronounced as a result of writing, why should this be considered 'tyranny'? Because, Saussure argues, 'by imposing itself upon the masses, spelling influences and modifies language' (*ibid.*). However, he continues, 'this happens only in highly literate languages where written texts play an important role' (1959: 31). Yet, he insists that data such as 'sept femmes' should be set aside because 'they are teratological cases' (1959: 32). Teratology is the scientific study of congenital abnormalities and abnormal formations. This terminology is a bit surprising. It is a metaphor akin to Herbert Spencer's evolutionary conception of society that was very influential in the late nineteenth century. It should not be taken, however, to indicate that Saussure conceived of linguistics as a natural science. He did not. He rejected the conception of language as a natural organism to which the 'first linguists', that is, the comparativists, subscribed just as vigorously as the humanists' idea that letters were meant to guide pronunciation.

We have three distinct positions here as to what the task of linguists should be.

The humanists, some of them at least, saw grammar as the art of letters invented as a means to guarantee that the meaning of God's utterances would not be disfigured in the course of time. The grammarian's task was to honour the authority of God by preserving a close correspondence between sound and letter. The enlightened comparativists dispensed with God as the supreme arbiter of right and wrong in matters of writing, turning language into an organism governed by natural laws. In the spirit of his time, Saussure introduced yet another position, replacing nature by society. He agrees with his predecessors in historical-comparative linguistics in as much as he considers language as an integrated whole that determines individual speakers' speech but is beyond individual intervention. He parts company with them in regard to the formative forces of language which he famously characterized as a 'social product' rather than a natural one.

Where does writing come into play? Writing, according to him, is external to language, but so is *phonē*, voice. Language is an abstract system that as a matter of principle is independent of any material manifestation, but he recognizes that, because

Table 1.1 What linguistics is all about: Three points of view

	Humanists	Comparativists	Saussure
Reference point	God	Nature	Society
Individual speakers are guided by:	Ignorance	Forces of nature	Social dynamics
The linguist's task is:	to establish and preserve the original meaning of the divine word.	to reconstruct the natural laws that determine linguistic change.	to discover the conventions adopted by a social body to permit individuals to exercise the faculty of speech.

it is a social fact, it cannot exist in individual brains alone without any communicable manifestation. Thus the embodiment of language as speech sounds comes in again through the back door. Writing, however, Saussure sees in the Aristotelian tradition as a derived sign system only, designed to represent speech, a function it fulfils more or less faithfully. He fails to appreciate the fact that once used by a large part of the population, written language acquires a life of its own and that, accordingly, the logic of (oral) language and the logic of writing follow different rules. This has often been said and criticized, for instance by Roy Harris (2000) and myself (Coulmas 2003), among others. It is not only the genealogy of writing that is grossly misrepresented if it is described as an instrument to record speech. For all we know, no writing system was planned in order to record oral sounds from the beginning. Much rather, the *linguistic interpretation* of graphic signs that had been devised as a recording device, for bookkeeping, for example, came after the fact. There are some well-founded doubts about the 'natural sequence' whose reversal Saussure criticizes. Where do we let the history of writing begin? Is it a continuous evolution, or should we assume discontinuities and posit its 'true' beginning once a notation was at hand that could be employed to represent speech sounds? In the history of writing this would be a rather arbitrary demarcation.

The second aspect that warrants some rethinking has to do with Saussure's conception of language. He speaks of a social fact that is to be understood in terms of its internal logic and must be kept apart from external phenomena such as foreign words, writing, language spread, among others. His analogy with chess (Saussure 1959: 22f) is illuminating. Many things can happen on a chessboard, but the logic of the game is fixed once and for all. In this sense Saussure's theory of language is static.

5 Nature and culture

Much like some evolutionary scientists believe that the human species has stopped evolving, Saussure's conception of language does not allow for the possibility that it might evolve. The moves and configurations on a chessboard are variable, but the totality of possibilities does not change. A chessboard with more than 64 fields or more

than 32 pieces would be a different game. We could of course accept Saussure's analogy as a working hypothesis, for arguably what linguists should explain is language as a fully developed system, not its embryonic stages or its decaying remains. What does this imply for the analysis of social facts? As defined by Durkheim, social facts 'reside in the society itself that produces them and not in its parts – namely its members. In this sense therefore they lie outside the consciousness of individuals' (Durkheim 1982: 39). Although social facts are functioning outside human introspection, they can be changed, and they do change. Take such a fundamental social institution as the family. The study of kinship shows that virtually nothing is immutable there.

The other important point is Saussure's above-quoted remark that 'spelling influences and modifies language ... *only in highly literate languages* where written texts play an important role' (1959: 31). What does this imply? The relatively recent appearance of writing has often been cited as the principal reason for ignoring it in the study of language. Humanity took to writing about 5,000 years ago, admittedly a short period of time when matched against the appearance of homo sapiens, said to have reached 'anatomical modernity about 200,000 years ago and ... full behavioral modernity around 50,000 years ago' (McHenry 2009: 265).

However, consider this. Two thousand years ago, there were about 300 million humans on the planet. It took 1,800 years then for the world population to triple to one billion. In the next 300 years it increased sevenfold, approaching exponential growth. During the past century, the world population grew exponentially, and it grew much older. For example, the average probability of a present-day 70-year-old Japanese dying is the same as a 30-year-old hunter-gatherer 100,000 years ago. The main part of this progress was made in the course of the twentieth century. Hygiene, medicine and technological progress have changed human life profoundly in a very short time. That is, the interaction between genes and human intervention in the environment has had unpredictable consequences.

My question then is: What does this mean with regard to language? That languages change is uncontroversial, but does language change? And could not a technology that is 5,000 years old exert an effect on the population that uses it? I do not profess to have answers to these questions, but I think we shouldn't shy away from asking them, just because we feel uncomfortable talking about the evolution of our species, unless the discussion is about the distant past.

According to some evolutionary biologists (e.g. O'Neil 2013), our DNA today differs from that of our forebears around the time of the end of the last ice age; that's just 10,000 years ago. Civilization, so the argument goes, made a difference. People learnt to live in cities where among many other things contagious diseases were much more devastating, speeding up the process of natural selection, that is, favouring the transmission of the genes of individuals lucky enough to survive epidemics. The point at issue here is the environmentally induced selection pressure, that is, the potential impact on our nature by external changes in the environment. Should students of human biology ignore them on the grounds that they obscure human nature? Similarly, we must ask whether writing ought to be excluded from the realm of linguistics proper because it is external/artificial. It seems to me that the question is settled. Just as modern humans manipulate nature including their own, they manipulate their language in

many ways, of which those associated with writing are the easiest to raise to the level of conscious reflection. In this connection it should also be noted that literacy rates have been rising continuously. Currently, 84.1 per cent of adults and 89 per cent of youth are literate, according to UNESCO, which implies that vastly more people than in the past are influenced in their language behaviour by writing.

Writing should, therefore, be considered one of several external, that is, social and artificial, influences on language. If these influences deserve to be called 'tyrannical', what about vaccination, not to mention foetal intervention, and organ transplantation?! There are, of course, people who reject these procedures, but this is because of ideological reasons rather than because these procedures obscure our insight into human nature.

Human history is the history of emancipation from the *tyranny of nature*. The first fire that was lit, the first stone axe that was flaked and the first shelter that was built helped early humans to withstand the elements and defend themselves against predators. Ever since, our relationship with the environment has been technology-mediated. Saussure's argument for the exclusion of writing from the study of language rests on the untenable assumption that it is possible to separate external, artificial forces such as the borrowing of foreign words and writing from the natural 'constant forces in the life of language' (1959: 22). What is more, if language is a social product, then how can loan words, spelling pronunciations, etc. reasonably be excluded from linguistic analysis? All of these phenomena are social products. The pristine homogeneous language community that lives in complete isolation without any contact with the outside world is an illusion rather than an abstraction.

As we have seen earlier, Saussure concedes that 'in highly literate languages' 'spelling influences and modifies language' (1959: 31). This admission clearly undermines his argument and is enough to assign writing a place in linguistics where all aspects of the influence of writing on the social institution of language are studied.

Notice in passing that expelling writing from the realm of linguistics would reduce its object of investigation to the present. About earlier historical stages of languages and languages no longer transmitted from one generation to the next we would know little if it wasn't for writing, as Saussure would be the first to admit. Harris (1987: 43) has made this point: If writing only obscures the view on language, Saussure would be 'obliged to conclude that in the case of dead languages a study of *la langue* ("the social product stored in the brain") would be impossible in principle.' That, Saussure would not have wanted to accept, but that nonetheless he argued that only the spoken forms of words 'rather than both the written and the spoken forms of words are the linguistic object' (1959: 23) is inconsistent.

6 Can we do linguistics without writing?

But what about languages that have never been written, including dialects and substandard varieties that have caught the linguists' attention? Here a different question arises: *Can* these languages be studied without recourse to writing? It is a matter of interest (also of historical interest) that Saussure considers what possible

alternative there could be. He writes: 'In Vienna and Paris samples of all languages are being recorded. Even so, recorded specimens could be made available to others only through writing' (ibid.). Although nowadays it is much easier to reproduce speech recordings and make them available to others, this is essentially unchanged. We cannot begin analysing linguistic data unless we set pen to paper and work on a transcription.

In contradistinction to some natural sciences, linguistics constitutes its object of investigation. The relationship between observable facts and units of analysis is very indirect. In the field of language, there are no given observable objects to start out with, because speech communities are not uniform, and no two people speak exactly alike. In fact, no one speaker speaks exactly the same on different occasions. Linguists, therefore, have to deal with an 'unmanageable mass', as Saussure called it; and to get a grip on it, they make assumptions about it and impose upon it structures, whose plausibility can be assessed, both internally as being more or less consistent (free of contradictions, redundancies and ad hoc rationalizations), and externally on the basis of speakers' judgements about similarities and differences.

In the background of linguistic analysis the *Tekhnê Gramatikê* in the sense of the art of letters therefore looms large. Both speakers whose judgements are relied upon for organizing the 'unmanageable mass' and linguists are, as Saussure readily admits, influenced in their speech behaviour and in their perception of language by writing. For this reason alone, a proper understanding of writing is essential for the study of language. Languages cannot be dissected like plants and animals and human cadavers. Rather than starting out from observable objects, knowledge generation in the field of language proceeds from models that impose structures on the object of study, or, to

put it differently, that constitute the units of investigation. The most commonly used model is the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) which, true to its name, is an alphabet. Since it was first designed in the 1880s, it has been refined, to be sure, but it is still an offshoot of the Latin alphabet. Aronoff (1992) and Faber (1992) have convincingly shown that phonemic segmentation is an outflow of alphabetic writing. The underlying principle of dividing the continuous flow of speech into discrete units is still the same. The visualization of speech that is produced by means of the IPA is a model of speech rather than its faithful image. Tone languages such as Chinese and many African languages provide further evidence for that. There are several options for notating tones in phonetic descriptions of languages where tone is distinctive that include numerals, a set of diacritic and tone letters. They all have in common the fact that they submit pitch accents and contour tones to the segmental structure of the IPA, although tones are not segments that precede or follow consonant and vowel segments. The imagery of a tonal language suggested by an augmented IPA transcription is as misleading and obscuring of linguistic facts as Saussure thought the *t* was in *sept femmes*.

The Chinese writing system engenders a different kind of model that favours the perception of syllables. By means of a procedure known as *Fanqi* (反切) or 'reverse cutting' it led to sophisticated analyses of syllables in terms of onset and rhyme by matching characters that share initial and terminal sounds with each other.

For instance, the *fanqi* for 東 is 德紅. The initial of 德 (*d/e*) is *d*, and the final of 紅 (*h/ong*) is *ong*. Accordingly, 東 is to be pronounced *dong* 'east'.

The Devanagari script is also focused on the syllable as a unit; each *akshara* contains a neutral vowel and is modified with a diacritic for syllables containing a different vowel. These are just some other examples of how writing systems function as models of language. It is an illusion to assume that the IPA is much closer to the reality of speech than other writing systems.

7 Conclusions

To conclude, Saussure was certainly right to point out that discrepancies between sound and letter can be misleading and, therefore, most written language material should not be regarded as reliable data at face value. He was wrong to argue that these problems could be solved, once and for all, by means of a 'truly phonological system of writing [... where there is] one symbol for each element of the spoken chain' (1959: 33). And he was wrong to argue that the linguistic object is not both the written and the spoken forms of words, but the spoken forms alone (1959: 23f). I have argued against this position because writing is crucially important for linguistic analysis on three levels.

First, *on the methodological level* we have to understand the properties of the tool we work with. What are the raw data of linguistic research? How are they processed for analysis? Why use the IPA rather than Hangul? In scientific inquiry the effects that research tools have on the outcome of the investigation is a well-known phenomenon. No matter which transcription system we use, it is a tool whose properties we must understand.

Second, *on the theoretical level* we have to be able to answer the question whether the structures we analyse are derived from or imposed onto the object of our investigation. What is a phoneme, a word, a sentence? In the absence of writing, these questions are not easily answered. As a matter of fact, common definitions of these notions are heavily influenced by writing.

Third, *on the object level* we have to come to grips with the influence that writing may exert on a language, for instance by comparing written and unwritten languages; by comparing the linguistic output of speakers who communicate much in writing with that of others who do not. In this connection, phenomena such as the following are to be investigated: language standardization, diglossia, Ausbau, spectrum of varieties, spelling pronunciation and text-mediated linguistic borrowing, among others.

This is an ample field, and if it is not for linguists to plough, I would not know for whom, *pace* Saussure to whom we can still turn, once again, by way of ending where we began, for 'We generally learn about language only through writing.'

References

- Aristotle (1938), *Peri Hermeneias (De interpretatione)*, translated by H. P. C. Fook, London: Loeb Classical Library.

- Aronoff, Mark (1992), 'Segmentalism in linguistics: The alphabetic basis of phonological theory', in *The Linguistics of Literacy*, edited by Pamela Downing, Susan D. Lima and Michael Noonan, 71–82, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Coulmas, Florian (2003), *Writing Systems: An Introduction to their Linguistic Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Durkheim, Emile (1982), *The Rules of Sociological Method*, translated by W. D. Halls, London: Macmillan.
- Faber, Alice (1992), 'Phonemic segmentation as epiphenomenon: Evidence from the history of alphabetic writing', in *The Linguistics of Literacy*, edited by Pamela Downing, Susan D. Lima and Michael Noonan, 111–35, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Harris, Roy (1987), *Reading Saussure*, London: Duckworth.
- Harris, Roy (2000), *Rethinking Writing*, London: The Athlone Press.
- Mignolo, Walter D. (1992), 'Nebrija in the New World: The question of the letter, the colonization of American languages, and the discontinuity of the classical tradition', *L'Homme* 32, 185–207.
- McHenry, H.M. (2009), 'Human evolution', in *Evolution: The First Four Billion Years*, edited by Michael Ruse and Joseph Travis, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Nebrija, Antonio de ([1492] 2017), *Gramática de la lengua Castellana*, Barcelona: Red Ediciones.
- O'Neil, Dennis (2013), *Evolution of Modern Humans*, Website: <http://anthro.palomar.edu/homo2/default.htm> (accessed 08/22/2017)
- Rojinsky, David (2010), *Companion to Empire: A Genealogy of the Written Word in Spain and New Spain, c. 550-1550*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de (1916), '*Cours de linguistique générale*', edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, with the collaboration of Albert Riedlinger, Lausanne and Paris: Payot; English translation by Wade Baskin (1959), *Course in General Linguistics*, New York: Fontana.

DuEPublico

Duisburg-Essen Publications online

UNIVERSITÄT
DUISBURG
ESSEN

Offen im Denken

ub | universitäts
bibliothek

This text is made available via DuEPublico, the institutional repository of the University of Duisburg-Essen. This version may eventually differ from another version distributed by a commercial publisher.

DOI: 10.5040/9781474292436.0006

URN: urn:nbn:de:hbz:465-20250108-120743-8

Proof version of: Coulmas, F. (2018). Revisiting the ‘Tyranny of Writing’. In C. Weth & K. Juffermans (eds.) *Tyranny of Writing: Ideologies of the Written Word* (pp. 19-30). London: Bloomsbury Academic.
<https://doi.org/10.5040/9781474292436.0006>

All rights reserved.