

Digraphia: the Story of a Sociolinguistic Term

Sveva Elti di Rodeano

Abstract. Digraphia is a metalinguistic term referring to the coexistence of two scripts for one language. The main objective of this paper is to provide the all the attestations of the term “digraphia” and its meanings, in order to propose an unambiguous definition for Grapholinguistic Studies.

This reflection has a twofold aim: it is meant to establish a definition for this term, useful for a linguistics and language glossary; and it is intended to highlight the necessity of a precise designation in the Grapholinguistic field. The terminology is in fact the *trait d'union* between the disciplines involved (computer science, statistics, linguistics, sociology, etc.). The interdisciplinarity of terminology results from the character of the designations: they are linguistic items, conceptual elements and vehicles of communication. In order to spread, share and improve knowledge in this special field,¹ the communication between scholars must be normalized and the concepts must be standardized.

1. Introduction

The metalinguistic reflection has spread the generally accepted opinion that “language and writing are two distinct systems of signs; the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first” (Saussure, 1959,

It is a pleasant duty to express my gratitude to my supervisor Prof.ssa Raffaella Bombi (Udine), who spent time with me discussing this paper, and Prof. Vincenzo Orioles (Udine), who inspired me the idea of dealing with metalinguistic terminology of writing systems. All remaining errors are my own responsibility.

Sveva Eltidi Rodeano
University of Udine
Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici e del Patrimonio Culturale
vicolo Florio, 2/b
33100 Udine, Italy

1. It is relevant to note that even the name of this field is still uncertain. English scholars use “graphematic, graphematik, grapholinguistics,” German “Schriftlinguistik, Grapholinguistik, Graphemik,” Italian “grafemica, grafematica”.

The designation “Schriftlinguistik” is relatively new, Dürscheid (2006, p. 12) refers to Nerius and Augst (1988) as its first user.

Y. Haralambous (Ed.), *Graphemics in the 21st Century. Brest, June 13-15, 2018. Proceedings Grapholinguistics and Its Applications* (ISSN: 2534-5192), Vol. 1.

Fluxus Editions, Brest, 2019, p. 111–126. <https://doi.org/10.36824/2018-graf-elti>
ISBN: 978-2-9570549-0-9, e-ISBN: 978-2-9570549-1-6

pp. 23–24). Therefore, there is not a linguistic conception of writing system, since the *écriture* is just the portrayal of the *langue*.

The *fil rouge* and common thread that wends its way through this paper is whether writing systems are strictly symbolic systems representing languages, or linguistic entities themselves.

For this discussion, which goes beyond this paper but it seems impossible not to mention it at all, it is useful remind us of Aristotle's definition of writing (Περὶ Ἑρμηνείας 16a 3–9), since it became axiomatic in the Western tradition.

Ἔστι μὲν οὖν τὰ ἐν τῇ φωνῇ τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ παθημάτων σύμβολα, καὶ τὰ γραφόμενα τῶν ἐν τῇ φωνῇ. καὶ ὥσπερ οὐδὲ γράμματα πᾶσι τὰ αὐτὰ, οὐδὲ φωναὶ αἱ αὐταί· ὧν μέντοι ταῦτα σημεῖα πρώτων, ταῦτα πᾶσι παθήματα τῆς ψυχῆς, καὶ ὧν ταῦτα ὁμοιώματα πράγματα ἦδη ταῦτά.

Now spoken sounds are symbols of affections in the soul, and written marks symbols of spoken sounds. And just as written marks are not the same for all men, neither are spoken sounds. But what these are in the first place signs of—affections of the soul—are the same for all; and what these affections are likenesses of—actual things—are also the same. (Acrill, 1991, p. 25)

Here τὰ γραφόμενα, written words, are symbols, σύμβολα, of spoken words, while spoken words are symbols of affection of the soul. Therefore, the relationship between written words, spoken words, words and things are linear and monodirectional.

Currently, even if several books have been published that suggested the equity of writing with speech sound (Massias 1828, Assmann 1991), writing became a device for expressing language, rather than being the mere representation of speech from its origin (Gelb, 1963, p. 13). This idea leaves space for recognizing non linguistic functions of writing, but, since the aim of this paper is focused on the metalinguistic aspect of writing, I will intentionally go beyond this and consider writing within the framework of its respective languages.

Indeed, sociolinguistic studies have seeded the soil where we can now find different approaches to the study of writing systems: the idea that scripts are able to modify a community of speakers is now disseminated, since they are bound to religious motions, identity claims, and even scientific progress. One of the most eminent scholars in this field, Florian Coulmas, stated that:

rather than being mere instruments of a practical nature, they [scripts and orthographies] are symbolic systems of great social significance which may, moreover, have profound effect on the social structure of a speech community” (Coulmas, 1989, p. 226).

Even though nowadays several scholars have seen a utilitarian relation between language and writing, because writing is “not language [...] writing does represent language” (Rogers, 2005, p. 2), where language

must be interpreted as phonetic representation, various studies have been published in recent years regarding adoption/change of script(s), no linguistic dictionary has yet recorded the lexicon referring to these phenomena. For instance, Bußmann and Cotticelli Kurras (2007, p. 202) offered the following explanation for the term “digraphia”:

digrafia

[gr. gráphein ‘scrivere’].

Rappresentazione di un fonema tramite due segni grafici, ad es. ingl. <sh> per [ʃ], ted. <ch> per [x] o [ç]. I due segni interessati costituiscono nella loro unità un “digrafo”.²

In this paper, I illustrate the history of one most attested words in the literature of writing systems, as “digraphia,”³ considering it as a typology, as well as diglossia (Ferguson, 1963, p. 163), useful both for graphemic studies, since it strictly refers to scripts, and both for linguistic studies, since it considers the coexistence of two scripts for one language. The term is intended as a sociolinguistic typology, in comparison with its linguistic parallel “diglossia,” therefore its attestations and history of meaning are divided into ante- and post- adventum of Charles Ferguson’s contribution.

Above all, “digraphia” is a metalinguistic term and for this field afterwards I will propose an unambiguous definition.

2. Digraphia Ante Diglossia: The Pioneers

The adjective “digraphic” appeared for the first time in the narration written by Demetrios Pierides, a bank manager in Larnaca and collector of classical antiquities. Pierides recounted his discovery of an inscription with the same text written down in two different scripts, Greek and Cypriot:

In the summer of 1873 I became possessed of an inscription in Greek and Cypriote, then discovered in Larnaca, the ancient Citium. [...] As the language is the same in both parts, and only the writing differs, I prefer calling this inscription *digraphic*, instead of *bilingual*. (Pierides, 1875, p. 38)

2. “digrafia//[gr. gráphein ‘to write’].//The representation of a single phoneme with two graphic signs, e.g. Engl. <sh> for [ʃ], Germ. <ch> for [x] or [ç]. The two written signs constitute a “digraph”.”

Similar explanations could be found in Pei and Gaynor (1954, p. 57), Hartmann and Stork (1972, p. 67), Mackay (1989, p. 159), Trask (1996, p. 113): 113), Beccaria (1994, p. 230), Matthews (1997, p. 98), Bußmann (1998, p. 315), Crystal (2008, p. 145).

3. The history of this word is briefly written down in Britto (1986, pp. 309–310), Grivelet (2001, pp. 1–6) and more extensively in Bunčić, Lippert, and Rabus (2016, pp. 27–50).

It is highly unlikely that Pierides had been trained in linguistics, but surely he was an enthusiast and amateur of the Greek world, therefore it is likely that he had formed the word “digraphic” with the Greek prefix δι- “two, double,” lacking the functional distribution sense.

In the same year, the numismatist Alfred von Sallet used *zweischriftig* to describe the inscription he recovered from some Cypriot coins:

[...] einige dieser Münzen, welche als zweischriftig—sit venia verbo—besonders interessant sind, geben neben der cyprischen auch die griechische Legende [...].⁴ (Sallet, 1875, p. 132)

He found that two different scripts (Cypriot and Greek) were employed, an instance for which he begged our pardon but no words appeared more suitable to describe it than “zweischriftig,” which is a new formation in the absence of an appropriate metalinguistic word.

In the same way as Pierides, the orientalist Joseph Halévy used *digraphique* in the description of some Sumero-Akkadian inscriptions, disagreeing with the assiriologists who called them “bilingual”.

Les textes réputés bilingues de l’antique Babylonie, quel que soit leur caractère, ne peuvent donc être que des rédactions digraphiques exprimant une langue unique, l’assyrien.⁵ (Halévy, 1883, p. 255)

Evidently, Halévy’s critique was justified by his conviction that Sumerian was not a language at all, but just an alternative script for Akkadian. This was the reason for it being not worth mentioning his contribution to the diffusion of the term “digraphia,” but just to be through regarding its attestations.

3. Digraphia Post Diglossia: The First Attempts

In 1959, Charles Ferguson introduced the concept of Diglossia as

a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation. (Ferguson, 1959, p. 336)

4. “[...] some of these coins, which are especially interesting as they are zweischriftig—if you pardon the expression—, also give the Greek legend next to the Cypriot [...]”.

5. “The texts of ancient Babylonia regarded as bilingual, whatever their nature, can therefore only be digraphic recensions conveying a single language, Assyrian.”

Thus, the digraphic sense of functional distribution refers to this definition. Immediately following Ferguson, digraphia has been perceived as a sociolinguistic typology.

The linguist Robert Lafont, describing the features of Occitan, which reveal both two linguistic varieties (French and Occitan) and two graphic varieties (classic and mistral), wrote:

La situation se présente donc ainsi: deux langues d'expression écrite, mais l'une est populaire, familière, et en tout état de cause, dominée par l'autre. On ne parvient à l'écrit occitan que si l'on a déjà appris à lire en français. [...] La situation de diglossie occitane n'est donc pas semblable absolument à celles qu'on peut trouver en d'autres lieux de contacts linguistiques: elle se complète par une situation de digraphie.⁶ (Lafont, 1971, p. 95)

Though the reference to Ferguson was more than evident, it is not clear if Lafont conceived digraphia as a functional distribution of scripts, because here we are also dealing with orthographies.⁷

Otherwise, Petr Zima, describing the functional distribution of the two scripts (Latin and Arabic alphabets) in which Hausa is attested, clearly referred to Ferguson's diglossia. Furthermore, he discerned whether we can talk about a case of "digraphia" or a case of "diorthographia," phenomenon just now observed in Lafont:

Digraphia: "Two types of written form of one language co-exist, based upon the usage of two distinct graphical systems (scripts) by the respective language community."

Diorthographia: "Two types of written form of a particular language co-exist, using the same script, but they are based upon the usage of two distinct orthographies by the same language community." (Zima, 1974, p. 58)

Regarding this distinction, Paul Wexler had already received Ferguson's lesson, but he still did not have an appropriate terminology: therefore, he spoke about "orthographic diglossia" as a case of diglossia in which "different scripts may be used by a single ethnic group for different purposes [...]" (Wexler, 1971, p. 340).

For these reasons, we can see how the concept of a functional distribution between two linguistic varieties, in this case writing varieties,⁸

6. "The situation is as follows: two written languages, one of which is vernacular, familiar, and at any rate, dominated by the other. [...] Therefore the Occitan situation of diglossia does not resemble those which one can find in other places of language contacts at all: it is completed by a situation of digraphia."

7. Likewise, the authorship of "diglossia" (generally ascribed to Charles Ferguson, even if the term was used before him in 1885 by Emmanuel Roidis and Jean Psichari), the one of "digraphia" has been ascribed to Zima by Grivelet (2001, p. 1) and to Lafont by Bunčić, Lippert, and Rabus (2016, p. 40).

8. Having said that, I consider writing systems as a linguistic category.

has already been perceived by scholars, but there was not a specific and unambiguous terminology.

Just two years after Zima, the anthropologist James R. Jaquith wrote two papers regarding discordant orthographies in advertisements, and he defined digraphia as “the graphic analog of diglossia” (1996, p. 303). Another clue that the term had not still been accepted was that the title of the paper itself was wrongly spelled as “diagraphia”.⁹

3.1. Digraphia Post Diglossia: The Role of Giorgio Raimondo Cardona

Since 1978, G. R. Cardona had wondered “quanto dei concetti propri della sociolinguistica e della etnografia della comunicazione può essere estesi alla scrittura?” (1978, p. 67). The same question appears in *ILuoghi del sapere* (185), but it seems that for him the matter was already solved, given the paragraph “sociologia della scrittura” (1981), where he evidently used sociolinguistic categories—for instance writing-community (speech-community), prestige, and writing repertoire—for writing systems:

I vari insieme coerenti di simboli posseduti dallo scrivente possono essere paragonati, con le precisazioni che si diranno, alle varietà linguistiche che formano il repertorio verbale. Analogamente a quando si dà nell'uso di questo repertorio, anche nello scrivere si sceglierà la varietà scrittoria più adatta all'evento scrittorio.¹⁰ (ibid., p. 103)

He also added:

In ogni società le varie produzioni simboliche si diversificano e si strutturano in modo funzionale alla società stessa [...] le differenze verranno sempre rese funzionali agli scopi della società. [...] Dove, tra le varie forme di produzione simbolica, compaia la scrittura, questa non potrà certo costituire eccezione, ma sarà soggetta all'esigenza modellizzante propria della cultura.¹¹ (ibid., p. 89)

Having said that, it is now possible to reinterpret the following paragraph, where Cardona illustrated the spread of the Arabic script:

9. The same fate occurred to Dale (1980) and Collin (2005).

10. “The coherent sets of signs owned by the writer can be compared, with the previous mentioned below, with the linguistic varieties of spoken language. Likewise in the case of spoken language, in the written language the variety must be chosen in accordance with the written occasion.”

11. “In every society, different symbolic representations are functionally diversified and structured, in accordance to each society [...] the differences will be made functional to the purposes of the society. [...] If writing appears among the various forms of symbolic representation, then this certainly cannot constitute an exception, but will be subject to the modeling requirement of culture itself.”

La scrittura araba si è diffusa, nel giro di qualche secolo, [...] in Spagna, in Sicilia, in Serbia però essa, se è stata certo in uso spesso per qualche secolo per documenti e scritture religiose, non ha attecchito nemmeno nel periodo in cui gli Arabi erano effettivamente padroni della situazione. Possiamo pensare che in Sicilia vi sia stato un lungo periodo addirittura di bilinguismo siciliano arabo, ma non si può dire altrettanto di un periodo di digrafia latino-araba.¹²
(*ibid.*, pp. 128–129)

Even if he did not explicitly write which ones could be the functions of, respectively, the Arabic script and the Latin script, due to what we have just examined, Cardona meant “digrafia” as coexistence of two writing varieties sorted in different purposes.

Shortly afterwards, another Italian scholar, Carlo Consani, published a trilogy of papers titled “Bilinguismo, diglossia e digrafia nella Grecia antica” (1988–1990), in which, drawing on the philological current led by Pierides, he used the concept of digrafia as a sociolinguistic typology useful for describing the case of Cyprus. There, diglossia and digraphia coexisted, since the scripts implied are two: the Greek alphabet and Cypriot syllabary:

[...] tutti questi elementi mostrano a quali drastiche restrizioni, ai diversi livelli diatopico, diastratico e diafasico-situazionale, risponda l’uso del dialetto e della scrittura sillabica.¹³
(Consani, 1990, p. 77)

Therefore, the meaning of digraphia here is perfectly in step with Ferguson’s shared influence post-1959.

3.2. Digraphia Post Diglossia: New Models

In the last decade of the twentieth century, the functional distribution is an essential part of the digraphia concept. As a matter of fact, based on the case study of Serbo-Croatian and Japanese, several new models emerged. In Haarmann (1993, pp. 153–154), digraphia is employed in the description of a Korean text, where the use of two different scripts shows a functional distribution depended on their prestige. At the same time, he used bigraphism talking about languages, like Serbo-Croatian and Japanese, which do not show any differences in terms of prestige between their writing systems (2006, pp. 2406–2407).

12. “The Arabic writing has spread, during some centuries, [...] in Spain, Sicily and Serbia, it has been used in religious documents, but it did not hold even when Arabs were in charge. We can guess that there has been a long Sicilian-Arabic bilingualism period, but it can not be said about a digrafia Latin-Arabic period.”

13. “[...] all these elements are illustrative of the diastratic conditions, from the diastratic, diatopic and diafasic point of view, under which dialect and syllabic writing are used.”

In parallel to Ferguson's model, Chiang proposed a similar one more suited to digraphia, since it distinguished more analytically how the distribution of scripts does work: he related more prestigious scripts to "semantic scripts," while less prestigious scripts are related to "phonetic scripts".

It [the H variety] is retained to represent the same meaning although it no longer represents the pronunciation accurately. I call the script thus used the semantic variety. For instance, in English, "night" used to be pronounced /nixt/. This script form was preserved after the pronunciation had changed to /nait/. (Chiang, 1995, p. 112)

My use of the terms "semantic" and "sound" here are similar in meaning to Haas' use of the terms "pleremic" and "cenemic". See William Haas, "Determine the Level of a Script". (*ivi*, 125).

From the point of view of a speaker whose writing system does not accurately represent the phonetic form of language, this distinction turns out to be interesting. Orthographia, as "the correct graphia," is not necessarily phonetic, it is rather more common for the contrary: in less controlled contexts, where a less prestigious script is used, there could be orthographic mistakes; meanwhile in more controlled contexts, where a more prestigious script is used, there should not be orthographic mistakes.

3.3. (Implicit) Digraphia Post Diglossia

Since a scientific terminology for the contact between scripts has not been established, many scholars explain examples of digraphia, without mentioning the term. Among them, Sergio Pernigotti, talking about Ancient Egypt's writing systems (hieroglyphs and hieratic), wrote:

Questa situazione della contemporanea presenza di due scritture strettamente correlate tra di loro dal punto di vista della grafia e distinte soltanto nel loro uso di mantenne sostanzialmente immutata dall'unificazione del paese fino a circa l'inizio del VII secolo a.C., quando questo panorama abbastanza semplice venne complicato dall'introduzione di un terzo tipo di scrittura che si affiancò ai due precedenti e che noi chiamiamo ancora oggi con il termine, coniato da Erodoto, di "demotica" [...] ¹⁴ (Pernigotti, 1986, p. 30)

14. "The simultaneous presence of two scripts, which were interrelated from the graphic point of view and separated by their use, remained stable from the unification of the country until about VII BC., when it was introduced the third script, which was accompanied by the previous two and which now is called "demotic," as Herodotus coined first."

This case could be found in Bunčić, Lippert, and Rabus (2016, pp. 256–275), as an example of “bigraphism,” while, the later co-presence of three scripts (hieroglyphs, hieratic, and demotic) is called “scriptal pluricentricity” (*ivi*, 183–185).

In my opinion, this case could be a perfect example of the so-called “diachronic digraphia” (Berlanda, 2006, pp. 89–98): the internal differences in style of Egyptian Hieroglyphs led up to an internal digraphia,¹⁵ developing two different scripts which are used in two different domains, hieroglyphs for monumental inscriptions, hieratic for administrative documents.

Berlanda (*ivi*, 72–73) wondered why these two other scripts have evolved and suggested that the reason lay in the necessity of keeping it [the hieroglyphs] “clean from change”.

This idea, implying that a new script evolved from another one in order to keep the previous one unchanged (in terms of shape, domain of use, users) has a twofold implication: (A) uncommon domains of use allow the user to change the style of the script; (B) the user considers the script in charge suitable for the uncommon domain.

The consequence of (A) is that, considering Ancient Egypt’s scripts, if the calligraphy of hieroglyphs had been modified until becoming hieratic, we should have found some attestation of an intermediate phase between hieroglyphs and hieratic graphemes, and we have not. The consequence of (B) is that we could have found some attestation of hieroglyphs used in non-monumental texts, and we have not. For these reasons, it is more likely that the reason for the creation of one and then another script lies in the spread of use of writing, from the point of view of users (in Egypt, at first, it was prerogative of scribes) and of domains (at first used only in monumental texts).

Again, about hieroglyphs, Louis Godart described the scripts attested in II millennium AC in Crete:

A priori, sarebbe logico supporre che i motivi dell’esistenza di due scritture diverse nella Creta protopalaziale fossero legati alla presenza di popolazioni diverse, che parlavano due lingue diverse e quindi utilizzavano due sistemi grafici diversi [...] La semplicità e la logica di questa ipotesi non sembrano tuttavia resistere a un esame più attento dei dati archeologici. [...] Se si esamina la cronologia della scrittura geroglifica e si analizzano i tipi di supporti sui quali le prima due scritture cretesi sono attestate, si notano alcuni elementi sorprendenti:

1. I primi documenti geroglifici rinvenuti sono i sigilli, che recano testimonianza della cosiddetta scrittura di Arkhanes, mentre i più antichi documenti d’archivio in nostro possesso sono le tavolette in lineare A di Festo,

15. Hieratic script is the cursive version of hieroglyphic script, and the later demotic script is even more cursive than the hieratic one. Dale (1980, p. 6): 6) called this case “internal di[a]graphia”.

i documenti del Deposito geroglifico di Cnosso e gli archivi in geroglifico del Quartier Mu di Mallia.

2. La maggior parte dei documenti scritti in geroglifico è costituita da sigilli o impronte di sigilli, mentre non un solo documento in lineare A ci è pervenuto su questo tipo di supporto.

Una tale convergenza di dati non può essere frutto del caso, e forse possiamo trovare in questa differenziazione del supporto delle scritte i motivi che hanno spinto gli amministratori palaziali minoici dell'inizio del II millennio a.C. a utilizzare i due sistemi di scrittura di cui stiamo trattando.¹⁶

(Godart, 1992, pp. 139–140)

This is an example for which Bunčić, Lippert, and Rabus (2016, p. 58) would have used the definition “medial digraphia,” whereas the only discriminating factor for the choice of one script rather than the other one is the medium scriptiois. In this case, we are dealing with a case of coexistence of two scripts and, fortunately, their distinct material vehicle.

As detailed below, Massimiliano Marazzi described more extensively the reason for the coexistence of two scripts in the case in the Anatolia of II millennium A.C., hence the coexistence of cuneiform and Anatolian hieroglyphs:

[...] si assiste allo sviluppo contemporaneo e parallelo di 2 sistemi scrittori, facenti certamente capo agli stessi ambienti scribali e inizialmente profondamente diversi e differenziantisi quanto a:

- scelta dei supporti;
- principi di organizzazione dei segni su supporti stessi;
- tracciato, articolazione e organizzazione dei grafemi che compongono il sistema;
- rapporto fra codice scrittorio e codice linguistico.

[...] Se infatti il sistema cuneiforme hittita si afferma quale sistema scrittorio lineare fonetico su tavoletta d'argilla, utilizzato per esprimere in tutti gli ambiti [...] le lingue correnti dell'epoca [...], il cd. “geroglifico anatolico” rimane limitato alla sola superficie glittica, mantenendo intatto l'impianto originario di sistema segnico, organizzatosi essenzialmente all'interno di uno spazio, quello appunto del sigillo [...]¹⁷

(Marazzi, 2009, pp. 116–117)

16. “A priori, it would be logical assume that the reasons two different scripts exist in Protopalatial Crete were related to the presence of different peoples, speaking different languages and writing in different scripts [...] This simple and logic approach can not withstand an accurate archaeological study. [...] A careful analysis of both the chronology of the hieroglyphic script and the supports of the first two Cretan scripts displays some surprising elements://1. The first hieroglyphic documents found are seals, which bear witness of the so called Arkhanes script, while the more ancient archival documents are the linear A tablets from Phaistos, Knossos and Mallia.//2. The majority of the hieroglyphic documents are seals and seal imprints, while not a single linear A documents appear on this kind of support. The convergence of information can not be a coincidence, and perhaps we can find the reasons why two scripts have been used in the 2nd millennium BC in the distinction of support.”

17. “There is the development of two scripts, related to the same scribal environment and deeply different for://– support selection//– principles of signs

In this case we have the coexistence of two different scripts, which differ in the way of organizing their signs. Hittite cuneiforms consist of a large part of syllabic signs, whereas Anatolian hieroglyphs could have phonetic value or be direct symbol of a thing. Saying that hieroglyphs could be direct symbol implies that they could not rely on any language. From these premises, we should add that the “scribal habits” were highly sophisticated and multilinguistic. At last, in my opinion, this example offers us the occasion to highlight the role of the medium script: it could not be a coincidence that the first supports on which we have found Anatolian hieroglyphs are seals, thing characterizing by peculiar use and shape, and which perfectly fits for visual composition, rather than textual ones.

4. Digraphia Nowadays

Recently two volumes have been published regarding contact between writing systems: *Biscriptality, a Sociolinguistic typology*, by Bunčić, Lippert, and Rabus (2016) and *Contatti di lingue, contatti di scritture* by Baglioni and Tribulato (2015). The first one, chronologically successive, illustrates a theory which Italian scholars have been already been aware of: an heuristic model which investigates all the so called “biscriptality” cases (*digraphia, diglyphia, diorthographia, bigraphism, biglyphism, biorthographism, scriptal pluricentricity, glyphic pluricentricity, orthographic pluricentricity*), identified on the basis of two axes, the sociolinguistic one, which describes the relation between the two scripts (privative, equipollent, and diasituative) and the graphematic one, which identifies three levels of distinctions (script, glyphic variation, orthography). The only one called “digraphia” is when there is a clear functional division of domains of the considered script:

Digraphia with scripts in a privative opposition, based on a diaphasic, diastatic, diamesic or medial distribution.

(Bunčić, Lippert, and Rabus, 2016, p. 62)

On the other side, in Baglioni-Tribulato, even if they explicitly referred to the previous text, the concept of digraphia appears from a different point of view, given that “di questo macro fenomeno, poi, è possibile riconoscere diverse manifestazioni sociali, a seconda che le due

organization//– layout, structure and organization of signs//– relation between writing and language//[...] While the Hittite Cuneiform asserted its linear and phonetic scripts on clay tablets, and it was used in all context of use [...] the languages of that time [...]. the so called “Anatolian hieroglyphs” remains restricted only to the engraved surface, maintaining the original signs organization intact, which was mainly created within the seal written space [...].”

scritture abbiano un prestigio diverso e conoscano pertanto una netta ripartizione funzionale” (Baglioni and Tribulato, 2015, p. 15). It seems that the model of Bunčić-Lippert-Rabus has been interpreted too *in strictu sensu*: the only one remaining discriminating factor for the choice between one or the other scripts is the prestige of them. Again Baglioni-Tribulato specify:

differenza della diglossia, la ‘digrafia’ è una condizione non dell’intero repertorio, ma di una lingua specifica considerata nella sua relazione con la scrittura: ne consegue che diglossiche sono le società, mentre ‘digrafiche’ sono le lingue; nella diglossia le due lingue sono l’una gerarchicamente subordinata all’altra, mentre nella ‘digrafia’ [...] non sempre è individuabile una ripartizione funzionale delle due scritture [...]; esistono lingue per la cui notazione sono o sono stati impiegati più di due sistemi di scrittura e per le quali pertanto l’etichetta di ‘digrafia’ non è utilizzabile”¹⁸ (ibid., p. 14)

Therefore, here we have another point of view of the total subject: as well as speakers’ communities being diglossic, languages are digraphic, which do not always show the criterion with their preference for one script. For this reason, it seems pointless to compare this volume to the previous one, since the starting point of the matter is completely different: Baglioni-Tribulato consider writing system a feature of language, while Bunčić-Lippert-Rabus consider it as a linguistic object worthy of research per se.

In fact, they clarify:

By analogy with diglossia, in some cases of digraphia it even makes sense to speak of an H writing system and an L writing system. [...] However, there are also many cases of digraphia in which the feature governing the privative opposition does not lend itself to a high-low distinction. [...] The use of two writing systems for one language is a case of linguistic variation. Therefore, it seems appropriate to use the well-known model of linguistic variation assembled by Coseriu (1992, pp. 280–292), consisting of diachronic, diatopic, diastatic and diaphasic variation. (Bunčić, Lippert, and Rabus, 2016, p. 57)

Here, as Coulmas said, variation of writing systems is a linguistic variation, which means that writing systems must be studied as linguistic objects.

In summary, nowadays there are two understandings of digraphia: one, specular to the notion of diglossia, interprets it as a linguistic

18. “Unlike diglossia, digraphia is a condition of the specific language, given in its relation with the writing: it follows that societies are diglossic, while languages are digraphic; in diglossia the languages are hierarchically subordinated, while in digraphia [...] the functional distribution is not always identifiable [...]; there are languages which are, or have been, written with more than two scripts, for which “digraphia” is not suitable”.

change, the use of two scripts in privative opposition for the same language, where variations can be identified variations, like diaphasic, diastratic, or diamesic ones; the other provides the notion of prestige as the single determining factor for the choice between two scripts.

The resulting definition of “digraphia” should include all the previous illustrated ideas, but in this way it could not fit a dictionary in terms of unambiguity and coherence, even if the price is the general vagueness. In my opinion it will not be wrong to add the following to Bußmann-Cotticelli Kurras’ definition:

Digraphia: a sociolinguistic typology used for describing writing system contact in a speech community where several factors (diaphasic, diastratic, and diamesic) lead in the choice between scripts.

References

- Acrill, John (1991). “Translation of Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione*.” In: *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Ed. by Jonathan Barnes. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Assmann, Jan (1991). *Stein und Zeit: Mensch und Gesellschaft im alten Ägypten*. Munich: Wilhelm Fink.
- Baglioni, Daniele and Olga Tribulato (2015). *Contatti di lingue – contatti di scritture. Multilinguismo e multigrafismo dal Vicino Oriente Antico alla Cina contemporanea [Language Contacts—Writing Contacts. Multilinguism and Multigraphism from the Ancient Near Middle East to Nowadays China]*. Venice: Ca’ Foscari.
- Beccaria, Gian Luigi (1994). *Dizionario di linguistica [Dictionary of Linguistics]*. Turin: Giulio Einaudi.
- Berlanda, Elena (2006). “New Perspectives on Digraphia: A Framework for the Sociolinguistics of Writing Systems”. https://www.omniglot.com/language/articles/digraphia/digraphia_EBerlanda.pdf.
- Britto, Francis (1986). *Diglossia: A Study of the Theory with Application to Tamil*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Bunčić, Daniel, Sarah L. Lippert, and Achim Rabus (2016). *Biscriptality, a Sociolinguistic Typology*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter.
- Bußmann, Hadumod (1998). *Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Bußmann, Hadumod and Paola Cotticelli Kurras (2007). *Lessico di Linguistica [Dictionary of Linguistics]*. Alessandria: dell’Orso.
- Cardona, Giorgio Raimondo (1978). “Per una teoria integrata della scrittura [For an integrated study of writing]”. In: *Alfabetismo e cultura scritta nella storia della società italiana, Atti del Seminario tenutosi a Perugia il 29–30 marzo 1977 [Alphabetism and Written Culture in the History of Italian Society. Proceedings of a Seminar Held in Perugia on March 29–30, 1977]*, pp. 51–76.

- Cardona, Giorgio Raimondo (1981). *Antropologia della scrittura* [*Anthropology of writing*]. Turin: Loescher.
- (1990). *I linguaggi del sapere* [*Languages of knowledge*]. Rome: Laterza.
- Chiang, William Wei (1995). *"We Two Know the Script; We Have Become Good Friends": Linguistic and Social Aspects of the Women's Script Literacy in Southern Hunan, China*. Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America.
- Collin, Richard Olivier (2005). "Revolutionary Scripts: The Politics of Writing Systems". In: *iOmniglot: Writing Systems and Languages of the World*. Ed. by Simon Ager.
- Consani, Carlo (1988). "Bilinguismo, diglossia e digrafia nella Grecia antica I: Considerazioni sulle iscrizioni bilingui di Cipro [Bilingualism, Diglossia and Digraphia in Ancient Greece I: Writings on Bilingual Inscriptions from Cyprus]". In: *Bilinguismo e biculturalismo nel mondo antico: Atti del Colloquio interdisciplinare tenuto a Pisa il 28 e 29 settembre 1987* [*Bilingualism and Biculturalism in the Ancient World: Proceedings of an Interdisciplinary Colloquium Held in Pisa on September 28-29, 1987*]. Ed. by Enrico Campanile, Giorgio R. Cardona, and Romano Lazzeroni. Pisa: Giardini.
- (1989). *Bilinguismo, diglossia e digrafia nella Grecia antica II: Le lettere di Filippo V e i decreti di Larissa* [*Bilingualism, Diglossia and Digraphia in Ancient Greece II: The Letters of Philip v and the Larissa Decrees*] (Schwyzer, DGEEP, 590). Vol. 11, pp. 137-159.
- (1990). *Bilinguismo, diglossia e digrafia nella Grecia antica III: Le iscrizioni digrafe cipriote* [*Bilingualism, Diglossia and Digraphia in Ancient Greece III: Cypriot Inscriptions in Two Writing Systems*]. Vol. 25, pp. 63-79.
- Coseriu, Eugenio (1992). "Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte: Vorlesung im Wintersemester 1990/91 an der Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen".
- Coulmas, F. (1989). *The Writing Systems of the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Crystal, David (2008). *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*. London: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Dale, Ian R. H. (1980). "Di[a]graphia". In: *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 26, pp. 5-13.
- Dürscheid, Christa (2006). *Einführung in die Schriftlinguistik*. Göttingen: UTB.
- Ferguson, Charles (1959). "Diglossia". In: *Word* 15, pp. 325-340.
- (1963). "Introduction [to National Languages and Diglossia]". In: *Report of the Thirteenth Annual Round Table Meeting on Linguistics and Language Studies*. Ed. by E. Woodworthand and R. Di Pietro. Vol. 15. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.
- Gelb, Ignace Jay (1963). *A Study of Writing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Godart, Louis (1992). *L'invenzione della scrittura: dal Nilo alla Grecia* [*The invention of writing: from the Nile to Greece*]. Turin: Giulio Einaudi.
- Grivelet, Stéphane (2001). "Introduction". In: *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 150, pp. 1–10.
- Haarmann, Harald (1993). "The Emergence of the Korean Script as a Symbol of Korean Identity". In: *The Earliest Stage of Language Planning: The 'First Congress' Phenomenon*. Ed. by Joshua A. Fishman. Berlin: de Gruyter, pp. 143–157.
- (2006). "Language Planning: Graphization and the Development of Writing Systems". In: *Sociolinguistics: An International Handbook of the Science of Language and Society*. Ed. by Ammon Ulrich et al. Vol. 3. Berlin: de Gruyter, pp. 2402–2420.
- Halévy, Joseph (1883). "Étude sur les documents philologiques assyriens". In: *Mélanges de critique et d'histoire relatifs aux peuples sémitiques*. Paris: Maisonneuve et C^{ie}, pp. 241–364.
- Hartmann, Reinhard R.K. and F.C. Stork (1972). *Dictionary of Language and Linguistics*. London: Halsted Press.
- Lafont, Robert (1971). "Un problème de culpabilité sociologique: La diglossie franco-occitane". In: *Langue française* 9, pp. 93–99.
- Mackay, Ian (1989). *Phonetics and Speech Science. A Bilingual Dictionary*. New York, Bern: Peter Lang.
- Marazzi, Massimiliano (2009). *Lineare o geroglifico? Sistemi scrittori a confronto nel Mediterraneo centro-orientale* [*Linear or Hieroglyphic? Comparative Writing Systems in the Central-Eastern Mediterranean*]. Ed. by Marco Mancini and Barbara Turchetta. Rome: Il calamo, pp. 115–142.
- Massias, Nicolas de (1828). *L'influence de l'écriture sur la pensée et sur le langage*. Paris: Firmin Didot.
- Matthews, Peter (1997). *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nerius, Dieter and Gerhard Augst (1988). "Probleme der geschriebenen Sprache". In: *Linguistische Studien*. Vol. 173: *Beiträge zur Schriftlinguistik auf dem XIV. Internationalen Linguistenkongress 1987*. Berlin: Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR.
- Pei, Mario A. and Frank Gaynor (1954). *A Dictionary of Linguistics*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Pernigotti, Sergio (1986). "L'antico Egitto [Ancient Egypt]". In: *Sulle tracce della scrittura* [*On the Traces of Writing*]. Ed. by Giorgio Raimondi Cardona. Bologna: Grafis, pp. 25–46.
- Pierides, Demetrios (1875). "On a Digraphic Inscription Found in Larnaca". In: *TSBA* 4, pp. 38–43.
- Rogers, Henry (2005). *Writing Systems. A Linguistic Approach*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Sallet, Alfred von (1875). "Die Münzen der griechischen Könige von Salamis in Cypern und die denselben zugetheilten moderne Fälschungen". In: *Zeitschrift für Numismatik* 2, pp. 130–137.

-
- Saussure, Ferdinand de (1959). *Course in General Linguistics*. New York: Philosophical Library.
- Trask, Larry (1996). *A Dictionary of Phonetics and Phonology*. London: Routledge.
- Wexler, Paul (1971). "Diglossia, Language Standardization, and Purism: Parameters for Typology of Literary Languages". In: *Lingua: International Review of General Linguistics* 27, pp. 330–354.
- Zima, Petr (1974). "Digraphia: The Case of Hausa". In: *Linguistics: an Interdisciplinary Journal of the Language Sciences* 124, pp. 57–69.