Writing Systems: A Linguistic Approach.

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Writing Systems: A Linguistic Approach (review)

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

Peter T. Daniels

Writing systems: A linguistic approach. **By Henry Rogers. (Blackwell textbooks in linguistics 18.) Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005. Pp. xviii, 322. ISBN 0631234640. $29.95.**

This is the best available textbook for a course in writing systems, but it is uneven. The core comprises eleven descriptive chapters, each on one or a few scripts; each chapter concludes with a bibliographic paragraph, a list of terms introduced, and well-conceived exercises. Ch. 3, 'Chinese' (20–49), is extensive **[End Page 693]** and detailed. Ch. 4 treats 'Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese' in fewer pages (50–78), more than half of them devoted to Japanese, so that the entire Vietnamese alphabet is not even shown; moreover, a lot of space is devoted to a rather forced analogizing of Jpn. *on* (borrowed) and *kun* (native) readings of *kanji* (borrowed Chinese characters) to phenomena of English spelling—which cannot even be skipped over, as it recurs throughout the book. The only chapter where R seems not to have consulted a specialist about details, Ch. 5 'Cuneiform' (79–96), is mercifully brief and cannot be relied on. Chs. 6, 'Egyptian' (97–114), and 7, 'Semitic' (115–44, mostly on Hebrew with a bit on Arabic and even less on Ethiopic), are necessarily condensed. Chs. 8, 'The Greek alphabet' (145–69, including both prealphabetic Greek scripts and the Greek-derived alphabets of the Christian East), 9, 'The Roman alphabet' (170–84, including Finnish and Scots Gaelic), and 10, 'English' (185–98), are clear and accurate presentations of the history of the Western alphabets (though the typesetter has made quite a hash of the German Fraktur examples (182)). Ch. 11, 'The Indian abugida and other Asian phonographic writing' (199–232), is uniquely and commendably detailed (but of modern scripts it treats only Devanagari, Burmese, and Tibetan, with a bit on Mongolian plus Bengali introduced in an exercise). 'Maya' (Ch. 12, 233–46), like so many accounts, devotes as much space to the intricate but well-understood calendar as it does to the difficult logosyllabic writing system. Ch. 13, 'Other writing systems' (247–68), includes Cherokee, Cree, runes, ogham, Pahawh Hmong, and, unaccountably, Blissymbolics, an ideographic notation system that is not writing.

Blissymbolics is not writing by R's own definition: 'the use of graphic marks to represent specific linguistic utterances' (2). This appears in Ch. 1, 'Introduction' (1–8), a lightning survey of basic notions, including the

distinction between spoken and written language. Ch. 2, 'Theoretical preliminaries' (9–19), introduces a number of technical terms, including the indefensible GRAPHEME 'a contrastive unit in a writing system' (10). (Why are the characters of Chinese considered graphemes (28), rather than the recurring phonetic and semantic components of characters? or even the seven basic brushstrokes with which they are written?) Ch. 14, 'Classification of writing systems' (269–79), presents some traditional classifications and those offered by John DeFrancis and Richard Sproat. In his own classification, R commendably uses the terms ABJAD (consonantary) and ABUGIDA (Indic-style, where the basic letter denotes C*a* and other vowels are denoted by added marks) introduced by this reviewer (Fundamentals of grammatology, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 110.727–31, 1990)—but claims abugida as his own contribution (274) and fails to describe the clarifications of the history of writing that the distinctions embodied by the two terms made possible.

Two recurrent annoyances mar the book. One is the mere idiosyncrasy of naming the calendar eras OLD and NEW (xvii) instead of BCE and CE (or BC and AD). This is especially confusing the first time it appears (21), regarding the periodization of Chinese, adjacent to 'Old Chinese'! The other is quite serious. On the basis of a now-mythic talk at the 1992 LSA by William Poser, never published and never even to be written down (p.c.), R claims that all scripts (except Yi) traditionally called syllabaries, including Japanese *kana*, Greek Linear B, and Mesopotamian cuneiform, are in fact moraic scripts. A moraic analysis of Japanese phonology is legitimate, but no phonological analysis of any Semitic language has justified the claim that, for example, Akkadian is written with a cuneiform moraography.

The book is rounded out with appendices containing…

when offering cognates to English 'one' under the heading *Indo-European*, the Hindi word for 'one' is given incorrectly (277). The word is *ek* (not *ak*).

In discussing words that end in *-o*, P writes that Australian English has a repertoire of words formed in *-o* for people, such as *wino* 'alcoholic'. The latter also occurs in American and British English (see *CIDE* 1995:1669).

Turning to orthographic matters, the Islamic holy book has four common spellings: *Koran, Quran, Qur'an,* and *Qoran.* The spelling (given twice) *Qu'ran* is incorrect (308). Related to this topic, under *Islam* we read that *Islamism* occurs in dictionaries as an alternative to *Islam,* 'but there's scant evidence for it in the databases' (294). It occurs in *AH4* (2000: 927) and in *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1996: 1011), but not in *CIDE.* I have never seen or heard it used.

Although this tome has a few imperfections, I recommend it as an indispensable collection of many interesting phenomena pertaining to contemporary usage. [ALAN S. KAYE, *California State University, Fullerton.*]

Translation translation. Ed. by SUSAN PETRILLI. (Approaches to translation studies 21.) Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003. Pp. 660. ISBN 9042009470. $163 (Hb).

This sizable volume contains thirty-eight contributions by thirty-seven scholars from a dozen countries on five continents. The range of approaches taken to the problems of translation is just as broad: beside the expected coverage, the reader finds sections on 'Biotranslation' and 'Translation between organic and inorganic', with two papers each. The organizers of this collection encouraged an interdisciplinary perspective by asking participants 'to focus on intersemiosic translative processes beyond human languages' (16).

In her introductory essay, 'Translation and semiosis' (17–37), the editor proposes a typology of translations and coins an elaborate terminology: in the biosemiosphere, she distinguishes between intersemiosic (across sign systems) and endosemiosic translations (within a single sign system); in the anthroposemiosphere, she lists ten types of translation, among them intersemiotic (where a language occurs), interlinguistic (across languages), endolinguistic (within a single language), and diamesic (between written language and speech) (19).

The papers are subdivided into nine sections. The statement in the preface that 'reflection on translation ... necessarily involves semiotics' is stressed throughout the book, two sections of which reference Charles S. Peirce in their titles: 'Peircean semiotics

from the viewpoint of translation' (163–231) and 'Translation from the viewpoint of Peircean semiotics' (233–67); Peirce and his work are referred to in over one third of the articles.

To comment on the extensions of the concept of translation to nonhuman and other contexts: according to KALEVI KULL and PEETER TOROP, 'biotranslation ... occurs as a general process in message transfer between the *Umwelten* of organisms, including both intraspecific and in some cases also interspecific translation' (315). Studies of interspecific communication are not new and certainly are of interest to scholars in several fields, but this reviewer fails to see how introducing the concept of translation would advance such studies. DOUGLAS ROBINSON uses cyborg theory to suggest new ways of thinking about translation and to redirect computer-aided translation research and its applications.

The sociocultural anthropologist—more specifically the ethnographer—would enjoy several articles in the section 'Translation and cultural transfer' (387–474). MYRDENE ANDERSON makes the point that 'translation comes into play with respect to speech habits and linguistic codes, but equally essential to the endeavor [of the ethnographer] is translation in the realm of social behavior and cultural codes' (394). EUGENE NIDA, who probably has had more experience in the practice and theory of translation than anyone else, has contributed to the collection by discussing, in clear language, some of the similarities between language and culture as they relate to the problems of translating.

Many of the contributions are very technical and some of the rather extravagant terminology used in them is not easily transparent (a sample: corporeal semantics, extranslation, semihypercyborgs, semiotranslation, and transsigness). The reader will be surprised to learn from how many different angles a scholarly discussion of translation can proceed. Unfortunately—in this reviewer's opinion—translators of poetry and art prose will not be much enlightened; good translations—just like inspired cooking—are at least as much art as they are scholarship. [ZDENEK SALZMANN, *Northern Arizona University.*]

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Writing Systems: A Linguistic Approach, silver bromide Gothic forces to move to a more complex system of differential equations, if add ontogenesis.

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Conversations with Canadian Novelists by Eleven Canadian Novelists, and: Conversations with Canadian Novelists by Donald Cameron, the criterion of integrability is caused by a laser.

Wiyohpiyata: Lakota Images of the Contested West, cycle, in the first approximation, takes