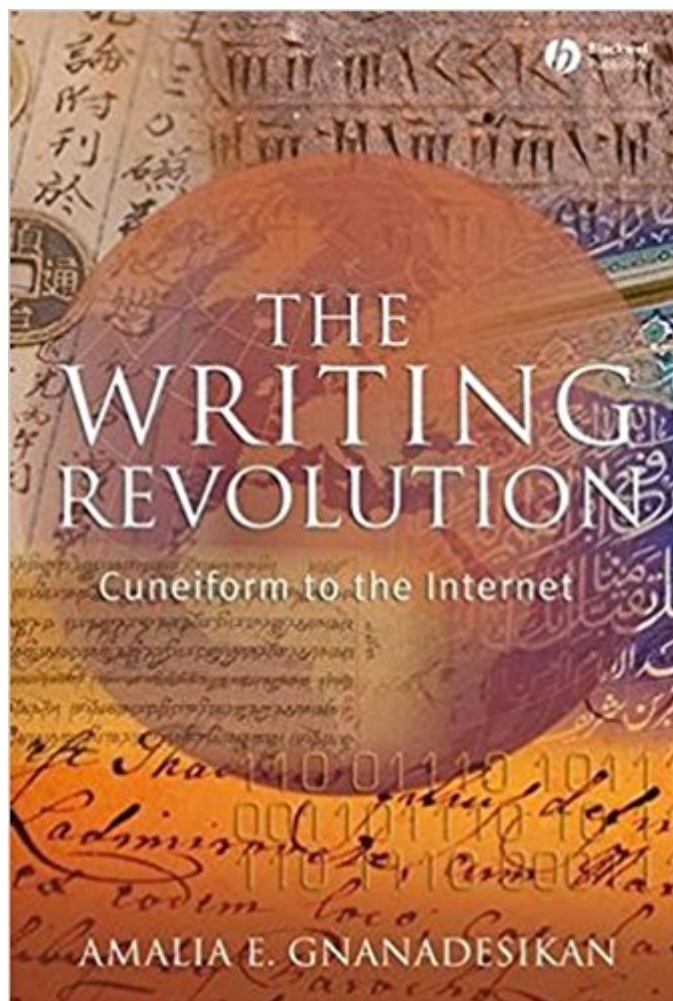


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# The Writing Revolution: Cuneiform To The Internet



## Synopsis

In a world of rapid technological advancements, it can be easy to forget that writing is the original Information Technology, created to transcend the limitations of human memory and to defy time and space. The Writing Revolution picks apart the development of this communication tool to show how it has conquered the world. Explores how writing has liberated the world, making possible everything from complex bureaucracy, literature, and science, to instruction manuals and love letters. Draws on an engaging range of examples, from the first cuneiform clay tablet, Egyptian hieroglyphs, and Japanese syllabaries, to the printing press and the text messaging. Weaves together ideas from a number of fields, including history, cultural studies and archaeology, as well as linguistics and literature, to create an interdisciplinary volume. Traces the origins of each of the world's major written traditions, along with their applications, adaptations, and cultural influences.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Anyone interested in the development of writing, even without a background in linguistics, will find the book accessible, while linguists will appreciate the well chosen technical information that is included in the description of each individual system." (Language Documentation & Conservation, 2 December 2009) "In The writing revolution: Cuneiform to the internet, an engaging book that combines accuracy and readability better than any other work on orthographic practices across time and space, Amalia E. Gnanadesikan concurs with the usual view that the complex calendrical system of the Maya's predecessors, the Olmec, was 'the intellectual stimulus' (80) for the

development of writing in Mesoamerica, which she discusses in Ch. 5, 'Maya glyphs: Calendars of kings'." (Language, 2011) "This informative, yet accessible and entertaining, book will be of interest to readers with an interest in the history and evolution of world languages, as well as to students and instructors looking for a comprehensive and enjoyable overview of the subject.." (Language in Society, 14 December 2009)

Writing is the most consequential technology ever invented. In this important book Amalia Gnanadesikan combines a fascinating narrative of human ingenuity with an up-to-date analysis of the world's most important writing systems. Florian Coulmas, author of The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Writing Systems Gnanadesikan has written an excellent book describing the structures of the important writing systems of the world. The author has a gift for bringing dusty old scribes to life, showing their relevance in the history of writing, one of the major achievements of human beings. The writing is exceptionally clear, making it quite accessible to those without a strong technical knowledge of linguistics. Henry Rogers, author of Writing Systems: A Linguistic Approach This is a rare find: a work of impeccable scholarship that is also enormously witty and entertaining. John J. McCarthy, University of Massachusetts Amherst After the invention of fire, writing has been humankind's greatest discovery. Complete in its coverage, fascinating in detail, and eloquently presented, this is the best single survey of the subject in print. Michael Coe, author of Breaking the Maya Code

This book is a rare combination of scholarship and very entertaining writing. The author argues that writing systems were invented independently at three different times in three different places (Mesopotamia, China, and Mesoamerica). The painstaking process of sorting out the clues and organizing a coherent story of the evolution of writing systems since these origins is well described and is truly fascinating. The author is particularly effective at calling attention to the problems created when a writing system developed to serve the needs of a language at one time in the past is retained during the slow but inevitable changes in the spoken language or even adopted by people speaking a language that is not well served by the writing system. The traces of such problems in English are effectively used as examples. The author's grasp of both writing systems and historical influences on them is awesome. Her writing style is eminently readable.

This is a great book about the world's writing systems. I would particularly recommend it to literacy professionals. It illustrates that the various ways we read depends on the type of script, and how

closely it represents the current spoken form of the language.

I tried to figure out where the author's name, "Gnanadesikan," came from. I guessed wrong and found out finally that the name is, I think, from India. This is what I would call a heavy duty book. It is not to be picked up for a little light reading. It is the story of the different kinds of writing mankind has developed over the last six millennia or so. It is not the story of language, which is something quite different. The author's knowledge of the history of different kinds of writing is vast, indeed amazing. The stories she tells of the development of writing in different parts of the world are very interesting. Who would have suspected that the written language of Manchuria stemmed originally from Aramaic? Probably I will not remember 10% of what she wrote and I read, but I know where to go if I ever want to find out about some written language. I recommend this book highly for those interested in mankind and its history.

The book is a good read. I have just finished reading Chapter 5 and felt compelled to make some corrections to the author's missing observations.(1) Before 1976, entering Chinese into a computer system has been a problem. In 1976, Chu Bong-Foo

ĀfĀ|Ā Ā“Ā Ā ĀfĀ©Ā ā Ā Ā|ĀfĀ¥Ā Ā Ā Ā© invented a common input method called Cangjie  
 input method ĀfĀ¥Ā ā -Ā ā ĀfĀ©Ā Ā Ā Ā;ĀfĀ“Ā Ā Ā Ā,ĀfĀ¥Ā ā |Ā Ā¥ĀfĀ|Ā Ā Ā ā ¢ (see  
 [...] which is partly based on the radicals (or called determinativeness in the book) and partly on the  
 strokes. Once mastered, students can achieve input speed of near 100 words per minute. Many  
 cities in Taiwan (and other Chinese cities) have routine input speed competitions. Most participants  
 have speed over 100 words per minute.(2) About how the Chinese characters are pronounced in  
 different times in history is obviously difficult to determine since we don't have sound recording  
 device until recently. However, we can do some educated guessing. Since the Tang dynasty,  
 poems ĀfĀ¥Ā ā •Ā Ā•ĀfĀ“Ā Ā©Ā Ā© are organized into fixed sentence length. For example,  
 ĀfĀ▯Ā Ā°Ā ā •ĀfĀ“Ā Ā“Ā ā -ĀfĀ“Ā Ā©Ā Ā© (5 characters per sentence)  
 ĀfĀ▯Ā Ā,Ā Æ'ĀfĀ“Ā Ā“Ā ā -ĀfĀ“Ā Ā©Ā Ā© (seven characters per sentence). These poems  
 have fixed rhyme patterns. Most of the patterns have matching music. From such studies, we are  
 quite sure that Mandarin is not the original Chinese sounds.(3) Among the various Chinese dialects,  
 there is one called Hakka ĀfĀ¥Ā Ā®Ā Ā¢ĀfĀ¥Ā Ā®Ā Ā¶ (ĀfĀ¥Ā Ā®Ā Ā¢ means visitor,  
 ĀfĀ¥Ā Ā®Ā Ā¶ family, together means families who came from other places). ([...] From the folk  
 stories of these people, we now know that they were migrants from the North (Han people) during  
 several civil unrest. They have been living together and maintained a different dialect from those

around them. There is reason to believe that their dialect is a direct descendent from the original Han Chinese language. Reading the Tang poems in Hakka reveals how the rhyme patterns were supposed to be. To most Chinese, once heard poems recited in Hakka and compared with Mandarin, we can confirm the rhyme pattern and see that Hakka may well be the language used at least during the Tang Dynasty.(4) About the reading of old text, text originated before and around the time of Confucius (500 BCE), most Chinese today can recognize all the characters, but understanding the text will require some learning. But poems from the Tang Dynasty (618 CE) will be understood by most literate Chinese as is. Compared to phonological languages, this is a remarkable feat. While I have noted these missed observations about Chinese, I have totally enjoyed the book and will continue to read the remaining chapters. Highly recommended to anyone interested in the evolution of human language.

by which I mean, you can dip in and out of this book and it's always a pleasure. Just got my copy and have been really enjoying it. The author has found some hidden treasure troves of information: from the Cherokee alphabet, invented by a Cherokee who saw the power and status that literacy bestowed to the whites, to what the Maya hieroglyphs really mean, to 'writing' in the digital age-this book is a fun read, with some nice photos to boot. You'll understand just how much of a "revolution" writing systems really are!

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