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Barker Center 218 (Fong Room)
TuTh 9:00–10:00 AM
Fr 1:00–2:00

Writing Systems and Language Conservation

Week 5: Domain, Prestige, and Control in Writing

1 Goals for this Week

Here is what we will learn this week:

- (1)
 - a. Status in script: Reverential Capitalization, Manchu Dotted Final n
 - b. Fitting in loans: Greenlandic Loans, Katakana
 - c. Who can use a script? Nūshu, Hiragana, and Braille
 - d. What does it mean to see your language written?

2 Highlighting: Prosody and Reverence

2.1 Capitalization in Latin Scripts

Historically, capitalization arose as a way to emphasize or illuminate parts of text. Scribal materials would use a typeface similar to modern day lowercase, and would highlight letters by writing them in the style of carved typefaces which correspond to modern uppercase letters.

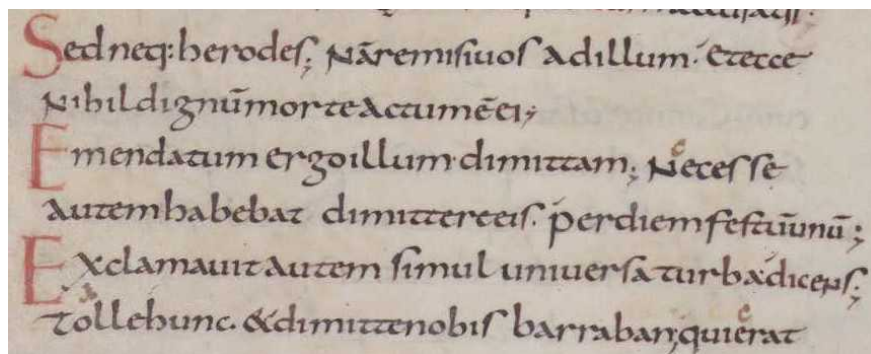


Figure 1: Carolingian miniscule (lowercase) with uppercase letters denoting the beginning of Gospel lines.

While this kind of highlighting was originally used to demarcate lines of poetry or scripture, it slowly became more standardized in official documents as a way of marking the beginning of a sentence, or for showing reverence, for instance, the capitalization of God. Rules for Capitalization are not universal: in English, proper nouns are generally capitalized, and the word 'I' is always capitalized. In German, all nouns are capitalized.

(2) Some dimensions in which capitalization varies across orthographies:

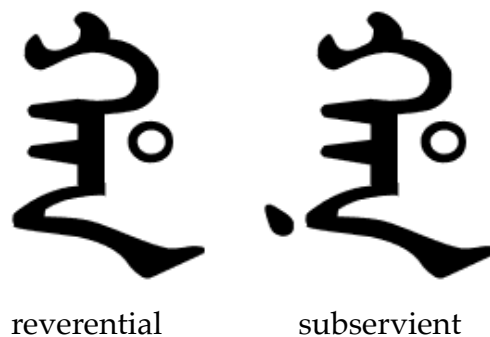
- a. the names of months and days of the week
- b. the names of languages and nationalities
- c. adjectives derived from proper nouns
- d. titles preceding personal names
- e. prepositions or particles which are part of personal names
- f. common name parts of placenames

2.2 Manchu Dotted Final n

Writing systems which are not bicameral may find their own ways of denoting a certain word as holding a certain status in reverence. Such is the case of the final dotted -n in Manchu.

The word for king or emperor in Manchu is *han* [χan] (cognate of khan). The sign for /n/ is written with a dot intervocalically, but not otherwise. Thus the expected form of writing it includes a final -n without a dot. However, when the word khan is being used to refer to local khans subservient to the Qing emperor, or to the kings of foreign countries, a dot would be added to denote a lack of reverence.

(3) The non-dotted versus dotted *han*, in printed font.



3 Loanwords

3.1 Loaning into West Greenlandic

Greenlandic is an Inuit language spoken in Greenland. Greenlandic phonology lacks a voicing distinction in its plosive consonants: it represents its plosives with the same symbols as their IPA sounds, and while <g> is used to denote the voiced velar fricative [ɣ], while and <d> do not represent any sounds native to the language.

(4) Greenlandic Plosives:

Labial	Coronal	Velar	Uvular
/p/ <p>	/t/ <t>	/k/ <k>	/q/ <q>

Meanwhile, Danish, the colonizing language of Greenland, does distinguish between unaspirated and aspirated plosives. As a result, , <d>, and <g> are used to denote unaspirated plosives, while <p>, <t>, and <k> are used to denote aspirated plosives.

(5) Danish Plosives:

	Labial	Coronal	Velar
Unaspirated	/p/ 	/t/ <d>	/k/ <g>
Aspirated	/p ^h / <p>	/t ^h / <t>	/k ^h / <k>

Greenlandic loans from Danish are not written just like the Danish, rather they are modified to match Greenlandic phonotactics; however, they maintain the written , <d>, and <g>, pronouncing them as in the Danish.

(6)	English	Danish		Greenlandic
	carrot	gulerod	>	gulerodi
	August	august	>	aggusti
	gasoline	benzin	>	benziina
	referee	dommer	>	dommeri
	zinc	zink	>	zinki
	chives	purløg	>	purløgi

3.2 Japanese Katakana

One of the syllabaries employed in Japanese, namely Katakana, is used specifically to denote onomatopoeia, ideophones, and loanwords. Katakana is a syllabary, and has a natural one-to-one mapping with the other syllabic system Hiragana. As a result, loanwords are necessarily written in a form which changes the phonotactics and pronunciation of the loanword into a Japanese pronunciation.

(7)	English	Japanese (Katakana)	Hepburn Romanization
	computer	コンピューター	konpyūtā
	double	ダブル	daburu
	viking	バイキング	baikingu
	collab(orations)	コラボ	korabo
	fried potato	フライドポテト	furaido poteto
	coffee	コーヒー or 珈琲	kōhī
	Klaxon (horn brand)	クラクション	kurakushon

Note that “coffee” is a rare instance of a loan from a language other than Chinese which has associated kanji (珈琲). Additionally, the name of the car horn brand Klaxon was interpreted in Japanese as a generic term, and so *kurakushon* generally refers to any car horn.

How does a writing system affect the way that loanwords from a language that uses the same writing system are written? For loanwords from a language that uses a different writing system? How does English tend to write loans from French, Chinese, Wôpanâak?

4 Who can use a Script?

4.1 Women's Scripts: Nüshu and Hiragana

Nüshu is a script used exclusively by the women of Jiangyong County in Hunan province to write Xiangnan Tuhua dialect of Chinese.

Nüshu is a syllabic script with between 600–700 characters, in which tonal distinctions are often ignored. Characters are derived from Hanzi, often representing the phonetic sound of said character in Xiangnan Tuhua. For instance the word 晓/晓 *xiǎo* is a homophone with 小 *xiǎo*, and thus both words are represented in Nüshu by the same character, derived from 小.



Figure 2: A poem written in Nüshu script with simplified Hanzi correspondences shown in blue.

Nüshu was developed by women as a way to exchange messages secretly from men. At the time that it was developed, before and during the Qing dynasty, women's access to literacy was greatly hindered — writing was generally restricted to upper class people, and while a good portion of rich women were literate, there were extremely low literacy rates for middle class or poorer women.

Nüshu was a simplified and thus easier to learn system for writing Chinese, and thus women illiterate in Hanzi could more readily pick up and teach Nüshu to other women.



Figure 3: Some Nüshu calligraphy.

As women's literacy rates increased in the 20th century, Nüshu fell into disuse until the 1970s, when researchers began to take interest in the script and documented it.

Japanese hiragana was initially a similar system to Nüshu: simplified versions of Hanzi were used to represent syllables and were used among women to communicate in written form. However, hiragana was later adopted as one of the scripts used in general Japanese writing, denoting inflectional morphology which Hanzi were not equipped to deal with.

4.2 Accessibility in a Script: Braille Scripts

Braille is a series of auxiliary tactile scripts, used primarily by the blind to communicate in writing. Braille was invented in 1824 by Louis Braille at the age of 15, and was originally designed for French.

Braille consists of 64 possible ‘cells’, made up of six dots in a 2 x 3 matrix which may be either raised or flat. Braille cells are conceptualized into five “decades” consisting of ten cells in a numeric sequence, and two or three additional cells.

The 64 modern braille cells

decade		numeric sequence										shift right	
1st	○ ○	● ○	● ○	● ●	● ●	● ○	● ●	● ●	● ○	○ ●	○ ●	○ ●	○ ●
	○ ○	○ ○	● ○	○ ○	○ ●	○ ●	● ○	● ●	● ●	● ○	● ●	○ ○	○ ●
	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○
2nd	○ ○	● ○	● ○	● ●	● ●	● ○	● ●	● ●	● ○	○ ●	○ ●	○ ●	○ ●
	○ ○	○ ○	● ○	○ ○	○ ●	○ ●	● ○	● ●	● ●	● ○	● ●	○ ○	○ ●
	● ○	● ○	● ○	● ○	● ○	● ○	● ○	● ○	● ○	● ○	● ○	● ○	● ○
3rd	○ ○	● ○	● ○	● ●	● ●	● ○	● ●	● ●	● ○	○ ●	○ ●	○ ●	○ ●
	○ ○	○ ○	● ○	○ ○	○ ●	○ ●	● ○	● ●	● ●	● ○	● ●	○ ○	○ ●
	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●
4th	○ ○	● ○	● ○	● ●	● ●	● ○	● ●	● ●	● ○	○ ●	○ ●	○ ●	○ ●
	○ ○	○ ○	● ○	○ ○	○ ●	○ ●	● ○	● ●	● ●	● ○	● ●	○ ○	○ ●
	○ ●	○ ●	○ ●	○ ●	○ ●	○ ●	○ ●	○ ●	○ ●	○ ●	○ ●	○ ●	○ ●
5th	shift down	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○
	● ○	● ○	● ○	● ○	● ○	● ○	● ○	● ○	● ○	● ○	● ○	● ○	● ○
	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○	○ ○

Figure 4: The full set of possible Braille characters.

Braille as used for French was originally based on this decade system, where the letters of the Latin alphabet, excluding <w>, are written using the first two decades and half of the third decade. For English, additional cells are used to denote common digraphs such as <ch>, <sh>, <th>, and <wh>.

Single letters are used for abbreviations in English, such as the cell representing <y> being used to represent <you>. Every language which uses Braille has their own variation on what constitutes each letter and what abbreviations there are, though many stick to the ‘international uniformity’, in which sounds/symbols more or less correspond across Brailles.











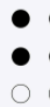





a/1	b/2	c/3	d/4	e/5	f/6	g/7	h/8	i/9	j/0
k	l	m	n	o	p	q	r	s	t
u	v	x	y	z					w














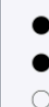

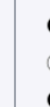
Capital follows	Number follows	ch	sh	th

















Figure 5: Twenty six letter Braille alphabet.

a	but	can	do	every	from, -self	go	have	I	just	
knowledge	like	more	not		people	quite	rather	so	that	still
us	very	it	you	as						com-†
child		shall	this	which		out		will		
	be, be-	con-	dis-	enough en-	to+†	were	his	in, in-	by+,† was	into+†

Figure 6: English abbreviations in Braille.

Consonant	ka	kha	ga	nga	ca	cha	ja	nya
Print								
Braille								

Consonant	ta	tha	da	na	pa	pha	ba	ma
Print								
Braille								

Consonant	tsha	tsha	dza	wa	zha	za	'a	ya
Print								
Braille								











Consonant	ra	la	sha	sa	ha
Print					
Braille					

Figure 7: Braille for the Dzongkha (Bhutanese) alphabet.