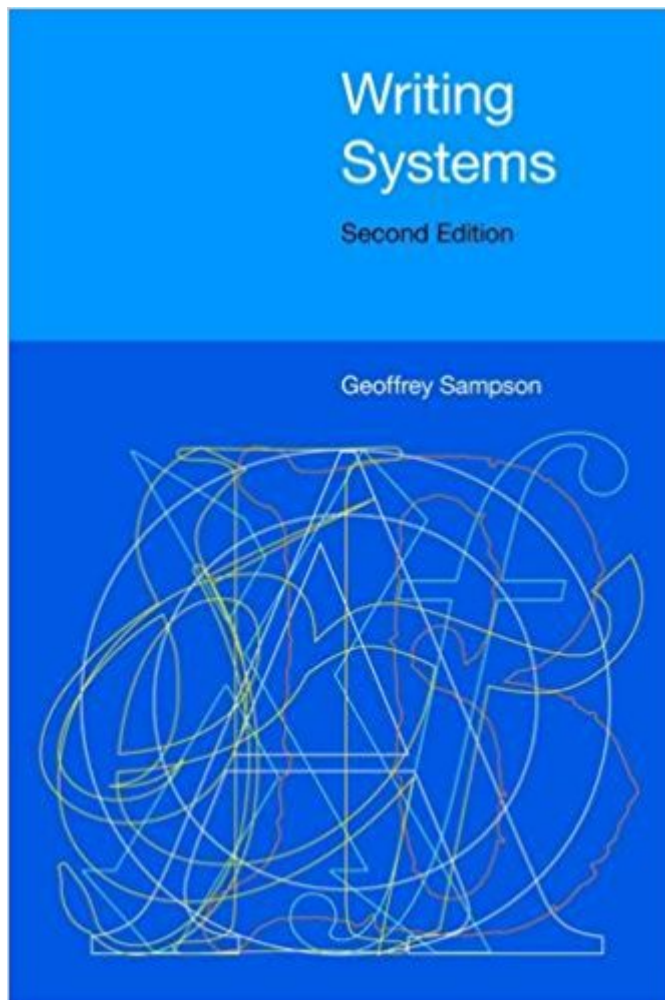The book was found

Writing Systems

Writing
Systems

Second Edition

Geoffrey Sampson

Synopsis

The cultures of the world have chosen different ways to make spoken language visible and permanent. The original edition of Writing Systems represented the first time that modern linguistic principles were brought to bear on a study of this. Now this new edition brings the story up to date; it incorporates topics which have emerged since the first edition (such as electronic techniques for encoding the world's scripts), together with new findings about established topics, including the ultimate historical origin of our alphabet. Featuring a series of detailed case studies of scripts of diverse types, and giving due attention to the psychology of reading and learning to read, the book is written so as to be accessible to those with no prior knowledge of any writing systems other than our own.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Praise for the first edition: "This is a splendid book ... of outstanding interest to professional linguists and students of linguistics, and also to the large number of lay readers who are fascinated by facts about human language." British Book News "A refreshing and rigorous contemporary scientific examination of writing ... Linguists on all fronts should welcome this." Choice "An incredible tour de force, covering both Western and East Asian scripts, their historical development and their linguistic features. The treatment of Chinese, Japanese and Korean scripts is particularly fascinating for a Western reader." ASI Newsletter "I have found Sampson's book invaluable as a source of descriptive information ... it is written in a straightforward and approachable manner which makes it very engaging as general reading matter ... shows an acquaintance with recent psychological work

that is seldom to be found in linguistic writing." Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology "...the best linguistic introduction to the study of writing systems now available." --Language

Geoffrey Sampson is Professor Emeritus at Sussex University and a Research Fellow in the Linguistics Department at the University of South Africa. His most recent book is Grammar Without Grammaticality (2014, with Anna Babarczy).

As there are no reviews for this book I have decided to post one. First, this book is quite technical. It is a serious linguistic study of writing -- that is, the way spoken language is recorded in visual form. This is not a perfect description, for instance, braille is touched on lightly, but it does not include audio recordings or art, for instance. There are few (if any) comparable books on the subject.There is (as yet) no kindle version of this book, so it may be useful to post the table of contents for this book:1 Ã¢Â Â" Introduction2Ã¢Â Â"Theoretical preliminaries3 Ã¢Â Â" The earliest writing4 Ã¢Â Â" A syllabic system: Linear B5 Ã¢Â Â" Consonantal writing6 Ã¢Â Â" European alphabetic writing7 Ã¢Â Â" Influences on graph-shape evolution8 Ã¢Â Â" A featural system: Korean Hangul9 Ã¢Â Â" A logographic system: Chinese writing10 Ã¢Â Â" Pros and cons of logography11 Ã¢Â Â" A mixed system: Japanese writing12 Ã¢Â Â" Writing systems and information technology13 Ã¢Â Â" English spelling14 Ã¢Â Â" ConclusionThere is also a bibliography and index. The individual chapters give some indication of what books might be worth reading for further information, but it is limited. Many of the books and their authors were mentioned for their outdated or inaccurate positions, which makes it hard to determine what books are worthy of investing time and effort.ItÃ¢Â Â™s rather remarkable how much information the author has managed to jam into his head and reproduce on a book this size. I do not know how he managed to have such an apparently in depth language of everything from Cuneiform to Greek to Dravidian languages to Japanese. Honestly, itÃ¢Â Â™s rather shocking. You will learn how many of the scripts of the world work in this book, and not just Ã¢Â Âœthis is the Korean equivalent of aÃ¢Â Â• but really learn how they are used in written form.The origins of the Greek alphabet and its debt to Semitic writing and the decipherment of Linear B (from the isle of Crete) were of particular interest to me Ã¢Â Â" which I fully expected. I have a longstanding interest in Semitic languages (and a degree in Arabic), so I enjoyed the coverage of cuneiform, Hebrew, and other Middle Eastern languages. The advantages and disadvantages of short-vowel-less writing as in many Semitic languages such as Arabic and Hebrew was not news to me, but it was interesting to read academic writing about it.What I did not expect was how much I learned about so many other less familiar languages. The section on

Korean Hangul writing was mind blowing: who knew that they had one of the most efficient writing systems in the world (at least if it werenÃ¢Â Â™t for the fact that they often write Chinese loan words using Chinese)? The Japanese chapter went over my head (and I speak an Asian language fluentlyÃ¢Â Â¦), apparently bolstering the authorÃ¢Â Â™s belief that it is the most complicated system in the world.Instead of going into depth on each section, I will just zoom in on one.The section of Chinese was nothing short of mind-blowing. His defense of the Chinese system was brilliant. Apparently Chinese has many homophones (words that sound the same but mean something different, including tone in this case) that the existence of individual symbols for each word is a significant advantage (for us, the spelling of Ã¢Â ÂœbearÃ¢Â Â• and Ã¢Â Âœto bearÃ¢Â Â• and Ã¢Â ÂœbareÃ¢Â Â• can be confusing, but context usually shows the difference Ã¢Â Â“ but we have far fewer homophones; spelling each one differently can be an advantage, just as Ã¢Â ÂœbareÃ¢Â Â• and Ã¢Â ÂœbearÃ¢Â Â• can help us tell the difference). In a country with many different languages having a script that all can read is an advantage as well. And of course, we spend a lot of time on spelling. Just because we have 26 letters doesnÃ¢Â Â™t mean it isnÃ¢Â Â™t a lot of effort to learn how to spell. The amount of effort expended may not actually be as different as it appears.One of the biggest downsides is the difficulty that Chinese have in spelling foreign names. As the historic cultural power in Asia, regional languages generally borrowed from China not vica-versa. As a consequence there are far fewer English borrowings in Chinese than other world languages. While this on its own is will be contested in subjective valuation, the inability to represent foreign names is a huge deal.The other largest downside is the difficulty in representing Chinese with a computer. While computer programs akin to a kind of spell-check can help a Chinese pull up the correct symbol, it simply is not as fast. It is, however, faster than I expected, achieving Ã¢Â Âœcomparable speedsÃ¢Â Â• for trained typists. The author downplays this problem as a consequence. Which shows his age, since he obviously doesnÃ¢Â Â™t try to type on a smartphone or tablet. He also says that Ã¢Â Âœmost creative typesÃ¢Â Â• write Ã¢Â Âœusing longhandÃ¢Â Â• anyway, later transferring to the computer. This, too, underestimates the problem.Still, his argument that the logographic writing of Chinese is actually rather well adapted to the Chinese language itself is well taken. It is also why Japanese is so difficult Ã¢Â Â“ they borrowed Chinese writing, but Japanese is not a language well designed for such a system. For instance, it has inflectional endings whereas Chinese does not. Chinese doesnÃ¢Â Â™t have grammatic tense. All of which, among other things, makes for a very difficult system to impose on Japanese.In any case, if you have a serious interest in language this is one book that you really shouldnÃ¢Â Â™t miss. There just isnÃ¢Â Â™t anything else out there like it. However, if you are

reading casually this isnâ€™t for you. This is an academic book, not a â€œpopular scienceâ€• style book.

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