

The Webscout

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Writing (and language) around the world

When thinking about 'writing around the world', the first thing that came to my mind was the obvious fact that every medical writer can work anywhere in the world and independently of where the client is located, as long as the client and writer use the same writing system. Asking Google what it thinks about writing around the world, I found the following:

<http://library.thinkquest.org/06aug/01496/>

Today, English is considered a global language and it is the language most often taught as a foreign language. It belongs to the most commonly used writing system, the Latin script or Latin-based alphabet. As a so-called 'C and V alphabet', it is a direct descendent of Greek script, which was the first true alphabet. In C and V alphabets, every consonant and vowel represents a specific sound in the language. Other writing systems include logographic or syllabic alphabets. Logographic alphabets – for example, the Chinese alphabet – consist of logograms, which are single characters that represent a complete word. A syllabic alphabet or syllabary consists of written symbols that represent syllables (either a consonant followed by a vowel or a vowel alone) that compose words. An example of a language using syllabaries is Cherokee, a Native American language. A more comprehensive overview on the different writing systems around the world is available on this Wikipedia page:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Writing_system

Diving deeper into the subject, I came across a journal called 'Writing Systems Research', a free biannual online journal. When the journal was founded in 2009, its editorial board consisted of 15 people from nine countries with various academic backgrounds, thereby covering diverse writing systems and languages. Even more countries and backgrounds are included now. Besides computational approaches to script and the neurocognitive underpinnings of language, sociolinguistic aspects of writing systems or even orthography are discussed as well as questions like 'Is Korean a logographic or syllabic language?' The free-access journal can be found here:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/pwsr20/current>

Besides different writing systems, some other differences between cultures are reflected by writing. I initially found a book called 'Writing around the world: A guide to writing across cultures' but then discovered that one can take classes in 'Writing Across Cultures' at the Department of Writing at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan:

<http://www.gvsu.edu/writing/writing-across-cultures-18.htm>

This topic dealing with the power of language, enabling the students to work for global or multicultural organisations led me to another website about the power of language:

http://www.diversitycouncil.org/toolkit/Activities_ThePowerofLanguage.pdf

This site includes examples of how groups of people are affected by the names others have given them. This goes beyond what we call political correctness and shows how important it is to be aware of the language we use.

The effect of our language on professional success or failure is the topic of another site I came across. This site is a simple guide on how to strengthen one's arguments but it may still be worthwhile to take a look at:

<http://www.openforum.com/articles/the-power-of-language-5-wicked-words-that-are-sabotaging-your-success/>

In addition to our professional development, the way we think and view the world depend on the power of our language. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis – named after its inventors – is based on the fact that some languages use words or even whole concepts that do not exist in another language. These differences are seen not only between cultures but also between social groups that claim to speak the same language:

<http://www.education.com/reference/article/culture-language/>

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