

Open Call for the Special issue in L&C on Cognitive approaches to written language

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Abstract

Current approaches to cognitive linguistics emphasize that language is an inherently multimodal phenomenon. For example, spoken language is usually accompanied by co-speech gesture, which has given rise to extensive research from a cognitive-linguistic point of view. Another aspect of multimodality has arguably been neglected so far: writing. Linguistics in general has, for a long time, suffered from what Berg (2016) calls a “spoken language bias”, and only recently has written language received more attention in the emerging field of grapholinguistics (see Meletis & Dürscheid 2022). This special issue sets out to demonstrate that cognitive linguistics and the study of written language can cross-fertilize each other. In particular, we invite papers that discuss how the study of writing can inform our understanding of the relationship between language and cognition. There are numerous good reasons for assuming that written language offers an excellent window to the mental representation of language. For one thing, it has been shown that learning to write entails a “rewiring” of the brain (Dehaene 2009) that is so significant that it has been linked to major cultural developments (Henrich 2021). For another, written language gives valuable clues about how language users segment linguistic items into words and larger units (especially so in alphabetic writing systems that have over time developed segmentation markers for words and sentences; see e.g. Hartmann & Szczepaniak 2023).

Bringing together cognitive linguistics and grapholinguistics, this special issue seeks contributions that address key questions concerning the implications of written language for understanding the cognitive organization and the cognitive underpinnings of language, e.g. by either addressing the role of writing in shaping linguistic representation, literacy's impact on cognition, or the influence of writing on linguistic change. Individual contributions may address—but are not limited to—the following guiding questions:

- What exactly can written language tell us about the mental representation of language(s), and what are potential limitations of capturing cognitive concepts through writing?
- How does literacy change the way we learn and think about language(s)?
- In what ways do writing tools (e.g., pen, keyboard, touchscreen) affect how we think and write?
- What is the relationship between spoken and written language and what consequences does spoken language bias have for written language?
- How can the interaction between grammar and writing be modelled in written language use?
- How does written language reflect linguistic change, and what does this in turn tell us about the cognitive processes underlying language change? What does the change of written language over the centuries tell us about cognitive processes involved in reading and writing?

- How does the knowledge of multiple writing systems affect multilingual language users' linguistic knowledge?

The contributions are intended to reflect the diversity of perspectives within cognitive approaches to written language and to address fundamental questions about the interaction between writing and cognitive processes. In accordance with L&C's special issue policy, we now invite further contributions with a clear empirical focus that collectively shed light on open questions regarding the intersection of writing and cognition.

Submission Guidelines:

Please send an abstract (max. 500 words + selected references) as PDF, along with your contact details (title, affiliation, e-mail), to both editors:

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Timetable:

- June 1, 2025: Deadline for abstract submission.
- July 31, 2025: Notification of acceptance/rejection with further details on with regarding the length of the contribution and formatting guidelines.
- December 31, 2025: Submission of full papers and start of review process.

Kind regards,

Jessica Nowak & Ilka Lemke

References:

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- Hartmann, Stefan & Renata Szczepaniak. 2023. Elements of writing systems. In Marco Condorelli & Hanna Rutkowska (eds.), *Cambridge Handbook of Historical Orthography*, 50–73. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Henrich, Joseph. 2021. *The weirdest people in the world: how the West became psychologically peculiar and particularly prosperous* (Penguin Psychology). London: Penguin Books.
- Meletis, Dimitrios & Christa Dürscheid. 2022. *Writing systems and their use* (Trends in Linguistics. Studies and Monographs [TILSM] 369). An overview of grapholinguistics. Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.