

Description for the general public

The most popular and prevailing approach to the studies of writing systems is a statement that writing comes into being as a full visualization of speech, and as a result, the only 'real' and 'true' writing system is the alphabet. Nothing could be further from the truth. The deeply rooted European assumption in the studies of writing systems begins to be substituted by the studies of widely understood graphic communication systems (henceforth: GCSs), which do not visualize speech but express thoughts, ideas and mental concepts, and are understood for the receiver no matter what language he uses (e.g., chemical, musical notations). Plenty of Western knowledge is as well codified in other GCS than alphabetical writing.

This approach to writing research meant that many graphic communication systems, especially those created in the New World, were excluded from literacy research. The aim of this project is the elaboration of the unified methodology of Amerindian GCS studies, so that the communication and transmission of knowledge among native Amerindians is better comprehended. This project will answer the question of how such GCSs work in Amerindian cultures and how their understanding contributes to a general theory of writing.

The project's main objective is to analyze different examples of Amerindian's GCS through similar basic methodical procedures. Each of the five examples stands for one subproject. The subprojects' subjects are: 1) the multilayered GCS of Mixtec narratives and divinatory codices from central Mexico, 2) the pre-Hispanic Andean Tiwanaku and Inca GCS, 3) the GCSs in *tio-tio* writing and their application in material culture among Yukpa group living in the Isthmo-Colombian area, 4) 'reading the seeds' - the logic of graphic/visual communication in maize divination in the contemporary Mexico's Ayöök ethnic group, as well as 5) the formal and structural encoding of meaning in pre-Hispanic rock art signs in northern Venezuela.

The starting point for the studies are the thesis of Carlo Severi (elaborated for the Amerindian Lowland GCSs) and Roy Harris (for the theory of writing in general), and also the previous work of the team members which have revealed that all GCSs may have several dimensions. Hence, the presented project is interdisciplinary and conjoins the theories and methodologies used in different scientific fields: linguistics, rock art, and iconography studies, ethnography, cultural anthropology, semantics, and cognitive linguistics. Therefore, in order to elaborate a common methodology to approach Amerindian graphic/visual sign systems, all the subprojects will undertake the following steps: 1) execution of formal description of the GCS according to its multidimensionality; 2) identification of how and in which ways the GCS codes and transforms meaning; 3) identification of how and in which ways the meaning of the GCS under supervision depends on the context and, consequently, to explain how the context contributes to the meaning.

This project will not only conjoin researchers from two countries, but it will bring together the specific knowledge and methodologies developed for analyzing pre-Hispanic and contemporary GCSs and different Amerindian regions, cultures, as well as different academic traditions. Thanks to the cooperation of all members of the project, it will be possible to exchange ideas, insights, and criticisms necessary for scientific work and to guarantee a high level of the conducted research. This will allow us to participate in the worldwide discussion regarding the traditional division between societies of orality and literacy, as well as to the general theory of writing, as until now only a few contributions were made by the Amerindian specialists in this field.