

Dubrovnik 2016

Human Dignity and Humiliation  
Studies

Cities at Risk – From Humiliation to  
Dignity

Sunday 18th – Sunday 25th  
September 2016

Dubrovnik 2016

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**From Past to Present: How writing  
and writing systems impact Dignity  
in Human Interaction**



# **Toward a dignity approach to writing**

A shift of focus from  
the functional relationship between  
speech and writing (phonemics and  
graphemics)  
to the ethics and dignity of writing

Linguists overestimate the functional aspects of writing

Important issues:

- writing is visual art
- emotional issues
- esthetics
- ideology
- politics
- power

Some few crucial scenarios:

- *Afghanistan*: Western alphabets or Persian script
- Minorities such as *Tartars* in Russia
- Former Tibet and China
- *Tyrkia*: Introduction of the Latin alphabet by Ataturk after World War I
- American linguistic efforts: Introduction of alphabetic writing systems with the Indians

«Writing is not language, and language is not writing.»

(W. Nelson Francis 1958: *The Structure of American English*, New York, p. 36)



Famous dialogue between two linguists:

«When Boswell objected to describing the Chinese as ‹barbarians›, Johnson's reply was: ‹Sir, they have not an alphabet!›» (Harris 1989: 100)

## The widely held view ...

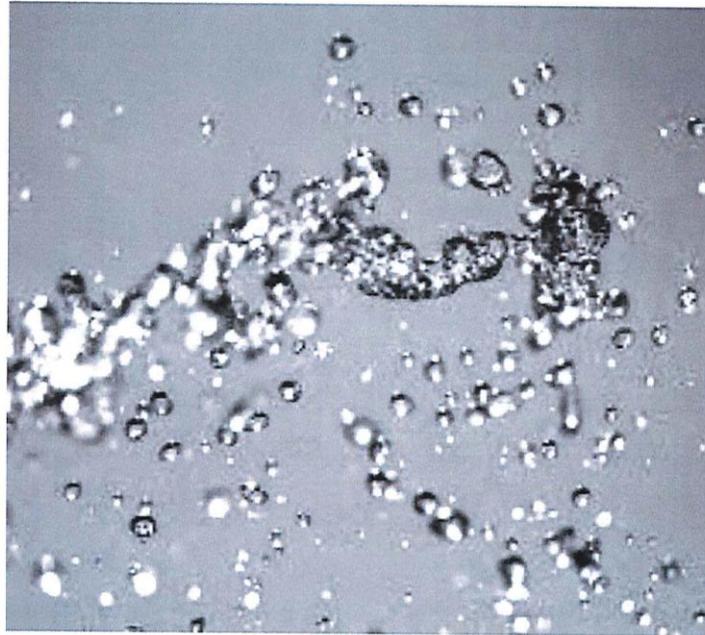
**Samuel Jonae Columbus** (born April 24, 1642 in Husby in Dalarna) a Swedish linguist and hymnwriter in the 1600s

«Bokstäfr äre teckn, som mäd mångeledes hijt och dijt dragne streck, prickar ok linier liksom **afcopiera tanckan ok dess tolk, språket.**»

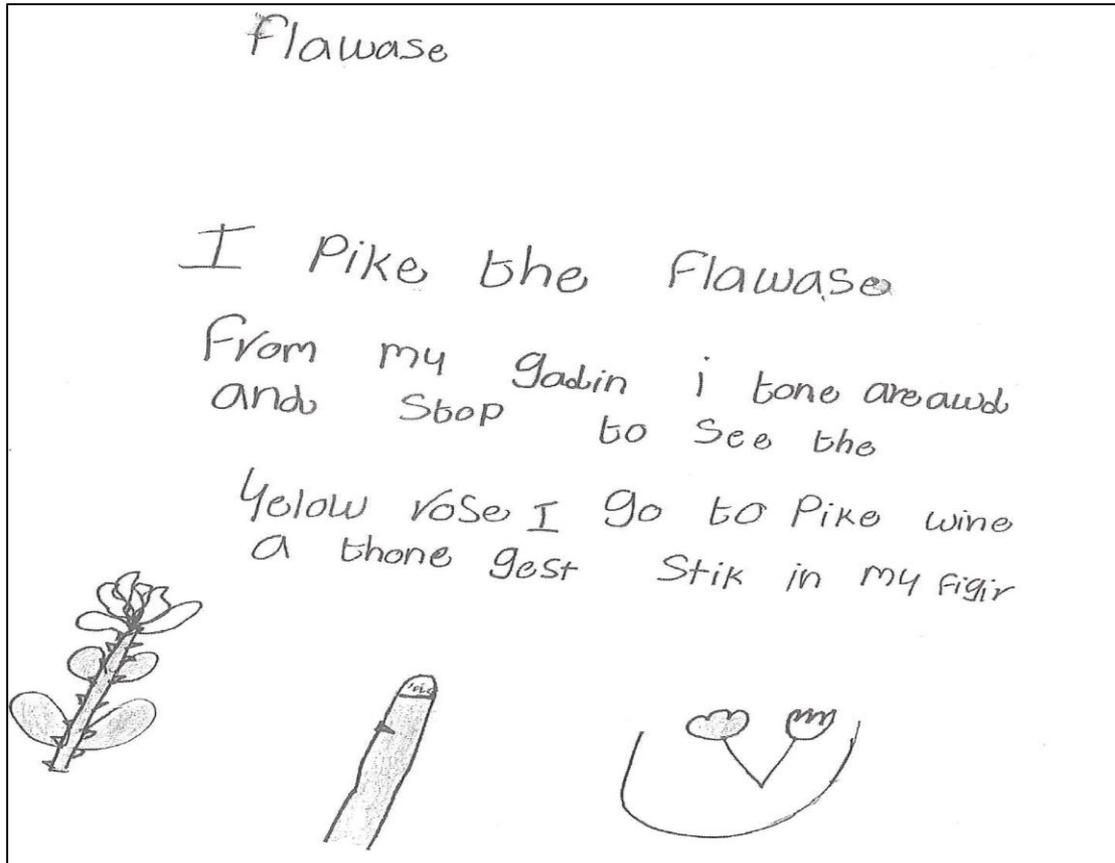
*From En svensk ordeskötsel angående bokstäfver, ord och ordesätt, 1678*

# Writing is always a kind of picture ✍️

◇ pReC!oUs L!L D!aMoNd ◇ (Coetzee 2012)



A child (6 years) exploiting the visual space ...  
... a stress on creative writing



(following Kress 2000: 190)

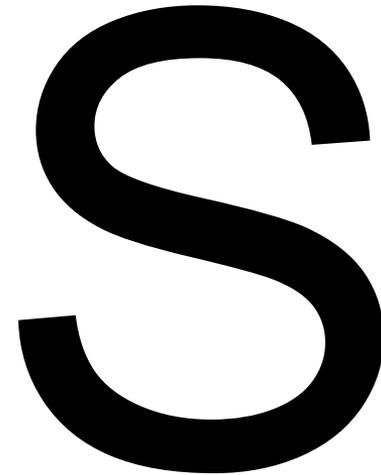
The esthetics and beauty of the  
text ...

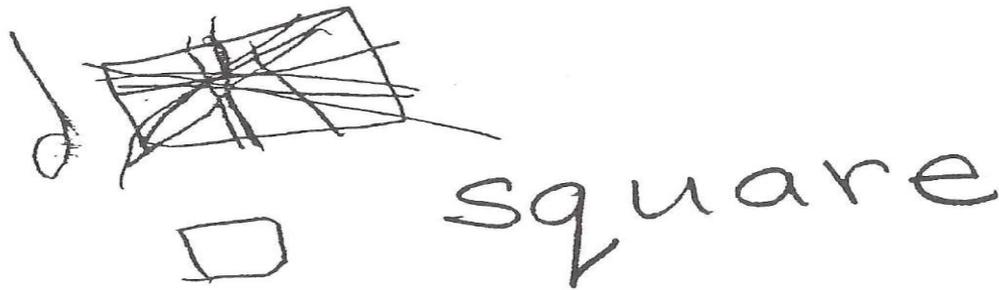
## **Flowers**

I pick the flowers  
from my garden I turn around  
and stop to see the  
yellow rose I go to pick one  
a thorn gets stuck in my finger.

**Iconic writing** of young children:

S = SNAKE or SLANGE





Source: Gunter Kress 2000: 188

Falls wir uns nicht vorher  
nochmal 📝, oder 👂 oder  
👁️, wünsche ich dir einen  
guten 🏂 ins Jahr 2015  
- aber Trink nicht zu viel 🍸  
oder 🍺 oder aber 🍷, sonst  
hast du am nächsten Tag  
einen fürchterlichen 🐕

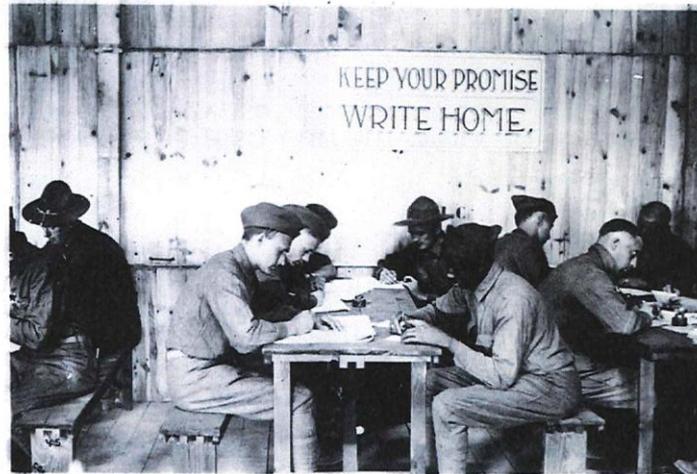
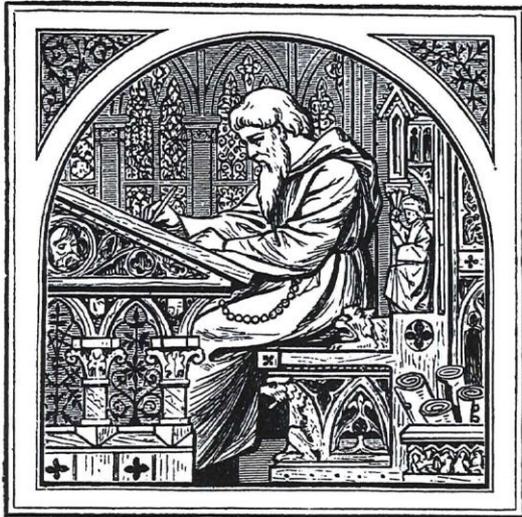
! Sollte das der Fall sein  
nimm lieber ganz schnell eine  
💊 und bleib in der Nähe vom  
🚽 😬!! Also lass es 💣, 🦊  
rein und mach einen drauf  
👗 ... ✨ 💖 😊 🍀 💖 🎉 📺 🎊 ...  
Guten Rutsch ins Jahr 2015



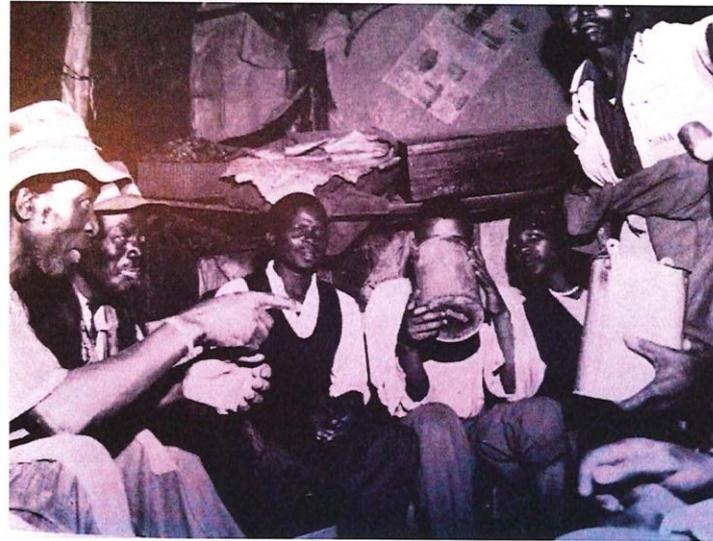
08:43



# Who wrote?



## School people and red people



## Skriving og klassesæthørighet

Breckenridge sier om skrijving i colonial-Afrika:

«[T]here are very good grounds for **seeing writing as a definite marker of class ... Yet the evidence that unschooled migrants wrote** is overwhelming ... Xhosa workers were the first **to make use of letter-writing as a tool for managing the exigencies of migracy.**»

See Keith Breckenridge (2008), «Reasons for writing: African working-class letter-writing in early twentieth century South Africa.» I: Karin Barber (red.), *Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self*.

## English summary

Writing is an immense creative source that involves much more than linguistic and orthographic factors ...

Sapir and Bloomfield have to be modified:

Writing is not secondary to speech or a reflection of speech, but **a social and cultural practice in its own right** (a term in new literacy studies is **linguistic landscaping**).