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*The story of writing* By Andrew Robinson (review)

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**Lexical change and variation in the southeastern United States, 1930–1990.** By ELLEN JOHNSON. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1996. Pp. xi, 318. Paper \$19.95.

This book examines changes in the dialect lexicon of 38 communities originally included in the *Linguistic atlas of the middle and south Atlantic states* (LAMSAS). To the original set of LAMSAS interviews from the late 1930s, Johnson added an additional set of interviews which she conducted in the same communities in 1990; her interviews, moreover, were mostly conducted with informants very (if not exactly) similar to those originally interviewed for LAMSAS. Thus, the original LAMSAS informant in Savannah, GA, was a white urban female born in 1856; J's 1990 Savannah informant was a white urban female born in 1900. The differences that did emerge from the two sets of data would seem inevitable with the passage of more than a half century. J's informants as a group are better-educated than the LAMSAS informants and are also more urbanized. These differences aside, J's matchup of similar informants from different eras allows a much better measure of change than the apparent-time studies which simply compare informants of different ages.

About one-third of the book describes and analyzes the data and their collection. The remainder consists of appendices including detailed biographical sketches of the informants, variants associated with regional or social groups, variants exhibiting diachronic change, tallies of answers to each question and commentaries on some of the answers by the informants, and finally an index of responses listed by question number. The index enables the reader to locate a response in the other appendices and to discover whether the term varied according to time, region, race, age, education, or rurality/urbanity.

Besides reporting changes in the individual lexical items, a major purpose for this study was to determine whether all of the nonlinguistic variables listed above have changed in their importance as a factor in language variation. J finds that, in 1990 unlike in 1930, region has become the least important variable. A dramatic example of this decline emerges in a comparison between the geographic distribution of 37 items from Hans Kurath's 1949 *Word geography of the eastern United States* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press) with the 1990 data. J's interviews corroborate the distribution of only 20 of Kurath's items, and her statistical comparisons of the two sets of data show the significance of region to be even less than the comparison with Kurath would suggest. However, most of these cases reflected variants—important regional variables in the 1930s—which had disappeared due to technological or economic changes. *Tow sack*, for example, would

have disappeared, presumably, because the burlap bag referent is no longer used for packing. The case of words like these, then, does not so much mean that region has itself diminished as a factor in language variation but only that these particular terms no longer are useful as regional indices. It is unfortunate that J's book has elsewhere been cited (in, for example, its own jacket blurb) as evidence that region *per se* is declining in importance, when in fact her book supports a much weaker claim. That does not diminish the achievement of this book, however, which presents a rich array of data in both its text and appendices. And J's efforts to match the LAMSAS interviews with similar 1990 informants, in the same communities, even the same neighborhoods, deserve unqualified applause. [TIMOTHY C. FRAZER, *Western Illinois University*.]

**The story of writing.** By ANDREW ROBINSON. London & New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995. Pp. 224. \$29.95.

*The story of writing* is an engaging, accessible, and comprehensive introduction to the world's writing systems. True to its subject matter, which is of course highly visual, it includes a wealth of photographs, timelines, and other illustrations—350 in all, many in full color. Part of the appeal of this book lies in its format. It is divided into three main sections: 'How writing works' (18–67), 'Extinct writing' (68–155), and 'Living writing' (156–217). These sections are divided into chapters which are themselves organized into a series of 'mini-articles' or topics, typically 1–2 pages long.

The first section explores a number of issues relevant to the development, classification, decipherment, and structure of writing systems. All of these are artfully integrated into a single case study—the decipherment of the Egyptian hieroglyphs—which provides the material for the first chapter, 'Reading the Rosetta stone' (20–35). Other chapters in this section are 'Sound, symbol and script' (36–51) and 'Proto-writing' (52–67). Selected topics include 'Theories of reading', 'Rebuses', 'Classification of writing systems', 'Pictography', and 'Ice Age symbols'. Robinson ends with an examination of the precursors of writing in Mesopotamia, shaped and incised clay tokens, and a discussion of the Sumerian counting system and the earliest known clay tablets.

The next section includes chapters called 'Cuneiform' (70–91), 'Egyptian hieroglyphs' (92–107), 'Linear B' (108–19), and 'Mayan glyphs' (120–43). The final chapter, 'Undeciphered scripts' (144–55), devotes at least a page to some of the more famous cases, among them the Indus Valley script, Linear A, Etruscan, and Rongorongo (Easter Island). The chapter on Maya glyphs is extremely well done, ad-

dressings aspects of Mayan culture and history as well as the calendar, numbers, and writing system itself. Since the phonetic decipherment of the glyphs was a fairly recent event, only a few general books on writing systems treat them adequately, as this one does.

The final and longest section of the book deals with writing systems in use today and their precursors. R discusses the Chinese and Japanese scripts in most detail ('Chinese writing' 182–97, 'Japanese writing' 198–209), and the alphabet, which he traces from its Phoenician beginnings to its descendants in various corners of the world ('The first alphabet' 158–67, 'New alphabets from old' 168–81). One disappointment is that R neglects the scripts of India, remarkable for the varied forms they take, and the Korean writing system (Hangul), arguably the most sophisticated in the world. Each is given a mere page, and one cannot help but think that they deserve more discussion in a book of this sort.

The concluding chapter is entitled 'From hieroglyphs to alphabets—and back?' (210–17). R dismisses those scholars who argue that 'with enough imagination and ingenuity, a system of signs could be expanded into a "universal" writing system . . . capable of expressing the entire range of thought that can be expressed in speech' (211). He is equally suspicious of the view that the alphabet is superior to logographic or syllabic scripts. This colorful and well-written book deserves a spot on the bookshelf of any true aficionado of writing systems. [KIRSTEN FUDEMAN, *Cornell University*.]

**The role of argument structure in grammar: Evidence from Romance.** By ALEX ALSINA. (CSLI lecture notes, 62.) Stanford: CSLI Publications, 1996. Pp xi, 306. \$69.95.

This monograph is a detailed and very readable study on argument structure and its relation to other levels of grammatical representation. Although the focus lies mainly on Catalan, most of the analyses are intended to hold for other Romance languages as well. The book consists of nine chapters including an introduction and a summary of the main conclusions.

In Ch. 2, 'The theoretical framework' (15–79), Alsina presents the theoretical foundations, a version of lexical functional grammar (LFG), which differs considerably from other LFG versions. For example, the correspondence between c(onstituent)-structure and f(unctional)-structure is not governed by functional equations but merely constrained by mapping principles. Furthermore, a(rgument)-structure maps to f-structure in the syntax rather than in the lexicon. A-structure is thus conceived of as an autonomous level of syntactic structure connecting the lexical-

semantic representation of a predicate and its syntactic subcategorization. Building on ideas of David Dowty, A assumes that arguments are merely specified as either Proto-Agents or Proto-Patients or neither or both.

Ch. 3 and Ch. 4 deal with reflexive clitics in Romance. In Ch. 3, 'The Romance reflexive clitic' (81–114), A presents evidence showing that the subject of a reflexive construction like Catalan *La directora es defensa* 'The director defends herself' corresponds both to the internal and the external argument of the predicate. In Ch. 4, 'Solving the paradox' (115–47), it is argued that these facts do not create a paradox unless the relation between arguments and grammatical functions is required to be one-to-one. According to A's analysis the Romance reflexive clitic functions as a morpheme which triggers the coindexation of two arguments in the a-structure of the predicate it combines with ('a-structure binding'). Both arguments are then linked to the same grammatical function and, as A points out, to the same 'semantic participant.'

In Ch. 5, 'Objects and case marking' (149–84), A distinguishes two types of objects in Romance claiming that the syntactic differences between them can be attributed to different case features, namely dative vs. nondative. However, the concept of morphological case A employs appears to be somewhat peculiar as he regards the preposition *a* in Catalan (and other Romance languages) as a case marker.

In Ch. 6, 'Causatives' (185–235), A proposes to analyze causative constructions in Romance as involving predicate composition, which means that the a-structures of the causative and the embedded predicate are merged. Consequently, all causative constructions are analyzed as monoclausal structures. The a-structure of a causative predicate is assumed to be triadic with an external, an internal, and a predicate argument. An interesting feature of A's analysis is the assumption that the internal argument may be alternatively linked to one of the two arguments of an embedded transitive predicate. This is intended to account for the semantic contrast reflected in examples like *He fet netejar els lavabos al general* 'I made the general clean the toilets' vs. *He fet netejar els lavabos pel general* 'I had the toilets cleaned by the general'. Only in the first example can the causee be analyzed as an internal argument and, accordingly, interpreted as being directly affected by the causing event.

In Ch. 7, 'Two types of binding' (237–64), A shows that Catalan (like Spanish) also allows for so-called clitic doubling, where a clitic cooccurs with a reflexive syntactic anaphor expressing the internal argument of the predicate. For example, in a structure like *La Maria es pentina a si mateixa* 'Maria combs herself' the external and the internal argument of the reflexivized predicate are mapped onto different