

*The ontogeny and phylogeny of writing: individuals compared with communities*

Grazia Basile

Studi Italiani di Linguistica Teorica e Applicata, XLVI, 3 (2017), pp. 441-458

Abstract

This work aims at investigating the processes that underlie learning of writing, both from a phylogenetic point of view and from a developmental perspective, highlighting similarities and differences compared to the spoken language.

During the phylogeny of the human species the appearance of the first forms of writing is due both to the specific needs of human communities and to the emergence of eminently social behaviours and practices. Similarly, from an ontogenetic point of view, the child, from early childhood, needs to interact with other human beings and to develop a social behaviour within forms of life that predispose him, first in oral form and then in written form, to the acquisition of the historical-natural language of the speech community to which he belongs.

The acquisition of the oral language occurs naturally, on the other hand, in the case of written language, the child necessarily need a special training from a competent and helpful adult. The social dimension is therefore essential both to learn to speak and to learn to write.

Learning to write then requires the maturation of the manual system and the development of a certain level of abstraction to establish the correspondences between the written, visual signs and the sounds of the words. In the latter case it is the achievement of a metalinguistic awareness, which is the final outcome of a *continuum* that ranges from epilinguistic unconscious behaviours to genuine metalinguistic conscious activities.