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Language of Immediacy – Language of Distance: Orality and Literacy from the Perspective of Language Theory and Linguistic History*#

In recent years, the relationship between spoken and written language, between orality and literacy, has rightly become an issue of central importance to linguistic research. Discussion of this topic, however, often suffers from conceptual confusion and misunderstandings. This is particularly true when the following problems are addressed:

- (1) the relationship of spoken and written language to the other varieties of a given language;
- (2) the fact that certain forms of spoken discourse often differ little from written texts and that written texts may exhibit clear characteristics of orality;
- (3) the concept of spoken and written language as different modes of communication and their possible foundations;
- (4) the meaning of the phrase 'primacy of spoken language';
- (5) the status of the characteristic features of spoken and written language in specific languages as well as on a typological level, and the relevance of these features to the unity of particular languages;
- (6) the state of primary orality and the effects of the transition to literacy.

In the following essay we develop several significant conceptual differentiations and attempt to clarify some of the issues involved.

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The term 'literacy', as it translates German 'Schriftlichkeit', is meant to primarily refer to the abstract quality or condition of being written rather than to an ability of people to read and write. Secondly, the term relates to a cultural state conditioned by the availability of writing.

1. Language variety and spoken vs. written language

As constitutive features of human language in general we regard semantic function, alterity, creativity, historicity, exteriority and discursiveness. The notion of historicity does not include merely the (external) differences between languages but also (internal) language variation.¹ Contrary to certain schools of structural linguistics which simply ignore (internal) language variety or methodologically exclude it from consideration,² Eugenio Coseriu takes language variety into account by complementing the concept of the *structure* (of a functional language) with that of the *architecture* (of a particular historical language). In doing so, he assigns the varieties within such an architecture to the three dimensions *diatopic*, *diastratic* and *diaphasic*, which constitute the *diasystem* of a given language.³ Notwithstanding the importance of this three-dimensional model of diasystematic variation, the possible variations of a historical language can only be fully described by taking into account the more fundamental aspect of the distinction between *written* and *spoken*, which *cannot* be reduced to diasystematic differences. Nevertheless, there are of course natural affinities between spoken or written language and certain varieties within all three dimensions of the diasystem. Thus, varieties with stronger diatopic marking (dialects, regional varieties etc.), as well as diastratically 'low' varieties (vernaculars), are closely related to spoken language. From a diaphasic point of view, the closeness of the 'low' registers (familiar, vulgar etc.) to spoken language is so obvious that historically the two have frequently been identified with each other, especially in the term *Umgangssprache*, 'colloquial speech'.⁴ However, the differentiation 'written/spoken' cannot be simply incorporated into the diaphasic dimension (compare especially section 5, below): the position that a given linguistic phenomenon occupies on the diaphasic register of spoken language does not correspond to its position on that of written language. Instead, it is shifted, so that, for example, the marking

1 On this subject, cf. Coseriu (1975, esp. pp. 127-136, p. 154, note 15); see also Oesterreicher (1979: 224-256, 1983: 170-173, and 1987).

2 Cf. Oesterreicher (1979: 131-141, 178ff.).

3 Coseriu takes the terms 'structure' and 'architecture', 'diatopic', and 'diastratic' from Flydal (1951); on this topic and for a brief presentation of the dimensions of language variety, cf. Coseriu (1970: 32ff., 1981a: 302-318).

4 For a discussion of this enigmatic term, cf. e.g. Moser (1960); Holtus and Radtke (1984); as to our question, see above all Söll (³1985: 37ff.). Of course, we must not overlook the fact that – under just that vague label of 'colloquial language' – valuable preliminary work was done in German studies (cf. Wunderlich 1894; Zimmermann 1965), Italian studies (cf. Spitzer 1922), Hispanic studies (Beinhauer 1958), and Latin studies (Hofmann ³1951) for the systematization (discussed below) of the universal phenomena of spoken language beyond all diasystematic differences.

'familiar' in written language corresponds to 'neutral' on the register scale of spoken language.⁵

In the following we shall consider primarily the aspects of the written/spoken distinction on the basis of three diasystematic dimensions.

2. Written/spoken language: medium and conception

By means of a twofold terminological differentiation, Ludwig Söll has eliminated significant problems of classification with regard to the terms 'spoken' and 'written.'⁶ On the one hand, as far as the medium is concerned, we can differentiate between the *phonic* and the *graphic* code as the two forms of realization of linguistic utterances. On the other hand, with regard to the communicative strategies or – in other words – to the conception of linguistic discourse, we can, *ideally*, differentiate between two general modes: *written* and *spoken*. Logically, four different ways of allocating medium and conception are thus possible. Following Söll's procedure, we illustrate these four possibilities by a system of four cells, using examples from French:

		conception	
		spoken	written
medium	graphic code	<i>faut pas le dire</i>	<i>il ne faut pas le dire</i>
	phonic code	[fopaldɪʀ]	[ilnəfopalədiʀ]

Fig. 1

Clearly, there are special affinities between the 'spoken' conception and the realization in the phonic code on the one hand, and between 'written' conception and the realization in the graphic code on the other hand. Therefore the combinations 'spoken + phonic' (e.g. informal conversations between friends, etc.) and 'written + graphic' (e.g. regulations in public administration, etc.) are typical. But of course there are also forms of communication that correspond to the other

5 Cf. Söll (³1985: 190ff.), Hausmann (1975: 31ff.). On the affinity but non-identity of spoken/written and the varieties on all three diasystematic dimensions, cf. Stourdézé (1969); Söll (³1985: 34ff.); Holtus (1983).

6 See Söll (³1985: 17-25) for a discussion of the often quoted, but rarely adhered to double distinction of these terms. While many linguists, such as Behaghel (1899: 27), De Mauro (1971), and Hesse and Kleineidam (1973) did recognize this problem, it is Söll who offers what is undoubtedly the most adequate solution as far as concept and terminology are concerned. Cf. also the complex historical approach by Knoop (1983).

two possible combinations (e.g., lectures = 'written + phonic', printed interviews = 'spoken + graphic').

On closer inspection of this double distinction it becomes clear that the relationship between the phonic and the graphic code must be regarded as a strict dichotomy, whereas the polarity of 'spoken' and 'written' conceptions stands for a continuum of degrees of conceptual possibilities.⁷ Thus we can tentatively list some forms of discourse in order of decreasing 'spoken' and increasing 'written' conception. These are, of course, idealized types of discourse: *a* intimate conversation; *b* telephone conversation with a friend; *c* interview; *d* printed interview; *e* diary entry; *f* private letter; *g* job interview; *h* sermon; *i* lecture; *j* article in a quality newspaper; and *k* administrative regulation. (It is the relative position of these items that is important. We are not concerned, in this context, with a systematic approach to discourse text typology.) In order to take into account the gradation within the conceptual continuum as well as the two forms of realization (phonic/graphic), we tentatively suggest the following diagram, into which we have entered the forms of utterance *a-k*:

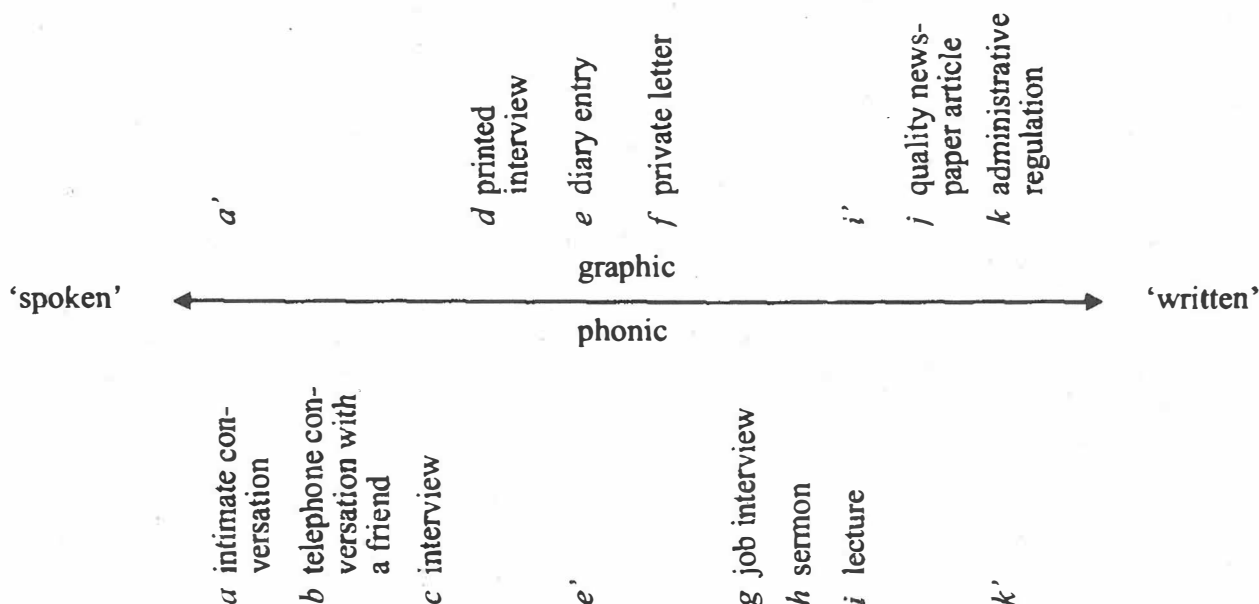


Fig. 2

Of course, transpositions of all these forms of discourse into the alternative medium of realization are always possible (e.g., reading from a diary = *e'*, printing of a lecture = *i'*).⁸ The discourse types which correspond to *a'* and *k'* exist only

7 Cf. especially Söll (1985: 23f.), who talks of exclusion with regard to medium and of overlap with regard to conception.

8 Cf. Lyons (1981: 11): "[...] it is possible to read aloud what is written and, conversely, to write down what is spoken [...] we will say that language has the property of *medium-*

in such a transposition: *k'* (i.e., reading in the sense of reading *out* an administrative directive) constitutes an extreme, yet widely practiced instance with a long history and a well-established place in Western cultures; *a'* (i.e., a transcript of an intimate conversation) on the other hand, is dependent on special technical equipment that has become available only recently (audiotape, videotape), and is primarily used for very specific purposes, as for instance in the context of linguistic research. Before the invention of such devices – a matter to which we shall return – discourses of a purely oral conception were untransmissible.

The possibility of transposition from one medium to the other demonstrates that a comparison of the phonic with the graphic codes (which, especially in a language such as French, can offer many valuable insights)⁹ tells us *nothing* about language variation dependent on orality and literacy. In the following we shall therefore concentrate on the conceptual continuum between the two poles 'spoken' and 'written' as defining features of orality and literacy.

3. Immediacy – distance: conditions of communication and strategies of verbalization

A close look at the discourse types *a-k* reveals that their places in the conception continuum result from the interplay of several communicative parameters: social relationship, number of partners, position of the partners in space and time, possibility of turn-taking, fixation of theme, degree of exposure to the public, spontaneity and involvement, role of linguistic, situational and socio-cultural context (shared knowledge, common values and norms of a society, etc.). In situations of extreme orality (as opposed to situations of extreme literacy), we can thus observe the following – still idealized – types of *communicative conditions* whose interplay results in different types of *communicative constellations*:¹⁰

transferability. This is a most important property – one to which far too little attention has been paid in general discussion of the nature of language” In this respect, the term ‘mediollect’ points in the wrong direction (cf. Löffler 1985: 87, 91ff.).

9 Cf. Söll (³1985: 68-110); Müller (1975: 58-74, 82-89). With regard to Spanish, see Geckeler (1978); Schmitt (1984). For a general discussion of writing, see Coulmas (1982).

10 For a general discussion of communicative constellations, see Steger et al. (1974: 76-95); Henne (1975: 1-15, esp. 7f.); Lorenzo (³1980: 39ff.); Henne/Rehbock (²1982: 32ff.); Koch (1986). On spontaneity and participation, see Bally (³1951: 284-301, 1965: 24; on *langue parlée*: “Les formes vivantes [...] dans leur fraîcheur et leur spontanéité” et passim); Frei (1929: 36, 233ff.); Söll (³1985: 60-62). On contexts, see Bühler (1934: §§6-12, §25) and esp. Coseriu (1955/56); Hörmann (1976: 310ff.). For a discussion of knowledge, values, etc., see Berger and Luckmann (1966: 31-61). In recent years, many of these aspects were

- In spoken language, the respective roles of the partners in communication are open, and the changing of roles is dealt with *ad hoc* (dialogue). In contrast, written language is characterized by a fixed distribution of roles, sometimes to the extent that a discourse may be entirely monologic.¹¹
- On the basis of the universal of ‘alterity’ (Coseriu), we can say that communication is always cooperation.¹² However, in spoken language, production and reception are *directly* linked: producer and recipient negotiate the development and content of a given communicative sequence; the recipient offers linguistic and extra-linguistic reactions and may interrupt at any time, ask for clarification or pose questions (“feedback”). In contrast to this, in written language, production and reception represent, so to speak, autonomous processes – even where they occur simultaneously (e.g., in a lecture); this means that the producer, from the beginning, must take the requirements of reception into account.
- In spoken language, the partners find themselves in *face-to-face* interaction (physical closeness and shared action)¹³ and/or they communicate via elements of the situational context and take them for granted; often there is a large amount of shared knowledge. In written language, the recipient – and often there is more than one recipient – is less a known quantity than an anonymous addressee; communication is public; elements of the situational context and the socio-cultural context must be extensively verbalized; thus, the linguistic context gains in importance.¹⁴

investigated by means of discourse analysis, particularly with a view to spoken language, cf. e.g. Schank and Schoenthal (1976); Schank and Schwitalla (1980); Kalverkämper (1981: 89ff.). See Ludwig (1980) on written language.

- 11 On the subject of dialogue and the changing of roles, see Kainz (²1962: 172-185, and esp. ²1965: 485-530); Ammann (³1969: 170f.); Sacks et al. (1974); Söll (³1985: 30-32); Henne/Rehbock (²1982: 22ff., 190-201).
- 12 Cf. Grice (1975); Henne/Rehbock (²1982: 207f.); Luckmann (1984); Schlieben-Lange (1975: 40f., 59f., 102f., and 1983: 90-97); Stempel (1984).
- 13 Cf. Berger and Luckmann (1966: 43ff.); Luckmann (1972: 226ff.). In this context, cf. the important works devoted to symbolic interactionism and of phenomenological sociology (e.g. Mead 1969 and Schütz 1971); for more detailed information, see Gross (1972: 57-109); Steinert (1973).
- 14 Cf. Coseriu (²1981b: 101): “Einer der wichtigsten Unterschiede zwischen geschriebener und gesprochener Sprache liegt darin, daß die erstere im Gegensatz zur letzteren nicht einfach alle möglichen Außer-Rede-Kontexte benutzen kann, sondern daß sie sich einen Teil dieser Kontexte erst durch den *Rede-Kontext* schaffen muß. Die Außer-Rede-Kontexte werden zu einem Teil erst einmal im Text selbst erzeugt und dann erst, wie in der gesprochenen Sprache, zum Zwecke weiterer Determinierungen verwendet.” [Contrary to spoken language, written language cannot simply use all kinds of extra-linguistic contexts, but

- The immediacy of ‘spoken’ communication noted thus far makes greater spontaneity possible; planning can be less thorough, taking place, as it were, in the course of the discourse itself (self-correction by the speaker, correction by others, hesitation, etc.). In written language, which is more clearly mediated, the detachment from the immediate situation requires a higher degree of planning (reflection), which is actually rendered possible by the separation of production and reception.¹⁵
- Spontaneity generally implies a higher degree of emotional involvement and affective participation; these factors are less important in written language.¹⁶

It thus becomes clear that the communicative continuum presented above cannot be seen as purely *linear*. The noted variables in varying combinations constitute different forms of communication. The product of the interplay and mutual influence of these variables must therefore be seen as a *multi-dimensional* space between two poles. The following combination characterizes the pole ‘spoken’: ‘dialogue’, ‘free turn-taking’, ‘familiarity of the partners’, ‘face-to-face interaction’, ‘free development of a theme’, ‘external to the public sphere’, ‘spontaneity’, ‘intense involvement’, ‘situation embedding’, etc. This form of communication can most appropriately be called *language of immediacy*. In analogy, the following combination characterizes the pole ‘written’: ‘monologue’, ‘no change of speaker’, ‘no familiarity between the partners’, ‘separation in space and time’, ‘fixed content or theme’, ‘totally in the public sphere’, ‘high degree of reflection’, ‘low degree of involvement’, ‘detachment from the situation’, etc.

must form part of these contexts by a *speech-context*. This is one of the most important differences between written and spoken language.]

At first, the extralinguistic contexts of written language are established in the text itself, only then, they are used for further determinations, like the contexts of spoken language] (1981b: 201). The extreme poles ‘spoken’ and ‘written’ become tangible in Bühler’s “Sprachinseln [...] im Meere des schweigsamen aber eindeutigen Verkehrs” [language islands [...] in an ocean of tacit, but clear traffic] (1934: 156), or Olson’s dictum: “[...] all of the information relevant to the communication of intention must be present in the text” (1977: 277). Both, Bühler and Olson, recognize the ontogenetic implications of the differing modes of communication; cf. also de Laguna (1927: 107-110); Hörmann (1976: 394-424); Keenan et al. (1978: 45f.).

15 Cf. the terms ‘unplanned’ versus ‘planned discourse’ in Ochs (1979); cf. also Parisi and Castelfranchi (1977: 176ff., 181ff.); for corrections and ‘bridging’ phenomena, see e.g. Gülich (1970: 169-200, 263-276); Schegloff et al. (1977).

16 Chafe (1982) uses the term ‘involvement’ (as opposed to ‘detachment’); see also Bally (³1951: 284-301, and 1965: 24 et passim); Frei (1929: 233ff. et passim); hints are also given in García de Diego (1951).

For this form of communication we shall use the term *language of distance*.¹⁷ Now we can define the conceptual continuum as the space in which components of immediacy and distance mix within the framework of individual parameters, thereby constituting certain forms of expression, certain discourses.

The communicative conditions of immediacy and distance give rise to particular preferences for different communicative *strategies* and *media* in utterances:

- The dialogic character and low degree of planning result in a certain tentativeness and self-generation of discourses of the ‘immediacy’ type. In contrast, utterances of the ‘distance’ type aim at a definite form and reification,¹⁸ i.e. texts in the strict meaning of the word. Since modern linguistic research has – for good reasons – extended the term ‘text’ to all utterances independently of medium and conception, we are nevertheless faced with the question whether a clear differentiation between *discourse* (as an utterance in the language of immediacy) and *text* (as an utterance in the language of distance) might not be enlightening or even indispensable.¹⁹
- It also becomes clear now that there are affinities between ‘discourse’ and the ‘fleeting’ phonic code on the one hand, and between ‘text’ and the ‘reifying’ graphic code on the other.
- The compactness, complexity and density of information in utterances in the language of distance (texts) can be explained as a result of their relative detachment from the situation and the increased degree of planning required. This integrative elaborateness contrasts with verbalization in the discourse of immediacy. Such verbalization is made possible by means of contextual clues

17 ‘Distance’ should under no circumstances be associated with any derogatory nuance. It is *the* communicative counterpart – naturally showing different historical formations – of the language universal of a necessarily ‘graded’ human relation to reality, as was established by modern anthropology and phenomenology; cf. e.g. Plessner (²1965); Graumann (1966); Schütz (1971); Luckmann (1972: 233-235); Hörmann (1976: 195ff., 401ff.). The term ‘distance’, as used by us, refers to neither ‘communicative figurativeness/impropriety’ nor ‘linguistic estrangement’.

18 Cf. the well-known passages in Humboldt (1836: LVII or CC). On the necessity to interpret ‘texts’ as a consequence of ‘reification’, see Plato (1958: 56); cf. also Raible (1983).

19 For strong arguments supporting this view, see Brinkmann (²1971: 724). For another concept of ‘text’, see Wunderlich (1974: 386f.). Raible (1979: 63ff.) distinguishes between different concepts of text; cf. also Coseriu (1973: 6; 1981b: 5-7); Ehlich (1983: 24-27). It is interesting that Olson (1977: 258) distinguishes between “more informal oral-language statements, which [he] shall call ‘utterances’” versus “explicit, written prose statements, which [he] shall call ‘texts.’” ‘Text’, in the sense of an utterance in the language of distance, is predestined to become “Wiedergebrauchs-Rede” [utterance for repeated use] (Lausberg ²1963: 28f.).

and can be either economical or, because of the low degree of planning and process-orientation, extensive and less integrated. Especially with regard to syntax, the complexity and integration of the 'distance'-text demand an elaborate, 'rich' verbalization (hypotaxis, etc.). In this area, economy is certainly most typical for the discourse of immediacy. This is shown, e.g., in a preferred use of parataxis, the use of holophrases, and the economy, from a pragmatic point of view,²⁰ achieved by the use of reductive particles. On the other hand, we find rich verbalization in the language of immediacy in the lexico-semantic area when it coincides with a high degree of affective expression (swear words, affective accumulation of synonyms, etc.).

- It has been said that communication operates either with discrete ('digital') elements, or with holistic-continuous ('analogous') elements. We can now note that communication of immediacy favors analogous elements. To this category belong not only the situational context, but also non-verbal means of communication such as gestures, facial expression, etc., as well as intonation – all methods that also fulfill the demand for affective use of language and expressiveness. In the language of distance, more – though not all – stress is put on digital methods.²¹

These considerations lead us to suggest the following system, in which the two triangles mark the conceptual affinity of the characteristics with the respective medium. The relative position of the individual forms of utterance *a-k* shows the degree of 'immediacy' and 'distance':²²

20 Chafe characterizes spoken vs. written language by using the terms 'fragmentation' vs. 'integration'; cf. also Ochs (1979: 72); we prefer 'aggregation' vs. 'integration', 'aggregative' vs. 'integrative' for some of the phenomena described (cf. Ludwig 1986). For a discussion of the linguistic categories 'coherence', 'cohesion', 'informativeness', etc., cf. Beaugrande and Dressler (1981: 3-14). Discussing the 'progressive sequence' of French, Bally gives a good example of the complexity of utterances in the language of distance: In the "parler élégant" *Ils cédèrent parce qu'on leur promet formellement qu'ils ne seraient pas punis* turns into *Ils cédèrent à une promesse formelle d'impunité* (Bally 1965: 356). On switching back and forth between economic and extensive verbalization in the language of immediacy and rich (intensive) and compact verbalization in the language of distance, see Koch 1986; cf. also the juxtaposition of economy and 'waste' in 'colloquial language' as used by Wunderlich (1894: 64-196) and Spitzer (1922: 134-175).

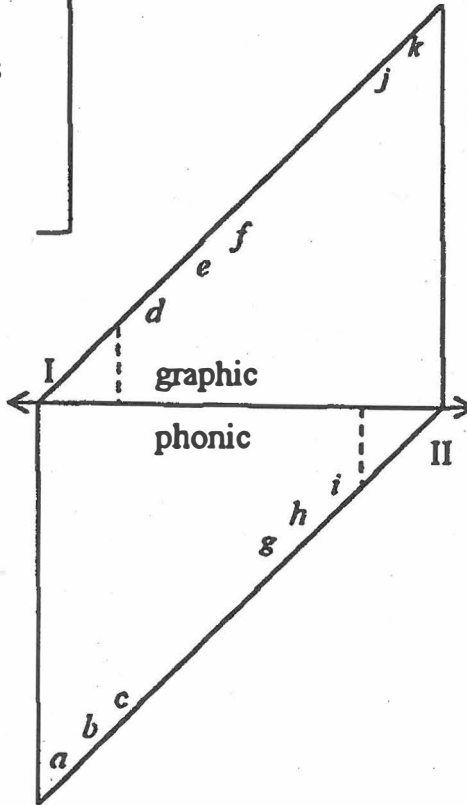
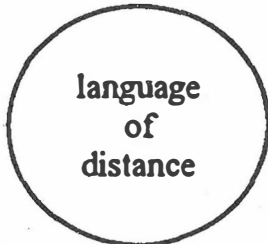
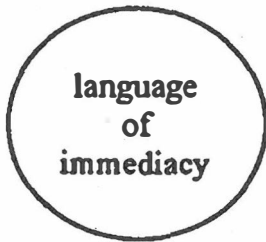
21 Cf. Watzlawick et al. (1969: 61-68); Stempel (1984: 153f.). Lehmann (1984: 29ff., 399) goes too far when he simply correlates 'knowledge' and 'social contact' as the basic functions of language ("epistemic" and "social dimension") with *digital* and *analogous* structures and with *predication* and *reference*. As for non-verbal communication, cf. Scherer (1984: 108-164).

22 Spandrels I and II aim at those forms of utterance, which, according to *a'* and *k'* in figure 2 actually exist only in medial transpositions.

conditions of communication:

- dialogue
- familiarity of the partners
- *face-to face*-interaction
- free thematic development
- non-public
- spontaneity
- 'involvement'
- context embeddedness
- expressivity
- affective speech

- monologue
- distance between the partners
- spatiotemporal separation
- fixation of topics
- public
- reflection
- 'detachment'
- contextual dissociation
- 'objectivity'



strategies of verbalization:

- process orientation
 - tentativeness
- less/lower:
- density of information
 - compactness
 - integration
 - complexity
 - elaboration
 - planning

- 'reification'
 - finality
- higher/more:
- density of information
 - compactness
 - integration
 - complexity
 - elaboration
 - planning

Fig. 3

Regarding part 6, we emphasize that in the cases of functional bilingualism (e.g. the juxtaposition of Latin and the Romance vernacular languages in the Middle Ages) the language of distance (cf. fig. 3) as a whole – though this later holds only for certain text types and genres – is totally *different* from the language of immediacy.

Two points must be stressed: 1. In literary literacy there are of course specific forms of utterances that are marked by 'spontaneity', 'familiarity', 'power of expression', and 'affective participation.' No one would deny that these can find their most powerful expression in such texts, and that we can even speak of a 'new', 'higher' form of immediacy in this connection. However, it must be noted that this immediacy is always a *manufactured* immediacy,²³ created by means of certain features of the language of immediacy. One can distinguish two types of this manufactured immediacy: it can either be of a general character, if the text as a whole uses the language of immediacy and its structures (cf. certain lyrical forms etc.); or it can be of a fragmentary character, as, for instance, in an author's mimetic-imitative use of the language of immediacy – as a quotation, so to speak – (characterization of characters, local color, etc.; see, e.g., dialogues from Petronius' *Cena Trimalchionis*, or *Zazie dans le métro* by Raymond Queneau). Conversely, partial distance can be created in a discourse of immediacy by excessively explicit, complex or well-integrated elements. Such elements often occur in conjunction with the relevant phonetic, intonational, and gestural signals as well as facial expression. This is also a matter of stylized use requiring interpretation: the citations of the language of distance may be used to signal parody or irony in an affective utterance. 2. As far as strategies of verbalization are concerned, literature also offers fragmentary, unintegrated texts that appear unplanned (e.g., the use of the stream-of-consciousness technique in novels). Although at first glance such texts closely resemble productions in the language of immediacy, they are also 'manufactured' and function differently – and are interpreted differently – from comparable oral utterances. Such texts aim to force the reader to receive the text with a high degree of concentration, in order to challenge the recipient's imagination and creativity.²⁴

4. On the primacy of spoken language

The view persists not only among educated laymen that spoken language is to be seen as a deficient mode of 'real', i.e. written, language. For a long time, linguists saw written language as the only object worthy of investigation. The reasons for this view were theoretical and methodological – e.g., an unhistorical

23 In this context, Ochs refers to "planned unplanned discourse" (1979: 77f.). Cf. the term *fingierte Mündlichkeit* [feigned orality] (Goetsch 1985) used in literary studies. In this respect, one must consider forms of language consciousness, feeling for and sense of language, and various style models; for relevant comments, see Gauger (1976: 47ff.); Gauger/Oesterreicher (1982: 50-60); Gauger (1984).

24 Cf. Weinrich (1984: 98f.).

preoccupation with norms, a literature-oriented ideal of language, and the ephemerality of spoken utterances. But Wilhelm von Humboldt and the Neogrammarians of the 19th century already stressed the primacy of spoken language,²⁵ and more recent linguists have recognized that the phylogenetic, ontogenetic and historical development of writing follows that of speaking.²⁶ (Unfortunately this view is often linked to the equation of 'spoken' with 'phonic' and 'written' with 'graphic.')

It is more helpful to insist on the primacy of the *communicative conditions* of spoken language that are part of its definition and theoretically necessary. In short, it is potentially more productive to start with the characteristic features of 'communicative immediacy', as opposed to 'communicative distance.' Following the suggestions of Talmy Givón, the conditions of the 'pragmatic mode' of communication (the sum of conditions such as situational closeness, low degree of planning, dialogue, etc.) could be seen as contrasting with the conditions of a 'syntactic mode' (situational distance, higher degree of planning, monologue, etc.). The relationship between these two modes clearly marks the syntactic mode as secondary, as derived from the pragmatic mode. This is the case because the communicative conditions of the pragmatic mode are not merely typical of spoken language, but also of the following:²⁷

- pidgins (as opposed to creoles)
- phylogenetically early (as opposed to late) phases of language development, which

25 Among those who regard spoken language as 'deficient' are Frei (1929); Bally (⁴1965: 25-28). Cf. also the *vitia elocutionis* mentioned in traditional normative rhetoric; see Lausberg (²1973: §§309-314, 470-527, and 1063-1077). Even Dante mentioned the primacy of spoken language in *De vulgari eloquentia*; cf. Gauger et al. (1981: 40f.). The notion was also widespread in the 18th century; cf. e.g. Condillac (1973: II.1). For 19th-century views, cf. e.g. Humboldt (1836: LVII, LXXXIff.); Paul (⁵1920: 404-422); and for a general discussion, see Christmann (1977; 1978).

26 See e.g. Saussure (1916: 41, 45); Lyons (1968: 38ff.); Lyons (1981: 11ff.); Bally (⁴1965: 24-25) explicitly mentions the aspect of conception.

27 For a general discussion, cf. Givón (1979: 229f., 307f.); furthermore Sornicola (1981), and – from the phenomenological perspective – Luckmann (1972: 226ff.). With regard to the ontogenetic aspect, cf. Bates (1976) and our remarks in note 15 (above). Careful as one must be in respect of the juxtaposition of ontogenetic acquisition and aphatic loss of language (cf. List 1981: 88f.), the findings of Engel (1977) show that certain phenomena of the language of immediacy occur more frequently in aphasics than in 'normal' speakers. (As to the controversial debate about the correlation between phraseological problems and the written character of communication in aphasics, cf. on the one hand Wallesch [1983], on the other hand Peuser [1983].) We did not consider the relevance of the pragmatic mode for *certain* processes of language change; cf. Givón (1979: 208f.); Comrie (1981: 222); Koch (1986).

- are partly repeated in early (as opposed to late) ontogenetic phases. Research devoted to aphasia partly points in the same direction.

Against this background it is easy to integrate written and spoken language into an overall perspective with regard to phylo- and ontogenetic issues (see Fig. 4). Of course, spoken language (C) should not be regarded as identical with the phylo- and ontogenetically earlier phases of language development (A, B). Yet to a certain extent it preserves the communicative conditions of these early phases (situational immediacy, etc.) as well as their strategies of verbalization (economical verbalization). Spoken language therefore stands in close proximity to the pragmatic mode. However, it also exhibits a tendency towards detachment from the situation and 'syntactization'. Written language (D) uses these tendencies and develops them further in the direction of the syntactic mode with its rich and dense verbalization, so that a maximum of contextual distance, monologic character, reduced affectiveness, etc., can be achieved within the possibilities of a linguistic system. At the same time, more economical and less integrated strategies of verbalization contrasting with these communicative conditions remain unused, although they are available in the linguistic system.²⁸

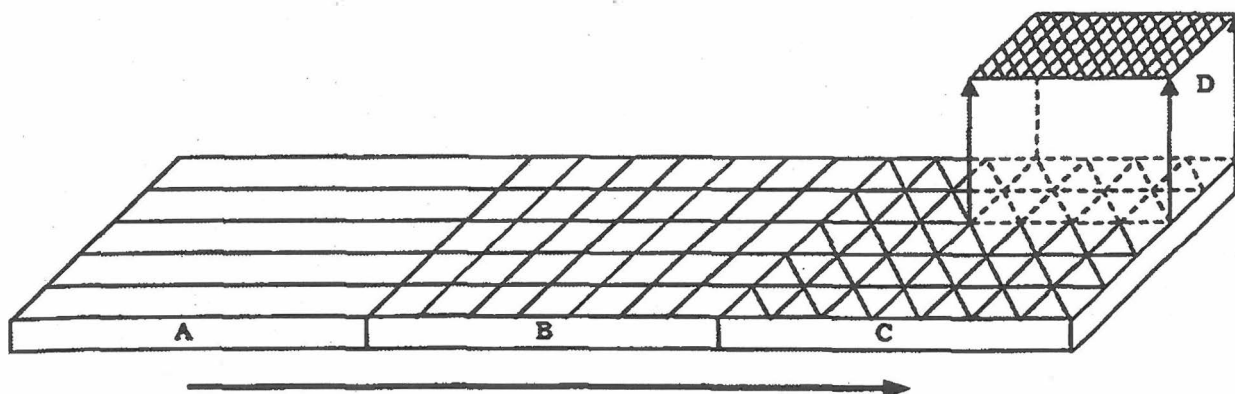


Fig. 4

The importance of written language (distance) is not discounted with this proof of a genetic, historical and communicative primacy of spoken language (immediacy). The cognitive achievement of the individual and of civilization in general made possible by literacy cannot be valued highly enough.²⁹

28 Cf. Ochs (1979: 51ff.) and Koch (1985: 64ff.).

29 This is one of the favourite topics of the Enlightenment, which stresses the importance of writing for the mental development of the individual and the progress of peoples; cf. e.g. Condillac (1793: II.1, chap. XIII, and I.4, chap. I, esp. §§11 and 12); Condorcet (1794/1963); the important entry in the *Encyclopédie* (1751-80/1968-95); on this, cf. Schlieben-Lange (1983: 173, note 42). See also Giesecke (1979) and Olson (1977).

5. Spoken and written language: universal characteristics and characteristics of individual languages

The conditions of communication and the strategies of verbalization that we have described inevitably imply, in all historical languages, particular types of phenomena. Despite the specific characteristics of individual languages, these phenomena must be regarded as *universal* features of the language of immediacy (spoken) or the language of distance (written). For the language of immediacy, this is supported by the following phenomena, which concern different levels of language (those concerning the language of distance can easily be supplied by analogy):

- In the area of *morphosyntax*: additions, anacoluthons, ‘errors’ in congruence, holophrastic utterances, phenomena of segmentation, *rheme-theme* sequences and the economical use of hypotaxis.
- In the area of the *lexicon*: *passe-partout* words; lexical ‘poverty’, low *type-token* ratio; on the other hand: expressive productions (hyperbole, swear words, etc.) and lexical richness in certain clearly defined semantic fields.
- In the *textual-pragmatic* area: speaker and listener signals, hesitation phenomena; markers of correction, markers of structure, reductive particles; frequent use of the present as narrative tense, direct speech as the preferred way of quotation; different expectations as far as coherence of the text is concerned. Universal phenomena, possible in an individual language but found in all languages, cannot be compared to those phenomena of a spoken language that, within an individual language, merely have a status of *historical contingency* and can therefore be understood solely as a product of the history of individual languages. The following are examples for such characteristics in the spoken language of *individual languages*. It is no coincidence that these characteristics are very often closely linked to diasystematic differences. The examples are from three different Romance languages (where the diatopic influence is more prominent in Italian than in Spanish, and more prominent there than in French):³⁰

30 Cf. the distinction between the universal-essential and monolingual-contingent features of spoken language in Koch (1985 and 1986); see also Vulpe (1981). For an explanation in terms of the theory of language, see Koch (1988) and Oesterreicher (1988). As far as the universal features of spoken language are concerned, the works on ‘colloquial language’ listed above (see note 5 and Havers 1931) already anticipate important results. Promising are the considerations on ‘every-day-rhetoric’ as given in Stempel (1983).

- In the area of *phonetics* and *phonology* it is difficult, even in French, to find characteristics that are not simultaneously diatopic. In spoken Spanish [-ð] as a final sound is silent in almost all regions. Spoken Italian lacks the phonological oppositions /e/-/ɛ/ and /o/-/ɔ/ in many, though not in all regions. In spoken French (with the exception of the *Midi*), /ə/ (*e caduc*) has zero realization in almost all phonetic environments.
- In the area of *morphosyntax*, the tenses expressing the past illustrate the different characters of individual languages. In spoken Spanish the use of ‘pretérito indefinido’ and ‘pretérito perfecto’ is no different from written Spanish. In Italian, however, instead of the opposition of ‘passato remoto’ and ‘passato prossimo’, we almost exclusively find the latter in the North, and almost exclusively the former in some southern regions. In spoken French the ‘passé simple’ has generally been abandoned in favor of the ‘passé composé’.
- As far as the *lexicon* is concerned, we are dealing inevitably with elements with low diastatic/diaphasic marking (familiar, popular). Compare French *fric*, *bouquin*, *flic*; Italian *grana* ‘money’, *sbolognare*, *cappuccio*; Spanish *chucho*, *pitillo*, *bici* (of course, there are words with diatopic marking everywhere as well).

Such phenomena characterize *only* spoken French, spoken Italian and spoken Spanish. We *cannot* deduce them from the communicative conditions of spoken language which we have discussed. Since this is also true for the diaphasic features in individual languages, we now understand why the universal-communicative differences between the language of immediacy and the language of distance cannot be reduced to the diaphasic dimension. (Of course, our differentiation between characteristics of individual languages and universal characteristics of spoken language does not exclude the possibility that certain characteristics of individual languages can exist in several genetically related or typologically comparable languages).

Now we can also assess the difference between the grammar of written and spoken language.³¹ In the area of the universal features, spoken and written language refer to the same system. Spoken language merely retains the more open norm, and uses the possibilities of the system less intensively. Written language, on the other hand, narrows the norm and uses the possibilities of the system more exhaustively. In the area of the individual language, differences in norm and in system between written and spoken language – using the terms in Co-

31 On this subject, see e.g. Vachek (1973); Mair (1979: 182ff.); Söll (1985: 27ff.); Scherer (1984: 176ff.).

seriu's sense – are possible and frequent.³² Normally, however, the coexistence of the two varieties, spoken and written, does *not* interfere with the unity of the individual historical language. If and when, on the level of the individual language, these differences become more pronounced, diglossia results, as it resulted, for instance, in the relationship between written Latin and spoken ('vulgar') Latin (and as it is possibly developing in French). If and when the differences between individual languages become sufficiently great, the result is bilingualism. The written language then remains available as a fossilized idiom, as in the case of Latin.³³ But such developments concern only individual languages. The universal differences between written and spoken languages have nothing to do with diglossia or bilingualism in any language.

6. On the history of orality and literacy

Thus far we have based our argument on conditions as we find them in fully literate societies. We shall now correct this simplifying view by considering other historically possible constellations and developments in the area of literacy and orality.³⁴

If we take our fig. 3 as a starting point, we notice that so-called primary orality, which can be found in certain parts of the world today and which was the rule in the earlier periods of history, inevitably lacks graphic realization. Does this render our argument questionable?

Certainly, the use of the term 'literacy' and the idea of literacy as one pole in the conceptual continuum are unfortunate. But since we have not defined the continuum of different forms of communication on the basis of the *medium*, but *conceptually* by means of the terms 'immediacy' and 'distance', we may ask which spectrum of forms of communication is available to a culture of primary orality. Even under conditions of primary orality we must expect to find a certain variety of constellations in communication and a variety of forms of communication: everyday conversations, speeches, story-telling, riddles, ritualized

32 Cf. Coseriu (²1967) and Koch (1988).

33 For a discussion of the terms 'diglossia' and 'bilingu(al)ism', see above all Ferguson (1959); Schlieben-Lange (²1978: 35ff., 125, and note 21). The situations and developments corresponding to these terms are shown with respect to the relationship between Latin and the developing/developed Romance languages, see, e.g., Tagliavini (⁶1972: §§75-85); Elcock (²1975: 312-345); Coseriu (1978); Berschin et al. (1978: 61-65, 178-193). For the 'danger' of diglossia in French ("le français langue morte" vs. "néofrançais"), cf. Müller (1975: 29ff.); Queneau (²1965); Bally (1931).

34 Cf. above all Ong (1982); furthermore the contributions in Goody (1968); Schott (1968); cf. also Illich (1984a).

speech, legal formulae, etc. The chosen order of these examples already hints at the fact that here, too, we find different degrees of immediacy.³⁵ In order to avoid having to speak of 'literacy' in this case, we use the term *elaborated orality* to signify the language of distance. We also note, however, that this particular form of orality seems additionally to require ritual actions (hand lifted in swearing an oath, handshake, manumission, breaking the staff over someone, etc.). These actions have 'demonstrative character', they create commitment by making an act public. In literary culture, where the graphic medium has gained in significance, such acts become less important.

Artistic-aesthetic discourses, for which, unfortunately, the term *oral literature* has become customary, are an especially interesting example of elaborated orality. The danger here is to associate the term 'literature' with a reified concept of 'text'. By this means certain constitutive characteristics of artistic-aesthetic discourses in primary orality are excluded, the most important being the nature of creativity as process, the staging of a speech, the interaction between singer, actor, minstrel, narrator and his audience.³⁶

Of course, it is true for all forms of elaborated orality that the means of 'elaboration' differ in several respects from the means used under conditions of literacy. Since primarily oral cultures only possess cultural traditions in the form of a memorial culture, linguistic formulation must, among other things, serve the memory. Contrary to received opinion, we also find some universal features of distance in such uses of language (performance in the public sphere, a clear definition of roles, use of fixed themes, beginnings of more coherence and compactness etc.). In addition, specific historical, genre-specific techniques are used that lend the discourse aesthetic qualities, especially in support of memorization: the use of fixed formulae, repetitions, rhyme, rhythm and melody, etc. These

35 For a discussion of the range of various forms of communication in a primary oral society, see Schlieben-Lange (1983: 77ff.); contrary to the '*Verbrauchsrede*' [utterance for consumption], utterances more strongly characterized by the language of distance may be regarded as '*Wiedergebrauchs-Rede*' [utterance for repeated use] (cf. Lausberg ²1963: 28f.).

36 The term 'oral poetry' is certainly better than 'oral literature'. Ong is quite right in mentioning "purely oral art forms" (1982: 14) in this context. On the general problem of orality vs. literacy, see Rychner (1955); Lord (1960); Parry (1971); Haymes (1973); Duggan (1973 and 1975); Raible (1978); the contributions in Voorwinden and de Haan (1979); above all Zumthor (1983, with an extensive bibliography). On the character of 'oral poetry', cf. Zumthor's remark: "tous les faits poétiques [de la poésie orale] [...] participent en quelque manière à ce qui fait l'essence du théâtre; [...] tout ce qui est dit de celui-ci peut, d'une certaine manière, l'être d'eux" (1983: 56). On the other hand, it becomes clear now why – with the exception of the 'book drama' (Lesedrama) – "die Literaturgeschichte Theaterstücke nicht ungestraft als Text behandeln kann" [literary history cannot with impunity treat stage plays as texts] (Orlich 1984: 431).

techniques lead to a use of language which is often all too easily seen as residue of orality in literary works (texts), although they can be described much more precisely as residue of distance language, of elaborated orality. This, as we have remarked, is scarcely surprising, since the non-elaborated forms in primary orality of the past are forever lost, since they are by definition ephemeral.

The transition to a culture of literacy has far-reaching cultural and psychological effects. To put it briefly, they affect the organization and transmission of knowledge, the fundamentally changed methods of access to knowledge, and the relationship of the individual to this knowledge and to the realities of tradition and history.³⁷ That is to say, in societies that have experienced the transition to a culture of literacy, nothing remains as it was. Even (primary) illiteracy cannot be compared to the primary orality – which is, in any case, difficult for us to imagine.

After transition to a culture of literacy, the different forms of participation in literacy become important: passive knowledge by no means implies active competence. Thus the stratification and the characteristics of the socio-historical distribution of the abilities to *speak, hear, read and write* define various cultural situations. On the basis of the conditions of distribution and the possibilities of actualizing these abilities, one can explain the significance that *reading aloud, dictating, protocols, paraphrasing* and even *translating* have had in particular periods. Examples are the significance of the oldest monuments of the European languages, medieval literature and material culture, aspects of the Reformation or the French Revolution for the development and diffusion of linguistic standards and literacy-related cultural achievements.³⁸ In this regard, the possibilities for the history of language in the direction of social history are wide open ...

37 Cf. Plato's critical observations (Plato 1958: 54ff.). See also Bäuml (1968/79); Goody/Watt (1968); Goody (1977); Giesecke (1979); Rösler (1980); Schlieben-Lange (1983: 52-64); Assmann et al. (1983); Illich (1984a and 1984b). Surprisingly simplistic are Assmann/Assmann's assertions: "Das Gedächtnis bewahrt, was schon ist, und reichert die Gegenwart mit Vergangenheit an, die Schrift fixiert Neues und öffnet die Gegenwart für die Zukunft. Der Erinnernde hat die Vorfahren, der Schreibende die Nachkommen im Blick" [Memory preserves that which already exists and enriches the present with the past. Writing records that which is new and opens the present for the future. S/he who memorizes refers to ancestors, while the writer refers to descendants] (1983: 268). In speaking of the transition from orality to literacy, one must not overlook one distinctive factor: oral traditions do not cease to exist immediately, but *coexist* for a long time with the newly developed literary traditions. A *linear* transfer from orality to literacy is impossible.

38 With respect to the Middle Ages, Balogh (1926), Grundmann (1958), Lüdtkke (1964), Wunderli (1965), Bossong (1979), Bäuml (1980), Saenger (1982), and Illich (1984a and 1984b), for example, show that we need to distinguish between these abilities. For the modern period (France), see Furet and Ozouf (1977) on the introduction of literacy; Wein-

Technical developments in the media can bring about fundamental changes in participation in a culture of literacy. Thus, the extension of the graphic medium (printing) supported the spread of the culture of literacy; the extension in the phonic medium (modern technology), on the other hand, threatens participation in the culture of literacy, a participation which is often merely passive. In this respect, one is reminded of such catchphrases as 'new orality', 'secondary illiteracy', 'video culture'.³⁹

Clearly, fundamental changes in the *medium* of communication lead to fundamental changes in society at large. Their influence is so great because they involve much more than the distribution of technical abilities of codification ('reading', 'writing'). Our observations show that, in this respect also, the *conceptual* aspect is the most decisive factor: for the members of a language community nothing less is at stake than the importance of the ability to maximize communicative distance. The socio-political and cultural relevance of this ability cannot be overstated.⁴⁰

When literary cultures and oral cultures meet or coexist, as happens frequently in the history of the Romance languages, for example, we are faced with fascinating problems.⁴¹ We need merely think of the role-model that Greek pro-

rich (1960) and Settekorn (1981) on *bon usage*; cf. Strosetzki (1978) on dialogue culture (*Konversationskultur*); see Certeau et al. (1975), Schlieben-Lange (1979; 1981; 1983: 64-77) on the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.

39 On printing, cf. e.g. Febvre and Martin (1958), McLuhan (1962), Escarpit (1965), Dahl (²1941), and esp. Eisenstein (1979). On the dangers of re-oralization, see Assmann/ Assmann (1983: 279f.); see also Pilch (1984: 195); Weinrich (1984).

40 If Luhmann (1985: 21), with respect to a third medial revolution (i.e. "Elektronik-basierte[...] Medien der Informationsverarbeitung" [electronically based means of information processing]), is apparently automatically hoping for another increase in the communicative-cognitive possibilities of mankind, one has to marvel at his naïvely optimistic and deterministic view of medium and conception. On the communicative maturity of the individual, which was repeatedly jeopardized through the course of history, see, however, Adorno (1971: 133-147, esp. 135); see also Habermas (1972: 136ff.) and Schütze (1975, vol. II).

41 On the relationship between Greek and Latin, see the following: Palmer (⁵1961: 95ff.), Devoto (²1980: 14ff.). For the beginnings of Romance literacy in the context of diglossia/bilingualism and Latin literacy (cf. note 33), see Klein (1957); Kristeller (1950); Lüdtkke (1964); Wunderli (1965); Delbouille (1972); Stempel (1972); Kontzi (1978). Regarding individual Romance languages, compare, among others, the following language histories: Wartburg (¹⁰1971), Caput (1972/75), Migliorini (⁵1978), Durante (1981), Lapesa (⁸1980), Rosetti et al. (²1971), Ivănescu (1980). See Kontzi (1982) on Arabic influence. Cf. Furet and Ouzuf (1977), Berschin et al. (1978: 203-242), De Mauro (²1970) on the beginnings of literacy and linguistic 'unification'. See Stein (1984: 123ff.) on (French) creoles. Concerning the limits of some of the works presented here, cf. note 42 below.

vided for the development of literary Latin; or of the diglossia or bilingualism which persisted for centuries in Latin and the Romance vernaculars; or of the importance of Arabic (and Hebrew) literary culture on the Iberian Peninsula; or of the integration of Romanian into the area of Byzantine-Slavonic culture; or, on the other hand, of particular historical periods, as, e.g., the Renaissance or the period of Humanism, or of the consequences of the Romance peoples becoming literate. All of these processes have left behind deep marks in the particular character of literacy in individual languages. Thus, the entire history of the Romance languages is marked by contact and exchange between linguistic forms of literacy and orality. This is true for the first impulses on the verbalization of vernacular Romance languages (including today's Romance creoles), it is true for the development of individual Romance written standards and the establishment of the Romance languages as literary languages; and, conversely, it is no less true for the processes of standardization in the spoken Romance languages.

We hope that the factors and methods discussed here will generate new and more precise insights into the medial and conceptual aspects of orality and literacy, as well as into the universal and individual aspects of spoken and written language. Histories of the Romance languages can be *read differently* using these methods, and in the long run they will have to be *rewritten*. We envisage research in the history of languages which is not primarily interested in the written standard; which looks at 'language contacts' not only with regard to the 'horizontal' contacts between written standards, but also takes into account the 'vertical' contacts (within *one* language and between languages); which is prepared to take consistent account of phonological, morphosyntactic, lexico-semantic as well as textual-pragmatic phenomena; and, not least, we envisage an approach that differentiates carefully between the individual language and the universal aspects of language in written and spoken varieties. This is the only way to convey both the internal and external history of language.⁴²

42 Conventional historiographic application is *also* explained by the fact that an approach to the traditions and texts of the language of distance is much easier. Of course, the acquisition of material related to the language of immediacy confronts the linguist with much greater methodological problems, because the relevant language forms are only feasible in the distorting mirror – this term is used by Wolfgang Raible – of written texts. This problem has been known to scholars for a long time concerning research in Vulgar Latin: Tagliavini (⁶1972: §46) expressly mentions the "Fonti per la conoscenza de cosiddetto 'Latino volgare'" (cf. also Coseriu 1978). The heuristic interest (the development of Romance languages) resulted in the methodological necessity of examining *spoken* language, quite contrary to the conventional presentations of the histories of individual Romance languages. The interest in the topic 'age of spoken French' is quite new. Consequently, there are discussions about the methodological problems of source studies (cf. e.g. Stimm 1980, Ernst 1985). On the history of spoken Italian, see Radtke (1984) and various contri-

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butions in Holtus/Radtke (1985). Schlieben-Lange (1983) includes a plea for a comprehensive perspective in linguistic history, for which the problems of orality and literacy are crucial.

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