Language, writing, and mobility. A sociological perspective. Oxford: University Press.

Coulmas, F. (2022).

The author of this book, Florian Coulmas, is a distinguished German sociologist with extensive experience in both research and teaching worldwide. His works span several decades, with important contributions to sociology of language. These include "The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Writing Systems" (1996), "Writing Systems: An Introduction to Their Linguistic Analysis" (2002) or *"Sociolinguistics: The Study of Speakers' Choices"* (2005, with a second edition in 2013a). In the current decade, his latest book, which will be the subject of analysis in this review, is "Language, Writing, and Mobility. A Sociological Perspective", published in 2022 by Oxford University Press. An analysis with a critical approach from the viewpoint of new students in sociology of language.

With this work, written during the COVID-19 pandemic, the author aims to provide a procedural view of the relationship and interaction among the three subjects mentioned in the title: language, writing, and mobility. This approach follows the lines of social analysis traced by the German sociologist Norbert Elias. Special attention is given to writing, positioning it centrally because, according to Coulmas, sociology of language has historically focused more on speech. Here, however, writing is given greater prominence for several reasons: it is the most transcendent technology, it suggests stability, it offers significant language support, and it is a tool accessible to almost everyone. In today's age of relentless technological evolution, the book delves into how communication progresses in tandem, highlighting the need to grasp its historical transformations to forecast its future evolution.

The book takes an interdisciplinary approach with eight interconnected chapters that can be divided into four parts. It begins with the introduction, covered in the first chapter, which we will discuss later. Followed by chapters 2 through 5, where Coulmas explores the relationship between language, writing, and mobility via various factors such as trade, religion, nation, and race. In this section, different case studies are examined to observe these relationships, along with their origins, changes, and the impacts they have on contemporary society. The third part includes chapters 6 and 7, where the focus shifts to migrations and technology, continuing the analysis of changes in language and writing; both in the past and potential future developments. Finally, the conclusion is presented in the eighth and last chapter, where the author shares his final thoughts, introducing another key element: identity. We will now delve into

the different chapters in more detail, highlighting the main ideas presented in each.

In the 1st chapter, "Champagne and Algorithms: Laying the groundwork," which serves as the book's introduction, the author begins by explaining the differences between "Champagne" and "champagne." With a capital "C", it refers to the beverage produced exclusively in the Champagne region of France. Without the capital "C", it generalizes that type of beverage, regardless of its origin. Other similar examples about generalization and eponymy are discussed, including the invention of the algorithm and the origin of the word: from its creator's name creator to its current, widely used form after years of adaptation in different languages.

The author then explains that, although it may seem easy to identify a word's origin, in practice, this is often not the case. Language can be influenced by numerous factors such as religion, economics, and mobility. The latter emphasized because language ability establishing various connections between people. Coulmas also discusses the power of language, highlighting its role in the constant exchange not only of physical or economic goods but also with values, feelings, and more.

In chapter 2, "Trading goods, trading words", this exchange is explored more deeply. Languages connect people, fostering conversation and understanding among communities that may not share much but require effective communication to cooperate in a marketplace. The author presents three historical cases to illustrate this need for understanding. First, the importance of the Sogdian people and their language on the Silk Road is highlighted. Although it is not spoken today, it has left a significant legacy in Asian culture, visible in the Persian, Arabic, and Chinese languages. Secondly, the chapter examines trade in the Mediterranean ports around 1596. While Latin was the common language, many traders did not possess the education or cultural background to speak it fluently, so a "lingua franca" was adopted. This simpler idiom, based on a variety of Slavic languages, enabled traders to understand each other and prosper in their commercial interests.

The third example refers to the Dutch influence on many terms, stemming from the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, abbreviated VOC) founded in 1602. Although the primary objective of Dutch traders was economic profit, their language had a significant indirect impact. Today, this influence is seen in Dutch-origin place names in locations as diverse as New York, Africa, and South America. This was a reciprocal exchange, as they also brought back words such as "tulip," which has Turkish origins. These three illustrative

examples show that language and trade have gone hand in hand throughout history.

After discussing trade, the book turns to religion in the third section. The diffusion of language and faith are interconnected in complex ways. In chapter 3, "Spreading the word of god," these relationships are analyzed through four subsections: origin, mission, immigration, and pilgrimage. The chapter also examines the main religions' role in relation to writing. Origin: The pursuit of displacement has always been driven by both physical and spiritual reasons. This origin is explained through different historical periods, such as Ancient Egypt, and relevant figures like Confucius and Muhammad. Mission: The importance of sacred languages, such as Latin for the Catholic Church, is discussed. These languages tend to change very little over the years, maintaining their sacred status.

Immigration: Immigrants place special value on their language and community culture, which they export to their various destinations. Increased migration flows contribute to cultural and linguistic exchange. While many languages are vulnerable due to their small number of speakers or limited practical value, factors like religion help to preserve them. Pilgrimage: Examples include "El Camino de Santiago" and the Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca). Although pilgrims (and even tourists) are not profit-seeking merchants, they must also be familiar with the pilgrimage site's language. It is increasingly common to translate both religious texts and practical information into multiple languages at the pilgrimage site. With these examples, the author notes the multitude of combinations in the relationship between language and religion. Traders, missionaries, pilgrims, and others operate with fluid borders and changing practices, making it difficult to analyze the relationship as a whole.

Chapter 4, named "National language and transnationalization," explores the author's connection between language and nationhood. The chapter begins by posing several questions that serve as its main thread: "How do geographical, cultural, political, and linguistic borders impact demographic dynamics and mobility, and how do these dynamics influence language contact?" Coulmas discusses how language evolved from being a tool of a people to becoming associated with a territory. The chapter highlights the stark contrast between languages (approximately 7,000) and nations (around 200). Globalization is then examined, using an analysis of the percentage of foreign-born populations, revealing a significant increase in most countries over the past three decades.

International organizations like the United Nations and the World Trade Organization operate with multiple

official languages, yet the dominance of English is evident, as depicted in graphs and supported by various examples and contexts. Similarly, international companies use English as the global lingua franca because efficiency. From this globalization emerges the concept of "translanguage," pioneered by Li Wei (2017), and further explored in the book as a pedagogical method of great significance. Immigration and refugee movements illustrate "hybrid space," where multiple languages coexist. The chapter explains two phenomena in this context: diasporas, illustrated through the Jewish exodus; and transnational communities: exemplified by Chinatowns around the world.

Moving past the midpoint of the book, race takes center stage in the next chapter, the 5th: "Half-breed, mulatto, creole: Race and language". This chapter explores the relationship between language and race, presenting two cases of linguistic contexts shaped by specific migrations. Firstly, the term "Hafu", originating from Japanese, denotes mixed ancestry (one Japanese and one foreign parent). Secondly, "Dekassegues," a Portuguese-Japanese term, refers to citizens who migrate abroad for work. The context for its origin is explained, citing a severe labor shortage in Japan in 1980, prompting the employment of foreign workers to address the issue.

The chapter also delves into hybridization and the evolutionary process of half-breed and creoles over generations. Writing reemerges as crucial in what Errington (2001) terms "colonial linguistic management": the division of languages in territories by missionaries and settlers. The author elaborates on this role of writing through three key points: hierarchization, the pursuit of language purity, and the intricate relationship between language and writing.

Thereafter, chapter 6: "From cosmopolis to ethnopolis," explains how migrations impact social formations and language use. The chapter initially centers on migrations toward large cities, coinciding with industrialization. This urbanization faster in parts of Asia than in Europe, a trend observable today with the proliferation of enormous cities in China. The author cites both Aristotle and Plato to illustrate urbanization's advantages and disadvantages. Aristotle envisioned a city where life was perfect and self-sufficient, while Plato observed that any city, regardless of size, is divided between rich and poor people.

The chapter explores two historical examples about cosmopolitanism: the empire of Alexander the Great and the Roman Empire. The author references Erasmus (known for a life of extensive travel) and Kant (who remained rooted in his hometown). Despite their differing lifestyles, both philosophers shared a vision of a global world where the earth belongs to everyone equally,

without preferential rights. The concept of a cultural melting pot is introduced, with New York City serving as a prime example. This term describes a society where diverse cultures, ethnicities, and languages blend to form a more unified common culture. However, the persistence of neighborhoods like Chinatown or Little Italy in New York City illustrates that some groups retain distinct identities rather than assimilating into a broader cultural amalgamation.

Drawing on a study by Pool (1972), Coulmas correlates a country's GDP per capita with its linguistic homogeneity, highlighting that linguistically homogeneous countries tend to be wealthier than heterogeneous ones. Closing the chapter, Coulmas discusses "majority-minority cities," where immigrant cultures outnumber the local ethnic or linguistic majority. This phenomenon challenges traditional notions of dominant cultural majorities in urban settings, making diversity more diffuse and complex to analyze.

"Virtual Contacts", chapter number 7, reintroduces algorithms as tools for examining the relationship between language and mobility, which has become increasingly interconnected in recent decades. The chapter begins by discussing ongoing technological changes and their profound effects on social and linguistic dynamics. The author states: "Important stations along the way where humans took time to talk, time to write, time to print, and time to chat", framing a historical review of how human communication needs have evolved. The discussion starts with speech, the most primitive and shortest form of communication. It then progresses with writing, which vastly extends the reach of communication and stabilizes language over time. Printing is examined next, marking a pivotal evolution that exponentially spread written language as literacy rates rose.

Lastly, the chapter examines the intersection of chatting, the blurred line between speaking and writing in contemporary society, and the profound impact of digitization. This evolution is closely intertwined with mobile Computer-Mediated Communications (CMCs), which have significantly increased affordability and accessibility in communication. It's noted that established norms are swiftly adapting to users' needs, moving away from traditional authorities like schools or academies. For instance, smartphones have transformed how many people (particularly youth) communicate, preferring practical and informal modes. As the chapter nears conclusion, the author reflects on various themes, including the role of CMCs bridging the gap between the vast number of spoken-only languages and the smaller subset that are both spoken and written. Coulmas suggests that the proliferation of CMCs is

driving substantial linguistic changes, exemplified by the growing use of written language on the Internet.

The last chapter, number 8: "Wanderlust: A synthesis," serves as the concluding chapter of the book. Here, the author emphasizes Norbert Elias's processual perspective as crucial for understanding the interplay between language and mobility. The chapter derives its title from the term "wanderlust," which encapsulates the perpetual mobility of human beings, whether voluntary or often out of necessity. The "mobility-turn" concept is also introduced, a theoretical framework embraced by various scholars that delves deep into the study of mobility, elevating it beyond a mere means to an end. The author then confronts a dilemma regarding identity. Each person possesses one, shaped by personal attributes or influenced by external factors such as culture or religion. Similarly, language is viewed as a timeless entity. Yet, identity loses its essence if it excludes change, which can lead to stagnation or obstruction. Coulmas proposes an alternative perspective on identity that focuses less on preservation, in order to solve this issue.

In the concluding part of the chapter, the author synthesizes by noting that understanding the future through the lens of the past is crucial, despite the complexities posed by the fast pace of changes. The volume and speed of idea exchange have accelerated with the rise in population, migration, and technology, fostering greater social interactions and significantly increasing language usage. Ultimately, the author acknowledges that there is no universal or magical formula for fully comprehending these dynamics; continuous study and research remain the key to gaining deeper insights.

Precisely, this book stands as an ideal resource for current and future research in sociology of language. Offering a rich array of examples, historical narratives relevant to contemporary society, and interconnected themes explored throughout. All collectively providing invaluable material for deeper learning. Coulmas employs effective methodologies such as case studies and exhaustive literature review, enhancing the credibility and depth of the work. It represents a significant contribution to research, providing insightful analyses from an experienced sociologist, informed by the theories of predecessors like Norbert Elias. Looking ahead, the book's relevance extends into the future amidst advancements like connectivity, artificial intelligence, or augmented reality. Such work is instrumental for anticipating potential shifts in language and writing due to ongoing technological evolution. Moreover, its interdisciplinary approach appeals

to professionals across various fields, while the diverse range of examples ensures clarity and comprehension of Coulmas's arguments.

Nevertheless, the target is not limited to research, as any lover of language, writing, or even world history and its evolution can be fascinated by this work. Addressing contemporary themes like identity, nationalism, migration crises, and the use (or disuse) of minority languages, it engages a broader audience. Yet, due to its extensive connections and discussions, it may feel daunting to readers less familiar with the subject. But overall, it remains a commendable read, complemented well by other works from the author, such as those mentioned earlier, or by "Writing and Society: An Introduction" (2013b). It serves as an excellent entry point for students embarking on research in these fields.

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