

# Logogram Video Script

Logos (Hi, today I will talk about logograms)

Get it? Let's try again!

Hi, today I will talk about logograms

So obvious, right?

Why was it so difficult to understand that sentence, and what is a logogram anyways?

(show pictures like no smoking)

A logogram, part of a logographic writing system, is a visual (or tactile) image that signifies a morpheme, also known as a unit of meaning, and represents a thing or object. A logographic language would be one that would be communicated solely by use of logograms and would not have any phonetic aspects.

This is what separates logograms from phonograms. The majority of languages in our world are phonographic, which means that they have syllabaries or alphabets which represent sounds. By themselves, these syllabaries and alphabets have no meaning individually, but come together to form words which signify morphemes.

To qualify as a logographic writing system:

- it must use logograms to represent things and concepts
- each logogram must be able to function as a standalone morpheme
- it must not function as part of a phonetic syllabary that must be combined to create certain morphemes

Let's take a look at some examples of "logographic" languages in history.

Here are some ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs which date back to the 28th century BC (Powell, 2009). Let's look at them closely. From the surface, they look very much like they are logographic. It looks like each logogram is its own morpheme. However, according to Powell (2009), Senner (1989) and Pennick (1991), Egyptian only functions partially as a logographic system.

Let's take a look at the phonetic syllabaries. Note how some of the hieroglyphs represent a single sound. In other cases, each hieroglyph could represent a series of sounds. It has also

been observed that ancient Egyptian often functioned as a sort of logoconsonantal script, which means that the logograms functioned as consonants in their phonetic alphabet.

For example, *s3* 'duck' and *s3* 'son' are both headed by the consonant (show duck picture here)

So, ancient Egyptian satisfies condition 1 and 2, but not 3. Therefore it is only a pseudo-logographic text.

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Now, let's look at what most people consider to be a prime example of a logographic language, Chinese. The Chinese written language is said to have been around since the 15th century BC (Talyor & Olson, 1998). Look closely at the language. Does it look logographic to you?

Okay, that might be a little difficult, so let's look at how Chinese characters came to be what they are.

It looks like they are representative of the original objects and concepts that they are depicting, right?

Uh oh... what happened here? It looks like some of these morphemes have combined, except the meanings of the morphemes are not being considered, instead they are being used as phonemic representations.

There is a difference here between Chinese and Egyptian, though. While Egyptian is logoconsonantal, Chinese is logosyllabic as each Chinese character represents a syllable which can contain both consonants and vowels together like m-a or sh-i.

Going back to our checklist, we can see that conditions 1 and 2 are satisfied, while condition 3, just like in the case of ancient Egyptian, is not met.

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So, is there a such thing as a purely logographic text? It doesn't look like it, but wouldn't it be wonderful if there were one? If we had a purely logographic language everyone around the

world could communicate by it as we wouldn't need to learn a phonetic language and could communicate across traditional language barriers.

All of the references I came across said that there are no purely logographic texts in existence (Taylor & Olson, 1998., Powell, 2009., Senner, 1989., Pennick, 1991), merely pseudo-logographic texts.

Take a look at these, and feel free to pause the video if you want to analyze them further.

Show the emoji stories

Let's think about how this might fit in to our checklist.

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Surprisingly, these emoji texts satisfy all three of our logographic conditions. However, the largest challenge for a purely logographic system, as Powell (2009) points out, is that grammatically, semantically, and practically it is very difficult to base an entire language on logograms. So, I will leave you with this final question, do you think that emojis could function grammatically, semantically, and practically? Do you think you could understand the emoji stories without thinking in English or any other language? Give it a try!

Thank you.

## References:

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