How Uniskript Works

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The PHONICS way to READING

6 STEPS
1. Hear WORD <<< SOUNDS (Phonemic Awareness)
   /san/ <<< /a/ + /æ/ + /n/
2. Connect SOUND ↔ SYMBOL
   /a/ ↔ ʊ
3. Blend SOUNDS/SYMBOLS >>> WORD
   ʊ+æ+n > /a/ + /æ/ + /n/
4. Connect WORD ↔ MEANING
   sun /san/ ↔ the sun
5. Blend WORDS >>> SENTENCE
   the + sun + is + hot
   >>> The sun is hot.
6. Connect SENTENCE ↔ MEANING
   The sun is hot. ↔ The sun is hot.

Keli Woodward (2013) (American Youth Literacy Foundation)

ICONIC PHONICS

Why not use icons of the oral apparatus as initial literacy symbols?
• easy to remember
• teach phonemic awareness at the same time
Examples from Tok Pisin:

- close vowel icon
- fricative icon
- open vowel icon
- icon of closed lips
- tongue tip icon
- tongue back icon

Meanings of icons:
- teeth
- sharp
- cough
- wild sugarcane
- urine
- letter
- start

ICONO-FEATURAL ALPHABETS (1)
King Sejong’s Hangul for Korean (1445)

ICONO-FEATURAL ALPHABETS (2)
John Wilkins’ Physiological Alphabet (1668)

ICONO-FEATURAL ALPHABETS (3)
A.M.Bell’s Visible Speech (1867)

ICONO-FEATURAL ALPHABETS (4)
Stefan Woehrmann’s Mundbilder for German deaf children (current)

ICONO-FEATURAL ALPHABETS (5)
Uniskript (current - University of the Nations)

Dr Kim Cho expanded Hangul for possible international use - she showed her idea to YWAM (Youth with a Mission) leaders in 2002.

A YWAM team, including Brazilian linguists Marcia and Edson Suzuki, reworked the idea, distancing it from Korean, developing a more universally applicable icono-featural system. Then they tried it out with 8 languages.

In 2013 the YWAM shared their idea with SIL. We were impressed, and tried it out.
When you might use Uniskript

When the orthography is difficult to learn - create something that is easy to learn!

When there is too much over- or under-differentiation in the normal orthography - create a 1-phoneme-1-symbol orthography!

When there are conflicting orthographies - create something that can be used for initial literacy, from which to bridge to a “politically correct orthography”!

When a minority language needs revitalisation, or the group needs an identity they can be proud of - create an orthography that uniquely expresses the culture!

Doing Uniskript (in brief)

• Study phonology well first - discover the phonological features that are important.
• Use feature icons to make up prototypical phoneme symbols.
• Teach it to a pilot group and help them adapt it to their culture - cultural motifs and styles, alphabet or syllabary, writing direction.
• Get a font made.
• Design a teaching plan/syllabus.
• Test on small scale to see if it is easy to teach and learn; then evaluate, and adapt.
• Train teachers to read it, write it, and teach it. (Must train to teach with special focus on phonological awareness so the iconic advantage is maintained.)
• Follow the teachers up.

THE UNISKRIPT to ENGLISH LITERACY PATHWAY

3 Stages

From Uniskript vernacular literacy to Roman letter vernacular literacy to English literacy (with Uniskript pronunciation help)

References


Anon. 2013. Draft Mandarin Uniskript primer. Unpublished manuscript. (Contact: Marcia Suzuki)


