Writing Project 1

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LINGUIST 101 People and Their Language
Sections AA & AB
Fall 2026

October 23, 2026

Plan for Today

1. Housekeeping
2. Decipherment of Hieroglyphs
3. Writing assignment

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Assignments

- Assignment #4 grades are up on Canvas
- Assignment #5 (/r/-lessness in Boston English) is due on **Monday**, **November 2**
- Any questions on **Assignment #5**?
- Any questions on **this week's lectures**?

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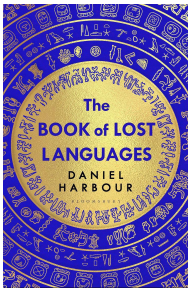
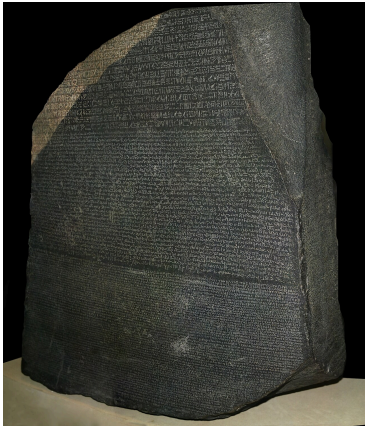
The Book of Lost Languages



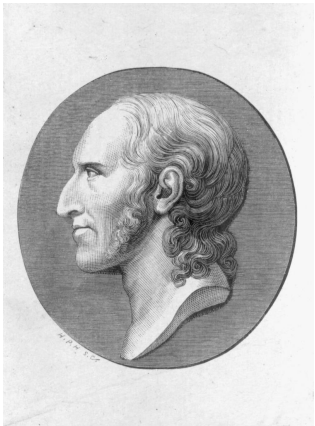
- **Daniel Harbour**: Professor of Cognitive Science of Language at Queen Mary University of London
- Expert in writing systems, morphology, feature theory, and documentation of endangered languages

The Rosetta Stone



- **Rosetta Stone**: three versions of a decree issued by King Ptolemy V of Egypt in 196 BCE
  1. Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphs
  2. Ancient Egyptian Demotic script
  3. Ancient Greek
- **Key to deciphering hieroglyphs**
  - *Why?*

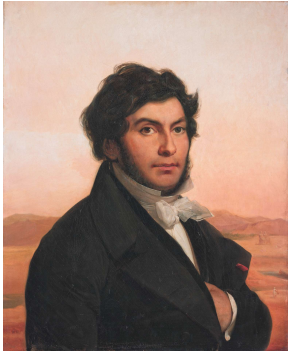
Pt 1. Georg Zoëga



- **Georg Zoëga (1755-1809)**: Danish archaeologist and numismatist
- *What were the 3 key discoveries that Zoëga made that eventually led to the decipherment of hieroglyphs?*
  1. Established the direction in which hieroglyphs are read
  2. Demonstrated the difference between hieroglyphs and images
  3. Conjectured that hieroglyphs combined to represent specific meanings

Pt 2. Thomas Young and Jean-François Champollion

Thomas Young (1773-1829):
British polymath



Jean-François Champollion (1790-1832):
French philologist and orientalist

Pt 2. Thomas Young and Jean-François Champollion

1. *Who were Thomas Young and Jean-François Champollion? What are some of the contributions that each one of them made to the decipherment of hieroglyphs?*
2. *Why did Daniel Harbour choose this quote? How does it relate to Young and Champollion?*
   - **p. 107:** "A fox knows many things, but a hedgehog one great one." (Archilochus)

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Please read Chapter 4. Pick one of the following prompts and write 150 words in it (can be a little more):

1. Who was Georg Zoëga, and how did he determine the direction in which Egyptian hieroglyphs are read? Explain the observations and reasoning that led him to his conclusion.

2. Who was Georg Zoëga and how did he use the number of distinct hieroglyphs to reason about the nature of the Egyptian writing system? Reconstruct his argument and explain what it established.

AND write 150 words (can be a little more) on the following prompt:

1. Using concrete examples of Thomas Young's and Jean-François Champollion's achievements described in the chapter, explain how their approaches to decipherment illustrate the distinction between foxes and hedgehogs, as proposed by the philosopher Isaiah Berlin. Which approach do you relate to the most regarding how you pursue your own goals, and what specific achievements from your life support your answer?

Have a great weekend!