

piece on current research or contemporary events, or musings on the state of being in today's world. The deadline for each issue is approximately two months ahead of publication; the length should be around 500–700 words and photos or other illustrations can be included. We've been managing this column for over 10 years now, and it's nice to see and hear other voices here now and again.

We also can serve as your contact if you're interested in proposing a longer piece for another section of *AN*, or even a series over several issues. SHA members have contributed to a number of these over the years. Again, it's a great way to reach an audience of interested anthropologists, and since *AN* is archived and indexed in AnthroSource these texts are accessible by online searching.

Speaking of online media, the SHA website has now migrated to the AAA server. What this means for users is that if you have in the past set a bookmark on your browser directly to the SHA site, it will no longer work. You can find the new page by going to the AAA website, then the Sections & Interest Groups page, and click through the list of sections there to the new page. You can set a new bookmark if you want easy access in your browser. If you don't find the answers you're looking for on the website, you can always contact Vilma, the SHA Secretary, and she can relay any questions to the appropriate people.

We also encourage members who use Facebook to add and become active on the SHA Facebook page. So far we've gotten a lot of people connected, but there hasn't been much interaction on the page. You're encouraged to post photos, short texts for feedback, inquiries, use the page to develop sessions or workgroups—and any other use people can think of. This is a relatively new kind of function for AAA sections and social media, and we're sure there are uses that we haven't even thought of as possibilities. The SHA is known for our openness to creative expression and experimentation, and if there are other kinds of activities that you'd like us to explore please let us know that, too.

Finally, we'd like to wish everyone peaceful, safe, and happy winter holidays and a happy new year. We expect to be able to start the new year's columns off with news from the New Orleans meeting.

Contact either of us at Dept of Anthropology, McGraw Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853; 607/255-6773; fax 607/255-3747. Email Fred at fwg2@twcny.rr.com or Vilma at vs23@cornell.edu.

Society for Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology

ANNELOU YPEIJ, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Notes from the Field: Incommunicado

By Courtney Kurlanska (State U New York–Albany)

For the first time after 10 years working and traveling in Nicaragua I felt truly cut off from the rest of the world. Hurricane Mateo of September 26 may not have packed much of a wallop but it certainly affected the commu-



There is no longer a bridge between the town of Condega and the road to Yali. Photo courtesy Courtney Kurlanska



October 8, 2010. Innertube transport of bananas between the town of Condega and the road to Yali. Photo courtesy Courtney Kurlanska

nity where I conduct my fieldwork. Mateo brought rain, and lots of it. It brought flooding, landslides and power outages. Nothing overly devastating but the loss of both electricity and transportation has a powerful effect when one is accustomed to refrigerators, lights and regular bus service.

Without power you can't charge a cell phone. You can't send a message to a loved one or a family member. If you have a store you lose business, you lose money. Without transportation you can't leave. You also can't get supplies. After four days without power or transportation supplies dwindle, food spoils, prices rise and people start to hoard. You go to bed earlier and you get up earlier. After eight days without power you begin to wonder if it will ever come back, and when it does you celebrate. You charge cell phones, perhaps a laptop, and you buy a cold drink. You also begin to wonder why there are still no busses.

What becomes evident in these times is the resilience and ingenuity of the Nicaraguans themselves. The hurricane washed out both the foot bridge and the rampla between the town of Condega and the road to Yali, cutting off all of the communities in between. After a few days one bus started to come down from the mountains and take people to the river. In the afternoon it would return to San Geronimo. The first day it made the trip it had three passengers. Now it is so full that there are generally a number of people riding on top of the bus as well.

What do they do when they get to the river? In the past they simply went over the footbridge when

the water was too deep for a bus to cross the rampla. Thanks to Mateo, that is no longer an option. The river itself has gone down but the damage is done. The force of water carved out a new section of the river and opened up a gulf between the rampla and the bank. The rampla spanned a distance of 75 meters, and now there is a gap of an additional 50 meters that needs to be covered. Until they are able to fill in that section or divert the water, the only way to cross the river is via very large inner-tubes. Fifteen cordobas per person and 10 cordobas per bag will get you across the river.

For some the cost is too great. Small business owners lose any profit they may have made in the additional transportation costs. For others, it is a small drop in the bucket. Some have decided to bypass the inner-tube transport and have created their own, ferrying supplies across the river on their inner-tubes and inflatable devices.

They say that you don't get wet when you cross in the inner-tube. I guess I'll find out tomorrow when I take my son go to get supplies and make some phone calls. Just because you can charge your cell phone doesn't mean you can buy minutes or get a signal.

Courtney Kurlanska is a graduate student doing fieldwork in Santa Rosa de Condega on the role of microfinance in the political economy of the rural household. She will stay in the field until August 2011.

Please send any comments, suggestions and ideas, including photos for future columns, to Annelou Ypeij at j.lypeij@cedla.nl or to CEDLA (Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation), Keizersgracht 395-397, 1016 EK Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Society for Linguistic Anthropology

MARK ALLEN PETERSON AND JAMES STANLAW, CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Ah, ... the The's Have It

By James Stanlaw

Any native English speaker who has had even brief contact with nonnative speakers probably knows that one of their most difficult challenges is mastering the article system. Before every English phrase there are three possibilities: *the*; *a* or *an*; or nothing (\emptyset). Certainly some general rules often apply. If the noun is known to the speakers, or is a unique referent, the definite article *the* is used ("*the sun*"). If the noun is just one of many, the indefinite article *a* (or its variant *an*) is used ("*a dog*"). Proper names take nothing (" \emptyset Tchaikovsky"). These rules are internalized very early on, perhaps by age two or three, and quickly become robust: Watch the snicker on any kindergartner's face if you say "Give this to *the Joe*."

But there are many exceptions. Why do we say "I have to go to *the bathroom*" when presumably the building must have several? Why is the article usage different here: "I want to travel to *the Bahamas* and then head over to \emptyset Jamaica"? Why does the sentence "My kid is smart; he went to \emptyset college!" sound more complimentary than "My kid is smart; he went to *a college*?"

In the past few years there have been a number of attempts by computational linguists to find ways to detect errors in English article usage by nonnative speakers. Besides having an immediate applied aspect in language pedagogy and assessment, such research also could shed some light on how the article system might operate. Na-Rae Han, Martin Chodorow and Claudia Leacock (*Natural Language Engineering* 12[2]:115–29, 2006; *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation*, LREC, 2004) found in their analysis of TOEFL essays that article errors were made about once every eight nouns. A native-English computer model was made using a 31.5-million word corpus. The words before a noun phrase and the one immediately following were noted, as well as their parts of speech. The model agreed with native speaker judgments 83% or more of the time.

Such results are both a pleasant surprise and a disappointment. Why does the computer still get it wrong 10% or 15% of the time? Chodorow says (with John Lee and Joel Tetreault in *Proceedings of the Third Linguistic Annotation Workshop*, ACL-IJCNLP 2009) that we should not assume there is one correct form of native usage per context. As an example, consider the article usage with the word “lamb” in these sentences: “Three years ago John Small, a sheep farmer in the Mendip Hills, read an editorial in his local newspaper which claimed that foxes never killed lambs. He drove to the paper’s office and presented _____ killed the night before, to the editor.” The choices are: lamb/ a lamb/ the lamb/ lambs/ the lambs. Most native speakers would choose “a lamb,” though “lambs” was thought to also be a possibility. However, if we take this sentence out of context—that is, if we remove the first sentence, in bold—the possibilities change. Now, all choices are acceptable, except the singular “lamb.” So context can significantly affect article usage, often sharply reducing the number of correct constructions. As most computer models use only features extracted from the target sentence, their performance will necessarily be compromised.

But things might not be as simple as having a model look at wider contexts because people are creative and idiosyncratic in their language use. For example, I think any computer model would be hard pressed to explain “the Donald,” the nickname of media celebrity Donald Trump. Officially changing their name to *The Ohio State University* has not improved their football performance. Perhaps C J Chivers is justified in calling his new book about the AK-47 simply *The Gun* as there is one such weapon for every 70 people on the planet. But often the



“The Gibson” F5 Master Model mandolin. Photo courtesy James Stanlaw

use of the can appear ostentatious. There has been a discussion on the Mandolin Café website recently about how a certain company has historically placed “The Gibson” on the headstock of some of their instruments. One commenter said, “It has always been my opinion that the ‘The’ with an upper case T is completely pretentious.” However, others think it is a way of saying that this is “the authentic Gibson, accept no substitutes.” I guess the choice, or a choice, is yours.

Please send your comments, contributions, news and announcements to SLA contributing editors Jim Stanlaw (stanlaw@ilstu.edu) or Mark Peterson (petersm2@muohio.edu).

Society for Medical Anthropology

KATHLEEN RAGSDALE, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Global Initiatives of the Society for Medical Anthropology

One of the goals set forth by the SMA Executive Board is to encourage greater collaboration between US-based medical anthropologists and their counterparts around the globe. Two initiatives to advance this objective were undertaken this year: (1) an international workshop on the anthropology of cancer; and (2) laying the groundwork for a second independent meeting of the SMA in conjunction with the European Medical Anthropology Network.

Cancer Workshop

The cross-cultural study of cancer provides an excellent subject for examination of complex symbolic and moral meanings attached to a life-threatening experience. Although anthropologists have devoted significant attention to exploring the metaphors, symbols and social relations of cancer, most of the work has had a regional focus. Few opportunities exist for bringing together anthropologists working in the cancer field from diverse geographic areas for purposes of mutual exchange and theory development. This is partly because historically, much of the anthropological research in developing countries has been focused on infectious and tropical diseases. Less attention has been paid to chronic diseases, which have traditionally been seen as problems of affluent countries. This is no longer the case, as medical anthropologists from many different countries are conducting research around the globe on cancer. Clearly, now is an excellent time to begin a dialogue of exchange that brings them together for collaborative work.

To this end, a workshop on “Cancer Narratives in Global Perspective” was held November 15–16 in New Orleans prior to the AAA Annual Meeting. Co-organized by Jeannine Coreil (U South Florida) and Holly Mathews (Eastern Carolina U), the workshop was funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation and brought together 14 anthropologists currently conducting international research on culture and cancer. The workshop provided a forum for exchanging research findings and developing a theoretical framework for anthropological approaches to cancer in global perspective within an environment that fostered mutual learning, collaboration and scholarly publication. The workshop was organized around four themes that cut across cultural settings: (1) narratives of meaning and identity; (2) narratives of treatment and recovery; (3) body politics and health disparities; and (4) social support and advocacy.

Participants discussed the state of knowledge regarding the four topics in their country of research, identified key concepts that inform each topic, developed a theoretical framework integrating the key concepts, and debated the applicability of the frame-

work in diverse sociocultural settings. The final product will be an edited volume on cancer narratives in global perspective. In addition to the organizers, participants in the workshop included Amarasira de Silva (Sri Lanka), Fiona Harris (Scotland), Nancy Burke (USA), Eirini Kampriani (Greece), Harikumar Bhasker (India), Natalia Luxardo (Argentina), Waleska Aureliano (Brazil), Deborah Gordon (USA), Benson Mulemi (Kenya), Aline Sarradon (France), Wendy Lam (Hong Kong), and Mojca Ramšak (Slovenia), among others.

Joint Meeting with the European Medical Anthropology Network

Initial discussions about holding a joint meeting with the European Medical Anthropology Network (MAN) took place during the 50th anniversary meeting of the SMA in New Haven, Connecticut, in September 2009. Then-President Carolyn Sargent and President-Elect Jeannine Coreil met with MAN President Brigit Obrist (U Basel,



Switzerland) and MAN board member Anita Hardon (U Amsterdam, the Netherlands). Further discussion took place at the SMA board meetings in Philadelphia (2009) and Mérida, Mexico (2010). In August 2010, Coreil attended the MAN annual meeting in Ireland and had further discussions with the organization about the possibility of a joint meeting. The dialogue generated considerable enthusiasm and excitement. Plans thus far include holding the meeting in a European country in spring 2013 and making it a global conference of medical anthropologists from around the world. Current MAN President Anita Hardon met with the SMA board in New Orleans to outline the next steps toward organizing a planning committee who will be tasked with selecting a site and theme for the international meeting and with finding ways to enable anthropologists from resource-limited countries to attend. The SMA board welcomes ideas and suggestions for the 2013 meeting. Please contact Carolyn Sargent (csargent@artsci.wustl.edu) for information and suggestions.

To submit contributions to this column please contact SMA Contributing Editor Kathleen Ragsdale (kathleen.ragsdale@src.msstate.edu).

Society for Psychological Anthropology

JACK R FRIEDMAN, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

The December 2010 *Ethos* is a special issue dedicated to the topic of motherhood. Below is a brief interview with the guest editors of the issue, Kathleen Barlow (Central Washington U) and Bambi Chapin (U Maryland, Baltimore County).

Jack Friedman: *What made you decide to do this issue on “Mothering as Everyday Practice?”*

Kathleen Barlow and Bambi Chapin: Each of us had our own young children with us in the field, and we